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Living on the hyphen: diaspora, identity and memory in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John/ Lucy* and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican/ Almost a woman*

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

Orientadora: Prof.ª Dra. Peônia Viana Guedes

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To all the people who somehow have to live on hyphens.

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Thanks to my wife and son for justifying my existence.

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I was tired of the constant tug between the life I wanted to live and the life I had. I dreaded the loneliness that attached itself to me in the middle of my raucous family. I didn't blame them for my unhappiness, but neither did I want to contaminate them with it. I wanted to be, like Garbo, alone. I wanted to become La Sorda, deaf to my family's voice, their contradictory messages, their expectations. I longed to cup my hand to my mouth, the way singers did, and listen to myself. To hear one voice, my own, even if it was filled with fear and uncertainty. Even if it were to lead me where I ought not to go.

Esmeralda Santiago

RESUMO

PECANHA, Jorge Luiz Monteiro. *Living on the Hyphen*: diaspora, identity and memory in Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John/ Lucy and Esmeralda Santiago's When I was Puerto Rican/ Almost a woman. 2012. 163 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

Esta dissertação tem por objetivo investigar o desenvolvimento de identidades de sujeitos diaspóricos em formas de narrativas nas quais a memória tem um papel crucial. As autobiografias e os *memoirs* têm despertado a curiosidade de muitas pessoas interessadas nos processos de construção de identidade de indivíduos que vivem em realidades singulares e nos relatos que dão sobre suas próprias vidas. Assim, o crescente interesse em diásporas e nos decorrentes deslocamentos fragmentários, provocados pelo distanciamento de raízes individuais e pelo contato com diferentes códigos culturais, poderiam legitimar as narrativas autobiográficas como maneiras estratégicas de sintetizar os nichos de identificação de autores e autoras que experimentaram uma ruptura diaspórica. Desta forma, ao analisar estes tipos de narrativas, deve-se estar atento às especificidades de algumas escritoras que passaram por processos diaspóricos e a como elas recorreram as suas memórias pessoais para, em termos literários, expressar suas subjetividades. Considerando todas essas idéias, tenciono usar *Annie John* e *Lucy*, de Jamaica Kincaid e *When I Was Puero Rican* e *Almost a Woman*, de Esmeralda Santiago como fontes de análise e amostras do desenvolvimento de identidades diaspóricas em narrativas autobiográficas.

Palavras-chave: Diáspora. Identidade. Memória.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims at investigating the development of the identities of diasporic subjects in forms of narratives in which memory plays a crucial role. Autobiographies and memoirs have awakened the curiosity of many people interested in the processes of identity construction of individuals who live in singular realities and the accounts they give of their own lives. Thus, the crescent interest in diasporas and the ensuing fragmentary dislocations provoked by the distancing of one's roots and the contact with different cultural codes might legitimize autobiographical narratives as strategic ways to synthesize the niches of identification of authors who experienced a diasporic rupture. In this way, when analyzing these kinds of narratives, one should be attentive to the specificities of some writers who have gone through diasporic processes and how they resort to their personal recollections in order to, in literary terms, express their subjectivities. Bearing all these ideas in mind, it is my intention to use Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy*, and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a woman* as sources of analysis as well as samples of the development of diasporic identities in autobiographical narratives.

Keywords: Diaspora. Identity. Memory.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is the result of years of study, which started even before my Master's course in Literatures in English at UERJ. In fact, the first seeds that eventually blossomed in the current work were initially sowed in my soul in the Specialization course taken many years ago in this very same institution and with some of the professors that I would reencounter and, once more, work with. During a chronological hiatus of more than ten years, from the Specialization to the Master's Course, I had the opportunity to read books written by authors that were and still are very relevant to my general academic endeavors and to meet people who helped me mature my fields of interest and decide to follow a theoretical line and to search for the critical approaches which invariably pointed to the path that I took and which fortunately led me to this moment.

Later on, in my Master's course, I had the possibility to go deeper into a whole new range of other theorists and texts and have contact with people who greatly contributed to my attempts to give form to this dissertation as well as to amplify my academic horizons and recover the pleasure of being part of such an intellectually productive center. Furthermore, it is also pertinent to emphasize that I had the chance to be in touch with professors and students from different areas of interest which added new perspectives to my paradigm of interest, opening my mind to certain theoretical possibilities as well as to some authors I was not familiar with.

The present work goes to show that the heart of the matter in discussions about autobiographies, memoirs, and other forms of narratives in which memory plays a crucial role, embedded in diasporic experiences, is really identity, or rather, it is identity which forms and is formed by the arrangement, communion and disentanglement of mnemonic elements and/or diasporic circumstances. In this way, when analyzing these kinds of narratives, one should be careful so as not to discard the specificities of some writers who have gone through diasporic processes and how they resort to their personal recollections in order to, in literary terms, express their subjectivities. Bearing all these ideas in mind, it is my intention to use Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy*, and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman* as sources of analysis as well as samples of the development of diasporic identities in autobiographical narratives.

To do so, I will pinpoint similarities and differences between the two writers' books, considering a kind of noticeable symmetry between them. What this means is that although

Kincaid and Santiago went through different diasporic processes, their books show points in common which allow the reader to peek at the epistemologies of two women – fictionalized or otherwise construed or constructed – striving to be themselves.

I will begin my investigation with Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy* and then focus my analytical efforts on Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*. It is pertinent to notice the aforementioned symmetry both writers' *oeuvres* share resides in the fact that *Annie John* and *When I Was Puerto Rican* are very appropriate starting points in that both books actually focus on the two writers' lives before they live their home countries, calling attention to the fact that their identities were already fragmented even before their departures, as it is easy to attest given the convoluted relationships the girls, who are the narrating-I of these books, had with their mothers and the issues they have to face in Antigua and Puerto Rico respectively. Hence, it is possible to say that both characters, in a way, underwent a "pre-diasporic" fragmentation, or an emotional/cultural diaspora, which was already within themselves, and was duly retrieved by the memories (and craft) of the two diasporic writers.

Still symmetrically speaking, *Lucy* and *Almost a Woman* give accounts of Jamaica Kincaid's and Esmeralda Santiago's lives when they start living in the United States, their host country, and location which fragments the selves of the writers, adding more identity related issues to the already convoluted processes of identity construction both women have, turning *Lucy* and *Almost a Woman* into "post-diasporic" life narratives for they contain the register of the writers' memories after their diasporic move.

I decided to develop this work in this way because I was always interested in marginal perspectives, and due to the growing interest in voices from minority groups inside and outside the academic scenario, I thought it was my opportunity to develop a research which in a way could contribute to the studies of those who have the same interest I do as well as enhance my own knowledge on the particularities of realities that are out of hegemonic centers.

It is relevant to highlight that in terms of structural narrative modes, Kincaid's and Santiago's books have some differences. Kincaid calls her books novels; however, in many interviews, she also declared that most of the events she narrates in those "novels" were actually events taken from her own life, assuring thus the autobiographical inscription in her work as Kincaid herself admits. Kincaid's posture endorses Stuart E. Bates' words, in *Inside Out: An Introduction of Autobiography*, when he says that "There is, in fact, no dividing line between autobiography and fiction" (BATES, 1937, p. 9). Bates' opinion is particularly

relevant to the current research principally if we agree that even the most accurate autobiographies have fictional elements.

On the other hand, Esmeralda Santiago's books are officially considered memoirs, a term which comes from the Latin word "memoria" meaning memory. Many people consider memoirs a subgenre of autobiographies, the most basic difference between the two genres lies in the fact that supposedly autobiographies are to be more comprehensive than memoirs which cover just a period of the narrating-I's life. Naturally, these topics will be further explored in this work. Besides the autobiographical trait in those writers' books, both of them have a diasporic life rupture which, as far as I can see, has a strong impact on their processes of identity construction, which in turn, given the writers' rather underprivileged conditions, was already something non-linear, already fragmented. Thus, as far as post-colonial studies are concerned, it may be relevant to investigate how fundamental memories are to the processes of identity construction of diasporic subjects.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter I worked with a theoretical basis which tackles some of the specificities of three concepts: diaspora, identity, and autobiography. To better develop key points about those concepts, I relied on the ideas developed by important critics who are well known throughout the academic world for their relevant opinions on diverse theoretical fields. Among those critics, in the first chapter of this dissertation, James Clifford and his notions about diaspora offered a very concise basis for me to develop some questions related to diasporic individuals and the gamut of situations their conditions of dislocation might entail. As far as identities are concerned, Stuart Hall and his many essays about culture, identity, the post-modern subject, and the continuous processes of identifications which may comprise the identities of the contemporary individual were always insightful and frequently a point of reference whenever I saw myself caught in some theoretical deadlock due to the intricacies of the themes I dealt with. Last but by no means least, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson were extremely important for me to tackle some questions about memory and the autobiographical realm as well as the subsequent unfolding questions related to this theme. Their approach of "almost everything related to the autobiographical universe" was often elucidating and opened my view to theoretical possibilities that had never crossed my mind before getting to know their work in more depth.

In the second chapter, I briefly introduce some biographical notes about Jamaica Kincaid and start my analysis of *Annie John*. To do so, I sub-segmented this chapter into smaller parts that referred to Jamaica Kincaid's private and public reasons to be the writer she is. My analyses cover the period that Kincaid's narrating voice, Annie John, lived in Antigua

and the personal tactics she had to come up with in order to preserve and develop her identity in accordance with her own terms. In this sense, it is impossible not notice the love and hate relationship she has with her own mother which greatly contributes to her feelings of inadequacy and dislocation, feelings which were duly aggrandized by some post-colonial issues Annie has to face due to Antigua's colonial status of subordination to England, which may corroborate the idea of *Annie John* as a pre-diasporic novel since, to a certain extent, it is about a diasporic writer's memories before the geographical dislocation the narrating voice of the book underwent.

In the third chapter, I focus my analytical efforts on *Lucy*, highlighting the identity negotiations Lucy, Kincaid's protagonist, had to go through when she arrived and started living in the United States. To a greater or lesser extent, *Lucy* could be considered a kind of continuation to *Annie John* because, although the protagonist's name is different, *Lucy* starts exactly from the point that *Annie John* ends. As a matter of fact, the "echoes from the past" in *Lucy* are such that it is impossible not to think that Lucy is an older version of Annie John living in a foreign country. Among other things, my analyses of this book takes into consideration Lucy's processes of assimilation in the United States, the change in identity references, and the cultural shock the girl had to go through in order to preserve her selfhood in her host country which might turn this book into a post-diasporic narrative because it covers the period of the narrating voice after her diasporic move.

In the forth chapter, I focused my attention on Esmeralda Santiago and her first memoir, *When I Was Puerto Rican.* I started this part with a short biographical note on Santiago's life and career and then I addressed the concept of a memoir which is Santiago's signature genre and which obviously highlights the importance of memory in autobiographical narratives. Although Jamaica Kincaid denounces some essentialist stereotypes in her books, with Esmeralda Santiago this problem is a little bit more pervasive and that is the reason why I dedicated great part of this chapter to analyze how the stereotypes Santiago had contact with in her childhood influenced the way she at first conceived, and later started to construct her subjectivity. This book could also be considered a pre-diasporic book since it gives an account of Santiago's life while she lived in Puerto Rico, an unincorporated territory of the United States and considered by some to have a colonial relationship with the North American country, which caused several levels of identity dislocation, principally considering that the American interference in some Puerto Rican affairs directly affected Santiago notions of nationality as well as her sense of root preservation.

In the fifth chapter of this dissertation, I tried to analyze issues of identity, diaspora and memory in Santiago's second memoir, *Almost a Woman*, which could be considered another post-diasporic book for it delineates the writer's life when she leaves Puerto Rico to (re)start her life in New York. Identity negotiations to Negi, as Santiago's family affectionately calls her, are very complicated because once in the United States she had to become another person while still being the Puerto Rican girl her mother expects her to be. Negi's solution to her identity dilemma was to become a hybrid subject, someone who was able to transit through two cultural codes, in between the metaphysical hyphen she has to occupy in order to deal with her processes assimilation. This chapter is about Negi's cultural shock and her struggles to make part of new social and cultural milieu without losing track of the values she held dear and which greatly contribute to the idea she has of herself even if sometimes she has to reevaluate those values.

In sum, it is my intention to provide a satisfactory investigation of autobiographical narratives as potential ways for some diasporic subjects to retrieve, synthesize and develop their identities as well as their niches of identification. To show that it is through the expression of their subjectivity that some diasporic writers can guarantee their visibility and propose alternative ways for one to conceive his or her own selfhood.

CHAPTER 1 – A WINDOW TO THE CONCEPTS

There are three basic concepts which sustain the line of argumentation about to be unfolded in the current work: diaspora, identity, and autobiography. In the general theoretical scope hereby developed, those concepts are intrinsically intertwined for they sustain the structural framework which grounds the investigation of the books which inspired the mode of analyses in Jamaica Kincaid's and Esmeralda Santiago's work respectively, for their experiences and subsequent narrative output is directed linked with particularities, causes, and consequences direct or indirectly related to those concepts.

As far as post-colonial studies are concerned, there has been a crescent interest in diasporic moves for they represent significant changes in the contemporary global scenery. Individuals with diasporic experiences share a notion of social, cultural, and emotional displacement that trespasses geographical boundaries to create a non-place of identification which may encompass the purviews of those individuals with a common life history of deterritorialization. In "Diasporas, James Clifford acknowledges this new kind subjectivity by recognizing that those individuals are concomitantly inside and outside the geographic field of ideology of the places that they eventually occupy, developing a perspective that is unique because it is different from the semantics of other kinds of dislocations. In this sense, diasporic subjects have to devise alternative notions of nationality so that they can accommodate the implications of what their lives were and then become before and after their diasporic moves in order to preserve a certain parameter of self-reconstruction. Clifford, says:

> Whatever their ideologies of purity, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms. Diaspora is different from travel (though it works through travel practices) in that it is not temporary. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this it is different from exile, with its frequently individualist focus). Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, roots and routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintains identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside with a difference. (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 251).

That difference is perhaps the most relevant trace, or even mechanism of resistance, developed to assure the visibility of people who deny being stratified by the essentialist labels present in Anglo-centric patriarchal societies which tend to keep those individuals out of the centers of power negotiations, ideologically erasing those individuals who cannot sit at the tables where the weapons of power and control are arranged by those who detain the economic means to set rules of the game of globalization as well as who is in and who is out of this game.

With the disruption of traditional conventions it is natural to think of identity as something inside the realm of a more mobile scope of signification, understanding that now new postures of self-conception require the acceptance of identity as something de-centered, something open to new possibilities of definitions that abandon the idea of individuality as something stable, solidified in a monolithic identity paradigm that rejects mobility and consequently hinders subjective evolution promoting sameness instead of celebrating difference. In "The Question of Cultural Identity", Stuart Hall develops the idea of what he calls "the Enlightenment subject" as something related to a concept that since the Enlightenment defines one's identity in essential terms, as if individuals were forcefully endowed with a paralyzed identity which is attuned with a given "essence" an individual is supposed to have. In Stuart Hall's words:

> The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose "center" consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous or "identical" with itself – throughout the individual's existence. The essential center of the self was a person's identity […] you can see that this was a very "individualist" conception of the subject and "his" (for Enlightenment subjects were usually described as male) identity. (HALL, 2007, p. 597).

Later, in the same article, Hall proposes the notion of a postmodern subject whose identity has much more to do with specific systems of identifications than to a frozen identity limited to a fixed subjectivity that forevermore would define individuals in accordance with an identity core who is given to them when they are born and is supposed to be immutably kept with them until they die. In the critic's opinion, postmodern and postcolonial identities are in an endless process of evolution.

That is precisely where the concept of daspora is irrevocably connected to the idea of ongoing identities as advocated by Stuart Hall and many other postmodern and postcolonial critics. The diversity of the situations diasporic subjects have to go through unavoidably forces them to negotiate their identity constructions in non-linear terms which endorses the idea of identity as something in a constant process of reinvention in order to adapt selfhood to mutable world configurations proposed by the transformations that change the world and the ways to conceive it such as the advents of globalization, technological advancements, and individual and collective relocations which subvert the essentialist interest some hegemonic groups may have in preserving some universalizing tendencies to conceive contemporary realities.

In "New Ethnicities", Hall also recognizes that "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture" (HALL, 1997, p. 227), such a consideration ratifies the urge to pay heed to the new forms individual

representations that now comprise the new global configurations which host individuals with different national and/ethnic backgrounds who come to inhabit places which contribute to their sense of identity fragmentation, but at the same time, help them construct a personal frame of self-recognition. Some migratory processes from third-world countries to first-world countries have greatly contributed to a new awareness of identity, paving the way for marginalized voices to gain visibility and, with that, show exactly from where they are speaking, even thought generally their voices show that their dislocations transcend geography.

One way those individuals, with non-hegemonic diasporic histories of identity fragmentations, have to express their subjectivities is by writing autobiographical narratives, which portrays the vicissitudes and peculiarities of their singular lives, which are so different from some hegemonic narrative conventions canonized and stabilized by some forces which use these forms of universal establishment to advertize a uniformity of identity conception, which limited the access of marginal social groups to a mainstream of political and social (self-) representation, more or less as Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith observe in "De/Colonization and the Politics of Discourse in Women's Autobiographical Practices":

> Since Western autobiography rests upon the shared belief in a commonsense identification of one individual to another, all I's are potentially autobiographers. And yet not all are I's. Where Western eyes see Man as a unique individual rather than a member of a collectivity, of race or nation, of sex or sexual preference, Western eyes see the colonized as an amorphous, generalized collectivity. The colonized "other" disappears into an anonymous, opaque collectivity of undifferentiated bodies. In this way argues Rey Chow, "Man (hence Europe)… hails the world into being… in such a way as to mark [the non-European world] off from European consciousness or universality." Moreover, heterogeneous "others" are collapsed and fashioned into an essentialized "other" whose "I" has no access to a privatized but privileged individuality. (WATSON; SMITH, 2005, p. 17)
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Hence, when marginal writers verbalize their memories into autobiographical narratives, they turn personal recollection into a political act, for those memories are usually different from what "commonsense identification" expects to read. In this way, those writers subvert commonsense and identification by questioning a paradigm historically constructed, demanding a reevaluation of (post-) modern realit(ies) as a more comprehensive space for identity negotiations.

1.1 Levels of dislocations

In “Diaspora Old and New: Women in the Transnational World”, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak acknowledges different levels of diasporic moves in a world that progressively becomes transnational. The critic investigates the implications of what she calls “Old and New Diasporas”, spotting the social conditions that triggered some individuals’ needs for geographical dislocations and recognizing economic world reconfigurations as a key factor for the uneven process of globalization the world has to go through. Spivak says that:

> What do I understand today by a “transnational world”? That it is impossible for the new and developing states, the newly decolonizing and the old decolonizing nations, to escape the orthodox constraints of “neo-liberal” world economic systems which, in the name of “Development,” and now “sustainable development,” removes all barriers between itself and fragile national economies, so that any possibility of building for social redistribution is severely damaged. In this new transnationality, what is usually meant by the “new diaspora,” the new scattering of seeds of “developing” nations, so that they can take root on developed ground? Eurocentric migration, labor export both male and female, border crossing, the seeking of political asylum, and the haunting in-place uprooting and “comfort women” in Asia and Africa. What were the old diaspora, before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transitional? They were the results of religious oppression, of war, of slavery and indenturing, trade and conquest, and intra-European economic migration, which, since the nineteenth century, took the form of migration and immigration into the United States. (SPIVAK, 2000, p. 3)

Spivak implies that those new diasporas are individual forms of getting along with new global reconfigurations. It is interesting to notice that contemporary literature has been marked by representing an increasing dialogue between different cultural codes. Nowadays, some people are inclined to interpret the world in non-linear ways, that is, as a space for the transit of cultures, a place where one can assimilate and be assimilated by diverse cultural elements which encompass what some people call a postmodern world. To a certain extent, in a globalized arena, or in a global village, self and other take part in semi-symbiotic games which most of the times culminate in strategies of identity construction. With the collapse of geographical borders, there are individuals who develop a kind of sensitivity which can no longer be dissociated from the outside, from alien elements, from the Other. As they are dislocated from their original geographical/emotional locations, those individuals become hybrid subjects with new perspectives which can only be understood according to their own specific diasporic process. Discussing diasporas, in “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Connection in Diasporic Studies,” Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur argue that:

> Etymologically derived from the Greek term *diasperien*, from *dia-*, “across” and *–sperien*, “to sow and or scatter seeds,” diaspora can be seen as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, or exile. (BRAZIEL; MANNUR, 2003, p. 1).

Therefore, most of the time, diasporic subjects have to deal with cultural elements that are foreign and ambiguous to them, and at the same time, fundamental to the construction of their own identities and subjectivities. This conflicting shock of values makes them undergo the process of hybridization resulting from the different ethnic orientations they bring with them and are faced with. Due to this hybridization, diasporic subjects may have a unique way of looking at the world(s) around them as well as a very particular way of feeling the nuances of their specific environments. These individuals will experience an amount of unusual situations which will make them come up with new/different answers to frequently asked questions about living out of geographical borders but inside personal ones. They will be cosmopolitans per excellence and outsiders by their own social perspectives. These individuals will conjugate notions of home, diaspora, and identity according to their own singular displaced and/or relocated subjectivities which, in a way, may equip them with the mechanisms to trespass the borders imposed on them by some limiting world views which conscious or unconsciously fail to comprehend the spiritual liberation and the ensuing tolerance that might be achieved by a different perspective, an alternative attitude which longs for nothing more than self-understanding and consequently a more impartial, or a less biased, understanding of the others, a new awareness of alterity.

It is justified to suppose that in today's world new ways of interpreting the realities that are now being (re-) configured are necessary in order to preserve a sense of identity, or at least, a communal niche of identification. However, one could say that reality itself is too vague a concept to accommodate a pre-established framework prescribed to fit in one's needs of self construction and the interaction this individual would have with the elements that could contribute to his/her own process of self-definition. According to Stuart Hall:

> The question of "identity" is being vigorously debated in social theory. In essence, the argument is that old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject. This so-called "crisis of identity" is seen as part of a wider process of change which is dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world. (HALL, 2007, p. 596).

Therefore, it is not difficult to assume that one trying to think the contemporary subject purely based on general social conventions would run the risk of essentializing individualities failing to locate the subject inside his/her own sites of belonging.

Nevertheless, given present world's reconfigurations, notions of belonging or sites of belongings are hard to grasp because notions of borders have proven to be rather elusive. By assuming notions of borders as a frame which encloses one's private and public life, sculpting the individual's identity, providing them with their own concept of reality, one may pose a

fundamental question: how are those borders built? According to Avtar Brah, “Borders are arbitrary constructions. Hence, in a sense, they are metaphors. But far from being mere abstractions of a concrete reality, metaphors are part of the discursive materiality of power relations” (BRAH, 1996, p. 180). Perhaps, what Brah is implying is that in the past these “power relations” would define the hegemonic hierarchies in which individuals should transit regardless of their necessity of self expression: the borders were there to lock individualities inside their metaphoric bars. With the advent of globalization new locations were created and with these new locations new dynamics of power have emerged.

Repressed individualities gained visibility and some borders were relocated to more metaphysical sites. In other words, although some people may refer to the concept of borders mostly in geographical terms, one could infer that this geography rests much more in the eyes of the beholder than in demarcations of land. Nowadays being globalized has much more to do with how the individual breaks the spell of borderlands than with how borderlands would define the individual. Moreover, it is noticeable that the question of identity/identification gets even more intricate if one takes into account diasporic realities.

In a global world, it is pertinent to take heed of how migratory experiences help characterize the downfall of the old conceptions of identity, ratifying Hall’s opinion and sustaining the notion of identity as something endlessly in progress, in movement, in processes of transformations, or in the words of Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, in “Cartographies of Diaspora: Dionne Brand's Global Village”:

> Identity becomes, in our cosmopolitan world, a process in flux, a temporary belonging rather than a unifying concept. It affects and is affected by transnational movements, and, in turn modifies both subjects in transit and those that remain static, as well as the way contemporary subjects conceive their identities and construct their subjectivity (ALMEIDA, 2006, p. 81).

Caught in-between cultural, geographical and emotional places, diasporic subjects are impelled to negotiate their identity fluency not exactly in a “global village”, but in an arena of hybrid references that will signal their nooks of cultural belonging, attracting these people, or introducing to them the possibility of having a –at least provisory – place to call home. Mostly under these circumstance, some individuals are able to find a kind of community, a site of belonging and with that some idea of home, perhaps not as it is regularly conceived, but as a place that will allow them to recognize themselves in their differences, endorsing Rosemary Marangoly George’s opinion, in “All Fiction Is Homesickness”: “the basic organizing principle around which the notion of ‘home’ is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference” (GEORGE, 2005, p. 2).

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to assume that each level of fragmentation scattered inside and outside diasporic individuals occurs obeying a specific set of situations that will vary according to the arrangement of some life events, and the type of subjectivity that will interpret the impact of these events on some individualities and the emotional response they will ignite in a person attempting to organize his or her inner strategies of identity constructions.

Since fragmentation is at stake here, autobiographies and/or memory narratives can offer further help to writers who underwent different levels of diasporic experiences, consolidating their mental framework of the events that comprise the notions they may have of themselves, and concomitantly, fostering a new narrative perspective, which might as well combine form and content with an almost undeniable touch of "literary verisimilitude". An added consideration to this is James Clifford's observation, in "Diasporas":

> […] diaspora will not be privileged in the new journal devoted to "transnational studies" […] "the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and American dispersion now shares meaning with larger semantic domain that includes words like emigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tolölian, 1994: 4-5). This is the domain of shared and discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories, that we need to sort out and specify as we work our way into a comparative practice of intercultural studies. (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 245)

As a matter of fact, Clifford broadens the reach of the concept of diaspora by implying that the fragmentation and dislocation, which invariably go hand in hand with discussions about diaspora, may transcend the geographic realm, acknowledging a "larger semantic domain" and "the domain of discrepant meaning", which endorses the visibility of writers whose lives and singular narratives can break a certain hegemonic linearity that always pervaded some metanarratives, establishing a rather uniform notion of identity. As a matter of fact, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard, addresses his concept of metanarrative in the following words:

> Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodem* as incredulity toward meranarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds; most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing, its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, Its great voyages, Its great goal. (LYOTARD, 1979, p. 24).

There are some diasporic writers who are, through their memories, narrative style, and alternative identity constructions, proposing a salutary difference to some conventional literary traditions, a new narrative function that may bring to light the individuality of writers who are systematically excluded from the metanarrative realm. In this sense, it is impossible not to take into consideration the role of diasporic women writers who are claiming their subjectivity calling attention to their own lives as some mark of opposition to universal ways

of understanding the conventional realities constructed by androcentric notions which invariably denied visibility to those writers who were systematically ruled out of patriarchal processes of configuration of what is supposed to be taken as “ideal world”.

By exposing some facts of their lives those diasporic women writers seize the concept of an ideal world by asking: “ideal according to whom?” Thus, those writers subvert the traditional mold that tends to prescribe how the lives of contemporary subjects are to be lived, conveniently ignoring some factors which are out of mainstream fields of identification such as ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender. As a matter of fact, James Clifford, in “Diaspora”, mentions gender as a key issue to be considered whenever diasporic experiences question the field of meaning construction within the ideological set of values sold by male oriented cultural codes. Clifford observes that:

> Diasporic experiences are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical account of diasporas and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences. Janet Wolff’s analyses of gender in theories of travel is relevant here (Wolff, 1993). When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate. Specific diaspora histories, co-territories, community practices, dominations, and contact relations may then be generalized into gendered postmodern globalisms, abstract nomadologies. (CLIFFORD, 1997, 258-9).

The way the patriarchal discourse tends to naturalize diasporic experiences usually excludes women’s diasporas as it may take for granted that no particularity is supposed to be observed in epistemologically female diasporic experiences since male diasporic experiences would then set the pattern of “everything related to personal and/collective processes of dislocations”. Therefore, because of its inherent potential to undermine male-centered diasporic notions, the question of gender has called the attention of those interested in the global reconfigurations that nowadays challenge the conventional in order to focus on the individual and consequently on interpersonal relations which are to change the design of contemporary social intricacies.

1.2 Behind the hyphen

In “A Conversation with Cristina Garcia”, Garcia and professor Scott Brown, talk about her novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, and how she felt during the process of writing the book. Garcia states that she had a sense of not fitting in either in Havana, or in Miami, which made her start to question her identity. She says, “Now I feel that I live more on the hyphen than in any other side of it” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 251). What Cristina Garcia means is that being in contact with both cultural frameworks, Cuban and American, she concomitantly is and is not part of their idiosyncratic environments. She is in between both countries and their systems of beliefs and world views.

Besides Cristina Garcia, there are many other women writers who highlight how “hyphenated people” feel having to deal with elements that are ambiguous to them, and at the same time, fundamental to their construction of their own identities. This conflicting shock of values makes them undergo a process of hybridization in order to orchestrate all the different ethnic orientations they may have in their souls. According to Peônia Viana Guedes, in “Cruzando Fronteiras, Marcando Diferenças, Buscando Identidades: Representação do Sujeito Feminino Pós-Colonial em Práticas Narrativas Autobiográficas e Ficcionais nas Literaturas Contemporâneas de Língua Inglesa”:

> Most of the post-colonial critics and theorists see the hybrid nature of post-colonial culture in a positive way, as part of new formations that result from the clash of cultures that characterize colonialism, as a way to escape from the binary categories of the past, and develop new patterns of cultural exchange and cultural growth. (GUEDES, 2008, p. 14, tradução nossa).[1]

However, it is also reasonable to assume that conflicting ideologies may lead one to fragmentation rather than to a unified sense of him/herself. According to Stuart Hall, in “The Question of Cultural Identity”: “[…] identities are being ‘de-centered’; that is, dislocated or fragmented.” (HALL, 2007, p. 596). Thus, it may be the aim of those directly affected by this process of dislocation “to qualify it, and to discuss what may be its likely consequences” (HALL, 2007, p. 596). Therefore, the question is how to put together all these fragments.

A possible way to deal with the issue of fragmented identities is to accept all these fragments as necessary consequences of the process of personal evolution one has to experience while stepping up the stairway of existence. In many phases of their lives, people will experiment with notions of their identities in different levels, in different places, in

[1] The text in Portuguese: “A maior parte dos teóricos e críticos pós-coloniais vêem a natureza híbrida da cultura pós-colonial de maneira positiva, como parte das novas formações que surgem do choque de culturas que caracterizam o colonialismo, como uma maneira de escapar das categorias binárias do passado, e de desenvolver novos modelos de troca e crescimento culturais.”

different circumstances. However, those phases will never sustain a definitive notion of whom a person really is because from each notion on the verge of closure, a new point will be made which will throw the individual into a new set of questions concerning who they are. This identity tendency bears resemblance to what Jacques Derrida, in "Differánce", called "deferred presence", that is, "the signified concept is never present in itself" and every concept is necessarily … inscribed in a chain or system, within which it refers to another and other concepts." (DERRIDA, 1973, p. 138). Added to this is Derrida's pun with the French word *différance*, which, according to Derrida's spelling of the word, could be an allusion to two French verbs: "to differ" and "to defer" (postpone). About this topic, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall points out that:

> To capture this sense of difference which is not pure "otherness," we need to deploy the play on words of a theorist like Jacques Derrida. Derrida uses the anomalous "a" in his of way of writing "difference" –*différance* – as a marker of which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding or translation of the word/concept. It set the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the *trace* of its other meanings. (HALL, 2010, p. 239).

One must acknowledge that the verb "to differ" captures the heterogeneous slant of contemporary identities, as well as the verb "to postpone" may indicate something that is always elusive, something to be achieved but never really reached. Hence, it is possible to say that each identity, in spite of helping some people momentarily find some understanding of themselves, also entail other ramifications that will reopen unsolved points about one's own subjectivity. Perhaps, the truth of the matter is that identities will always be a "work in progress", as Stuart Hall, in "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities", also seems to ratify:

> It makes us aware that identities are never completed. Never finished; that they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process. That itself is a pretty difficult task. Though we have always known it a little bit, we have always thought about ourselves as getting more like ourselves everyday. But that is a sort of Hegelian notion, of going forward to meet that which we always were. I want to open that process up considerably. Identity is always in the process of formation. (HALL, 1997, p. 47).

Hall rejects the notion of static identities, reinforcing the mobile aspect identity constructions may have as they absorb the facets of post-modernity with its random arrangement of reality perceptions. At this point, it is relevant to register that Homi K. Bhabha also seems to repel the idea of an absolute identity. According to his view, one should consider identities within personal contexts. In "The Other Question: Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", Bhabha implies that identities are not fixed essences prescribed to be performed in a set of pre-established systems. This kind of generalization invariably fosters stereotypical notions which fail to recognize the peculiarities of identity processes freezing the fluency of

the subjectivity of the Other in lieu of acknowledging or respecting their particularities. Bhabha says:

> Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated… as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (BHABHA, 1994, p. 293).

Bhabha analyzes the process of stereotype formation questioning pre-conceived ideas that are much more related to a common acceptance of what could be taken as "universal truths" than to a careful investigation of the essentialism implicit in strategies of standardization which place a general rule as a kind of formulaic methodology to label the Other.

It is noticeable that identities crisscross the intricacies of the situational webs that can define personal fields of interest, fomenting the kinds of interaction people will have in their specific milieus. In this sense, perhaps, one should consider the idea of niches of identifications instead of a fixed identity, prescribed to be performed in order to fulfill the expectations social conventions bestow on some individuals, limiting their personal autonomy.

It should be stressed that nowadays identities cannot be circumscribed by a frame of behavior installed to dictate a collective *modus operandi* of life in society. Identities are personal, dynamic, and mutant. Post-modern societies demand mobility, and because of that, people may feel the necessity of being attuned to certain inclinations of the contemporary *zeitgeist* pervasive in globalized societies, which is more and more prone to open inner and outer spaces to those people whose subjectivity is fluid enough to adapt their identities to their needs without really losing focus of what they are or who they want to be: people who are "translated" – to borrow the concept developed by Stuart Hall, in "The Question of Cultural Identity":

> For there is another possibility: that of "translation". This describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusions of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them, and losing their identities completely. They bear upon the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages, and histories by which they are shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several "homes" (and to no one particular "home"). People belonging to such cultures of hybridity have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of "lost" cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably translated. (HALL, 2007, p. 629)

Maybe, in accordance with Hall's terms, the lack of a pre-determined identity could be the actual identity of what he calls "the post modern subject" (HALL, 2007, p. 629), for it allows these people to find the elements they will identify with, turning their identities into a plethora of fields of identifications comprised by the elements that eventually will form part and parcel of what they are without totally compromising their singularity. In a way, the fragmentation of postmodern subjects, in spite of being conflicting at times, might also be incorporated by some individuals as a way of mingling with contemporaneity, finding alternatives to linear conceptions of identities. However, the question of fragmented identities gains more peculiar contours when people who were forced to live their lives in between places, inside a metaphorical cultural hyphen, mostly caused by several levels of dislocations, feel the urge to express their viewpoints. In this case, self-expression turns into a problematic necessity that can be further aggravated, taking into consideration that the question of putting together the fragments of one's life gains new dimensions in discussions about diasporic identities.

1.3 Autobiographical narratives

The answer to the question of putting together life fragments may be directly linked with postmodernism and some of its current strategies which tend to see reality as another construction. Moreover, nowadays it is impossible to avoid the gamut of references and pieces of information flowing over and over again, fragmenting even more individualities that are far from any level of self-consciousness. In her article "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana Feminism", Paula M. L. Moya points out that "[…] identities both condition and are conditioned by the kinds of interpretations people give to the experiences they have." (MOYA, 1997, p. 138). Due to this fact, many contemporary writers are resorting to autobiographical narratives as an attempt to synthesize their past memories and their subjective readings of the world, trying to join some key factors that comprise the construction of their own identities. In *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods,* Tess Cosslett asserts that an "autobiography is to do with recovering a past (as well as with a projection of the future),

and depends on the deployment of often shifting, partial and contesting set of personal or collective memories." (COSSLETT, 2000, p. 4).

According to Michael Herschmann and Carlos Alberto Messeder Pereira, in "O Boom da Biografia e do Biográfico na Cultura Contemporânea", auto/biographical narratives enable the individual to organize their own realities. They argue that "The contemporary man [...], deals with an enormous multiplicity of identity references, […] Thus, in this context, biographical narratives would allow an arrangement of reality, temporarily crystallizing identities, life plans." [2] (HERSCHMANN; PEREIRA, 2002, p. 143, tradução nossa). Therefore, it is also possible to assume how relevant memory is in helping individuals organize their conceptions of the world and of themselves as well. Herschmann and Pereira also claim that "Memory narratives, thus, seem to offer compasses or "time anchors" to individuals in a world that grows in a faster more fragmented manner."[3] (HERSCHMANN; PEREIRA, 2002, p. 143, tradução nossa). Taking these ideas into consideration, it is easy to infer that autobiographies might be a very interesting step towards the construction of individual identities since, according to bell hooks, in "Writing Autobiography", an "autobiography is a personal narrative, a unique retelling of events not as much as they happened but as we remember or invent them." (hooks, 2001, p. 430)

Furthermore, in the same article, bell hooks hints that, in a way, her systems of self-recognition might be triggered by the memories that help her define the person she is. From these past memories she has the means to construct the kind of individual she wants to be for they endow her with a kind of identity pointer which, at the same time, reminds her of where she comes from and guide her to where she wants to go without hindering her process of identity evolution:

> The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. It was the longing for release that compelled the writing but concurrently it was the joy of reunion that enabled me to see that the act of writing one's autobiography is a way to find again that aspect of self and experience that may no longer be an actual part of one's life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present. Autobiographical writing was a way for me to evoke the particular experience of growing in up southern and black in segregated communities. (hooks, 2001, p. 430).

It is interesting to perceive that by retrieving her memories and subsequently writing her autobiography, hooks goes through a kind of cathartic exercise, as if she herself had to evoke her personal demons to then exorcise them all, thus finding a certain paradigm of

[2] The text in Portuguese: "O homem contemporâneo [...], lida com uma enorme multiplicidade de referenciais identitários [...] Assim, neste contexto, as narrativas biográficas possibilitariam ordenar a realidade, cristalizando temporariamente identidades, projetos de vida".

[3] The text in Portuguese: "As narrativas de memória, portanto, parecem oferecer bússolas ou 'âncoras temporais' aos indivíduos num mundo cada vez mais veloz e fragmentário".

redemption. It is curious to see that this kind of attitude does not congeal the flux of her identity evolution, but on the contrary, pave the way for her to develop her own conceptions of herself: "Writing the autobiographical narrative enabled me to look at my past from a different perspective and to use this knowledge as a means of self-growth and change in a practical way." (hooks, 2001, p. 430).

bell hooks is one of the critics who is concerned with how the question of gender can be relevant to broaden the scope of identity references some autobiographical pieces can offer to some people who cannot see themselves in, or who cannot identify with, the autobiographical representations delivered by androcentric poles which privilege the linearity of patriarchal subjectivity to the detriment of other possibilities of identity constructions. In this sense, it is interesting to see how gendered autobiographies (re)presents alternative niches of identification as Peônia Viana Guedes observes in "Mapeando Espaços Ficcionais e Autobiográficos: Novas Versões da Identidade Canadense na Obra de Alice Munro":

> Feminist theorists and critics thus focused on the relevance of gender in many kinds of narratives, emphasizing the importance of taking into account gender as a determining element in the production and reception of narratives written by women. As a result of these studies, the male paradigm, androcentric, linear, which up to then guided the investigation and the assessment of fictional and autobiographical narratives was replaced by new theoretical and critical parameters and different lines of approach to the study of the narratives produced by women writers. (GUEDES, 2011, p. 66, tradução nossa).[4]

Thus, gender is another element with the inherent potential to reshape, or rather, undermine, dominating patriarchal configurations of realities because, as far as autobiographies are concerned, gender awareness may rescue female memories and consequently experiences that display other ways to conceive reality as dissociated of some enforced hegemonies of power which, by limiting female expression, or even erasing it, deny visibility to those who do not belong to conventional forms of what is taken to be reality. By explaining facts about their past, the autobiographer can express the development of her selfhood and with that find her own conception of what is supposed to be real. Memory plays a crucial role in constructing meaning and, mainly, parameters of self-definitions. Therefore it is possible to say that memories can be an inner point of introspection shared in an autobiographical piece which may catch the eye of those interested in the reality notion being proposed in that specific piece. In the words of Jean Quigley, in *The Grammar of Autobiography: A Developmental Account*:

[4] The text in Portuguese: "Teóricas e criticas feministas enfocaram, então, a relevância do elemento gênero em vários tipos de narrativas, enfatizando a importância de considerarmos o gendramento como elemento determinante da produção e recepção de narrativa produzidas por mulheres. Como resultado deste estudo, o paradigma masculino, androcêntrico, linear, que até então norteara a investigação e avaliação de narrativas autobiográficas e ficcionais, deu lugar a novos parâmetros e linhas de abordagem para o estudo de narrativas produzidas por escritoras mulheres."

> What we refer to confidently as memory –meaning a moment, a scene, a fact that has been subjected to a fixative and therefore rescued from oblivion – is really a form of storytelling that goes on continually in the mind and often changes with the telling. Too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things that they conform to this end. (QUIGLEY, 2000, p. 193).

However, memory is, by no means, trustworthy. Anyone can sense that every now and then people are betrayed by their own recollections. For this reason, in autobiographies, the expectations may differ from the kind of information people sometimes hope to find in historical archives, or other texts which advocate a kind of factual fidelity. In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson throw light on this issue by stating that "While autobiographical narratives may contain 'facts,' they are not factual history about a particular time, person or event. Rather they offer subjective 'truth' rather than 'fact.'" (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 10). Smith and Watson also point out that:

> More recently, Stanley Fish has observed that "[a]utobiographers cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not" (A 19). Any utterance on the autobiographical text, even inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer. Thus, when one is both the narrator and the protagonist of the narrative, as in life stories, the truth of the narrative becomes undecidable. We need then to adjust our expectations of the truth told in self-referential narratives. Of course, autobiographical claims such as date of birth can be verified or falsified by recourse of documentation or fact outside the text. But autobiographical truth is a different matter; it is an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of life. (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 10).

Perhaps, the understood pact between autobiographies and readers is not the one of veracity, but the one of verisimilitude. The proposed "autobiographical game" is not related to a utopian impartiality or an untainted depiction of truth, but to a depiction of what **could** be true. This touch of pseudo sincerity may provide readers and autobiographers with points of identifications and consequently a "unique retelling" of life that despite of really being unique, is also believable enough to have happened to anyone of us. Roger Porter and H.R. Wolf in *The Voice Within: Reading and Writng Autobiograhies*, observe that "Truth is a highly subjective matter, and no autobiographer can represent exactly 'what happened back them' any more than a historian can definitively describe the real truth of the past" (PORTER; WOLF, 1973, p. 5). Hence, just like historians can do in their registering of what is to be considered a historical fact, autobiographers have the power to select what they want to include and omit about their lives; the negotiations of meaning therefore depend on the readers' proneness to buy that "truth" being sold by a given autobiographical piece.

Perhaps one the most accurate terms to refer to literary works whose intent is to give an account of someone's life is the one which introduces the first chapter of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's book, *Reading Autobiography*: "Life Narrative." (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 1). The term, life narrative, encompasses many writing pieces that use mnemonic

resources as points of departure to compose auto/biographical narratives and/or other narratives sprinkled with personal memory vignettes. In fact, Smith and Watson give very elucidative explanations about the origins of the word autobiography and about how the ideas evoked by this expression can be further expanded:

> In Greek *autos* signifies "self," *bios* "life," and *graphe* "writing." Taken together in this order, the words denote "self life writing," a brief definition of "autobiography." The British poet-critic Stephen Spender cites the dictionary definitions of autobiography as "the story of one's life written by himself" but notes its inadequacy to the world that each is to himself" (115). More recently, French theorist Philippe Lejeune has expanded that definition: "we call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality."(SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 1).

Nonetheless, given the line of argumentation so far unfolded, it goes without saying that autobiographies are not a definitive mode of life narratives or an unquestionable account of individual sagas. Actually, autobiographies and other genres of life narratives allow some individuals to tell their histories according to their points of view; and every point of view is, in itself, already dependent on interpretations which are obviously personal, or rather, subjective.

The individual subjective aura behind autobiographical pieces facilitates the possibilities of self-representation, which, in turn, may subvert the penchant hegemonic societies have for patronizing those people who do not fit in an idealized identity frame. According to Leigh Gilmore, in "The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre": "Ultimately, then, autobiographies can be looked to as a site where clues for new social theory can be found, clues that exceed the limits of autobiography or social theory as they are traditionally understood." (GILMORE, 1994, p. 9).

In many cases, those kinds of narratives emphasize the "narrating I" (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 185) as an agent of the discourses established by the disposition of the factual/fictive arrangement of the events aligned in the autobiographical narrative. Therefore, those writers may have a rather unusual opportunity to conceive themselves as the protagonists in the metaphysical books of their own lives, a kind of conception frequently denied to those writers who do not partake in hegemonic circles of power.

Not rarely are diasporic subjects among those whose displacement "from what we could call a traditional notion of the subject" (GILMORE, 1994, p. 10) forces them to undergo an intense process or self-reinvention in order to dodge amongst the social conventions that set the borders that are not to be crossed by those who do not belong to a mainstream of ethnic, racial, social or sexual orientations pre-established to assure the *status-quo* of certain dynamics of power and control. In the words of Leigh Gilmore: "Kirsten

Wasson argues that autobiography's own marginality to other discourses, as well as to its internal contradictions, offers the ethnic and immigrant autobiographer and critic a room to maneuver." (GILMORE, 1994, p. 10).

In this sense, Linda Hutcheon is a strong voice to recognize the subversive quip of marginal representations as she denounces the unbalanced power systems between mainstream political representations and underground – or "ex-centric" – individualities. In "Representing the Postmodern", Linda Hutcheon argues that:

> [A]s many commentators have remarked, the often unconscious ethnocentrism and phallocentrism (not to mention heterocentrism) of many in this camp lead to a devaluing or ignoring of the 'marginalized' challenges (aesthetic and political) of the 'ex-centric', those relegated to the fringes of the dominant culture – the women, blacks, gays, Native peoples, and others who have made us aware of the politics of – not just postmodern – representations. (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 17).

The possibility to draw a parallel between Hutcheon's notions of the impact of post-modernity on dominant conjunctures and the autobiographical visibility of diasporic writers display *pieces de resistance*, underpinning the alternative identities that transit on the outskirts of the hegemonies of power.

Hence, it can be observed that diasporic Caribbean writers are among the best exponents of new proposals of identity building because they carry a different cultural approach by reconfiguring reality in accordance with their own way to experience it. Perhaps, one could say that within their memories lies the viability to understand the differences brought by alterity directly from those who, at least, have sufficient legitimacy to celebrate the inherent potential to – echoing Stuart Hall's vehement discourse in "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" – establish and "make a difference":

> Because they [young black people from the Caribbean] need to know that difference, that difference that makes a difference in how they write their poetry, make their films, how they paint. It makes a difference. It is inscribed in their creative work. They need it as a resource. They are all those identities together. They are making astonishing cultural work in film and photography and nearly all the most important work in popular music is coming from this new recognition of identity that I am talking about. (HALL, 1997, p. 59).

It must be stressed that the Caribbean conveys a cultural kaleidoscope of human diversity which hosts a plurality of voices which naturally favors an enormous range of identity variations which, in spite of being intrinsically different, have the conceptual space of the Caribbean islands as common point of liaison among themselves, as Angelique V. Nixon very appropriately points out in her article "Relating across Difference":

> Although my focus is on people of the African Diaspora within the Caribbean, it is important to understand that the Caribbean is a diverse region with regional and national specific perspectives on race, gender, class, and sexuality that reflects its diverse populations of Black Indian, Chinese, White and all the "mixes" in between – hundreds of islands separated not only by ocean but also by languages and national borders yet always bound through a shared history of colonization and present day globalization and neocolonialism. This without a doubt directly affects the established scholarship across the region dealing with such issues as

> Caribbean feminism, womanism, gender and development, and Caribbean women's literature. (NIXON, 2009, p. 245).

Because of its manifold layers of differences, the Caribbean could be viewed as a mosaic of references that trespass the concept of hybridism itself, expanding the idea of ethnic and cultural miscegenation, hindering any possibility of an essentializing interpretation of the kinds of identities that may transit across the Caribbean. In this sense, Caribbean people tend to deconstruct some notions which equate globalization and universalization as part for the same generalizing rationale, as Shalini Puri remarks in the introduction of her book, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*:

> Thus, in contrast to the approach that somewhat appropriatively generalizes from the experience of "the" Caribbean to a global condition, I have taken the approach of further *specifying* Caribbean elaborations of hibridity. For it seems to me we are better served such as *mestizaje*, creolization, douglarization, *jibarismo*, and the like – not because any of them constitute a perfect discourse, model, or explanation, but because the multiplicity of terms itself helps keep visible the specificities and histories of each term. In contrast, the umbrella term "hybridity" enacts a dehistoricizing conflation. (Ironically, hybridity itself may be on its way to subsumption under the still broader term "globalization," the newer discourse with claims to master-narrativity.) In fact, with its array of conflicting discourses of hybridity, the Caribbean example suggests we should be wary of the any generalization about hybridity. It is in part from a desire to study the immense diversity of actually existing hybridities rather than ideal types of hibridity that I have chosen to make the Caribbean the site of my case studies. (PURI, 2004, p. 3)

Perhaps, in the same way that one should consider *identities* instead of a prescribed identity, the passage above implies that maybe one should also consider the term *hybridities* instead of hybridity; however, regardless of intrinsic levels of references, it could be said that hybrid people may clamor the demise of unilateral hermeneutics of life. Therefore, it is significant that writers from the Caribbean have been greatly contributing to thrash out the particularities of the many levels of oppression underwent by those who do not occupy a privileged position in the well supplied societies of what lately has been – rather conveniently– called "global village". Sometimes, just by posing their individualities as counterparts to those people who are under the auspices of the well-to-do castes of the monetary elites, and with the visibility of their work, some Caribbean writers start promoting the downfall of the ostracism to which they were always relegated, denouncing the other side of the "global village." As Puri argues:

> Notwithstanding the rhetoric of the "global village," then, for most of the planet's population, the struggle is for basic food, potable water, and basic communications. Seventy percent of the children in the Third World suffer malnutrition; 82,000 children starve to death each day. Nearly one-third of the four billion people in the developing world do not have access to clean drinking water. Although the telephone is a 100-year-old technology, over half of the world population has never made a phone call. Tokyo has more mobile phones than does the entire continent of Africa; in Jamaica in 1990, there were only four phones per 100 people. Only 4 percent of the global supply of computers is owned by people in the Third World. In 1990, First World nation states consumed about 50 percent of the world's energy resources, compared to one-sixth in the Third World. These are stark statistics – and they pin us with the

> realization that if one truly looks at the globe as a whole, dirt roads are still more the norm than the information superhighway theorists travel. (PURI, 2004, p. 19-41).

In many cases those writers use their lives and memories as strategic tools for the development of their subjectivities and as a kind of recording of their alternative, imposed or not, lifestyles. Although the life narratives of those writers do not lay claim to be the quintessence of truth, they reveal part of a history they might long to share with interested readers and in so doing they synthesize all the identities that form their individual self, developing their subjectivities and concomitantly offering other points of identification to people who, like those diasporic writers, may be out of universal axes of power.

CHAPTER 2– ON *ANNIE JOHN*

Generally taken as one of the main voices among women writers from the Caribbean, Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 as Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson on the island of St John's, Antigua. She lived with her stepfather, a carpenter and a cabinet maker, and her Dominican mother, Annie, until 1965 when she was sent to Westchester, New York to work as an *au pair* girl. In Antigua, she completed her secondary education under the British system due to Antigua's status as a British colony until 1967. She went on to study photography at the New York School for Social Research after leaving the family for which she worked, and also attended Franconia College in New Hampshire for a year, but dropped out before starting the second year of studying. In "Jamaica Kincaid's writing and the Maternal-Colonial Matrix", Laura Niesen de Abruna summarizes some subsequent events that happened in Kincaid's life and career in the following lines:

> Soon afterwards she began to submit freelance articles to magazines, two of which were published in *Ms*. With the help of her friend, George Trow, she became a contributor to the *New Yorker*. From 1976 to the present, she has been a staff writer for the New Yorker, contributing some 80 pieces, a few as letters with her name attached, some unsigned, to the 'Talk of the Town' section and over 14 short stories. Her first volume of short stories, *At the Bottom of the River*, published in 1978, presented modernist dream visions of life in Antigua. Her best work to the date is the coming-of-age novel, *Annie John*, which appeared in 1983. Her collection of short essays on Antigua, *A Small Place*, was published in 1988. Her novel, *Lucy* appeared in 1990. Her most recent novel is entitled *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and picks up the theme of maternal matrix, as Kincaid presents her mother's life in the first person. Kincaid now lives in Vermont with her husband Allen, music professor at Bennington College, and their two children Annie and Harold Shawn. (ABRUNA, 1999, p. 172).

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* is the story of a young girl coming of age in Antigua, and also the unraveling of Kincaid's most recurrent themes: ambivalent bonds created by a mother's love, processes of identity constructions, and (post-) colonial-related issues. It is curious to notice that in this book Kincaid uses the relationship Annie has with her mother as a kind of metaphor to adjacent discussions of postcolonial individualities being subdued by the imperialist power of England as well as her inner struggles to preserve her own sense of subjectivity, in spite of her mother dominating hold.

Taken as a kind of sequence to *Annie John*, *Lucy* (1990) is, according to what Henry Louis Gates Jr. registers in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, "a sparse, beautifully precise novel […] the psychological space between leaving and arriving" (GATES JR, 1997, p. 2524-2525) since the transitional overtone of the novel is blatant. Nonetheless,

although, in many ways, *Lucy* is complementary to *Annie John*, some particularities are to be observed.

A more metaphorical or even psychological analysis of these particularities could suggest that the character, Lucy, is a young Antiguan woman who arrives in New York to work as an *au pair* girl, as an attempt to construct her identity to the detriment of the haunting presence of her past, majorly embodied by Annie John, the young Antiguan girl, who, although not really mentioned in *Lucy*, would be a symbolic representation of her memories in Antigua, principally if one considers the mother-daughter dynamic pervasive throughout the whole novel, solidifying the haunting presence of Kincaid's/Lucy's childhood.

Once in New York, the exercise of comparing and contrasting her former life with the reality that spreads out before her starts off, and Lucy sees herself located in a kind of limbic space where past, present and future are distant notions for she knew that she somehow had lost the "comfort zone" to which she would resort to define herself.

Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson decided to change her name to Jamaica Kincaid in 1973, an attitude which cannot be put aside in any attempt to understand a diasporic writer in pursuance of developing her/his own identities. In *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid*, Justin D. Edwards makes interesting points about Kincaid's name changing:

> Changing her name was, as Kincaid says, a liberation that gave her the freedom to write whatever she wanted. She also stated that she chose this name because it reflected her complex identity as a Caribbean woman who was marked by a British colonial education system. The name of the Island of Jamaica is after all, an English corruption of what Columbus called "Xaymaca," and "Kincaid" is a common surname throughout the English speaking world. The combination the two names, then, provided her a new identity for her new life in the United States. But it was also the name that connected her to her roots in the Caribbean and her colonial past. This process of renaming is a theme that appears throughout Kincaid's works, for renaming is often used as a metaphor for conquest and colonial domination. (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 2).

Another very symbolic choice of name is the one with which Kincaid decides to use as a title of her 1985 novel, *Annie John*. The title of Kincaid's book could be taken as a post-colonial hybrid amalgam that conjugates in the same lyric-I the name of the writer's own mother (and, perhaps, as put in the quotation above, a metaphor for "her roots in the Caribbean and her colonial past"), and the English name John, also a rather common name "throughout the English speaking world". The title of Kincaid's work, then, might also represent "a metaphor for conquest and colonial domination".

Leigh Gilmore makes interesting points in "There Will Always Be a Mother" as she evaluates the overlapped binary, naming and meaning, acknowledging the freedom Jamaica

Kincaid has when she experiments with the attribution of meaning from the names she juggles with in her creative and personal ambiances:

> The function of a name is to identify, to stabilize meaning, to fix and hold in place. Except in Kincaid's work. Jamaica Kincaid may have initiated her experiments in naming when she renamed herself. Her parents named her Elaine Potter Richardson, but she changed her name when she began writing; or, to put it another way, she gave herself a new name for a newly explored identity. In an interview, Kincaid said she chose the name Jamaica to evoke the West Indies and her birth place, Antigua, and the surname because it went well with the first. Kincaid has continued the recycling of names by naming her daughter Annie, which is her mother's name, as well as the name of the protagonist in *Annie John*. She reserves this opportunity in all her writing, and names shift and recur in her texts. In both her life and her writing, Kincaid takes the name as an occasion for experimentation, and thereby transforms its function. Recognizable relationships, especially that of mother and daughter, persist despite changes in the names of the characters. Autobiographical extension is enacted through the loss, or at least displacement, of names across texts to the point that the name functions as a self-representational sign at the limit of autobiography. (GILMORE, 1994, p. 102).

Some people may hesitate to consider Kincaid's books actual autobiographies because part of their structural frame follows some narrative conventions that resonate with characteristics normally associated with fictional pieces. However, in the "Autobiographical Pact", Phillipe Lejeune states that, "Autobiography is a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." (LEJEUNE, 1989, p. 4). Although Jamaica Kincaid has never overtly declared that *Annie John* was an autobiography, Justin D. Edwards argues that:

> Kincaid asserts that all of her writing is always in some sense autobiographical. "I am driven to write," she says, "so it has to be autobiographical … I'm not interested in things for their own sake. I'm only interested in explaining things to myself… but what I write is also fiction. It wouldn't hold up in a court of law." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 14).

Kincaid's need to explain things to herself is an indicator of her personality guiding the autobiographical drive the author herself admits encapsulates her writing. Moreover, in "The Autobiographical Contract", Phillipe Lejeune also observers that, "For autobiography to exist, there must be an identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist as well as an intention to honour that signature." (LEJEUNE, 2002, p. 193). This shared identity is precisely what guarantees the autobiographical inscription in Kincaid's books because it may work as a kind of narrative mortar that connects author, narrator, and protagonist to the same authorial entity, making them sound in unison. To reinforce the autobiographical presence in *Annie John*, Edwards adds:

> *Annie John* is also a text that incorporates autobiographical material. In an interview in 1990, Kincaid admitted to the personal content of her first novel: "the feelings in it [*Annie John*] are autobiographical, yes. I didn't want to say it was autobiographical because I felt that would be somehow about myself, but it is and so that's that." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 44).

What Kincaid says about the things she writes echoes the lines by Michael Herschmann and Carlos Alberto Messeder Pereira, in "O Boom da Biografia e do Biográfico

na Cultura Contemporânea", already cited in the present work, when they say that "auto/biographical narratives enable the individual to organize their own realities" (HERSCHMANN; PEREIRA, 2002, p. 143), and principally the lines coined by bell hooks, in "Writing Autobiographies", when she seizes the so-called "impartial veracity" of autobiographical narratives by conceiving them as a "unique retelling of events not as much as they happened but as we remember or invent them" (hooks: 2001, p. 430). In writing so, hooks acknowledges that the line between fact and fiction is even finer than one might suppose. Perhaps, according to her point of view there will forcefully be a very postmodern kind of blurring of genres in memory narratives; however, this time, the "genres" under scrutiny are reality and fiction, or the fictions of reality.

It is relevant to assume that, maybe more than anything else, Kincaid's intention is to make sense of herself by trying to find in her past the roots of the individual she is now by using her memories and imagination to construct the personas that she will use as possible (sub-)versions of herself since most of her writing derives from the colonial past she systematically insists on revisiting and reframing, perhaps in an attempt of creating her stories from her histories or vice-versa, reinforcing that historicity and/or fictionality will always depend on points of view and the position from which one will feel the necessity to adopt this or that point without compromising a common need for authenticity. Jamaica Kincaid can reach this level of credibility greatly because of the reasons given by Susheila Nasta, in "Beyond the Frame: Writing a Life and Jamaica Kincaid's Family Album":

> Most people familiar with Jamaica Kincaid would probably accept that her published work to date represents a series of shifting portraits of family album which, when released from the dark shadows of memory, presents the reader with a series of fluid narratives that speaks both to the absence of a past lost in its changing significance in the context of a diasporic present. I am using the idea here of "life-writing" rather than "autobiography" – although it is abundantly clear from Kincaid 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, online).

That is to say that, as far as life narratives are concerned, what is taken to be factual or fictional has to be believable in order to be palatable to a prospective audience. However, Kincaid's diasporic condition, which endows her with a hybrid identity, and her denial to assume her work as something entirely autobiographical allows her to discard some "discrete portraits of a life linked to verisimilitude/authentic autobiographical truths", such as documented official historical proofs, and even so, keep the realistic atmosphere that envelops her work in the limits of the life narrative realm.

Besides postcolonial and identity issues, there are also many layers of displacements in *Annie John*. In the very first paragraph of the book, Annie says:

> Usually we live in our house on Dickson Bay Street, a house my father built with his own hands, but just now it needed a new roof and so we were living in a house out of Fort Road […] I had nothing to do every day except to feed the ducks and the pig in the morning and in the evening I spoke to no one other than my parents. (KINCAID, 2007, p. 3).

It is interesting to notice that these short lines, in the beginning of the book, hint the semi diasporic overtone of isolation imbued in Kincaid's sense of forced dislocation. It is possible to presuppose that the writer retrieves this and other snippets of memory to give the reader a short window to the varied processes of dislocations she went through in the whole book and how she chooses to segment them in order to align her smaller displacements with her coming-of-age narrative, indicating how she will represent the kind of girl she was, and from where she is speaking. All that could be taken to mean that each detail of her inner or outer dislocations, regardless of how simple and fragmentary they are, might be a kind of diachronic photograph of a site where she was in a specific time, situating her geographically and emotionally. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall develops an idea which can be related to Kincaid's narrative intentions:

> We seek, here, to open a dialogue, an investigation, on the subject of cultural identity and representation. Of course, the "I" who writes here must also be thought of as, itself, "enunciated." We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always "in context," *positioned*. I was born into and spent my childhood and adolescence in a lower-middle-class family in Jamaica. I have lived all my adult life in England, in the shadow of the black diaspora – "in the belly of the beast". I write against the background of a lifetime's work in cultural studies. If the chapter seems preoccupied with the diaspora experience and its narratives of displacement, it is worth remembering that all discourse is "placed", and the heart has its reasons. (HALL, 2010, p. 234).

By reading *Annie John*, the reader may have access to some of Kincaid's reasons and locations because the writer offers her impressions of the events she experiences filtering them into personal facts "not as much as they happen, but as she remembers or invent them". In any way, as she delivers those events in an artistic format, she challenges canonical pieces by calling attention to her focuses of references, therefore undermining the notion of a unified subject, inverting the slightly overrated Cartesian motto and establishing her own voice which verbalizes the idiosyncrasies of her realities, marking her plea for self-representation and creating her own ideological refrain: I am, therefore I think **and write**. Hence, simply by translating her impressions of the realities she beholds through her writing, a diasporic writer such as Jamaica Kincaid walks towards the identities she is willing to develop, decoding her subjectivity into language, creating a personal dialect of life experiences which gives agency to her voice as observes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "The Politics of Translation":

> I want to consider the role played by language for the *agent*, the person who acts, even though intention is not fully present to itself. […] The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writing of a writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of British woman/citizen with the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain's imperial past, its often racist present, as well as its "made in Britain" history of male domination. (SPIVAK, 2005, p. 369).

Therefore, life narratives may condense the views of some writers and be a means with which identity differences are established. From her diasporic distance Jamaica Kincaid depicts other levels of displacements that contribute to format the individual she became. Susheila Nasta makes an interesting point about this issue:

> This is particularly important at a moment when representations of "self," "other," "voice," and "history" have begun to intersect productively with a broad range of other disciplines and theoretical perspectives. As Tobias Doring's helpful essay on the difficulties of defining the genre of post-colonial life-writing in Edward Said's 1999 memoir, *Out of Place*, makes plain: Autobiographies … are primarily performative texts: they are not just descriptive, but productive; in other words, they do things with words. What they are doing can be characterized as self-formation by self-formulation … Through telling his or her own life, the autobiographer therefore turns into the author of his or her own self. (NASTA, online).

Furthermore, still talking about names, diasporic overtones, and levels of displacements, let us not forget the title of the first and very suggestive chapter of *Annie John*: "Figures in Distance". Of course, such a title very appropriately fits in the general scope of the book, but another possible allusion that could be detected in this title is that when Jamaica Kincaid wrote *Annie John*, she did not live in Antigua any more, and perhaps that fact provided her with enough critical distance for her to revisit her memories, and with that, blow off some of the mists that, somehow, could cloud her own process of identity construction. In "Introduction: Diaspora Consciousness and Literary Expression", Wendy W. Walters raises very interesting viewpoints about "Critical Distances", the actual subtitle of the article from where I took the following quotation:

> The displacements of many of the writers discussed in this book seem rather permanent in that no writer seeks a final forever return to her or his homeland, country of origin, or ancestral connection. The nostalgia with which they invest their performances of belonging is often conflicted and uneven. […] with these disavows are the ways in which these writers' texts inhabit the very sites they reject. Even as they may deny a particular national or continental identity, they use the discursive space of prose narrative to encircle and claim that very identity. Yet what makes these writes so complex and interesting is the political critic of "home" with which they invest their literary visions. These ambivalences form the gist of this study as I attempt to flesh out the ways that physical distance allows these writers to perform the double work of nostalgic longing and political critique. (WALTERS, 2005, p. 22-3).

In this sense, it is through her – rather autobiographical – narrative that a diasporic writer such as Kincaid can express her ambivalent relationships to home, speaking not exactly from her host land(s), or even less likely, from pure recollections of homeland, but from her own diaporic self. Kincaid is not Annie John (at least not anymore), but undeniably, the metaphorical Annie John, the girl she might have been, is still a part of herself, a part she tries to figure out from the hyphenated subject she has become. Therefore, one could say that, as a

matter of fact, Kincaid speaks from her own hyphen, a metaphysical place in between two other locations. The hyphen here could be understood as third (non-) place, "a space called diaspora" – just to borrow Wendy W. Walters' words: "When writers like Richard Wright or Chester Himes produce imaginative work that take them to places where they materially conceive themselves as extra-national, they are creating and describing a third space, which can be called diaspora." (WALTERS, 2005, p. 11). However, it is important to remember that Annie John's/Kincaid's diasporic identity starts even before author/protagonist leaves Antigua.

2.1 – Identifications

In "The Question of Cultural Identity", Stuart Hall claims that "rather than speaking of identity as a finished thing, we should speak of identification, and see it as an on-going process." (HALL, 2007, p. 608). Naturally, one of Annie's primary focuses of identification is her mother. Even physically speaking, Annie has access to an awareness of her own body as she contrasts and compares it to her mother's, Evoking Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's words, in "Post-Colonial Body", when they say that:

> While there is no such thing as 'the post-colonial body', the body has been central to colonialist and post-colonial discourses of various kinds. Much post-colonial writing in recent times has contended that the body is a crucial site for inscription. How people are perceived controls how they are treated and physical differences are crucial in such constructions. (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p. 166).

There is a passage in the book which is a kind of ceremony of physical self-reflexive recognition: Annie and her mother took a bath together. In the general context of *Annie John*, the girl's body would work as a kind of miniature of her mother's, an image that in itself may be interpreted as an allegory for a postcolonial picture, a smaller country – in the Caribbean context of representation – supposed to bear some resemblance to a matrix. There is a clear undertone of subordination in this part since the mother is naturally the controlling agent of the whole scene. Concomitantly, Annie might see her own body as an extension of her mother's body, accepting her subordination, or rather, embracing her mother as the sublime biological inscription Annie would carry in her own body since, at this point of the novel, the girl would willingly construct herself after the image of her mother:

> My mother and I often took a bath together. Sometimes it was just a plain bath, which didn't take very long. Other times it was a special bath in which the barks and flowers of many different trees, together with all sort of oils, were boiled in the same caldron. We would then sit in this bath in a darkened room with a strange smelling candle burning away. As we sat in this bath, my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself. (KINCAID, 1997, p.14).

In Annie's eyes, her mother is an almost divine figure, an ideal of perfection which makes Annie idolize her:

> But when my eyes rested on my mother, I found her beautiful. Her head looked as if it should be on a sixpence. What a beautiful long neck, and long plaited hair, which pinned up around the crown of her hair because when her hair hung down it made her feel too hot. Her nose was the shape of a flower on the brink of opening. Her mouth, moving up and down as she ate and talked at the same time, was such a beautiful mouth I could have looked at it forever if I had to and not mind. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 19).

Annie's mother constantly monitors her daughter, controlling every detail of Annie's life. At first Annie likes her mother's ubiquity because it was a kind of affective shield Annie needed to feel around her and to have it constantly reinforced by her mother's stern vigilance: "It pleased me to think that before she could see my face, my mother spoke to me in the same way she did now. [...] No small part of my life was so unimportant that she hadn't made a note of it, and now she would tell it to me over and over again. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 22). However, the book shows several turning points that exemplify the thresholds Jamaica Kincaid always depicts in her books. Curiously enough, it is Annie's own body which initiates her self-awareness and the beginning of her search for selfness:

> The summer of the year I turned twelve, I could see that I had grown taller; most of clothes no longer fit. When I could get a dress over my head, the waist thin came up to just below my chest. My legs had become more spindlelike, the hair on my head even more unruly than usual, small tufts of hair had appeared under my arms, and when I perspired the smell was strange, as if I had turned into a strange animal. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 25)

After this pubescent prelude, there is a series of ruptures that starts compromising the idea of Annie's mother as a sort of paramount source of identification. Those ruptures are firstly accentuated by Annie's mother who also notices her daughter's growth and, perhaps unconsciously, blows the first psychological blasts that shatter Annie's, at this point, fragile identification mirror, fragmenting Annie's comfortable primal zone of identification and sending the girl to a non-place murkily decorated with conflicting emotions. One of the scenes that best exemplifies Annie's mother's ceasing to be a mirror is when she forbids her daughter to emulate her by not letting Annie wear a dress that would make the daughter a duplication of the mother:

> "Oh, no you are getting too old for that. It's time you had your own clothes. You cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me." To say that I felt like the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far. It wasn't just what she said, it was the way she said it. No accompanying little laugh. No bending over and kissing my wet little forehead (for suddenly I turned hot, then cold, and all my forces must have opened up, for fluids just flowed out of me). In the end I got my dress with the men playing their pianos, and my mother got a dress with red and yellow overgrown hibiscus, but I was never able to use my own dress or see my mother in hers without feeling bitterness and hatred, directed not so much toward my mother as toward, I suppose, life in general. (KINCAID, 1997, p.26).

The non-place Annie emotionally starts inhabiting is an identity limbo for she begins to lose her identity anchor, her maternal point of reference, which strips her from paradigms

of individuality, making Annie's inner mechanisms of identity construction a kind of blank slate where the girl floats without really knowing what to do with her newly found (or forced) identity leeway. In this sense, it is possible to draw a parallel between Annie's psychological situation and Linda McDowell's elaboration on the concept of non-places, in "Introduction: Place and Gender": "Non-places are those locations in contemporary world where the transactions that take place are between anonymous individuals, often stripped of social identity other than an identification number […]." (MCDOWELL, 2007, p. 6). Obviously, I am using Annie's non-place in more metaphorical terms, but when her mother denies Annie the possibility of mimicry, she also stripes her daughter of a social identity which forces Annie into a certain level anonymity which, in Annie's case, might as well be translated into loneliness, as the girl drifts around new forms of identifications.

In a way, the psychological identity gap – the inner non-place – Annie has to go through marks one of the several rites of passage found in *Annie John*. Once again Linda McDowell has an interesting point that could be worth addressing to illustrate the transitions in Annie's life. McDowell writes: "In non-places therefore, gendered attributes and perhaps even our sexed bodies become unimportant, opening up a paradoxical space of control and liberation." (MCDOWELL, 2007, p. 6). Although Annie could experiment a certain level liberation for now she would be on her own to create her identity, that is, without the shadow of her mother to limit her self-development, the girl is still not equipped to control the changes in herself, the control that was always performed by her mother. Thus, the "paradoxical space of control and liberation" is the intrinsic locale Annie is now situated. However, in Annie's case, her "sexed body" is really important.

In the same way that Annie looked at her mother's body to find self-recognition, her own body starts to be the source of identification she now looks at in an attempt to understand and cope with the rupture ignited by her mother's withdrawal which will mark her self-awareness as kind of watershed in her process of personal evolution:

> As if that were not enough, my mother informed me that I was on the verge of becoming a young lady, so there were quite a few things I would have to do differently. She didn't say exactly just what it was that made me on the verge becoming a young lady, and I was so glad of that, because I didn't want to know. Behind a closed door, I stood naked in front of a mirror and looked at myself from head to toe. I was so long and bony that I more than filled up the mirror, and my small ribs pressed out against my skin. I tried to push my unruly hair down against my head so that it would lie flat, but as soon as I let it go it bounced up again. I could see the small tufts of hair under my arms. And then I got a good look at my nose. It had suddenly spread across my face, so that if I didn't know I was me standing there I would have wondered about that strange girl – and to think that only so recently my nose had been a small thing the size of a rosebud. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 26-7).

Whilst Annie explores her own body, she notices that she is not the same person she was before, and with that she perceives that she will have to reinvent herself and find new

niches of identification, as she makes clear when she reveals her expectations towards the school period about to initiate: “I hoped that everyone would be new, that there would be no one I had ever met before. That way, I could put on a new set of airs; I could say I was something I was not, and no one would ever know the difference.” (KINCAID, 1997, p. 29).

Once at school, Annie’s struggle to find other points of references starts, which, initially, contributes to augment her sense of dislocation as she realizes that she does not belong to that place where all the students “seemed to know each other, and as they met, they would burst into laughter, slapping each other on the shoulder and back telling each other things that must have made for much happiness.” (KINCAID, 1997, p.34). In that stage of her personal quest to find a place to belong to, the yard of her school could be read a sort of identity arena where she sees herself as the Other, mainly because the self-confident attitude of the other girls contrasted with her deep sense of inadequacy, making Annie feel as foreigner in a place she was not supposed to be, indicating the beginning of her emotional diaspora, or rather, her pre-diasporic fragmentation:

> At school, the yard was filled with more of these girls and their most sure-of-themselves gaits. When I looked at them, they made up a sea. They were walking in and out among the beds of flowers, all across the fields, all across the courtyard, in and out of classrooms. Except for me, no one seemed a stranger to anything or anyone. Hearing the way they greeted each other, I couldn’t be sure that they hadn’t all come out of the same belly, and at the same time, too. Looking at them, I was suddenly glad because I had wanted to avoid an argument with my mother I had eaten all my breakfast, for now I surely would have fainted if I had been in anymore a weakened condition. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 35).

Annie notices the individual hiatus that spreads before her and her classmates, demarcating her personal borderland in opposition to the space in which the other girls occupy. Annie is alone; the other girls are a solid block, a community: “The girls in my classroom acted even more familiar to each other. I was sure I would never be able to tell them apart just from looking at them, and I was sure that I would never be able to tell them apart from the sound of their voices.” (KINCAID, 1997, p. 35). When Annie loses her maternal identity matrix, her notion of home, and consequently of belonging, is compromised since these notions are intimately related to the bonds of emotional elements which define the kind of relationship one has with other people or with the social communities one belongs to. In “All Fiction Is Homesickness”, Rosemary Marangoly George talks about the idea of belonging – Membership – and home, in a useful way to highlight what Annie does not have anymore, and perhaps seeks to rebuild:

> Membership is maintained by bonds of love, fear, power, desire and control. Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognized as such by those within and those without. They are places of violence and nurturing. A place that is flexible, that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose every reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions. Home is a place to escape to and to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to

> all. Home is the desirable place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place. It is community, communities are not counter-constructions but only extensions of home, providing the same comforts and terrors on a larger scale. Both home and community provide such substantial pleasure that have been so thoroughly assumed as natural that it may seem unproductive point to the exclusions that found such abodes. (GEORGE, 2005, p. 9).

Annie has neither home nor community and to reinforce her dislocation, at school she acknowledges otherness in postcolonial terms. Her sensation of oppression alluding to the dynamics of domination between England and Antigua is pointedly symbolized by her interaction with the activities and with the people at her school, particularly with the headmistress, Miss Moore:

> My palms were wet, and quite a feel times the ground felt as if it were seesawing under my feet, but that didn't stop me from taking in a few things. For instance, the headmistress, Miss More. I knew right away that she had come to Antigua from England, for she looked like a prune left out of its jar a long time and she sounded as if she had borrowed a her voice from an owl. The way she said, "Now, girls…" (KINCAID, 1997, p.35).

Perhaps, as form of self-defense, Annie resorts to stereotyping so as to deal with a person who can embody the repressing power of a matrix country by labeling the one whom she considers the Other, derogatorily referring to Miss Moore as "prune left out of jar" with the "voice from an owl". It is interesting to notice that, according to Homi K. Bhabha, in "The Other Question: Stereotype and Colonial Discourse":

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (BHABHA, 1992, p. 298).

Naturally, it is easy to infer, that a girl such as Annie would have her reasons to simplify the figure of her teacher with a gross stereotype. However, once more Annie reproduces her mother's behavior pattern by attacking what she does not really know with a generalization. Annie's mother was the person who inculcates in her own daughter the idea that English people "smelled like fish", and perhaps, from that pre- installed misconception, Annie uses this antagonizing example to rate Miss Moore:

> Once when I didn't wash, my mother had given me a long scolding about it, and she ended by saying that it was the only thing she didn't like about English people: they didn't wash often enough, or wash properly when they finally did. My mother said, "Have you ever noticed how they smell as if they had been bottled up in a fish? (KINCAID, 1997, p. 36).

Here, the reader may make allowances for Annie because her reaction towards Miss Moore is a mere reproduction of the kind of education she receives from her mother. Jo-Ann Wallace, in "'The Child' in Post-Colonial Theory", talks about another Jamaica Kincaid's "child narrator" emphasizing a point about this character's education that could also be applied to Annie John:

> Jamaica Kincaid's child narrator says to herself, 'I am primitive and wingless' (1983: 24), and in this description captures perfectly the ways in which the child is constructed both as the subject-to-be educated, the subject-in-formation (the term wingless implying the pupal stage of insect and pupil stage of human evolution) and (as the term 'primitive implies) as the subject in need of discipline. (WALLACE, 1994, p.173).

Curiously enough, it is the education she receives is in her school that will cause one of the most significant events for Annie to find her nooks of identification: the awakening of her writing skills. In one of her Homeroom teacher's class, Annie and her classmates were supposed to write something that Miss Nelson, the actual name of the teacher, "described as an autobiographical essay." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 38). At this point the book gains a metafictional contour for there is a mention of an autobiography cited in a life narrative, or rather an autobiography within an (admittedly or not) autobiography, evoking Hélène Cixous' words when she says that "All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another," (CIXOUS, 1997, p. 177) because this passage does not convey Jamaica Kincaid telling the history of herself or of a kind of an alter ego she named Annie John, but the history of Annie John by Annie John, "a story in place of another". In fact, Annie comes up with an emotional discharge of the pent-up feelings she had towards her mother: "I began to wonder about what I had written, for it was the opposite of playful and it was the opposite of imaginative. What I had written was heartfelt, and except for the very end, it was also too true." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 41).

Annie uses her essay to exorcise her mother's controlling power and to open the way for her to interact with the new world that forcefully would bring the necessity of developing new niches of identification: "The afternoon was wearing itself thin. Would my turn ever come? What should I do, finding myself in the world of new girls, a world in which I was not even near the center?" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 41). In the words of Justin D. Edwards in *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid*:

> The essay is a metafictional moment in the text. Annie's composition of her autobiographical assignment reflects the overall structure of the novel itself, in which Kincaid composes an autobiographical piece about her own separation of her mother. In this scene then Annie is the talented, potential writer whom Kincaid will eventually become. And according to the composition, Annie seeks to establish her identity outside of her mother's cycle of power, but she must do so in terms of the central conflict of her life, her troubled relationship with her mother. Indeed the essay can be ready as Annie's early attempt at finding a voice of her own – a voice that that will be heard and express her individuality. (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 51).

At first, there might be a tacit colonial image in the nature of the relationship Annie has with her mother: "Kincaid also links this power struggle to the colonial situation of Antigua. Indeed, symbolically speaking, a connection is drawn between the "mother country" of the colonizer and the infantilized state of the colonized nation." (EDWARDS, 2008, p, 51). Afterwards, those colonial images are made more blatant. A case in point happens when

Annie peers at her teacher, Miss Nelson, reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, ignoring the hustle and bustle in the classroom: "All this Miss Nelson must have seen and heard she didn't say anything – only kept reading her book: an elaborately illustrated edition of *The Tempest*, as later, passing, by her desk, I saw." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 39).

In one of the most famous lines of the William Shakespeare's play, Caliban responds to Prospero and Miranda: "You taught me language, and my profit on 't/ Is, now I know how to curse […]" (*The Tempest*, Act One, Scene Two). It is at least symbolic that Kincaid includes this scene in the context of a "British colonial educational system" which made Annie John aware of her writing skills. In this sense, there is an unexpected parallel between Caliban and Annie because in the same way that Caliban uses the English language to curse his oppressors, Annie John uses the English language to gain visibility.

Priyamvada Gopal reinforces this idea when she says that: "It is something of a commonplace in postcolonial literary studies that, like Shakespeare's Caliban, colonized peoples were able to appropriate the languages that were imposed on them and then use it to their own end." (GOPAL, 2004, p.144). As a matter of fact, so considerable is the number of Caribbean voices who use the language of the "boss" to gatecrash into the boss' house, that one could think of the neologism, *Calibbean*, to refer to the work of Caribbean writers with the inherent potential to evoke the image of Caliban to highlight the particularities of their postcolonial condition intersected in the processes of the construction of a Caribbean subjectivity, as Angelique V. Nixon, in "Relating across Difference", seems to acknowledge when she talks about a collection of essays dealing specifically with this theme:

> Another noteworthy collection of essays titled *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century* (1997) edited by Consuelo Lopez Springfield contains selections across disciplines written by feminist scholars in anthropology, sociology, health, law, literature, and culture studies" (xi). The introduction's title "Revisiting Caliban: Implications for Caribbean Feminisms" is quite telling not only in its reference to Caliban as an important cultural signifier of identity for people in the Caribbean, but also in its appropriation of the notion of a fluid identity for women of the Caribbean […]. (NIXON, 2009, p.346).

Afterwards, in her continuous struggle for niches of identification, Annie emotionally migrates from her mother to Gwen, a young girl who attends the same school Annie does, which may indicate another emotional diaspora. In this girl, Annie reaches a level of identification that suggested that both girls recognize each other in their isolation which sufficed for them to create a personal space where their aloofness from other cycles also indicated their difficulties to belong to other groups: "We separated ourselves from the other girls, and they, understanding everything, left us alone." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 46). Annie idealizes Gwen in the same way she did with her mother:

> Gwen and I were soon inseparable. If you saw one, you saw the other. For me, each day began as I waited for Gwen to come and fetch me for school. My heart beat fast as I stood in front of the yard of our house waiting to see Gwen as she rounded the bend in our street. The sun, already way up in the sky so early in the morning, shone on her, and the whole street became suddenly empty so that Gwen and everything about her were perfect, as if she were in a picture. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 46-7).

Actually, the symbiotic relationship Annie tries to have with Gwen is an attempt to replace her mother's love, and go on constructing her identities based on the focuses of identifications she meets in her life. However, little by little, Gwen ceases to be a person Annie can identify with because Gwen's relationship with her own mother has the same design of the liaison Annie has with her mother, that is, both girls were still very connected to their mothers which limited the scope of rupture Annie needs to find to break free from her mother's powerful identity spell:

> A few other girls were having the much the same experience as Gwen and I, and when we heard comments of this kind we would look at each other and roll up our eyes exactly and toss our hands in the air – a way of saying how above such concerns we were. The gesture was an exact copy, of course, of what we had seen our mothers do. (KINCAID, 1997, p.48).

Gwen does not bring enough subjective evolution to Annie because she is unable to equip Annie with the identity tools Annie needs to challenge her mother's values and with that Gwen unconsciously reinforces Annie's need to find her subjectivity in accordance to her own terms, that is, out of her mother's zone of power.

Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that Gwen represents a stage in Annie's personal development because with her relationship with Gwen, Annie is a bit closer to her personal psychological independence. Gwen opens the way for Annie to interact with other people, other than her mother, and thus discover the possibility of being the active agent in a relationship, transposing the dynamic Annie had with her mother to the ones who needed to be shielded, turning herself into a kind of semi matriarchal figure, shifting Annie's role of subordination, making her change from the one who had to be protected to the one who has to protect, which gave Annie a new position in her personal battlefield of self-representation:

> I would never dillydally with a decision, always making up my mind right away about the thing in front of me. Sometimes, seeing my old frail self in a girl I would defend her; sometimes, seeing my old frail self in a girl, I would be heartless and cruel. It all went very well and I became very popular. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 49).

However, Annie knows it is high time she moved on to new niches of identifications. The fourth chapter of the book introduces a character who is somehow a sort of nemesis to female idealizations mostly conceived by patriarchal notions of female behavior pattern. When Annie meets the Red Girl she finds a different source of identification that shows her something very different from what she had seen with her mother or with Gwen. As a matter of fact, the Red Girl, principally considering many female representations in the book, is a

counterpoint to the expectation some social conventions would take for granted as far as gender functions are concerned. Furthermore, according to Justin D. Edwards, “here Annie is not only trying to replace her mother’s love, but she is rebelling against her mother.” (EDWARDS, 2007, p. 49). Differently from Gwen, the Red Girl is not the kind of person Annie’s mother would call a lady. In a way, the Red Girl is a representative of gender subversion, as Annie acknowledges in the very first time they meet:

> One day I was throwing stones in a guava tree, trying to knock down a ripe guava, when the Red Girl came along and said, “Which one do you want?” After I pointed it out, she climbed up the tree, picked the one I wanted off its branch, climbed down, presented it to me. How my eyes did widen and my mouth form an “o” from this. I had never seen a girl do this before. All the boys climbed trees for the fruit they wanted, and all the girls threw stones to knock the fruit off the tree. But look at the way she climbed that tree: better than any boy. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 56).

By performing a boyish activity “better than any boy”, the Red Girl, in Annie’s eyes, starts dismantling the notion that suggests women’s inferiority and which, invariably, places women in positions of subordination principally when women are set in spaces traditionally occupied by men. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that turning male and female into oppositional binaries often imposes behavior patterns fostering a kind of collective psychological “how-to book” which sets the norms of social interaction between men and women, demarcating the territory each one should occupy, raising the borders that are not supposed to be crossed, therefore limiting the individual fluency of people’s subjectivity. To illustrate this point, Linda McDowell says that:

> This is because the assumption of a categorical difference between women and men – women are one thing, and men are the opposite – deeply embedded in our sense of ourselves as individuals, in daily interactions, in institutional structures and in Western intellectual thought. Despite a growing recognition of the plurality and diversity of social experiences, the belief of a distinctive version of femininity for women and masculinity for man is appropriate remains extremely powerful. (MCDOWELL, 2007, p. 10-11).

Although Mcdowell is right when she acknowledges “the growing recognitions of the plurality and diversity of social experiences”, each gender still performs very specific roles in many social spheres, roles that are intrinsically engraved in stereotypes of subjugation and domination that McDowell also refers to:

> Thus women and their associated characteristics of femininity are defined as irrational, emotional, dependent and private, closer to nature than to culture, in comparison with men and masculine attributes that are portrayed as rational, scientific, independent, public and cultured. Women, it is commonly argued, are at the mercy of their bodies and their emotions, whereas men represent the transcendence of these baser features, mind to women’s body. (MCDOWELL, 2007, p. 10-11).

However, sex is different from gender in that sex is biological, gender is constructed. A behavior list of things men and women are and are not supposed to do in social ambiences is inherently imbedded in terms such as masculinity and femininity in order to groom

individuals for social acceptance or social refusal, always in accordance with their willingness to take part in these social games. As a matter of fact, according to McDowell:

> It is the social-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places of multiple and changing boundaries constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion (Massey 1991; Smith 1993). Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and special – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the locations or site of the experience. (MCDOWELL, 2007, p. 4).

A girl like the Red Girl would never be accepted in the traditional social environments that Annie's mother seems to personify, given the way Annie's mother is portrayed in the novel. On the other hand, the way the Red Girl is portrayed in the novel not only suggests gender subversion but also gives Annie another source of identification that she once more idealizes:

> It went without saying between us that my mother should never know that we had become friends, that we planned to meet at the lighthouse in this way every day for the rest of our lives and beyond that, I now worshipped the ground her unwashed feet walked on. Just before we parted, she gave me three marbles: they were an ordinary kind, the kind you would buy three for a penny – glass orbs with a tear-shaped drop suspended in the center. Another secret to keep from my mother. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 59).

The Red Girl's boyish manners, her dirt feet, her marble playing offer Annie the possibility to experiment alterity in an unusual way since the Red Girl could be, in the general scope of the book, interpreted almost as a carnivalesque Bakhtinian allegory. The Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin develops his concept of the carnivalesque as notes Kate Webb in "Seriously Funny: Wise Children", when she talks about Angela Carter's *Wise Children* using an approach that, regarding the dully proportions, also reverberates through *Annie John*, and that could be taken to analyze the Red Girl's gender subversion in Kincaid's book:

> The Bakhtinian idea of carnival is central to *Wise Children*. In particular, Carter plays out ideas about sexuality's relationship to the carnivalesque transgression of order – a transgression that is, according to Bakhtin, at once both sanctioned and illegitimate. Jane Miller has argued in a collection of essays that because of the breakdown of all barriers, particularly linguistic and bodily ones, that carnival entails, women do not appear in Bakhtin's work distinct from men: carnival's amassing experience, which collapses laughter and fear, pleasure and nausea, where the world becomes 'infinitely reversible and remakeable', ends up denying female difference […]. It is not a question of Bakhtin denying difference, denying those pains and leakages that are not common to both sexes, but that women and carnival might, ultimately, be inimical because female biology and the fact of motherhood make women an essentially connecting force, while carnival is essentially the celebration of transgression and breakdown. (WEBB, 1995, p. 301).

In this sense, the Red Girl is a quasi carnivalesque rupture in the essentialist set of feminine values Annie's mother has and Gwen personifies. The Red Girl causes a strong personal impact on Annie making her review those values comparing and contrasting them with new proposal of subjectivity brought by the Red Girl. The awareness of an alternative gender representation makes Annie break with the ladylike pattern of behavior she grows up reproducing:

> And now I started a new series of betrayals of people and things I would have sworn only minutes before to die for. There was Gweneth, whom I loved so, and who was my dearest friend in spite of the fact that she met with my mother's complete approval, but she [Gwen] had such slyness and so many pleasing, to me, ways that my mother could never have imagined. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 59).

It is likely that the new series of betrayals Annie refers to is actually only one betrayal. The betrayal – or even denial – of her "old ways", the girl Annie was before the break with her mother, and principally before she met the Red Girl, was in fact an attempt to depart from her former self, which was more attuned with the rigid disposition of the social conventions that dictate how a girl is supposed to behave or even dress, and to open her mind to new possibilities. To a girl like Annie, the Red Girl represents such a freedom of identity that she could not help thinking how uninteresting some of those pre-established, finicky social convention were, "how dull the pressedness of her [Gwen's] uniform, the cleanness of her neck, the neatness of her just combed plaits." (KINCAID, 1997, p.60). Annie denies what Gwen and, by extension, her mother represent because the Red Girl shows a new source of identification. A source that put in check the set of limiting rules Annie is forced to abide by. The Red Girl then is an intriguing point of reference because she plays with Annie's notions of gender, and eventually, sexuality.

The Red Girl is "a girl who likes to play marbles", which is something a good girl should not do. In fact, Annie's mother says to her daughter, in a complimentary tone: "I am so happy you are not one of those girls." (KINCAID, 1997, p.61). Hence, there is the argument that, in the context of the book, the girls' marble playing could work as a metaphor to lesbian desire, principally if one takes into consideration that the image of marbles often appears linked to images that suggest a greater level of intimacy; images of body parts, love, and connection that could be rendered as images of bodies connected in love:

> As for the marbles! Quite by accident, in a moment I was just fooling about, I discovered that I had a talent for playing marbles. I played a game and I won. I played another game and I won. I took winning as a sign of the perfection of my new union with the Red Girl. I devoted my spare time to playing and winning marbles. No longer could I head aside for a game of rounders; no longer could I, during a break for recess, walk over from our schoolyard to sit on tombstones and gather important information from the other girls on what exactly it was I should do to made my breast begin growing. Out breasts were, to us, treasured shrubs, needing only the proper combination of water and sunlight to make them flourish. […] At first, the Red Girl and I met every day. I finished my chores, each chore being a small rehearsal for that faraway day, thank God, I would be the mistress of my own house, that faraway day I would have to abandon Gwen, the Red Girl, meetings behind the cistern and at lighthouse, marbles, places under the house, and every other secret pleasure. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 60-61).

Later in the text the relationship between Annie and the Red Girl, "the girl who plays marbles", gains a definite homoerotic design, treated by Kincaid with an undertone of conspiracy, a forbidden thing, something to be kept in secret not to shock a reactionary system of values, represented in the book by Annie's mother, which treats homosexuality as

something abnormal, although documented references to episodes related to homosexual practices in the human history abound:

> All the time I had been kept prisoner under the watchful gaze of my mother, the Red Girl had faithfully gone to our meeting place every day. Every day, she went and waited for me, and every day I failed to show up. What could I say to her now? "My mother the Nosy Parker, would kill me – or worse, not speak to me for at least a few hours – if she knew that I met our in a secret place," I said. For a while after I got there, we said nothing, only staring to the sea, watching the boats coming and going, watching the children our own age coming home from games, watching the sheep being driven home from pasture. Then, still without saying a word the Red Girl began to pinch me. She pinched hard, picking up pieces of my almost nonexistent flesh and twisting it around. At first, I vowed not to cry, but it went on for so long, that tears I could not control streamed down my face. I cried so much that my tears began to heave, and then, as if my heaving chest caused her to have some pity on me, she stopped pinching and began to kiss me on the spots where before I had felt the pain of her pinch. Oh, the sensation was delicious – the combination of the pinches and kisses. And so wonderful we found it that, almost every time we met, pinching by her, followed by tears from me, followed by kisses from her were the order of the day. I stopped wondering why all the girls whom I had mistreated and abandoned followed me around with looks of love and adoration in their faces. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 62-63).

In their sadomasochistic accomplishment of sexual desire, the girls found a dynamic of pleasure which intensifies the bond between them in spite of Annie's mother's suspicious gaze. Here, it is perhaps interesting to observe that, to a certain extent, pain and pleasure also pervaded the relationship Annie has with her own mother; however, in a more psychological way. The agents and the practices of control and subordination were different, but the "object" to be controlled was the same. In other words, although the Red Girl gives Annie alternatives to most of the realities Annie saw around her, Annie is still objectified by the Red Girl who seems to be the active agent in their relationship, just like her mother had been before.

Some people claim that sexuality is also socially constructed and that it is somehow interesting to certain hegemonic powers to keep a kind of politics of heterosexuality continuously "alive and kicking", perhaps because, in a way, to recognize and to legitimize the space of homosexuality in general social relations can pose too dangerous a threat to those who benefit from uniform ways of social practices, even as far as sexuality is concerned. To a greater or lesser extent, radical heterosexual discourses aim at perpetuating fixed notions of gender roles denying "activity" to straight women and "passivity" to straight men, brainwashing society into buying the values of those who establish the equation that prescribes who is supposed to command and who is supposed to obey.

In "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", Barbara Smith has strong considerations about power and sexuality which have some points of convergence with the underprivileged life circumstances Kincaid denounces in *Annie John*:

> Heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have. None of us have racial or sexual privilege, almost none of us have class privilege; maintaining straightness is our last resort. Being out, particularly out in print, is the final renunciation of any claim to the

> crumbs of “tolerance” that nonthreatening “ladylike” Black women are sometimes fed. I am convinced that it is our lack of privilege and power in every other sphere that allows so few black women to make the leap that many white women, particularly writers, have been able to make in this decade, not merely because they are white or have economic leverage, but because they have had the strength and support of a movement behind them. (SMITH, 1977, p. 11-2).

Jamaica Kincaid could have chosen not to include the part about the Red Girl in her life narrative; however, as she does so, she systematically subverts some linear, in this context heterosexual, social expectations by constructing a character which is not limited to any convention in particular. Annie comes very close to have an actual sexual experience with the Red Girl, which would suffice for some people to label Annie as a lesbian. However, the girls limit themselves to a kind of homoerotic foreplay which hinders the conception of Annie as a homosexual: Are the girls just playing with their blossoming sexuality or are they actually gay?

As a matter of fact, the text does not categorically affirms whether Annie is gay or not, which contributes to the broad-minded attitude Kincaid has when she constructs the identity of her character, and to a certain extent, her own since, according to Leigh Gilmore in “There Will Always be a Mother”, an “Autobiography offers an opportunity to experiment with becoming a person.” (GILMORE, 2011, p. 103). Kincaid leaves Annie’s sexuality open perhaps to meet with Kincaid’s personal decision of not particularly being affiliated with any kind orthodoxy turning her subjectivity into a singular exercise of selfness. About this topic, Susheila Nasta, in “Beyond the Frame: Writing a Life and Jamaica Kincaid’s Family Album, has interesting remarks:

> So how should we locate Kincaid as a writer in all of this? Not surprisingly, Kincaid, who has always insisted on situating herself outside the critical map of any defining orthodoxies – whether 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 text to which she wishes to distance herself from any easily identifiable theoretical comfort zone, finding any forms of definition – whether linked to her race, gender or politics – untenable. Talking to Gerard Dilger in a 1992 interview notably entitled “I Use a Cut and Splash Policy of Writing,” she comments that any form of easy “racial classification” is simply “absurd” (23). Significantly, too, as Evelyn O’Callaghan argues, Kincaid later condemns in this discussion any “fixed distinction” between “the people’s language” and what she calls the “imperial language” (90-91). Most significantly, perhaps, it is clear that she wishes to refuse any notion of clarity, any fixity, preferring to reside in an indeterminate and shadowy landscape characterized by lack of definition and imprecision. Describing her own position as a black Antiguan living in the United States, she says, “In this world I live in I’m nobody, and it’s quite fine with me. I Choose that. I’m not African, I’m not anything” (24). (NASTA, 2009, p. 66)

As far as gender is concerned, there is another controversial passage in the book that narrates an episode that happens when Annie is coming back home from school and sees a group of four boys standing across the street from her. They start exaggerating their manners in order to make fun of Annie out of pure gender prejudice, for the guys do not seem to have

any other apparent reason for their sarcastic behavior. Annie recognizes one of the boys and greets him which augmented the mockery the other boys use to pick on her. Annie notices that "it was malicious and that I had done nothing to deserve it." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 95). As a matter of fact, Annie experiments a sheer gender attack directed to her because she was, simply, as Justin D. Edwards observes, "under the tyranny of the male gaze, defined as a sexually available object and humiliated by the experience. She returns home in a state of confusion, seeing herself 'alternatively too big and too small'." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 54).

In another metafictional moment, one of these boys ignites in Annie the memories of her childhood, when both of them used to play together. The kind of game the kids played is an indicator of the strong lesser roles women are forced to perform due to gender and, in this passage, postcolonial issues, also indicating that women are, since very early age, raised with the idea that men are always in control:

> Of course, in all the games we played I was always given the lesser part. If we played knight and dragon I was the dragon; if we playing discovering Africa, he discovered Africa; he was always the leader of the savage tribes that tried to get in the way of the discovery, and I played his servant, and not a very bright servant at that; if he played prodigal son, he was the prodigal son and the prodigal son's father and the jealous brother, while I played a person who fetched things. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 96).

In her memories Annie sees herself put in a gender arrangement that connects women and subordination as if one word were a kind of reference to the other. In their games, the division of "labor" invariably puts Annie in an inferior position, subduing her individuality and relegating her participation in their games almost to a complete invisibility. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", a text considered by many people a founding text of postcolonialism, the Indian critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, talks about the lack of agency women have to go through even when they share the same space of colonial subordination men do:

> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (SPIVAK, 1988, p. 82-83).

The gender dilemma is further aggravated in the subsequent unfolding of the alluded episode with the boys: Annie gets home to discover that she is still under gender attack. Her mother accuses her "of making a spectacle of [her]self in front of the four boys" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 102). To reprimand her daughter Annie's mother says that "it had pained her to see [Annie] behave in the manner of a slut" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 102).

It is interesting to observe that in the same way that her mother cannot conceive that Annie play marbles, which would implicate in Annie's gender inversion, she cannot accept

her daughter to interact with the opposite sex either, leaving Annie with almost no possibilities to access her sexuality. It is Annie's own mother who castrates her daughter's self-representation, curbing Annie's self-autonomy and thereby highlighting the discourse of some social conventions which would never admit women's agency. In the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "The figure of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves. (SPIVAK, 1988, p. 82).

Some traditional pre-conceived notions seek to deny any particular alternative to gender roles. Men are not allowed to have a – let us say – more passive posture, running the risk of being labeled by very derogatory terms, such as "wuss", "sissy", or even "faggot" – remember, "boys don't cry". Likewise, women cannot assume an active posture, running the risk of being rated as "butches", "tomboys", or even "girls who like to play marbles", according to Annie's mother's (mis-) conceptions. On the other hand, for instance, in heterosexual terms, women's situation is even more complicated than men's because, differently from men, if a woman assumes a more aggressive sexual posture in relation to the opposite sex, she is likely to be called a "slut", another term which, although derogatory, also suggests an active role denied to women.

In one of the several ruptures of the book, Annie rejects this passive posture when she refuses to be unfairly attacked, reacting against her mother's accusations and concomitantly claiming her individuality by responding to her mother's insults in her mother's own terms:

> The word "slut" (in patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the word "slut," and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth. As if to save myself, I turned to her and said, "Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 102).

Annie feels that she is wallowing in her mother's biased mire of misconceptions, and in what could be called a sort of a crucial epiphany, she realizes that she has to do something to defend herself, and she chooses to do so by making her mother feel the weight of her own accusations. As she reciprocates her mother's offense, she thinks: "I looked at my mother. She seemed tired and old and broken. Seeing that, I felt happy and sad at the same time." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 102). Annie has a small victory for her reaction assures her of the right to live her own individuality, but to a certain extent, this victory is a two edged blade because from this point on Annie feels that there will be no turning back. She finally cuts the psychological umbilical cord that tied her subjectivity to her mother's persona, establishing a necessary identity chasm between two independent individuals: "At that, everything stopped. The whole earth fell silent. The two black things joined together in the middle of the room

separated, hers going to her, mine coming back to me." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 102). In *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid*, Justin D. Edwards points out that when Annie's mother calls her "a slut", Annie's mother "condemns her daughter for being sexually transgressive until Annie retorts, 'Well, like father like son, like mother, [sic] like daughter' (KINCAID, 1997, p. 102). Annie decides to fight back a decision that cements the divide between them." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 54).

2.2 The Other question

It goes without saying that the constant repetition of what eventually becomes a "fact" can be a very powerful strategy to construct "universal truths" due to the latent brainwashing potential the continuous restatement of a so-called truth may entail. Thus, one could remark that some myth formations would greatly rely on the repetition of a, "generally convenient", interpretation of an event to create the myths that will become essential icons not to be questioned.

In Annie's school, Annie's teacher, Miss Edward, uses repetition as a pedagogical technique to educate her students about some iconic European figures. Her method consisted of having a student who occasionally did not know the answer of a given question repeat verbatim the words of the student who did:

> It was Miss Edward's way to ask one of us a question the answer to which she was not sure the girl would not know and then put the question to another girl who she was sure would know the answer. The girl who did not know the answer correctly would then have to repeat the correct answer in the exact words of the other girl. Many times, I had heard my exact words repeated over and over again, and liked it especially when the girl doing the repeating was one I didn't care about very much. Pointing a finger to Ruth, Miss Edward asked a question the answer to which was "On the third of November 1493, a Sunday morning, Christopher Columbus discovered Dominica." Ruth, of course, did not know the answer, as she did not know the answer to questions about the West Indies. I could hardly blame her. Ruth had come all the way from England. Perhaps, she did not want to be in the West Indies at all. Perhaps she wanted to be in England, where no one would remind her constantly of the terrible things her ancestors had done. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 75-6).

Annie finds a certain level of personal redemption by having a kind of ideological revenge on Ruth, the English girl whom Annie takes as the "Other", that is, a kind of metonymic representative of the colonizers of Antigua. Here, there are two layers of postcolonial criticism: first, it is possible to think that Kincaid uses a character like Ruth to point out first-world indifference towards the cultural realm of the colonized; second, Kincaid denounces the brainwashing process Annie goes through in her school which enforces pre-established historical notions consequently constructing "facts" without proper levels of critical analyzes, evoking Linda Hutcheon's idea, in "Re-presenting the Past", noticeably

when Hutcheon remarks that “All past events are potential historical facts, but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated.” (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 75).

It is almost impossible not to observe that in the same scene, Kincaid includes images of the unequal relationship between colonizer and colonized as well as some strategies of colonization used by colonizers, such as the construction of symbolic figures to establish the myths to be revered in order to install the “truths” that will be forcefed deep down the throats of those who occupy less privileged positions in the configurations of power which invariably favor dominant forces, as the topic of Columbus’ discoveries, in this context, might suggest. It is very interesting to notice that Kincaid uses her life-narrative, to highlight and consequently, undermine the unquestionable truths constructed by the hegemonies which, most of the times, do not hesitated in effacing the cultural significance of dominated people, who, under highly unfavorable circumstances, had no other option but to swallow the jagged pills imposed by their oppressors:

> Her ancestors had been the masters, while ours had been the slaves. She had such a lot to be ashamed of, and by being with us every day she was always being reminded. We could look everybody in the eye, for our ancestors had done nothing wrong except just sit somewhere, defenseless. Of course, sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belonged – with the masters or with the slaves – for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now; all of us celebrated Queen Victoria’s birthday, even though she had been dead a long time. But we, the descendants of the slaves, knew quite well what really had happened, and I was sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently; I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a proper interest in the European on first seeing them, and said, “How nice,” and then gone home to tell their friends about it. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 76).

With this passage, Kincaid turns her eyes to those who were behind the “main stages” of History, the marginalized voices who, in spite of having the possibility of speaking, never really found, among the ones in control, anybody willing to pay attention to them; and by doing so, once again Kincaid evokes Lind Hutcheon’s concepts about the postmodern view of history, in “Representing the Postmodern”, when the critic acknowledges that such a view “once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world.” ((HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 11).

Kincaid is attuned with Hutcheon’s ideas for she subverts the essential truths behind imposed history, by proposing a counterpoint of historicity, coming up with an angle of event narration which would scaffold the point of view of the marginalized individuals. Kincaid uses her creative subjectivity to “confront authority of power, as well as the power of authority” (NASTA, online). Her views of the domination of Antigua express a political posture with an open criticism against the imperialist attitude of the dominant’s ideology which obliterates the other’s culture, assimilating by cultural annihilation in lieu of

assimilating – since, to some people, assimilating seems to be unavoidable – by addition, unnecessarily equalizing assimilation to deculturation. In this sense, Kincaid's life narrative, besides helping her synthesize facets of her own identity, is also an act of political self-assertion as observes Susheila Nasta in "Beyond the Frame: Writing a Life and Jamaica Kincaid's Family Album".

> There is no doubt too that the personal is always in some sense the political and we, as readers, are repeatedly made aware of the violence, both psychological and material, that her experience of growing up in the aftermath of Antigua's colonial history has caused. It would seem, however, that there is little point in attempting to disentangle painstakingly the direct correspondences to Kincaid's life that we find in these ostensibly autobiographical but shape-shifting pieces. As she so often dupes readerly expectation and writes against the grain, remolding the fixed subject matter of her past and crossing over the aesthetic borderlines of different genres, it would seem that the more inclusive idea of "life-writing and the more active notion of "writing a life" is the most appropriate way of reading the literary experimentations she is engaged in. Not only does she continues to write "*from*, as well as *about*, [her subjects' lives]" (Rusk 3), but in persistently exposing the gaps between how the "powerless and the powerful exist" (Birbalsingh 144), she turns her writing into a form of active theater, an alternative space for dialogue and physical inscription (both within and outside history) that enables her to shape all the voices "that should have come out of me … the person who was never allowed to be and … the person I did not allow myself to become" (Autobiography 227-8). There can, it seems, be no final word, no final stop. As she has put it: I just write. I come to the end. I start again. I come to the end, I start again. And sometimes I come to the end and there's no starting again … I'm really interested in breaking the form. (NASTA, online).

Annie rejects the history she has to learn at her school. And her sense of vindication is intensified when she sees a picture of Columbus in chains which, perhaps, according to Annie's point of view, would represent a kind of "poetic justice" for, at that moment, the slaveholder is in the shoes of the slave, alone in the bottom of ship, a strong image which reinforces Kincaid alleged project of disrupting totalitarian maxims. The Columbus Annie beholds is a fallen angel, a bound Prometheus waiting for the unfolding of his fate: "His hands and feet were bound up in chains, and he was sitting there, staring off into the space, looking quite dejected and miserable. The picture had as a title 'Columbus in Chains,' printed at the bottom of the page." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 77).

Cunningly, in another autobiographical moment, Annie draws a parallel between this broken Columbus and her grandfather, who "was having a bit of trouble with his limbs [and] was not able to go about as he pleased" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 78). Echoing her mother, when she ironically observes that "The Great Man" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 78), Annie's grandfather, will depend on others to be moved from side to side, Annie writes under the picture of Columbus in chains: "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 78). Annie's doing so is a kind of final blow against the decrepit figure that, in Annie's eyes, represented the past of exploitation imposed on her ancestors. Kincaid subverts the commonsensical notion that is prone to accept idealized heroes, such as Christopher Columbus, without questioning the ideological agenda behind these figures. Thus, Kincaid's

deconstructs the imperialist discourse behind Columbus, perhaps in an attempt of rescuing Antigua's collective identity. According to Justin D. Edwards, in *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid*:

> Columbus, then, is not portrayed as a hero but as a tyrant. He is linked to an overbearing parent (her mother's father), and instead of "creating" Antigua with his "discovery" he is presented as a key figure in the destructive force that crippled the island. The spread of European empire, Annie implies, has shrouded the Caribbean in darkness, turning it into a lost paradise. As such, Annie demythologizes the "official" colonial history and challenges national metanarratives that perpetuate social control through an exertion of imperialist ideologies. If these manipulative stories continue to dominate the island, then the country will remain in a constant state of dependence on the "mother country," never able to mature and develop a sense of identity separate from the colonial power." (EDWARDS, 2007, p. 53).

According to Annie's position, to her ideological site, justice has finally been served. Annie is able to preserve some sense of selfhood refusing to be totally assimilated in the dominating hands of a hegemonic Other. Hence, Annie experiences a kind of subjective victory. At least, momentarily.

Annie's victory does not last much longer. Her teacher sees that Annie "had defaced [her] school book by writing in it" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 82) and considers Annie's attitude as a kind of blasphemous act, which maculates the image of "one of the great men in history, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was [her] home" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 82), or so to speak. Moreover, Annie's lack of respect for one of the emblematic European myths her teacher so insistently tries to reinforce, also breaks the repetition mechanism which, to a certain extent, constructs Antigua after the image of the colonizer. In Leigh Gilmore words, in "There Will Always Be a Mother":

> The mechanism of repetition works to different ends: it is to make the island of Antigua unrecognizable to Annie and her classmates as their home to remap it as a colony, a little England. Annie intuits in both pedagogies, however, the psychic and structural presence of a too-powerful force. (GILMORE, 2001, p. 122).

Annie's teacher punishes her with a highly ironic task: she makes Annie copy Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*, written by the English poet, John Milton, in the 17th century. In a narrative strategy arranged as a kind of spiraling disposition of events in that once again Annie has to put up with an authoritarian (post) colonial power, Kincaid suggests that the struggle for identity is continuous, one may win an occasional battle and find some piece of mind for a while, but the war for self-representation is endless.

2.3 The diasporic baggage

Perhaps the strongest rite of passage that Annie has to go through to build her own identity is to deal with her mother's legacy. It is relevant to notice that Annie's mother is herself a diasporic character because she has to leave her homeland, Dominica, and go to Antigua, after severely fighting with her own father. Consequently, Annie's mother has her own diasporic background, or a personal collection of memories that she carries with her from Dominica to Antigua. These memories are concretely symbolized by the figure of Annie's mother's trunk, which gains the metaphoric contour of a kind of temporal gate, allowing her to have access to her past in her homeland by the maintenance of the things she takes with her and stores in her trunk. Annie narrates her mother's displacement in the following lines:

> When my mother, at sixteen, after quarreling with her father, left his house in Dominica and came to Antigua, she packed all her things in an enormous wooden trunk that she had bought in Roseau for almost six shillings. She painted the trunk yellow and green outside, and she lined the inside with wallpaper that had a cream background with pink roses printed all over it. Two days after she left her father's house, she boarded a boat, and the trip would have taken a day and a half ordinarily, but a hurricane blew up and the boat was lost at sea for almost five days. By the time it got to Antigua, the boat was practically in splinters, and though two or three of the passengers were lost overboard, along with some of the cargo, my mother and her trunk were safe. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 19-20).

That could be reread as "my mother and her legacy were safe". And principally because of this kind of possible rereading, I have to once more agree with James Clifford when he refers to diaspora as the "domain of shared and discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories with a larger semantic domain" (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 245). In a way, Annie's mother's diaspora starts to be Annie's – shared – diaspora because Annie accepts it as if it were her own, perhaps as a token of the process of on-going identification that Stuart Hall talks about in "The Question of Cultural Identity". Annie knows that, to a certain extent, her mother's memories are also her (Annie's) memories: "Now twenty-four years later, this trunk was kept under my bed and in it were things that belonged to me starting from just before I was born." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 20) Thus, a person/character like Annie John does not need a geographic dislocation to experience diasporic consequences.

Annie carries her mother's trunk because it also represents her own cultural baggage, an indicator of the intersection of the material and spiritual heritage, a literary trace recurrent in what Rosemary Marangoly George calls "Immigrant Genre" (GEORGE, 2005 p. 171), in "'Traveling Light': Home and the Immigrant Genre", and that could be used to spot some of the features of a book such as *Annie John*, once more indicating one of the possible factors that might have influenced Jamaica Kincaid to write her life narrative the way she did:

> Like the distance that exile imposes on a writing subject, writers of the immigrant genre also view the present in terms of its distance from the past and future. This genre I will argue, is marked by a disregard for national schemes, the use of a multigenerational cast of characters and a narrative tendency toward repetitions and echoes – a feature that is often displayed through plots that cover several generations. Most importantly, the immigrant genre is marked by the experience of homelessness which is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material. (GEORGE, 2005 p. 171).

Being a diasporic writer, Kincaid might have relied on her own exile to retrieve the specific memories that could have equipped the writer with the tools to construct a character that is admittedly autobiographical, creating thus a novel that, in itself, is an exercise of self-understanding. Therefore, it is possible to speculate that instead of trying to erase her past to build a new identity, through Annie John, Kincaid has the chance to revisit her past not to deny it, but as Rosemary George suggests, in the same article, to create new alternatives for her process of identity construction:

> Forgetting the past, burning or burying it, creates the illusion of providing an escape route into the present that looks ahead rather than behind. Having discarded the luggage of the past, one can desire inclusion into the modern nation. But immigrants and others on the margins do not automatically or necessarily desire a (national) status that is identical to the mainstream citizen's. (GEORGE, 2005, p. 178).

As for Annie John, in spite of repeating her mother's habits, she repeats with a difference. Differently from her mother, Annie was not banished from her home, the diasporic factor in Annie's life results from the inadequacy the girl feels in her home and which is intensified as Annie perceives that her mother's luggage does not necessarily have to be her luggage; Annie's diaspora has a different nature.

Furthermore, it was already mentioned that, according to Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, in "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Connection in Diasporic Studies," the word *diaspora* derives from the Greek word *diasperien*, which would mean something like "to sow and scatter seeds accros the Earth" (BRAZIEL; MANNUR, 2003, p. 1). Stretching this concept, one could say that this "scattering of seeds" could also be done across time, turning Annie's mother's trunk into a kind of "pocket museum" in charge of archiving one's own life, and allowing this life to be visited and revisited, in a sort of process of meta self-discovery, or a self-reflexive recollection of life events not necessarily as they really "happened but as we remember or invent them", as Annie acknowledges in the following passage:

> From time to time, my mother would fix on a certain place in our house and give it a good cleaning. If I was at home when she happened to do this, I was at her side, as usual. When she did this with the trunk, it was a tremendous pleasure, for after she had removed all the things from the trunk and aired them out, and changed the camphor balls, and then refolded the things and put them back in their places in the trunk, as she held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself. Sometimes I knew the story first hand, for I could remember the incident quite well; sometimes what she told me had happened when I was too young to know anything; and sometimes it happened before I was even born. Whichever way,

> I knew exactly what she would say, for I had heard it so many times before, but I never got tired of it. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 21).

In “The Post Always Rings Twice: The Postmodern and the Postcolonial”, Linda Hutcheon states that “museums have begun to see themselves as cultural ‘texts’ and have become increasingly reflexive about their premises, identity, and mission.” (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 5) By the same token, the implicit image of the trunk in *Annie John* can also be read as a “cultural text” for it establishes a tradition as Annie assimilates it, not only as a material bequest, but also as a cultural heritage. In the same article, Linda Hutcheon asserts: “Of course the very act of technically preserving objects from the ravages of time and decay (not to mention that of ‘restoring’ them to their original state) could be seen as universalizing in its denial of change over time.” (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 5).

Although I agree with Hutcheon, it is worth noticing that, perhaps, with the preservation of the trunk and the objects inside it, Annie can play with her own temporality, diachronically freezing (or perhaps self universalizing) some “facts” of her past, mostly in accordance with her mother’s (re-) constructions of the memories that may ignite the identities she is to develop. I recognize that this “denial of change over time” can circumscribe the individual’s agency over their own lives – in Annie’s case, it is her mother who constructs some of Annie’s most primal memories, but maybe only when Annie spots her own subordination to some aspects of her own life can she accept or refuse the memories that will constitute the particularities of her personality.

For Annie to develop her identities, it is necessary that she have a point of departure, thus, in this sense, this “universalizing” of time is a kind of “personal strategic essentialism”, something that has to occur for her to have a point (or a counterpoint) of references with which she will plant the roots of the individual she will choose to be. Annie has to become a new subject out of her former self, out of her own memories, or in Priyamvada Gopal’s words, in “Reading Subaltern History”, when the critic talks about strategic essentialism: “an effect made by an effect.” (GOPAL, 2004, p. 148) As to *Annie John*, it is not difficult to see an attempt of identity building made by the retrieval pre-diasporic memories.

Curiously enough, one of the most crucial moves Annie has to make in search of her subjectivity is to break the spell of her mother’s grasp. In “There Will Always Be a Mother: Jamaica Kincaid’s Serial Autobiography”, Leigh Gilmore observes:

> In *Annie John*, the idyllic mother-daughter relationship falters permanently over individuation. Until the rupture in their seamless domesticity, Annie is happily patterned in the form of her mother who is represented as paradise. The details of the scenes Kincaid chooses to illustrate the dissolution of mother-daughter intimacy appear trivial; yet, the daughter reacts to each as severe, intolerable, and world-destroying abuse. (GILMORE, 2001, p. 106).

A good scene to illustrate Gilmore's point is the one when Annie's mother is scolding Annie, for the mother had forbidden the daughter to play marbles, an order that Annie ignored. To extract a confession from her daughter, the mother narrates a heartfelt anecdote of a situation that many years ago, when Annie's mother was just a girl, made her run the risk of being bitten by a poisonous snake. Annie's mother's intention is to make Annie pity her, emotionally blackmailing her daughter, in an attempt to make her surrender and tell where the marbles were. However, after almost giving in to her mother's appeals, Annie decides to withhold this information:

> The words "the marbles are in the corner over there" were on the very tip of my tongue, when I heard my mother, her own voice warm and soft and treacherous say to me, "Well, Little Miss, where are your marbles? Summoning my own warm, soft, and newly acquired treacherous voice, I said, "I don't have any marbles, you know." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 70).

This passage may signal a rupture from the girl whose identity was a continuous attempt to mirror the image of her own mother to a person who starts to feel the necessity to find her own individuality. In this sense, Annie's mother concomitantly represents an agent of balance, since she was Annie's most pervasive source of identification, and the cause of the imbalance that will make Annie migrate from the mere representation of someone's image to the representation of **her self**. Thus, it is not too far-fetched to note that, even with no geographic dislocations, Annie undergoes an emotional diaspora, or at least, an emotional displacement, while dealing with her mother's legacy. To go a little further in this discussion, it is interesting to pay heed to Florence Ramond Jurney, in her article "Exile and Relation to the Mother/Land in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath Eyes Memory* and *The Farming of Bones*", when she asserts:

> The heritage that is passed down to women is not just geographical. In fact, women don't seem to be grounded in the land, but rather, appear as ever-evolving beings. From that constant evolution is born a woman with a new identity, expressing herself through a community rather than a territory. (JURNEY, 2001, online).

Although Jurney is referring to the work of Edwidge Danticat, another diasporic writer, the same strand of thought could be applied to Jamaica Kincaid's work.

Furthermore, the ritualistic colors of this episode with the marbles are accentuated when Annie says that "soon after that, I started to menstruate, and stopped playing marbles." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 70) This leads one to suppose that the beginning of her menstrual cycle physically marks the transition between mimetic representations to self representation, or to put it in simpler words, the metamorphosis of a girl into a young woman.

By lying to her mother about the marbles, Annie breaks the chain of power with which her mother subdued her individuality, and at the same time, the metaphysical chain that tied

her to Antigua. To a greater or lesser degree, Annie's mother is the personification of Annie's life in Antigua, a life Annie does not want live anymore, but before leaving, Annie knows that she needs to start her own legacy, a move that is beautifully symbolized in the conversation she has with her father, asking him to build a new trunk: "It came into my mind without saying. "A trunk", I said. 'But you have a trunk already. You have your mother's trunk,' he said to me. 'Yes, but I want my own trunk,' I said back. Very well. A trunk you request, a trunk you will have,' he said." (KINCAID, 1997, p.106).

Although Annie has a new trunk, she needs to fill it up with new memories, which is something she is willing to do as it is easy to attest when she leaves Antigua ready to experience the sequence of events that will comprise new metaphorical items in her inner baggage, as Rosemary Marangoly George remarks: "Some fictional immigrants, like Annie John, the seventeen year old protagonist of Jamaica Kincaid's novel, determinedly leave their native lands without baggage." (GEORGE, 2005, p. 173).

In addition to that, Annie's mother ceases to be a source of identification to Annie John, and little by little, the girl realizes that she needs to start a new life in a new place in order to fully live her own individuality. Annie knows that she has to restart her life according to her own terms. Although Annie feels that leaving home is not easy, in the end of the book she does leave home, concretizing the emotional displacement she feels throughout the whole book, and finally performing the geographic diaspora that her constantly dislocated state of mind had been hinting she eventually would:

> Now, too, I had nothing to take my mind off what was happening to me. My mother and my father – I was living them forever. My home on an island – I was living it forever. What to make of everything? I felt a familiar hollow space. I felt I was being held down against my will. I felt I was burning up from head to toe. I felt that someone was tearing me up into little pieces and soon I would be able to see all the little pieces as they floated out into nothing in the deep blue sea. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 144).

2.4 A diasporic Farewell

Annie John's eighth and last chapter is a kind of rehearsal for Annie's actual diasporic move. The chapter starts with self-assertive lines which suggest Annie's progressive mental erasure of Antigua diluted in the solidification of an identity which, at that point, reaches a (provisory) peak of independence: "'My name is Annie John.' These were the first words that came into my mind as I woke up on the morning of the last day I spent in Antigua, and they stayed there, lined up one behind the other marching, for I don't know how long." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 130). Annie is in a state of mind that indicates that although she fears

what is unbeknownst to her, the unknown is a more preferable choice than the life she was living in Antigua:

> My name was the last thing I saw the night before, just as I was falling asleep; it was written in big, black letters all over my trunk, sometimes followed by my address in Antigua, sometimes followed by my address as it would be in England. I did not want to be a nurse, but I would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with my life as it stood. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 130).

This passage suggests that Annie never really fitted in Antigua, she always felt misplaced there, which deeply fragmented her identity because although her dislocation is not really geographical, her emotional dislocation makes her transit in a kind of identity limbo. In spite of finding some points of identification in her home country, she grows more and more aware that she does not belong to Antigua, or at least not only to Antigua, her life evolution starts indicating that Annie actually floats in an identity threshold. The circumstances of her life impel her to a suspended state of "diaspora-to-be", which is also the entire overtone of this last chapter.

It should not be forgotten that this chapter is entitled "A Walk to the Jetty". Maybe, in the context of the book, the jetty in question works as a kind of temporal aisle which links her former life to her life to come. Such a view, may also allow another reference: in a metaphorical sense the jetty might be taken as Annie's personal "River Styx", which, in Greek mythology, was a (non-) place of intersection which formed the boundary between Earth and the Underworld. Paul E. Larson, in "The River as a Liminal Space in Berceo´s *The Fornicating Sexton*", also recognizes the imagery of intersection present in the symbolism of rivers, in particular, the River Stix:

> In a very real sense, the unnamed river becomes a liminal space, a "between land;" it is a kind of symbolic Styx, across whose murky waters the soul must pass before arriving at its final destination—the gates of Hell and eternal damnation or the Pearly Gates and eternal bliss. The River Styx in Greek mythology was, after all, the boundary between the Earth and the Underworld—Hades or the world in which the dead receive their final just desserts. (LARSON, 2009, p. 62).

Thus, Annie's jetty –and here it is pertinent to notice that a jetty is the kind of construction that is normally built over a river– could be taken as her liminal space, a point of intersection where she says farewell to her former life and senses that now she has no turning back. As she walks to the jetty, Annie revisits the person she was when she lived in Antigua:

> I never wanted to lie in this bed again, my legs hanging out way past the foot of it, tossing and turning on my mattress, with its cotton stuffing all lumped just where it wasn't a good place to be lumped. I never wanted to lie in my bed again and hear Mr. Ephraim driving his sheep to pasture – a signal to my mother that she should get up to prepare my father's and my bath and breakfast. I never wanted to lie in my bed and hear my mother gargling again. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 130-1).

On the verge of finally performing her diasporic move, Annie sees some images of her life in a kind of inner slow motion of memories, an autobiographical video clip, which

envelopes her subjectivity in the haze of a metaphysical dream, preparing her to make the transition from the person she was in Antigua to the person she will be, living overseas:

> As I passed by all these places, it was as if I were in a dream, for I didn't notice the people coming and going in and out of them, I didn't feel my feet touch ground, I didn't even feel my own body – I just saw these places as if they were hanging in the air, not having top or bottom, and as if I had gone in and out of them in the same moment. The sun was bright; the sky was blue and just above my head. We then arrived at the jetty. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 143).

It is a commonplace in the literary universe that water imagery symbolizes rebirth. In fact, according to Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, in *Dicionário de Símbolos: Mitos, Sonhos, Costumes, Gestos, Formas, Figuras, Cores, Números*:

> [...] water erases all infractions and all blemishes. The baptism water, and only this, washes down the sins and it is given only once because it makes one accede to another state: the state of the new man. This rejection of the old man, or rather, this death of a moment in history, is comparable to a deluge, because it symbolizes a disappearance, a destruction: one era is annihilated, another one emerges. (CHEVALIER; GHEERBRANT, 1998, p. 18, tradução nossa).[5]

As *Annie John* reaches its end, water-related images are getting more recurrent: "When we were all on board, the launch headed out to sea. Away from the jetty, the water became the customary blue, and the launch left a wide path that looked like a road" (KINCAID, 1997, p.145). Those images eventually culminate in the last lines of the book:

> I went back to the cabin and lay down on my berth. Everything trembled as if it had a spring at its very center. I could hear the small waves lap-lapping around the ship. They made an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out. (p. 148).

As far as water-related images are concerned, in this passage the receding waves mentioned may represent the events in everyone's lives which come and go according to the fortunes and hazards of time, and the emptying vessel could suggest Annie is getting rid of the things that hindered the flow of her identity in Antigua, prompting her to deal with the waves she will find in her new geographic location and the unraveling these waves will bring to her life.

Notwithstanding, some of the consequences of the new life Annie John seeks to live will be further addressed in Jamaica Kincaid's subsequent autobiographical novel, *Lucy*.

[5] The text in Portuguese: "[...] a água apaga todas as infrações e toda mácula. A água do batismo, e só ela, lava os pecados, e só é conferida uma vez porque faz aceder a um outro estado: o do homem novo. Essa rejeição do homem velho, ou melhor, essa morte de um momento da história, é comparável a um dilúvio, porque este simboliza uma desaparição, uma destruição: uma era se aniquila, outra surge".

CHAPTER 3– ON *LUCY*

Taken as a kind of sequence to *Annie John*, *Lucy* (1990) is, according to what Henry Louis Gates Jr. registers in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, "a sparse, beautifully precise novel […] the psychological space between leaving and arriving" (GATES JR, 1997, p. 2524-2525) since the transitional overtone of the novel is blatant. Nonetheless, although, in many ways, *Lucy* is complementary to *Annie John*, some particularities are to be observed.

A more metaphorical or even psychological analysis of these particularities could suggest that the character, Lucy, is a young Antiguan woman who arrives in New York to work as an *au pair* girl, as an attempt to construct her identity to the detriment of the haunting presence of her past, majorly embodied by Annie John, the young Antiguan girl, who, although not really mentioned in *Lucy*, would be a symbolic representation of her memories in Antigua, principally if one considers the mother-daughter dynamic pervasive throughout the whole novel, solidifying the haunting presence of Kincaid's/Lucy's childhood.

Once in New York, the exercise of comparing and contrasting her former life with the reality that spreads out before her starts off, and Lucy sees herself located in a kind of limbic space where past, present and future are distant notions for she knew that she somehow had lost the "comfort zone" to which she would resort to define herself.

As Justin D. Edwards remarks, "Although the name of the protagonist has changed from Annie to Lucy, Kincaid's second novel begins where her first novel ends: *Annie John* concludes with a departure, *Lucy* begins with an arrival." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 58). If *Annie John* could be considered a pre-diasporic life narrative, for the book gives an account of the life of a young girl who was fragmented even before her diasporic experience, that is, before living her homeland, in *Lucy* the reader comes across a post-diasporic life narrative, for the book narrates the life of a girl after her diasporic move, the life of a girl living in a foreign land.

Perhaps, what the two books really have more conspicuously in common is that their protagonists try to establish their identities in spite of the feeling of inadequacy they felt with or without the diasporic move. Although the narrative modes of both novels are different, their storylines are similar for both of them work in a complementary way asserting their inclusion in what some people would call a *Bildungsroman*, "the novel of development and social formation of a young man, as in Dicken's *Great Expectations*" (SMITH; WATSON,

2006, p. 189). It does not matter if they are read separately from each other or if as a kind of continuation of each other, among other things, the books are about the discovery of individuality and the alternatives people like the central characters of the books have to face to grow and learn about the world. Being a little bit closer to Kincaid's books, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson develop the concept of the *Bildungsroman* in a way that can be quite applicable to Annie John/Lucy's saga:

> And yet the form of the Bildungsroman has been taken up more recently by women and other disenfranchised persons to consolidate a sense of emerging identity and an increase place in public life. The Bildungsroman can also be used negatively as a norm of assimilation in the dominant culture that is unattainable and must be relinquished, or that produces alienation from the home community. In much women's writing, its plot of development culminates not in integration but in an awakening to gender-based limitations. (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 189).

Indeed, more than coming-of-age narratives, *Annie John* and *Lucy* depict several dilemmas some individuals, with a particular sense of non-belonging, have to deal with when developing their selfhoods. These books are also "depictions of female characters who are able to resist racism, sexism and colonial subjugation by creating a personal space in which African traditions and European culture are intertwined." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 42).

However, as far as narrative modes are concerned, there are some structural differences to be observed in the books, which also reveal Kincaid's versatility as well as her own evolution as a writer in a relatively short space of time:

> In terms of style and structure, for instance, the novels are quite distinct. *Annie John* is lush and descriptive, whereas *Lucy* is much sparser and more fragmented. *Annie John* tends to move chronologically through the events of the child's life, underscoring major themes with imagery and metaphor, whereas the narrative of *Lucy* resists chronology, moving back and forth in time while also avoiding clear-cut resolutions or conclusions. (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 42).

Moreover, one could observe that *Lucy* may be a little bit denser than *Annie John* given the contemplative pathos Lucy has, which sometimes disguises the girl's deep sense of isolation and anger, while in *Annie John*, those feelings are diluted in Annie's more direct responses to the reality around her as well as to her slightly lighter personality: "Annie is lively, curious, and engaged, whereas Lucy is more thoughtful, pensive, and critical." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 42). Although *Annie John* has its own charge of raw anger, this feeling in *Lucy* is of a bitterer nature. One could observe that, in *Annie John*, Kincaid is a little bit more intimate, more open to share her narrating-I's emotions with a prospective reader, whereas in *Lucy*, the reader can feel a certain distance, as if the writer were more prone to unveil the factors that direct and indirectly contribute to her character's identity fragmentation with a more cerebral analysis, that is, not with the sensorial exuberance Kincaid uses in *Annie*

John to color her narrative of the life of a young girl, but with an engaged and enraged tone which is very precise in fingering her targets.

3.1 Echoes from the past

Before a more direct analysis of *Lucy*, it is worth mentioning that there is an emblematic scene in *Annie John* which refers to a moment when Annie is window shopping in Market Street, a place "where all stores were" (KINCAID, 1997, p. 93), and she sees her reflection in a glass "among Sunday hats and shoes, among men and women undergarments, among pots, pots and pans, among brooms and household soaps, among notebooks and pens and ink, among medicine for curing headaches and medicines for curing colds." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 94). In reality, these overlapping images hint that Annie sees herself among a Kaleidoscopic segment of reality which blurs her own image, as if the girl were rejecting herself: "My skin was black in a way that I had not noticed before, as if someone had thrown a lot of soot out of a window when I was just passing by […] Altogether I looked old and miserable." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 97).

Perhaps, the actual reason for Annie's self-rejection is that this passage is written just after Annie starts avoiding Gwen, which suggests that although Annie cannot help doing so, she knows it is not fair with Gwen, and due to this fact Annie situates herself in kind of mind game of guilt and self-punishment which, somehow, may evoke a Christian dynamic which remarks that sins must be purged by suffering. This semi religious undertone is further corroborated by the other point of reference Annie uses a source of identification: Satan:

> Not long before I had seen a picture of painting entitled the *Young Lucifer*. It showed Satan just recently cast out of heaven for all his bad deeds, and he was standing on a black rock all alone and everything around him was charred and black, as if a great fire had just roared though. His skin was coarse, and so were all his features. His hair was made up of live snakes, and they were in a position to strike. Satan was wearing a smile, but it was one of those smiles that you could see through, one of those smiles that make you know the person is just putting up a good front. At heart, you could see he was really lonely and miserable at the way things had turned out. (KINCAID, 1997, p. 94-5).

Annie identifies with Satan because she also feels cast out. As she never felt she was really part of the social milieu she inhabited, almost all her social performances were often a kind of a simulacrum enveloping a fragmented spirit, the spirit of an outsider who, similarly to the picture of Lucifer, sometimes had to "put up a good front" even if deep inside the girl "felt sorry for [herself] and [she] was about to sit down the sidewalk and weep, already tasting the salty bitterness of [her] tears." (KINCAID, 1997, p. 94-5).

This passage in *Annie John* is particularly pertinent because, as Leigh Gilmore argues in "There Will Always Be a Mother", "Annie identifies her image in the shop window with this image of Lucifer and, in that chain of associations, predicts the next name in Kincaid's serial autobiography: Lucy." (GILMORE, 2001, p. 109). Gilmore attests the serial autobiographical direction Kincaid seems to be heading for by bridging *Annie John* to *Lucy*, registering the recurrent reference to Lucifer with two different narrative intents which complement Kincaid's construction of the singular characteristics of both personages, which is a kind of narrative resource that may also mark the evolution of the character Annie John into Lucy that occurs after the girl's diasporic move:

> The self-representational figure that makes Kincaid's work intelligible as serial autobiography reapers in *Lucy*. In its return to the autobiographical scene, *Lucy* shares with *Annie John* a clarifying, if costly moment of identification that follows a confrontation with her mother. It occurs when Lucy presses her mother to tell her why she was named Lucy. Her mother's answer welds *Annie John* to *Lucy*: "I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer. What a botheration from the moment you were conceived" (152). Lucy's feelings evoke Annie's response to her "like mother like daughter" confrontation, itself a scene about naming and identity. "I went from feeling burdened and old and tired to feeling light, new, clean." But the scene ends differently. Lucy does not fall ill; instead, she identifies: "I was transformed from failure to triumph," she now insists. "It was the moment I knew who I was … whenever I saw my name I always reached out to give it a strong embrace" (152-53). (GILMORE, 2001, p. 113).

If in *Annie John* the Lucifer image is related to the state of misery Annie feels given her sense of inadequacy, in *Lucy*, the allusion to Lucifer comes almost as a celebration, a rupture of values that makes Lucy feel, as Gilmore also asserts, "transformed from failure to triumph." (GILMORE, 2001, p. 113). Lucy embraces her name because she senses the possibility it has to help her define her identity as a sort of "postcolonial Byronic heroine" who dares and defies the power of her mother, of her "creator", just like the character, Satan, defies the omnipotent supremacy of God. Lucy acknowledges that she has the rebellious trait those who do not easily accept to be subdued invariably show and from very early age she learns to recognize the subversive potential of the outcasts as well as the importance of discerning them as prospective sources of identification:

> When I was quite young and just being taught to read, the books I was taught to read were The Bible, *Paradise Lost*, and some plays by William Shakespeare. I knew well the Book of Genesis, and had been made to memorize parts of *Paradise Lost*. The stories of the fallen were well known to me […]. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 152).

She accepts her name as a part and parcel of her personality irremediably molded by her colonial and subsequent diasporic condition. Moreover, Kincaid's treatment of the Lucifer trope in both novels denotes the growth of her narrating-I who, even continuously struggling to develop her identities in accordance with her own conceptions, now seems to be more independent in her attempts of self-construction, showing the level of maturity Lucy begins to

develop after leaving Antigua and consequently her mother and her colonial past, which greatly limited the alternatives for self-definition the girl might have had.

3.2 Where is home?

The first chapter of *Lucy* shows a girl trying to put up with in a new land, dealing with her expectations and trying to manage her own anxiety: “The undergarments that I wore were all new, bought for my journey, and as I sat in the car, twisting this way and that to have a good view of the sights before me, I was reminded of how uncomfortable the new can make you feel” (KINCAID, 199O, p. 4). She could not rely on her old world views any longer because the world, as she knew it, had changed, and she sensed that she would have to change as well, and this scared her:

> It was the middle of January, after all. But I did not know that the sun could shine and the air remain cold; no one had ever told me. What a feeling that was! How can I explain? Something I had always known – the way I knew my skin was the color brown of a nut rubbed repeatedly with a soft cloth, or the way I knew my own name – something I took completely for granted, “the sun is shining the air is warm,” was not so. I was no longer in a tropical zone, and this realization now entered my life like a flow of water dividing formerly dry and solid ground, creating two banks, one of which was my past – so familiar and predictable that even my unhappiness then made me happy now just to think of it – the other my future, a gray blank, an overcast seascape on which rain was falling and no boats were in sight. I was no longer in tropical zone and felt cold inside and out, the first time such a sensation had come over me (KINCAID, 1990, p. 5-6).

At this point, it is relevant to insist on highlighting that the similarities between the states of mind Lucy shares with Annie John suggest that the character, Lucy, could be taken as Annie John, re-baptized in an older version with an actual geographic diasporic condition. But, in reality, those similarities transcend the personal traits the two girls may have in common as they are textually overlapped in *Lucy* as if they were quotations extracted from *Annie John* and duplicated in *Lucy* to echo the former book as if it were a kind of textual canvas on which the latter book is delineated, a palimpsest of old memories that may have the potential to remold new ones:

> Oh, I had imagined that with my own swift act – leaving home and coming to this new place – I could leave behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings, and my discontent with life in general as it presented itself to me. In the past, the thought of being in my present situation had been a comfort, but now I did not even have this to look forward to, and so I lay down on my bed and dreamt I was eating a bowl of pink mullet and green figs cooked in a coconut milk, and it had been cooked by my grandmother, which was why the taste of it pleased me so, for she was the person I liked best in all the world and those were the thing I liked best to eat. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 6-7).

As Lucy notices that her present situation does not bring the personal relief she initially thought it would have, she experiments a gamut of conflicting emotions that

contradicts the predictions of peace of mind she would find after leaving Antigua. In "Resident Aliens: Diasporic Women's Writing", Sneja Gunew wrote lines that somehow portray Lucy's situation when the critic says that: "Anomaly and ambiguity characterize the diasporic condition, and while many cultural texts examine its complex permutations they are not always perceived as commenting on 'here' so much as 'there.'" (GUNEW, 2009, p. 1). In Lucy's case it is impossible to dissociate "here" from "there" because the girl needs to rely on her memories, memories that, even not being completely satisfactory to Lucy, are the only idea of home the girl has to help her adjust herself to her present life, or at least, to have a "place to hide" when life gets too hard to endure.

It is interesting to notice that Lucy´s diasporic condition distorts her sense of belonging, making her try to retrieve her memories of home. However, those memories are not enough to provide Lucy with the tools of self-definition she needs to put the fragments of her identity together and she realizes she would need to relocate herself in a place she could eventually call home. It was already mentioned that, in "All Fiction Is Homesickness", Rosemary Marangoly George asserts that "Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all" (GEORGE, 2005, p. 9). In fact, Lucy´s love-and-hate relationship with the elements of her homeland endorses George's view. Lucy is forced to perceive that going back home is not something that would be easily available to her. As a matter of fact, the ambiguity caused by Lucy´s mixed, conflicting feelings toward home makes the reader guess that, although Lucy misses what she has left behind, going back home is not really an option for her: "What a surprise this was to me, that I longed to be back in the place I came from […] to be with those people whose smallest, most natural gesture would call up in me such a rage that I longed to see them all dead at my feet" (KINCAID, 1990, p.6).

However, little by little, as Lucy interacts with the world and the people for whom she has to work, she starts to redefine herself. Initially, she realizes that the new world – home? – where she is in now does not convey such an unbearable reality as one might be inclined to think, given Lucy's quite complicated life context. It is relevant to notice that Lucy refuses to be condescending with herself and thus soothes the piercing sense of isolation that her condition could inflict upon her. She faces reality in a very concrete way: "I was only an unhappy woman living in a maid's room, and I was not even the maid. I was the young girl who watches over the children and go to school at night" (p. 7). Lucy discards a totalizing representation of her postcolonial experience by assuming her condition of social subordination without being necessarily subdued, or spiritually subordinated to her situation.

According to Stuart Hall, “the ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization” (HALL, 2010, p. 236).

Hence, when Lucy chooses to be the agent of her life instead of a victim of her own circumstances, she is, perhaps, also subverting a stereotypical notion which makes subaltern existence and diasporic black femaleness part of the same essentializing notion, showing that it is possible to interpret her attitude as a way of redefining her black female identity according to her own terms, not following a prescribed standardized pattern of behavior. She, actually, refuses to be defined by her situation and challenges traditional victimization positions.

3.3 The cultural chasm

Nonetheless, Lucy’s process of adaptation is not easy. Initially, the reader may perceive that there is a kind of cultural clash between Lucy and the American family she now lives with. Such a clash hinders Lucy’s assimilation process and she starts being called a “Visitor” because “They said [she] seemed not to be a part of the things, as if [she] didn’t live in the house with them, as if they weren’t like a family to [her] as if [she] was just passing through, just saying one long Hallo, and soon would be saying a quick goodbye!” (KINCAID, 1990, p. 13). Lucy’s rhythm of “belonging” cannot be measured in accordance with the terms of her host family who seems to take for granted that a person like Lucy would be obviously willing to live with them; however, as to Lucy, her diasporic condition is so unprecedented that she does not have a clear parameter to get an appropriate evaluation of the unusual reality around her. Lucy would need more time to fully understand her situation and make herself at home, should a person like Lucy ever feel at home anywhere. Rosemary Marangoly George, in“‘Traveling Light’: Home and the Immigrant Genre”, has a point of view which may illustrate the circumstance Lucy is under:

> The distraction and /or comfort offered by these memories of other times and places makes the immigrant more multi-faceted a figure than does the equation that delivers a subject who is marginal and therefore yearns for assimilation into the mainstream. While the desire for assimilation into the mainstream is popularly read as the trademark of the immigrant experience, “feeling at home” may or may not require assimilation. At the same time, the process of making oneself at home is a process that may not be completed even by several successive generations. (GEORGE, 2005, 184).

A moment in the book that shows the cultural hiatus between the American family and Lucy happens when they are eating together and the difference in their habits makes the

family overreact in their way to treat Lucy, assuming a condescending posture towards the girl, essentializing the nature of their visitor, and turning Lucy into a "poor visitor" (KINCAID, 1990, p.14) even without knowing how she really feels about the whole situation:

> For the look at the way I stared at them as they ate, Lewis said had I never seen anyone put a forkful of French-cut green beans in his mouth before? This made Mariah laugh, but almost everything Lewis said made Mariah happy and so she would laugh. I didn't laugh, though, and Lewis looked at me, concern on his face. He said poor visitor, poor visitor" over and over, a sympathetic tone to his voice, and then he told me a story about an uncle he had who had gone to Canada and raised monkeys, and of how after a while the uncle loved monkeys so much and was so used to being around them that he found actual human beings hard to take. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 14).

Whatever the intention Lewis, the patriarch of that family, could have had when he tells this anecdote about his uncle to Lucy, he could by no means expect the reaction it causes in Lucy which generates an even more awkward moment in the family. The girl decides to tell them about a dream she had in which she saw Lewis chasing her around the house with his wife, Mariah, rooting for him in order to incentivize him to catch Lucy, who, eventually "fell down a hole, at the bottom of which were some silver and blue snakes." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 14). The couple gets astonished with Lucy's dream for they do not know what to think of it, as Lucy observes in the following quotation:

> When Lewis finished telling his story, I told them my dream. When I finished they both fell silent then they looked at me and Mariah cleared her throat, but it was obvious from the way she did it that her throat did not need clearing at all. Their two yellow heads swam toward each other and, in unison, bobbed up and down. Lewis made a clucking noise, then said, Poor, poor Visitor. And Mariah said, Dr. Freud for Visitor, and I wondered why she said that, for I didn't know who doctor Freud was. (KINCAID, 1990**,** p. 14-15)**.**

As Lucy does not get the "Dr. Freud Joke", she is excluded from the space of inherent intimacy homes normally have, turning the complicity of the couple into a kind of inner dialect to be understood only by those who share the cultural codes the couple does. Naturally, Lewis and Mariah might have assumed that Lucy knew who Dr. Freud was because, in accordance with the reality they inhabit, everybody is supposed to know who Dr. Freud was.

As Lucy talks about her dream, the American family takes it as an indicator of deep psychological issues, but Lucy's account of her dream is, in fact, an attempt to show that the girl is trying to open her guard and accept that perhaps she has a kind of home in that house: "I had meant by telling them my dream that I had taken them in, because only people who were very important to me had ever shown up in my dreams. I did not know if they understood that." (KINCAID, 1990, p.14-15). However the communication breakdown between them showed that the two parts, the family and Lucy, are positioned in different places: theirs, a place of security and tranquility through which they meandered, well

protected, inside the metaphysical walls of the world they live in; hers, a place for "thriving for a place", an inner battlefield of identity construction which invariably locks herself in an in-between state.

Although she wants to avoid fixity by trying to interact with her new environment, what she really finds is a world that systematically labels her as the "Caribbean girl", a term, which, in accordance to some dominant conceptions, is *vis-à-vis* with the discursive rationale of other essentializing terms such as "poor Visitor", which, conscious or unconsciously, tends to seize Lucy's subjectivity by freezing her identity with a pre-established notion.

At this point, it is relevant to notice that Jamaica Kincaid rejects these kinds of notions as she depicts a situation that at first installs the setting for misconceptions –inside the house of a "typical" American family(?) – and subsequently subverts (to use Linda Hucheon's terms) these misconceptions by adopting the point of view of a character who is in the weaker, or, at least, less visible extreme of that particular chain of power and who, precisely due to this underground, or rather, alternative position, is able to filter and then translate the writer's position, making creator and creature sound in unison, refusing to be conveniently molded so as to fit in the universal frames the view of the colonizer already readied to accommodate some people who, perhaps like Jamaica Kincaid/Lucy, need to be constantly thriving just to be themselves.

In addition to that, the aforementioned scene shows one of the ways with which some dominant discourses patronize the cultural references of the colonized, ignoring what is common knowledge in the view of the less privileged Other, producing a notion of alterity which does not really represent alterity in a fair way, but which fulfills the perspectives of those more powerful ones who are often inclined to conceive their cultural paradigms as the unquestionable factors that foster the so-called "universal truths". In this sense, Lucy's ignorance about Dr. Freud maybe taken as Kincaid's strategy to undermine the conceptions of what is "mandatory knowledge" by pinpointing that those very conceptions are not everyone's truths: mandatory to whom?

Here, it is relevant to highlight how Jamaica Kincaid uses the cultural shock Lucy has to go through, a cultural clash Kincaid herself may be very familiar, to wittily create a passage that may speak books to those who sympathize with Stuart Hall's idea about the creative power transculturation may bring to writers who transit in zones of intersection. Hall states that because of the hybrid perspectives some writers can develop due to their diasporic situation, those writers could potentially cannibalize the cultural references they have contact with and come up with something authentic, not a mere "simulacrum or cheap imitation of

the culture of the colonizers" (HALL, 1999, p. 6). In "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad", Hall says:

> Through transculturation "subordinated or marginal groups select or invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant metropolitan culture". It is a process of the 'contact zone', a term that invokes the "the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures … whose trajectories now intersect". This perspective is dialogic since it is as interested in how the colonized produce the colonizer as the other way around: the "co-presence, interaction, interlocking of understandings and practices, often [in the Caribbean case, we must say always] within radically asymmetrical relations of power". (HALL, 1999, p. 6).

That is to say that a writer like Kincaid, greatly because of her hybrid background, can create a very particular way of writing which can intermediate the space(s) between colonizer and colonized, developing a kind of narrative dialect that contains elements of the two – or more – different cultural codes these writers have contact with, opening new levels for the limits of representation as far as postcolonial studies are concerned. Therefore, the perspectives of such writers, with unique life experiences, intrinsically can provide literature with a sort of narrative refreshment.

Back to *Lucy*, as time passes by, Lucy's abandonment of her old conceptions allows the reader to see the evolution of her process of self-rediscovery since she is able to adapt to her new life assimilating the elements that were not familiar to her, and reconstructing her past in accordance with the perspectives of the person she is becoming:

> It had been six months now, and I knew that I never wanted to live in that place, but if for some reason was forced to live there again, I would never accept the harsh judgments made against me by people whose only power to do so was that they had known me from the moment I was born. I had also grown to love the idea of seasons: winter, spring, summer, and autumn (KINCAID, 1990, p. 51).

Besides her refusal to abide by the rules of the ones with "the harsh judgments made against her", Lucy´s acceptance of the "idea of seasons" is also an indicator of a kind of rupture with her former self, not because she is willing to deny her past, but because she is open to putting together her experiences in her host land as a type of natural continuation of the person she once was. Lucy allows herself to change, and by doing so, she experiences different possibilities to reinterpret her past and to welcome the perspectives of the individual she is becoming. This will turn her into a unique individual with a hybrid outlook of the realities around her. In the words of Stuart Hall, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora":

> We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about "one experience, one identity," without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's "uniqueness." Cultural identity, in this second case, is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being." It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subjected to the continuous "play" of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the

> different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (HALL, 2010, p. 238).

Perhaps, because of this "positioning of the narratives of the past", autobiographies may give to some writers a good starting point to begin to gather memorialized material to construct their identities, a sort of personal basis to which other elements of their lives will be added, contributing to this ongoing process of self definition. Therefore, as far as autobiographies are concerned, in the book, another relevant point to consider is the aforementioned life-pervasive relationship Lucy has with her mother.

3.4 References and differences

In many senses, Lucy's going to America was also a way to escape from her mother's dominating grasp. Still, it is interesting to notice that many of the events that were for evermore tattooed on the retina of her infant eyes were related to her mother, as Lucy herself acknowledges: "my past was my mother" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 90). According to Justin D. Edwards, in *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid*:

> Lucy's feelings about her mother pull her in two different directions. She sees her mother as the great love of her life and the figure she must separate herself from if she is to develop her own identity. Lucy, then views maternal love as something that threatens to kill her by suffocation. "I had come to feel that my mother's love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn't know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead that just become the echo of someone" (p.36). If she is to grow into a complete individual, Lucy must distinguish herself from her mother. But Lucy finds it difficult to extricate herself from the maternal bound, and her journey to America – her rejection of Antigua – does not sever the link that she has with the past (EDWARDS, 2007, p. 64).

In a way, Lucy´s mother is the representation of the past that hinders her personal evolution. It is clear that, to become herself, Lucy has to get rid of her mother´s presence, which is constantly hovering in her mind. However, Lucy´s mother was also a point of reference which always provided her with a very strong paradigm of identification. This paradigm started fading away as Lucy grew up, but it never completely vanishes. In America, this point of identification proved to be unfit to help Lucy deal with the subjective particularities already emerging inside her soul when she was in Antigua, and which were aggravated, once Lucy had to face the peculiarities of inhabiting a new environment.

Lucy's friendship with Mariah, the woman whose children she had to look after, gave her a certain kind of point of reference, but not an identification. From the very beginning of Lucy's friendship with Maria, the girl tries to understand what kind of person Mariah is, how Mariah ends up becoming a woman who is completely different from the other women Lucy

has found throughout her life. However, Lucy seems to be unable to understand Mariah's attitude towards life itself.

The elements that defined Mariah as a person are so different from Lucy's that the whole second chapter of the book is based on Lucy's attempts to define who Mariah really is. For instance, this chapter, not surprisingly entitled "Mariah", opens describing Mariah's sense of amazement by the blossoming daffodils she sees "pushing their way up out of the ground" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 17), which also amazed Lucy, but not because of the flowers, but because of Maria herself: "So Mariah is made to feel alive by some flowers bending in the breeze. How does a person get to be like that?" (KINCAID, 1990, p.17).

Lucy's reality and, principally, her past memories, are much harsher than Mariah's as this episode with the daffodils may illustrate. Lucy, very understandably, broods over the fact that, in Laura Niesen de Abruna's words, in "Jamaica Kincaid's Writing and the Maternal-Colonial Matrix", "As a ten-year-old on a tropical island, Lucy was forced to memorize and recite a poem about daffodils approved by the Queen Victoria Girls' School." (ABRUNA, 1999, p.178). A line in William Wordsworth´s famous poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", also known as "The Daffodils", reinforces the image of the daffodils as an iconic symbol of power and subjugation in *Lucy*'s narrative mode. Having to memorize a poem about a flower which does not grow in the Caribbean is taken by Lucy as display of cultural enforcement which awakens the girl's anger, principally when she compares and contrasts what that flower may represent to a person like Mariah and what it represents to herself.

At this point, it is impossible not to consider the autobiographical slant present in *Lucy* provided that one takes into consideration Kincaid's position towards some events of her life that might have possibly inspired the narration of Lucy's reaction concerning the whole Daffodil segment in the book. Author and critic J. Brooks Bouson, in the notes for the forth chapter of his book, *Jamaica Kincaid: Writing Memory, Writing Back to the Mother*, notices the parallel between Lucy and Jamaica Kincaid herself:

> Kincaid describes being forced to memorize Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud": "Every colonial child has to do that. It's a two-edged thing because I wouldn't have known how to write and how to think if I hadn't read those things" (Perry, "interview", 507). Later Kincaid had a reaction similar to Lucy's when she saw the white cliffs of Dover during a visit to England (see Kincaid, "On Seeing England" 40). Kincaid draws a connection between the two experiences in an interview as she recalls the "nervous breakdown" she had when she first saw the white cliffs of Dover, which she says was "quite like" Lucy's experience with the daffodils. "I had heard so much about those white cliffs. I used to sing a hymn in church that was about longing to see White Cliffs of Dover over and over again. Things like that permeate my memory, but these things have absolutely no value to me. I hardly know the names of any flowers growing in the West Indies, except the hibiscus, but I know the names of just about all flowers in England and I also can identify them… I know the White Cliffs of Dover, and I yearned for them… So there is something wrong there, just as it would have been for a person like Lucy to love those daffodils. Daffodils do not grow in tropical climates. I know a poem about daffodils, but I did not know a poem about hibiscus. (BOUSON, 2005, p. 204).

According to Bouson, one could say that Kincaid's and Lucy's experiences are so intertwined that reality and fiction are blurred enough in the author's memories to qualify Lucy as a possible autobiographical life narrative. Furthermore, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in *Reading Autobiography*, say that "The writer of an autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the past within that experimental history." (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 16). The critics also imply that "Much memory is contextual" (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 16). Hence, the daffodils, in the context of Lucy's life, trigger a storm of memories that are far less "flowered" than the spring-like sensation they evoke in Mariah. When Lucy remembers her past it does not make her "feel alive", but awaken in the girl a deep sense of anguish:

> I remembered an old poem I had been made to memorize when I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girl's School. I had been made to memorize it, verse after verse, and then had recited the whole poem to an auditorium full of parents, teachers and fellow pupils. After I was done, everybody applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth. I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false; inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a bow to erase from my mind, line by line of that poem. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 17-8).

To a greater or lesser degree, Lucy's anger can be justified by a certain feeling of oppression the girl may have had for she was forced to memorize the poem, and by doing so, Lucy unwillingly violates the independent identity the she is continuously trying to develop. Thus, her attempt to erase the lines of the poem from her mind is a way to avoid manipulation and preserve the loyalty she senses she owes to herself, a strategy of resistance which would, to a certain extent, guarantee some level of agency in her own life and contribute to Kincaid's narrative project of denouncement of the unfair systems of oppression to which some people are submitted. According to Smith and Watson:

> One of the compelling contexts in which to consider possibilities of agency is the field of postcolonial writing. The question arises: what about formerly colonized peoples who have been educated as subject populations in the colonizers' languages, beliefs and values (interpellated as "colonized"), while their indigenous culture has been repressed, often brutally? Such subjects are inheritors of the legacies of a colonial history that made than less than fully human beings. For them, autobiographical writings has often served as a tactic of intervention in colonial repression. (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 45).

Moreover, still talking about "the colonizers' languages, beliefs and values", it is also relevant to say that at the same time that, through *Lucy*, Kincaid questions the real meaning of having to learn about a poem which has no intrinsic connection to the place where she was born, she also seems to know that, by the contact she had with the culture of the Other, she is able to develop that hybrid perspective which, later, after her diasporic move, may protect and

place her in what the critic Avtar Brah, in “Diaspora Border and Transnational Identities”, calls “diaspora space”, a location to be dwelled by those who direct or indirectly have to go through the consequence of a geographic, cultural or emotional dislocation. In the words of the critic: “The diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native* […] experience, subjectivity and identity are relational categories situated within multiaxial fields of power relations.” (BRAH, 1996, p. 209).

Kincaid’s immigrant view is in and out of the society into which she immigrates which endows her with the potential to change and be changed by that society. Due to this cultural amalgamation it is possible to say that Kincaid writes from a sort transcultural “*yin yang* location” because within her literary ambitions there is a part of the society she inhabits as there is a part of herself in that very same society.

To further illustrate this idea, it may be of interest to consider that Lucy’s position is evocative of the point made by Susan Stanford Friedman in “The ‘New Migration’: Clashes, Connections, and Diasporic Women’s Writing”, when the critic observes that “some world historians claim that collisions between competing civilizations have always brought increased connection, migration, and interaction” (FRIEDMAN, 2009, p. 3). Hence, it is possible to infer that the resulting interaction between two different entities may be precisely the element that will bring the new hybrid trace to both world/cultural views: that of the migrant and that of the host land, reinforcing the symbiotic dynamic within the *yin yang* metaphor, as Friedman also seems to agree with: “The host culture is as much changed by the presence of the migrants as the migrant culture is changed in its new homeland.” (FRIEDMAN, 2009, p. 3).

Notwithstanding, *Lucy* is also impregnated with strong metafictional tones of self-reflection which highlights Kincaid’s detachment perhaps to write a life narrative whose lyric- or narrating- I is precociously aware of herself despite her fragmentation and/or identity conflicts caused by intertwining with an alien cultural mode: “something settled inside me, something heavy and hard. It stayed there, and I could not think of one thing to make it go away. I thought, so this must be living, this must be the beginning of the time people later refer to as “‘years ago, when I was young.’” (KINCAID, 1990, p. 24). Lucy knows where she is exactly situated in time and in space which greatly indicates the intensity of her fight to be the master of her subjectivity and resist the labels society sometimes insists on using to stratify people like her.

Such processes of stratification happen in numerous ways, and sometimes they are so deeply rooted in common sense that hardly are they detected. Mariah insists on making Lucy

adopt an impression in relation to the daffodils that would be necessarily much more in consonance to her (Mariah's) life view than Lucy's: "Mariah said, 'these are daffodils. I'm sorry about the poem, but I'm hoping you'll find them lovely all the same.'" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 29).

"All the same", that is, Mariah expects that Lucy's appreciation of those flowers be exactly the same kind of appreciation she, Mariah, enjoys. Mariah fails to notice that it is very unlikely that people like Lucy have the same optimistic or even naïve world impressions some well-to-do people like Mariah herself come to develop. To a certain extent, Mariah chooses to turn a blind eye to the differences between herself and Lucy and consequently fails to see the person behind the guilt some people in more privileged positions feel when less privileged people show them that the world is not as fair as they would like it to be. As Justin D. Edwards claims in *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid*:

> The problems that arise between Lucy and Mariah are based on Mariah's refusal to recognize the differences between them. That is, Lucy is aware that Mariah's love and affection for her stem from her employer's "goodness" and generosity, but they also arise from her need to ignore (and thus erase) the profound cultural, racial and economic differences that have defined their lives. Mariah chooses to remain blind to the inequalities that exist between her own privileged position as her domestic servant. (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 67).

What is really worth noticing in this whole situation is the form with which Lucy rejects Mariah's disrespect of her life circumstances declining to embrace Mariah's commiseration. When Mariah tries to hug Lucy, the girl moves away and says, "'Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?'" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 30). In this sense, what is really behind the image of the daffodils is the view of the colonizer and of the colonized imbued in the life background, the metaphorical luggage, the two characters have and the ideological systems they might represent:

> As soon as I said this, I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes. This woman who hardly knew me loved and wanted me to love this thing – a grove brimming over with daffodils in bloom – that she loved also. Her eyes sank back in her head as if they were protecting themselves, as if they were taking a rest after some unexpected hard work. It wasn't her fault. It wasn't my fault. But nothing could change the fact where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness. The same thing could cause us to shed tears, but those tears would not taste the same. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 30).

Perhaps, the culmination of Lucy and Mariah's cultural gap is beautifully shown when Mariah, trying to sound sympathetic to Lucy, decides to say that she also has Indian blood: "'I was looking forward to telling you that I have Indian blood, that the reason I'm so good at catching fish and hunting birds and doing all sorts of things is that I have Indian blood.'" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 40). The almost apologetic tone Mariah uses to say that to Lucy hints the

awkwardness of the nature of their relationship, given their cultural distance. To Lucy's ears, Mariah's saying that she has Indian blood might have sounded almost hypocritical because, compared to the reality of Lucy's ancestors, it seems that Mariah does not have a clue of the deeper implications of what to have Indian blood actually represents to Lucy. Mariah says that with a kind of solemn hesitation: "I don't know why, I feel I shouldn't tell you that. I feel you will take it the wrong way." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 40). And, by doing so, Mariah takes Lucy by surprise, igniting in Lucy a landslide of memories mixed with a gloomy feeling of outrage:

> This really surprised me. What way should I take this? Wrong way? Right way? What could she mean? To look at her, there was nothing remotely like an Indian about her. Why claim a thing like that? I myself had Indian blood in me. My grandmother is a Carib Indian. But I don't go around saying that I have Indian blood in me. The Carib Indians were good sailors, but I don't like to be on the sea; I only like to look at it, I am sure they would put my grandmother in a museum, as an example of something now extinct in nature, one of a handful still alive. In fact one of the museums to which Maria had taken me devoted a whole section to people, all dead, who were more or less related to my grandmother. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 40).

Differently from Lucy, apologetically or not, Mariah advertizes her alleged "Indian blood" for behind her hesitation to tell it, there is also an attempt to establish a connection to Lucy by talking about something they supposedly might have in common. However, Mariah's hesitation in her statement might sound a bit calculated, like a victor who is falsely unsure of showing a battle scar or someone "announcing the possession of a trophy." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 40). Once again Mariah essentializes Lucy by suggesting, even though implicitly, that the relation Lucy might have with her Indian ancestors could somehow define some traits of Lucy's personality. Leigh Gilmore also throws further light at this discussion in "There Will Always Be a Mother":

> Lucy sees Mariah's privilege as uninspected and naïve (41). In her harshest comment on Mariah's efforts to establish rapport with Lucy on the grounds of their shared "difference" (Mariah claims to have "Indian blood"), Lucy wonders how do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?" (GILMORE, 20O1, p. 115).

Curiously, Kincaid ends this chapter in the same way she started it. Lucy says, "'all along I have been wondering how you got to be the way you are. Just how it was that you got to be the way you are.'" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 41). Nevertheless, little by little Lucy is seduced by Mariah's universe, the ups and downs, the intricacies of her life and Lucy openly admits that she "had grown to love her so" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 46). However, it does not mean that Lucy loses her critical distance towards Mariah's universe. In the subsequent pages of the book there are many situations that deconstruct that universe and reinforce the differences between the two women.

Mariah's best friend, Dinah, accentuated these differences because she does not hesitate in stratifying Lucy, once again triggering Lucy's rage. From the very begging of her

acquaintance with Dinah, Lucy does not like her as she perceive the snobbish inclination some people may have to put up to preserve the hierarchy that separates certain social layers, reducing the Other to a vague stereotype:

> This was because the first thing she said to me when Mariah introduced us was "So you are from the islands? I don't know why, but the way she said it made a fury rise up in me. I was about to respond to her in this way: "Which island exactly do you mean? The Hawaiian Islands? The islands that make up Indonesia, or what?" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 56).

Lucy recognizes that "To a person like Dinah, someone in [Lucy's] position is 'the girl' – as in 'the girl who takes care of the children.'" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 58). In fact, to a person like Dinah, it is always more practical to disguise her indifference with a pre-established construction such as "the girl who takes care of the children", "the help", "the subaltern", than to focus her attention on the individual behind these labels to really see who this specific person is. This whole situation evokes Spivak's very incisive line of argumentation when she asks: "Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems more problematic in this context. Clearly if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways." (SPIVAK, 1994, p. 90).

Jamaica Kincaid seems to be able to provide Gayatri Spivak with an answer when she gives voice to a character that may be taken as the representation of a person in a position of subordination who interacts with a reality that, in Lucy's view, may sound elitist, but even so, refuses to be emasculated by the ideological oppression of that society. Furthermore, Lucy is also able to invert that arrangement of power by also (de-) constructing a character like Dinah, who is a kind of stereotypical representative of a person in a dominant position who wants to take what she does not have, perhaps to satisfy the endless greed that generally walks hand in hand with the lust for power some people have:

> It would never had occurred to her that I have sized her up immediately, that I viewed her as a cliché, a something not to be, a something not to rise above, a something I was very familiar with: a woman in love with another woman's life, not in way that inspires imitation but in a way that inspires envy, I had to laugh. She had her own husband, she had her own children (two boys and two girls), she had the same things Mariah had, and still she liked Mariah's things better. How to account for that. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 58).

Lucy refuses to legitimize any level of superiority a person like Dinah might think she has by effacing the aura of moral invulnerability Dinah's social position could give her. When Lucy spots Dinah's flaws, the former unveils the woman behind the social being and, by doing so, strips the latter of the camouflage of perfection a person with Dinah's lifestyle may be willing to display.

If, as it is generally acknowledged, underprivileged people are in search of the things they do not have, for instance, Lucy is in continuously in search of an identity in her own terms, Dinah's envy shows that she also desires what she does not have: Mariah's life. With this kind of relativization of power articulation, Kincaid puts Lucy and Dinah in the same discursive realm that, in their specific case, may blur the "exercise of colonial power through discourse" to which Homi K. Bhabha refers, in "The Other Question: The stereotype And Colonial Discourse":

> The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and the desire and economy of discourse, domination and power. (BHABHA, 1992, p. 294).

The metaphorical equation which envelops Lucy and Dinah's pseudo relationship subverts the dynamics of power which are inclined to vilify the colonized as an strategy to assert the ideological force of the, most of the times intimidating, discourse of the colonizer, authenticating, at least in accordance with the viewpoint of the hegemonies of power, the controlling grasp of the dominant social castes. As Bhabha also observes: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction." (BHABHA, 1992, p. 194).

The people Lucy meets in Mariah's milieu are too distant from the feasible points of reference Lucy needs to find in her quest of identity building. Small wonder she finds some points of references out of Mariah's social atmosphere as one could attest from the friendship Lucy develops with another *au pair*, a girl named Peggy. Peggy is very different from the other female references Lucy finds around her, "Peggy smoked cigarettes, used slang, wore very tight jeans did not comb her hair properly or often, wore shiny fake-snakeskin boots, and generally had such an air of mystery that it made people who did not know her well nervous." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 60).

It is relevant to notice that in the same way that, in the general scope of *Annie John*, the Red Girl functioned as a kind of counterpoint to Annie's mother, in *Lucy*, Peggy is also a counterpoint to Mariah who, not surprisingly, admits that "she [Maria] did not like Peggy." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 60). Yet, similarly to the way that Annie uses the Red Girl as a kind of provisory niche of identification, Lucy uses Peggy to sooth her feeling of isolation by finding a way to manage the heterogeneous experience both girls share in that place to create a sort "subaltern solidarity" which does not really equalize the two girls' experiences, but make them recognize in each other alternatives that, in a way, could help them preserve their own

individuality: “The funny thing was that Peggy and I were not alike, either, but that is just what we liked in each other; what we didn’t have in common were things we approved of anyway.” (KINCAID, 1990, p. 61).

Moreover, Peggy offers a way out, a sort of spiritual relief from Mariah’s world which, at the same time, arouses Lucy’s interest, but also throws Lucy into a well of loneliness for she cannot and does not want to establish a connection with people who never demonstrate the slightest interest in really seeing beyond their meager power of alterity comprehension:

> Now I knew for these people, all standing there, holding drinks in their hands, reminded me of the catalogue; their clothes, their features, the manner in which they carried themselves were the example all the world should copy. They had names like Peter, Smith, Jones, and Richards – names that were easy on the tongue names that made the world spin. They had somehow all been to the islands – by that, they meant the place where I was from – and had fun there. I decided not to like them just on that basis; I wished once again that I came from a place where no one wanted to go, a place that was not filled with slag and unexpectedly erupting volcanoes, or where a visitor was turned into a pebble on setting foot there; somehow it made me ashamed to come from a place where the only thing to be said about it was “I had fun when I was there.” (KINCAID, 1990, p. 64-65).

Lucy sees herself caught in mosaic of indifference, surrounded by people who are living allegories, symbols of power; their names, the way, they dress, the way they sound, all those things bounce against Lucy’s way to conceive the world, and her state of mind endorses Rosemary Marangoly George’s opinion, in “All Fiction Is Homesickness”, an article already mentioned in this work, noticeably when the critic says that “Home is a place to escape to and to escape from.” (GEORGE, 2005, p. 9). Lucy wants to escape to a place that is in consonance with her conception of home, not a place exoticized by the view of the hegemonic Other, to fulfill the fetishist expectations of those who often fail to see that sometimes what is mere entertainment to some may be home to others.

The passage quoted a few lines above hints that Lucy searches for a place that directly and indirectly might have molded the way she eventually perceives the world. However, it is very likely that this place no longer exists for Lucy herself is not the same person who created that place in way the she actually remembers it. Thus, such a place can be taken as mythic construction concocted by Lucy to help her organize some elements that greatly comprise the identity fragments which, somehow, may define the kind of person she was and consequently is. More specifically, In “Cartographies of Diaspora”, Avtar Brah writes about the conception of home as a “mythic place of desire” (BRAH, 1996, p. 192). The critic develops her point in a way that is attuned to Lucy’s situation, highlighting how the girl probably sees herself, taking into consideration that the idea of home, as Lucy knew it, is a bygone notion:

> Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the

> geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds, its smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evening, somber grey skies in the middle of the day… all this, as mediated but the historically specific everyday of social relations. In other words, the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, of the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be differently experienced sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion compared with standing huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth-century England. (BRAH, 1996, p. 192).

Home to Lucy is something registered in her sensory memory, the unconscious way that she started feeling her own existence, the way with which she grows accustomed to drinking life and being aware of herself as a unique individual. Ironically enough, it is Dinah's brother who sees Lucy beyond the realm of idealization. When Dinah introduces her brother to Lucy "the first thing he said to [her] was 'where in the Indies are you from' and that is how [she] came to like him in an important way." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 65).

Perhaps, what is really important to Lucy is that Dinah's brother, in lieu of classifying her in a rather superficial way so as to make her fit in his own conceptual frame as most of the people Lucy is in touch with do, wants to hear from Lucy herself where she comes from, that is, he want to know about Lucy's home in accordance to her own terms. Mariah's universe conveys a reality hermetically sealed in its own epistemologies, with individuals who are basically worried about their own need to satisfy their necessities, too aloof from those people who have a lifestyle which is forcefully different from their cultural and mostly economically hegemonic world: "Like her, all of the members of this organization were well off but they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them. I could have told them a thing or two about it." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 72). In this context, Dinah's brother is a paradoxical character to Lucy because, differently from the self-centered people Lucy has to interact with in Mariah's world, Dinah's brother seems to be really interested in learning more than what he can see at a first glance.

Dinnah's brother calls Lucy attention because he is a boy who seems to be sincere and allows Lucy to speak for herself something that not even her mother did, principally concerning gender roles. After the birth of Lucy's brother, Lucy's mother start, ignoring Lucy's need of independence and selfhood, deciding that Lucy should be a nurse and her brother should be the one on whom she would focus her efforts in order to make him, not Lucy, a more educated and influential person in the society they live in. consequently, "Lucy identifies these different visions and expectations as a betrayal because her mother reinscribes a gender hierarchy that positions the son in the role of greatness and the daughter in the role of servitude." (EDWARDS, 2008, p. 65). Due to the many betrayals acted by her mother against Lucy's individuality, the girl senses that she needs another source of reference, and

that is perhaps the main importance Mariah has in Lucy's limited patterns of female behavior. In fact, in terms of reference, Mariah was inversely proportional to Lucy's mother for she was a wealthy woman, who apparently had a perfect family and lived a perfect life. In Lucy's words:

> Mariah, with her pale yellow skin and yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light, and she looked blessed, no blemish or mark of any kind on her cheek or anywhere else, as if she had never quarreled with anyone over a man or anything, would never have to quarrel at all, had never done anything wrong and had never been to jail, had never had to leave anywhere for any reason other than a feeling that had come over her (KINCAID, 1990, p. 27).

Nonetheless, Lucy sensed that all that perfection was too idealized for her to really trust in it. Later on, Lucy discovers that Mariah's husband does not love her anymore and their caressing each other is just "a show – not for anyone else's benefit, but a show for each other (…) it was a show and not something to be trusted" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 47). Lucy knows that Mariah´s husband has a love affair with Dinah. As a matter of fact, even before learning that Mariah's husband and best friend were cheaters, Lucy already suspected of that aura of flawlessness Mariah had created around herself as she (Lucy) saw "her [Mariah's] blue eyes (which I would have found beautiful even if I hadn't read millions books in which blue eyes were always accompanied by the word 'beautiful') grew dim" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 39).

Lucy is suspicious of Mariah's world and conceptions of life because from very early age, Lucy had to learn that life is not something that comes with "instructions attached", with a "how-to book" that could teach people an appropriate arrangement of procedures for a successful life. Lucy had to learn, under extreme circumstances, that some people are not to be trusted: "A woman like Dinah was not unfamiliar to me nor was a men like Lewis. Where I came from, it was well known that some women and all men in general could not be trusted in certain areas." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 71). Lucy herself was a victim of odd gender politics for she was the daughter of a man who "had perhaps thirty children [and] one woman he had children with tried to kill [her] when she was in her mother's stomach." (KINCAID, 1990, p. 71).

With such a hard background, such heavy luggage, Lucy gets used to making do with the unusual – of course, "unusual" to some people – circumstances of her life in order to construct her identity, which, perhaps, forces her to realize that life has more to do with imaginative improvisation than to naïve idealizations. That is, according to Lucy's experiences, life is about finding particular solutions to particular matters, Lucy must see herself as an individual who has to forcefully understand that sometimes it is not possible to rely on pre-established idealizations which many times fail to safeguard some people, like

Mariah herself, whose lives are so soaked with these kinds of formulas and/or ideals of perfection that they are too blind to perceive the blatant obviousness of their life conditions. For instance:

> Mariah did not know that Lewis was not in love with her anymore. It was not the sort of thing she could imagine. She could imagine the demise of the fowl of the air, fish in the sea, mankind itself, but not that the only man she had ever loved would no longer love her. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 81).

Lucy deconstructs Mariah's values, and with that, reinforces her own values, truths and world conceptions. By way of illustration, one can point to Lucy's considerations about gender roles and male behavior and notice that due to Lucy's life design she has a very strong opinion about men which, although it may sound biased to some people, it is also more likely to protect her and make her see life in a more concrete way, which, in Lucy's case, is a sort of strategy of self-defense, leaving to the reader the impression that, differently from Mariah, a person like Lucy would only be hurt by a man if she allows it to happen:

> "Your [Mariah's] situation is an everyday thing. Men behave in this way all the time the ones who do not behave in this way are exceptions to the rule." But I knew what her response would have been. She would have said, "What a cliché." She would have said, "What do you know about these things?" And she would have been right; it was a cliché, and had no personal experience about that. But all the same, where I came from, every woman knew this cliché, and a man like Lewis would not have been a surprise; his behavior would not have cast a pall over a woman's life. It was expected. Everybody knows that men have no morals, that they do not know how to behave, that they do not know how to treat other people. It was why men like laws so much; it was why they had to invent such things – they need a guide. If the guide gives them advice they don't like, they change the guide. This was something I knew; why didn't Mariah know it also? And if I were to tell it to her she would only show me a book she had somewhere which contradicted everything I said – a book most likely written by a woman who understood absolutely nothing. (KINCAID, 1990, p. 141-2).

Perhaps, having to challenge the mendacity of the simulacrum of Mariah´s existence was really necessary to Lucy and she finally realizes that neither her mother nor Mariah could provide her with sufficient sense of identity orientation for her to accommodate the components that would be more in consonance with the kind of person she was slowly becoming. To a lesser or greater extent, Lucy´s mother and Mariah, although symbolically taken as paradoxical samples of female behavior patterns, give Lucy a counterpoint as they embody role models, living examples of what she does not want to be. In other words, perhaps Lucy's journey of self discovery never really ends, but she already seems to know who she is not: "I am not like my mother. She and I are not alike. She should not have married my father. She should not have had children. She should not have thrown away her intelligence. She should not have paid so little attention to mine […] I am not like her at all" (KINCAID, 1990, p. 123). As for Mariah, Lucy says:

> She had washed her hair that morning and from where I stood I could smell the residue of perfume from the shampoo in her hair. Then underneath that I could smell Mariah herself. The smell of Mariah was pleasant. Just that – pleasant – she smells pleasant. By then I already

> knew that I wanted to have a powerful odor and would not care if it gave offense (KINCAID, 1990, p. 27).

Lucy is not willing to mirror her mother's persona; she overtly declares that they are different people. As for Mariah, she uses the "image" of Mariah's smell as a kind of metonymy to her mild, overly kind, inoffensive personality which, concomitantly, reinforces Lucy's own personality as something stronger ("a powerful odor"), highlighting her presence wherever she is. In a way, Kincaid/Lucy seems to find an answer to one of the issues raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her groundbreaking essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?":

> The family's role in patriarchal social relations is so heterogeneous and contested that merely by replacing the family's role in this problematic is not going to break the frame. Nor does the solution lie in the positivist inclusion of a monolithic collectivity of 'women' in the list of the oppressed whose unfractured subjectivity allows them to speak for themselves against an equally monolithic 'same system' (SPIVAK, 1994, p. 73).

Although in New York Mariah is her closest "female model", Lucy knows that she cannot substitute her mother (family's role), for she has her own problems in relation to "breaking the frame" of the psychological traps of her own life. Lucy notices that their gender does not provide them (Lucy, her mother, and Mariah) with a formula to unravel their specific deadlocks. Thus Lucy decides to speak for herself by drawing a counter parallel between these two women to be able to, eventually, find herself.

Nevertheless, Lucy needs to go through a diasporic move to help her break with whatever could block her way in her march of self-discovery and prevent her from becoming the kind of person she eventually is as well as to manage the idiosyncrasies resulting from having access to many cultural codes, be this access voluntary or not. In the words of professor Leila Assumpção Harris:

> The ruptures brought by geographic, linguistic and cultural dislocations which affect the diasporic subject and impel him to negotiate with other cultures and rethink concepts such as nation, home, and community are, therefore, influenced by double, triple or even multiple dislocations (HARRIS, 2009 , p. 88, tradução nossa).[6]

It is interesting to consider that Harris' statement may corroborate the idea of *Lucy* as a sample of a post-diasporic book in that the book shows that *Lucy*'s narrating-I needs the diasporic experience to solidify some tendencies in her own personality. An experience that potentially interferes in her cosmovision, greatly contributing to the processes of development of her own identity, adding new chapters to the book of her life.

Hence, it is reasonable to assume that *Lucy* could be taken as a post-diasporic life narrative with strong autobiographical traces as already appointed by Jamaica Kincaid herself

[6] The text in Portuguese: "As rupturas geradas pelos deslocamentos geográficos, lingüísticos e culturais que afetam o sujeito diaspórico e o impelem a negociar com outras culturas e a repensar conceitos tais como nação, lar e comunidade são, portanto, influenciadas por deslocamentos duplos, triplos ou mesmo múltiplos."

in some interviews. If memory is elusive, a character like Lucy gives to Kincaid the possibility of playing with her reminiscences without having to be necessarily supported by this or that fact in order to be trustworthy, once again evoking bell hooks' "Writing Autobiography", when she says that "an autobiography is a personal narrative, a unique retelling of events not as much as they happened but as we remember or invent them" (hooks: 2001, p. 430). An assertion with which Jamaica Kincaid seems to fully agree as her interviews attest and her creation – alter ego? – Lucy endorses:

> I understood that I was inventing myself (…) I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything exactly in mind, but when the picture was complete I would know. I did not have position, I did not have money at my disposal. I had memory, I had anger, I had despair (KINCAID, 1990, p. 134).

This leads one to suppose that Lucy might be Kincaid's vehicle of self-representation since in the same way that Kincaid has the possibility to rely on her memories, invented or not, to create a life narrative that has so many aspects and episodes in common to the life of the author, so does Lucy, setting a metafictional attempt to establish her own identity, blurring the limits of fact and fiction, and showing how important memories are to construct niches of identifications.

From the viewpoint of Jamaica Kincaid, her ideological locale, Lucy, the character, could be considered a simulacrum of representation as arguments Ellen McCracken in "Beyond Individualism: Collective Narration, History, and the Autobiographical Simulacrum" when the critic states that in an autobiography a simulacrum will be invariably "at work, but now as a presence not as an absence. The autobiographical narrator openly declares the power of simulation, that she or he is creating a representation of real life" (McCRACKEN, 1999, p. 73). Hence, it is possible to argument that the presence to be felt in *Lucy* is indeed Kincaid's, who legitimizes *Lucy*'s autobiographical aura by basing her character's experiences on her own, endowing *Lucy*'s fictional scope with a kind of plausible factuality. As McCraken argues:

> Even though the autobiographic simulation is more open about its narrational power, it often functions as well to occlude its own simulation; that is, it establishes itself as testimonial representation: an accurate firsthand account of the events in a person's life. Readers often forget the fictionality of the autobiographic mode, temporarily believing that they are experiencing life as it was in the time of the narrated events. In fact it is more important to evaluate the mediated history of the autobiographical mode because, although on one level it openly declares itself to be a simulation, on another it claims more truth value than does fictional representation. As Paul John Eakin has argued, the referential dimension of autobiographical texts is "vexingly unverifiable"; autobiographical "truth" is an evolving content in which fact and fiction are "slippery variables." The self at the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure. (McCRAKEN, 1999, p. 73).

Therefore, it is not too far-fetched to say that any interpretation of an event to then turn it into a fact would already compromise the so-called "narrative purity" – as far as

impartiality is concerned – of this fact turning it into another construction. Consequently, when Jamaica Kincaid retrieves some of her own memories to create *Lucy*, even if her intent were to actually talk about herself, the memories of her younger self would already be filtered by the notions of her mature self, somehow making the author's conception of her younger self and of her work a kind of fiction of reality.

However, in terms of identity, the self-reflective potential of such a creative exercise may facilitate the synthesis of the many fragments that comprise one's identities as if trying to put together the pieces of a metaphysical jigsaw puzzle which will never be totally completed, but the mere attempt to combine its parts continuously gives a clearer idea of what the bigger picture is. Such a puzzle might be even more intricate in the case of diasporic subjects who many times are forced to resort to their own geographical, emotional, psychological, or cultural isolation to have "a bigger picture" of themselves as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe in *Reading Autobiography*: "Immigrant narratives and narratives of exile become sites through which formerly marginal or displaced subjects explore the terms of their cultural identities and their diasporic allegiances." (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 107).

That is to say that by revisiting some memories, a person, in the present study a diasporic subject, can have a better understanding of who s/he became, of the crucial "facts" that molded their subjectivity as well as some of the reasons why those facts had to happen the way they did. In other words, some individuals who acknowledge the power of their own memories, who are endowed with this autobiographical self-reflective trait, may be equipped to see how some events in their lives define them as well as how they can define some events in their own lives, and to a certain extent, be the masters of their own subjective domain.

The skillful way with which Jamaica Kincaid gives voice to her memories creates an irresistible exercise of understanding the Other as well as a highly poetic recording of her own life. In this sense, it is hard not to pay heed to Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith's words in "De/Colonization and the Politics of Discourse in Women's Autobiographical Practices": "While popular practitioners carry on the old autobiographical tradition, other practitioners play with forms that challenge us to recognize their experiments in subjectivity and account for their exclusion from 'high' literature" (WATSON; SMITH, 1992, p. 18). Undeniably, Kincaid helps in the legitimization of the inclusion of autobiographical narratives in the realm that some people consider "high" literature.

Lucy limns out the life of a young black woman coming from a non-hegemonic reality who struggles to be herself, who refuses to be framed or labeled by a society which does not have the penchant for easily accepting the Other, celebrating their differences. By just living

her life, Lucy gives a heartfelt account of what is self respect in the pursuit of one's individuality. Maybe, given the strong autobiographical elements present in *Lucy*, Jamaica Kincaid has found her own meaning of what is to be a Caribbean woman in a new land simply by discovering her paths, her niches of identification, simply by thriving to be faithful to herself, never giving up developing her subjectivity.

CHAPTER 4 – ON *WHEN I WAS PUERTO RICAN*

Esmeralda Santiago was born on 17 May 1948 in the San Juan district, of Villa Palmeras, Santurce, Puerto Rico. In 1961, she came to the continental United States when she was thirteen years old, the eldest in a family that would eventually include eleven children. Santiago attended New York City's Performing Arts High School, she and her husband, Frank Cantor, founded CANTOMEDIA, a film and media production company, which has won numerous awards for excellence in documentary filmmaking

Her writing career evolved from her work as a producer/writer of documentary and educational films. Her essays and opinion pieces have appeared in national newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe*, and on mass market magazines like *House & Garden*, *Metropolitan Home*, and *Good Housekeeping*. About her work, Santiago's official site reports:

> Upon publication of her first book, the memoir *When I was Puerto Rican*, Ms. Santiago was hailed as "a welcome new voice, full of passion and authority," by the *Washington Post Book World*. Her first novel, *America's Dream*, has been published in six languages, and was an Alternate Selection of the Literary Guild. "*Thrilling and page turning, the fabulous story of América Gonzalez is laid out masterfully*," according to the Chicago Tribune. Her second memoir, *Almost a Woman*, received numerous "Best of Year" mentions, in addition to an Alex Award from the American Library Association. It has recently been adapted into a film for Exxon Mobil Masterpiece Theatre, which premiered nationally on PBS on September 14, 2002. With Joie Davidow, Ms. Santiago is coeditor of the anthologies, *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories* and *Las Mamis: Favorite Latino Authors Remember their Mothers* both published by Knopf. Her 2004 memoir, *The Turkish Lover*, describes her life from the time she left New York in 1969 at age 21 until her graduation from Harvard in 1976, and focuses on her relationship with Turkish filmmaker Ulvi Dogan. While still in high school, she was cast in a small role in the 1967 film version of Bel Kaufman's novel, *Up the Down Staircase* where she portrayed a student named Esmeralda. (SANTIAGO, 2011, online).

Moreover, it is relevant to say that her electronic site also emphasizes that:

> In addition to her literary endeavors, Ms. Santiago is an **active volunteer**. She is a spokesperson on behalf of public libraries. She has designed and developed community-based programs for adolescents, and was one of the founders of a shelter for battered women and their children. She serves on the boards of organizations devoted to the arts and to literature, and speaks vehemently about the need to encourage and support the artistic development of young people. Her community activism was cited when she received a **Girl Scouts of America National Woman of Distinction Award** in March 2002 along with Alma Powell and Elizabeth Dole.
> Ms. Santiago has earned a **Master of Fine Arts** in Fiction Writing from Sarah Lawrence College and **Honorary Doctor of Letters** from Trinity University, from Pace University, from Metropolitan College and from Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Mayagüez. The mother of two adult children, she lives in Westchester County, New York, with her husband, filmmaker Frank Cantor. She's currently at work on a novel. (SANTIAGO, 2011, online).

In *When I was Puerto Rican* (1993), Esmeralda Santiago also writes a coming-of-age memoir which tells of a childhood in Puerto Rico full of both tenderness and domestic strife,

a childhood bursting with tropical sounds and sights, and mired in poverty. In Puerto Rico, Esmeralda constantly tries to understand the mechanisms of colonization and to keep the values that she holds dear. The book depicts life in very extreme conditions, proposing a reflection on what a person can bear before deciding for a radical life change. This narrative unfolds the events that forced Santiago's mother to take off for New York with her seven – soon to be eleven – children, Esmeralda, the oldest, must learn new rules, a new language, and eventually a new identity, issues that also will be further explored in Santiago next book, *Almost a Woman* (1994). If Kincaid uses the loss of a maternal matrix to represent the arise of her subjectivity, Santiago uses the mother-daughter dynamics to construct her identity and to guide her in the process of filtering the American imperialist grip which, due to political interests, starts to take over Macún, the Puerto Rican city where Negi, Santiago's nickname in her family environment, lived, igniting the first postcolonial shocks the young girl has to deal with.

Differently from Jamaica Kincaid, who chose to call *Annie John* and *Lucy* novels in spite of the blatant autobiographical overtone present in both books, Esmeralda Santiago has been using the Memoir as her signature genre, underpinning the biographical twist that endows her books with an irresistible aura of verisimilitude, of true authenticity, even though veracity is too muddy a terrain for one to fix his or her flag in. Santiago admittedly uses her own life as a primary source of inspiration to construct her narratives based on the memories she can gather to retrieve the facts that greatly contributed to the formation of the individual she is.

In fact, the writer declared that by defining to herself what she is, she found a way to help those people with similar life backgrounds, providing them with a kind of point of identification. Still, even being a diasporic Caribbean writer, who succeeded in the United States, Santiago avoids messianic labels by refusing to romanticize her life history, constantly questioning the concept of the American Dream she so willingly tries to deconstruct. In the words of Adriana Lopes in "When I Was Esmeralda Santiago": "Santiago stresses that she doesn't want her body of memoir work to be known as a rags to riches story or 'jíbara to Harvard story.' Her life was too painful and nuanced for such simplification." (LOPEZ, 2010, p. 2).

Santiago seems to be deeply concerned with the intricacies of the lives of marginal individuals who, like herself, underwent a process of identity fragmentation as they reject the code of stoic behavior pattern imposed on them by their personal and social environments: "She feels she was put in this Earth to write these memoirs, however maddening the

experience can be at times, to give voice to those overlooked lives within the American dream, documenting them while validating her own help to others." (LOPEZ, 2010, p. 2). However, before going on analyzing Santiago's ideas, it is mandatory to try to answer a fundamental question that insists on resounding: What is a Memoir?

Obviously, a memoir belongs to the realm of autobiographical narratives, but it is perhaps slightly differently from what some people would intrinsically consider an autobiography *per se* in that, as far as memoirs are concerned, the social surrounding is as important, some people might say even more important, than the purely personal. In the words of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography*, a memoir is "A mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more towards the lives and actions of others than to the narrator." (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 198).

Thus, it is observable that memoirs have an intimate relation with the epistemologies of the narrators and with the realities they transit through, potentially placing them concomitantly inside and outside their social ambience, turning those narrators into postmodern *flâneurs* who float over the spaces around them, not necessarily interfering, but witnessing and consequently translating the realities that envelop them, digesting these realities to then regurgitate a new version of life that could be taken as a life endowed with another viewpoint, the viewpoint of those who have to understand what they are when inserted in a society which denies them this very possibility of self-comprehension, forcing them to construct their social milieus on their invariably marginal terms. To do so, such narrators constantly have to live on a metaphysical hyphen that bridges paradoxical dichotomies such as subject and object, private and public, reality and fiction, self and Other.

This metaphysical hyphen is forcefully a place to negotiate identity, to preserve individuality in spite of the external factors that sometimes help and sometimes violate the subjective scope of individuals who are caught in-between different cultural codes. In this sense, it is understandable why some writers with diasporic experiences may resort to memoirs in order to express that what they are is largely a consequence of their interaction with what they have around themselves. Although sometimes memoirs and autobiographies are (because they can be) used interchangeably, Smith and Watson observe that an "autobiography promotes an 'I' that shares with confessional discourses an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority" (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 198), whereas a memoir sets its narrative rationale within the intertwined dynamics between

self and Other, blurring inter and intra-personal boundaries, evoking thus that tradition of reality relativization proposed by postmodern dogmas, as Smith and Watson also point out:

> For Nancy K. Miller "memoir is fashionably postmodern, since it hesitates to define the boundaries between private and public, subject and object." Central to Miller is the etymological root of the word in the double act of recalling and recording: "To record means literally to call to mind, to call up from the heart. At the same time, record means to set down in writing, to make official. What resides in the province of the heart is also what is exhibited in the public space of the world" (*Bequest and Betrayal*, 43). (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 198).

Therefore, it is possible to argue that perhaps Esmeralda Santiago chose to write a memoir to break the cultural taboo that the writer acknowledges concerning Hispanic people, who, supposedly, are too reserved about their personal lives although extremely connected to their own families. One might even suppose that not shielding her own life and consequently the lives of the other people around her with fictional names and "based-on-real-fact" situations was one of the first indicators of the hybrid perspective Santiago came to develop due to her multicultural dislocations:

> Unlike many of her Latina fiction writing contemporaries, Esmeralda Santiago, 56, likes to tell it like it is, through nonfiction. In the tradition of memoirists Maya Angelou and Kathryn Harrison, who established themselves in the readers' minds by revealing their life's most naked moments, Santiago is making her mark. It's an act that most Latina writers, in the States or elsewhere, have traditionally shied away from. "[We Latinos are] a gregarious and social people but very private about our personal lives," says Santiago speaking from a life retreat in Maine last September. We have an incredible respect for the family secret, and it's not as culturally acceptable to put our lives out there. (LOPEZ, 2005, p. 1).

More than a simple attempt to subvert tradition, *When I Was Puerto Rican* is, among other things, a memoir in which Esmeralda Santiago gives an account of her life in Macún, the Puerto Rican city where the writer grew up and lived until the beginning of her adolescence. Similarly to Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, *When I Was Puerto Rican* could also be taken as a pre-diasporic book for it narrates Santiago's life and her processes of identity fragmentation and subsequent quest for individuality mostly before her diaporic move. Although the book also alludes to the beginning of Santiago's life in New York, the vast majority of the narrative refers to the period the author lived in Puerto Rico. This cultural fragmentation happens because of the influence the United States has over Puerto Rico as well as the values the writer's mother tries to pass on her daughter, values which are highly questioned by Esmeralda Santiago who, to a certain extent, recognizes herself as a kind of victim of those values due to the unfair system of rules she is forced to abide by.

In many ways, the book is also an attempt to construct Esmeralda Santiago's past based on the memories the writer has and uses to point out the personal strategies she developed to preserve her subjectivity without betraying the values she holds dear, alluding to Anh Hua's statement in "Diaspora and Cultural Memory": "Memory does not revive the past

but constructs it". (HUA, 2008, p.198). Moreover, in *When I Was Puerto Rican*, Santiago's memories took the shape of a book where the writer was firstly able to delineate some of her most recurrent themes as observes Adriana Bianco in "Esmeralda Santiago: Finding Her Voice": "Her themes include immigration, Puerto Rican identity and self-discovery, the transplant of a new culture, and acceptance of a bicultural, multiethnic, and bilingual model." (BIANCO, 2008, p. 3).

When I Was Puerto Rican is also an inner journey of self-discovery, full of the bittersweet elements that comprise the life of a girl trying to understand the limits of selfhood and alterity, perceptively written by an author who had the subtlety to depict the other version of the American Dream, a realistic postcolonial tale of assimilation and perseverance which, according to Bianco, for some people, became "a paradigm for women who are looking to find their identity and for Hispanic readers who aspire to find the American Dream without giving up their traditions and language." (BIANCO, 2008, p. 3).

4.1 An appeal to the senses

The very first and very short chapter of the book, entitled "How to Eat a Guava," is an appeal to sensory memory. This chapter starts with Esmeralda Santiago already in New York, more specifically in a supermarket, in the "exotic fruit" aisle holding a guava, a fruit which triggers an avalanche of memories of her life in Puerto Rico. As she recollects the way she learned how to eat that fruit, she experiences a chain of sensations ignited by the feeling of the fruit melting inside her month and the other memories that come attached to such a feeling:

> some years, when the rains have been plentiful and the night cool, you can bite into a guava and not find many seeds. The guava bushes grow closer to the ground, their branches laden with green then yellow fruit that seem to ripen overnight. These guavas are large and juicy, almost seedless, their roundness enticing you to have one more, because next year the rains may not come. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 3).

Through her guava eating the writer recollects how she became aware of weather changes and probably of other elements that establish the way she understands, interprets and feels what is around her, the elements that are so rooted in her soul that work as a kind of identity base, a personal drive that can synthesize the contours of her own subjectivity. A case in point is the last guava she has in Puerto Rico which then assumes the symbolism of a part of her hometown that will be forevermore registered in her senses, a metonymy of the plethora of elements that help define what she is, and, due to this reason, makes her want to carry the flavor of this "last guava" with her wherever she goes to because it also represents

the flavor of her land: “I had my last guava the day we left Puerto Rico. It was large and juicy, almost red in the center, and so fragrant that I didn’t want to eat it because I would eat the smell.” (SANTIAGO, 2003, p. 4).

Her retrieval of some key memories in her past could be considered a very effective strategy to solidify the notions of herself and, in this sense, it is very relevant that the book opens with sensory memories, memories that are more related to the way people feel the world than to the way people think about it, many times trying to make sense of life in rational terms, as if the exact circumstances of someone’s life or the sequence of events that happen in someone’s life were something possible to be predicted or even totally calculated. Thus, if memories are constructions, perhaps sensory memories might be a little bit more trustworthy, for they are beyond mere attempts of rationalizations, they may be something else. According to Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography*:

> Memory, apparently so immaterial and personal and elusive, is always implicated in materiality, whether it be the materiality of sound, stone, text, garment, integrated circuits and circuit boards, or the materiality of our very bodies – the synapses and electrons of our brains and our nervous systems. Memory is evoked by the senses – smell, taste, touch, sound– and encoded in objects or events with particular meaning for the narrator. In the *Confessions*, Augustine’s memory of stealing pears from a tree is imbued with the sense-awakening qualities of the pears that momentarily overcome him in writing that moment. In the early twentieth century, the aroma of madeleine stirs Marcel Proust’s narrator as a psychological conduit imaginatively returning him to a scene of his past. And later in the century Vladimir Nabokov exercises a fiercely aestheticized mode of visualizing memory in mnemonic images of the past of his childhood in Russia. In *Speak, Memory: A Memoir*, Nabokov associates his fascination with entomology and butterflies with his art of remembering in pictures and words. (SMITH; WATSON, 2006, p. 21).

These memories come with a nostalgic flavor because they force the narrating-I to revive her days in her homeland which, structurally speaking, is a very interesting prelude to introduce the narrative that is about to be unfolded.

In this brief “overture” Santiago already hints one of the themes which is a *leitmotif* in her work: the hybrid perspective she has to develop to find and keep her identity in accordance with her own terms. Throughout her work, it is not difficult to detect that Esmeralda Santiago notices that it is impossible to resist to the assimilation imposed by hegemonic powers, enforced on her and her family by the imperialist power of the United States; however, all her writings are marked by a strong need to preserve her Puerto Rican roots, to keep the base on which she constructs the individual she is.

The beginning of the book is highly self-reflective, overlapping present and past. In fact, the ellipsis of the present is the point from which Santiago departs to commence her self-narrative, aligning her life story in flashback as the intrinsic structure of autobiographical pieces is normally deployed, paving the way to the story about to be told:

> Today I stand before a stack of dark green guavas, each perfectly round and hard, each $1.59. The one in my hand is tempting. It smells faintly of late summer afternoons and hopscotch under the mango tree. But this is autumn in New York, and I'm no longer a child […] The guava joins its sisters under the hash fluorescent lights the exotic fruit display. I push my cart away, toward that apples and pear of my adulthood, their nearly seedless ripeness predictable and bittersweet. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 4).

It is interesting to acknowledge the parallel Santiago draws between her mature self and the fruit in her cart which are "nearly seedless". It seems that the writer wants to, on metaphoric terms, indicate that she is somehow getting "seedless" because the memories of her past in Puerto Rico are being lost in the haze of time, choked by the consequences of having to go through a process of transculturation as her life in New York forcefully demands. However, her writing those memories, in the way she did, contradicts the notions of root erasure, for remembering is preserving.

Moreover, there is another strategy of resistance Santiago uses which may be worth noticing. Throughout the whole book she inserts Spanish terms in her narratives and all the chapters in her book start with epigraphs in Spanish which subsequently are translated into English. For instance, she begins the first chapter of the book by quoting a Hispanic proverb: "*Barco que no anda, no llega a puerto*." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 3). And then she translates it: "A ship that doesn't sail, never reaches port." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 3). Those sayings have an allegorical moral that is related to the overtone of each chapter, and her code switching, besides being considered by many people a very interesting strategy of cultural resistance, also reinforces the idea of hybridity pervasive in almost everything that may be linked to Santiago's work.

After, this epiphany of past memories and reticent reflections, Santiago jumps in time, and goes back to her Puerto Rican days.

4.2 – *Jíbara*

In the second chapter of the book, Santiago introduces her family and the very poor conditions of their lives in Puerto Rico. She initiates her narrative by talking about a period of her life with her family that spans from her fourth year of age and goes up to the beginning of adolescence, stressing how their lives bordered on extreme poverty as Santiago points out in the very first lines of this chapter:

> We came to Macún when I was four, to a rectangle of rippled metal sheets hovering in the middle of a circle of red dirt. Our home was a giant version of the lard cans used to haul water from the public fountain. Its windows and doors were metal, and, as we stepped in, I touched the wall and burned my fingers. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 7).

It is important to notice that Santiago talks about her difficult situation in the beginning of the book without a strong sign of melancholy due to the hardships of her life, but with a bittersweet rhythm that indicates that although hard, her life was not unhappy. In this sense, Santiago does not share the deep sense of anguish Jamaica Kincaid shows in her books. In spite of having many things in common, the two writers differ when the tone of their narratives is taken into consideration. Whereas Kincaid's anger is blatant in pinpointing the causes of her fragmentation, Santiago is a little bit softer in addressing the same issues, although equally effective.

In Kincaid's books paternal references are almost absent, which does not happen in *When I Was a Puerto Rican*. Although, if one consider the serial sequence of Santiago's work, her father figure progressively disappears, at first Santiago's father and mother are almost equally present in the writer's life, perhaps to represent the early possibilities of identity constructions Santiago has to help her decide what she wants to be, having two different sources of reference which are inversely proportional. Her mother comes from a more economically privileged background, but by no means rich, while her father is a *jíbaro*. According to Peonia Viana Guedes in "Deslocamentos Identitários e Culturais: As Narrativas Autobiográficas de Esmeralda Santiago": "*jíbaro* is the name given to Puerto Ricans from indigenous (the *Taínos* Indians) and Spanish (in some cases also African) descent, originally related to agrarian practices, and nowadays considered representatives of the Puerto Rican popular culture." (GUEDES, 2010, p. 126, tradução nossa). [7]

Such distinction between both her parents might place Santiago in a non-place between two dichotomous references: her mother, symbolically representing what is to come - eventually it is her mother who decides to leave Puerto Rico; and her father, an intrinsic representative of the autochthonous values Puerto Rican roots may mean to Santiago. This leads one to suppose that behind the two inverted polarities her parents personify, lies a very controversial social discussion: how far can people go preserve their roots, or rather, to what point is it beneficial to maintain some values that in a way might interfere with the evolution of one's social self?

In the general social context of the life Santiago has in Puerto Rico, being a *jíbara* means being unsophisticated, that is, less prone to get along with the progressive tendencies some societies develop from time to time. In the specific case of Macún, sophistication is

[7] The text in Portuguese: "*jíbaro*, denominacão dada aos porto-riquenhos de origem indígena (os índios taínos) e espanhola (em alguns casos, também, africana), originalmente ligados ao cultivo da terra e hoje considerados repositários da cultura popular porto-riquenha."

somehow related to the acceptance of the approaching American culture that invariably clashes with the simpler life *jíbaro* culture may suggest.

An individual capable of adopting something closer to the American way could be taken as someone with a more privileged financial situation and consequently from a more elevated social status, whereas being a *jíbaro* may be the nemesis of social privilege, the opposite of cultural refinement, although *jíbaros* are still highly indentified with the genesis of Puerto Rican culture and also supposedly carriers of deep moral attributes. Peônia Viana Guedes observes that: "Although glorified in verse and prose for their tenacity, honesty, pride and musical talent, *jíbaros* are, nowadays, considered intellectual and socially inferior by the Puerto Rican elite." (GUEDES, 2010, p. 2, tradução nossa). [8] Initially, Esmeralda Santiago identifies more with the autochthonous purity that her father and his *jíbaro* origins might symbolize than with her mother and her rather cosmopolitan inclinations. Here, it is pertinent to say that the word cosmopolitan is being used as addressed by Bruce Robins in "Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism" where the critic states that "cosmopolitanism has often seemed to claim universality by virtue of its independence, its detachment from the bonds, commitments and affiliations that constrain ordinary nation-bond lives." (ROBBINS, 1998, p. 1). Thus, Esmeralda Santiago's mother has a more urban world conception, one that rejects the regionalist drive rooted in the conceptual notion of *jibarism*:

> Early each morning the radio brought us a program called "The Day Breaker's Club," which played the traditional music and poetry of the Puerto Rican country dweller, the *jíbaro*. Although the songs and poems chronicled a life of struggle and hardship, their message were that *jíbaros* were rewarded by a life of independence and contemplation, a closeness to nature coupled with a respect for its intractability, and a deeply rooted and proud nationalism. I wanted to be a *jíbara* more than anything in the world, but Mami said I couldn't because I was born in the city, where j*íbaros* were mocked for their unsophisticated customs and peculiar dialect. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 12).

In the micro-universe Santiago's family lived, her mother's "cosmopolitan" role finds echo in "Women and the New Cosmopolitanism", an article written by Josna Rege, which states that the word cosmopolitan conjures up, from one perspective, a worldly secular, mobile individual. From another, it suggests an elitist vagrant opportunist who has betrayed region and homeland." (REGE, online). Maybe Santiago's mother senses that to safeguard their survival and keep some possibility of personal evolution to her family, they will have to adapt themselves to whatever is to come, and in their case, it probably sounds as a "regional betrayal".

[8] The text in Portuguese: "Embora glorificados em prosa e verso por sua tenacidade, honestidade, orgulho e dotes musicais, os *jíbaros* são, hoje em dia, considerados intelectual e socialmente inferiores pela elite porto-riquenha".

Naturally, in the context of Esmeralda Santiago's life, to use the term cosmopolitan is not to say that her mother is a cosmopolitan individual par excellence, but it is to assume that she strategically has to assure their survival by developing a kind of cosmopolitan notion which, to a certain extent, would deny some Puerto Rican prime values for, according to Josna Rege, "The term [cosmopolitanism] has long contained contradictory connotations, and has also long been used in opposition to nationalism." (REGE, online). This opposition is very well represented by the contrast between Esmeralda Santiago's parents in that her mother is more related to the *avant-garde* atmosphere that surrounds Puerto Rico due to the American presence that is to be intensified in the subsequent pages of the book, whereas her father is the quintessence of an almost romanticized idealization of a pure Puerto Rican root.

Perhaps, this quasi romantic purity of *jibarism* is more attuned to the limited perspective of a young girl who is, at that point, not yet equipped with the necessary touch of malice people must have to protect themselves from the social traps life in the cities unremittingly entails. That sense of purity could justify young Santiago's identification with her father and his life conceptions; however, noticing danger in this level of *naiveté*, her mother represses this identification resorting to the shock of a violent gesture to call her daughter's attention to the fact that she should know better than to buy what Santiago's mother might consider romantic idealizations of a life which, sooner or later, is doomed to perish, given Puerto Rico's colonial situation: "´Don't be a *jíbara*,' [her mother] scolded, rapping her knuckles on [Santiago's] skull, as if to awaken the intelligence she said was there." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p.12).

It is complicated for the girl not to see herself as a *jíbara* because this concept could give her several points of identification that would be easier for a very young girl, with the simplistic Manichaeism those who are not very well used to the intricacies of life invariably have, to spot and recognize within herself. It is feasible that what the young Esmeralda Santiago actually fails to intellectualize is the dissimulation of the social conventions which sometimes hate to love the signature of what people are inscribed in the cultural, familiar, and epistemological social complexion people have but curiously have to deny in order to be something else. Perhaps what the young girl fails to accept is the "good and old" social hypocrisy:

> If we were not *jíbaros*, why did we live like them? Our house, squatting on low stilts, was shaped like a *bohío*, the kind of house *jíbaros* lived in. our favorite program, "The Day Breaker's Club," played the traditional music of rural Puerto Rico and gave information about crops, husbandry and the weather. Our neighbor *Doña* Lola was a *jíbara*, although Mami had warned us never to call her that. Poems and stories about the hardships and the joys of the Puerto Rican *jíbaro* were required reading at every grade level in school. My own grandparents, whom I was to respect as well as love, were said to be *jíbaros*. But I couldn't be

> one, nor was I to call anyone a *jíbaro*, lest they be offended. Even at the tender age when I didn't yet know my real name, I was puzzled by the hypocrisy of celebrating a people everyone looked down on. But there was no arguing with Mami, who, in those days, was always right. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 12- 13).

The power of some financial hegemonies usually ends up relegating to a lesser position in the capitalist globalized arenas those people who, for some reason, do not or cannot partake in the games of economic display, and, due to this fact, are sometimes de-territorialized in their own homeland, erased by the power of the capital waves. In "What is Postmodernism?", Jean-Francois Lyotard states that "capitalism inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery" (LYOTARD, 1993, p. 40).

Although Lyotard is aiming at issues related to postmodern aesthetics, his line of argumentation reverberates in identity issues particularly pertinent to thrash out questions related to the *jíbaro* condition in Puerto Rico. The refusal to assimilate the new rules of behavior postmodern and globalized centers impose on some "non-global" individuals forcefully changes them into something else that transits between total invisibility or a caricature of themselves, which invariably makes them be the target of the mockery of those more prone to dance to rhythm of capitalism. In any way, the advent of capitalism to people who cannot be dissociated from their most primary roots is very frequently "an occasion for suffering rather than for satisfaction." (LYOTARD, 1993, p. 40).

The irony in this whole situation is that, translated (to allude to Stuart Hall's concept in "The Question of Cultural Identity") or not, that is, either (post-) modernized or *jibaros*, Puerto Rican citizens become American subjects (or rather, objects) principally if one takes into consideration that, because of the Spanish-American war, in the end of the nineteenth century, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1898, Spain had to cede its Caribbean colonies, Cuba and Puerto Rico, to the United States, changing the colonial configurations of power in the Island. Thereby, "Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens since March 2, 1917, via the Jones-Shafroth Act and, like with all the States, the United States Congress legislates many aspects of Puerto Rican life."(MORRIS, 1995, Online).

Even more ironic is that hardly ever do these centers of power establish their domain without the sustenance of the people from the lands which are the focus of the imperialist grip, people who, inadvertently, wind up "legitimizing" the authoritarian control of these matrixes of financial power, thus establishing a symbiotic relationship that is reluctant to effectively expose who exactly the host is and who exactly the parasite is. According to

Shalini Puri in *The Caribbean Post-Colonial: Social Equality, Post Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity*:

> The Créolistes' emphasis on the traffic between slum and city, or the daily negotiations between plantation slaves and masters, privileges a poetics of infiltration rather than separation. Reversing imperial and entrepreneurial images of the slums as living parasitically off the cities, the Créolistes assert not only the superior vision of the marginal, but the dependency of the center on the margin. As with Anzaldúa's borderlands, the nagging irony remains that in recognizing that the city is dependent upon the slum (and by extension, perhaps, that France is dependent on the Martinique), they implicitly concede that the slum sustains the city; the margin *reinforces* the center. Or, at the very least, any epistemic disruption of the center that the margins might effect is at odds with the economic consolidation they enable. In *Puerto Rican Jam*, the equivalent metaphor becomes that of the *jaibería*, the *jaiba* or crab becoming a figure for "oblique advancement," "subversive complicity," 'collective practices of non-confrontation and evasion," "the feminization of resistance" (30-33) –all versions of the long standing Afro-Caribbean trope of the trickster – which are invoked to replace what they see as virile, masculine, heroic nationalist conception of resistance. In the case of *Puerto Rican Jam*'s intervention in the often tense relations between island Puerto Ricans and diasporic mainland Puerto Ricans, who are estimated to constitute one-third and one-half of the total population, somehow the hybrid diasporic Puerto Rican becomes the most authentic Puerto Rican subject, the supreme example of internal rather than external resistance, a case in point of tactics of oblique advancement. The island of Puerto Rico is meanwhile constructed as the site of an exclusivist purism. (PURI, 2004, p. 33-4).

Besides tackling the question of autochthonous identities, the quotation above also refers to the issue of cultural resistance and/or strategies of identity preservation that are in consonance with Esmeralda Santiago's life and memoirs. From very early age Santiago sees herself in-between the two dichotomous realms of the ideological symbolism her parents represent, which indicates the beginning of her inner dislocation. Similar to Jamaica Kincaid's narrating voices, at first Esmeralda Santiago's dislocation is not geographical, but emotional and to a certain point ideological, which may sustain the notion of *When I Was Puerto Rican* as a pre-diasporic book.

There are several terms which refer to the phenomenon of hybridism in Hispano-American postcolonial literature: *mestiza, chicana, tejana, jíbara*. This plurality of terms indicates that there is also a tendency to highlight both sides of the cultural hyphen, centralizing the marginal in the space of visibility the mainstream offers. Gloria Anzaldúa talks about her hybrid duality, stressing how her 'Raza' identity was a condition s*ine qua non* for her to deal, preserve and construct her *mestiza* perspective as notes Shailani Puri:

> Yet, despite this multiplication of names, I believe that, in many discurses of hybridity, an implicit, unacknowledged, and untheorized of one hybrid identity occurs – in this case that of the mestiza. When Anzaldúa assersts "I identified as 'Raza' before I ever identified as 'mexicana' or 'chicana'" (62), she grants "raza" a certain priority; similarly, her claim that her "Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (21) privileges the Indian component of her identity. PURI, 2004, p. 23).

By the same token, Santiago recognizes herself as a *jíbara* before assimilating any other cultural code which also grants *jibarism* a certain priority and rescues her own Indian woman's history of resistance, and, just like Gloria Anzaldúa, the intrinsic *jibarism* in her identity also "privileges the Indian component in her identity."

In '"Boast now, chicken, tomorrow'll be stew': Pride, Shame, Food, and Hunger in the Memoirs of Esmeralda Santiago", Joanna Barszewska Marshall writes that Puerto Ricans have to deal with the fragmentation of their identities due to the processes of colonization they are submitted to by developing a *boricua* identity that is the identity "of a prideful Puerto Rican." (MARSHALL, 2007, p.48). Marshall goes on saying that, according to Negrón-Muntaner, some Puerto Rican identities are negotiated "'through spectacles to offset shame' and that *boricua* identity as we know it would not exist without the 'shame' of being Puerto Rican (xiii)." (MARSHALL, 2007, p. 48). The word *shame*, in the context of Negron-Muntaner's line of argumentation has a very particular field of signification.

The shame the author refers to has a sarcastic bittersweet taste for it is much more related to the result of enforced exploitation than to the vexed regret one may feel due to a particular consequence of doubtful behavior. According to Marshall, "The shame that [Negrón-Muntaner] theorizes is not the product of an individual inferiority complex, but a mechanism that constitutes 'social identities generated by conflict within asymmetrical power relations.'" (MARSHALL, 2007, p. 48).

In this context, the way Esmeralda Santiago writes her memoirs substantiates the idea Negrón-Muntaner has for Santiago does not hesitate in narrating the hardships of her life in a very outright way which assumes her difficulties and turns them into something else. Hence, it is also relevant to notice that Marshall points out that "Negrón-Muntaner concludes that the most vital cultural productions that deal with *boricua* identity have 'sprung not from the denial of shame, but from its acknowledgement into wounds that we can be touched by.'''(MARSHALL, 2007, p. 48).

Even being a successful writer, Esmeralda Santiago knows that, in great part, she owes her narrative verve, her unique impressions of the world, to the hybrid perspective she comes to develop by interacting with the many cultural codes she comes across, the several dichotomies which started with her parents and later gained more global contours as her work and personal posture very well externalize. Perhaps, a part of an interview Santiago conceded to Adriana Bianco serves to illustrate the extent of the commitment the writer has with her own origins:

> In my language, in my people, in who I am. I am Puerto Rican, and I can't separate that feeling. I am a woman who was born and raised in Puerto Rico who lives and writes in the United States. That duality is very interesting and very natural to me. I don't notice the biculturalism – I switch from one language to the other, and I feel it as part of my life. I am so bilingual and so bicultural that it feels normal to me. (BIANCO, 2008, p. 3).

Santiago, the writer, learned how to synthesize her memories to write more than a "*jíbara* to Harvard" body of memoirs, she knows how to use her imaginative powers to

mediate the identity choices she has found and consequently to lessen the impact of constant processes of identity construction. In an article entitled “On the Ethics and Poetics of How We Make Our Lives: Esmeralda Santiago and the Improvisation of Identity”, José R. Rosario observes that Santiago’s “spiritual journey” as the writer herself calls it “is a poetic fabrication, a series of ‘identity performances’ [...] that no calculative model riding on deliberate and rational decision-making can fully explain.” (ROSARIO, 2010, p.108).

Perhaps, precisely because of her constant state of in-betweeness, Santiago develops an improvisational sensitivity that helped translate fragmentation into memorial vignettes of life and subsequently into a work of art as Rosario also hints: “there are as Michel de Certeau (1974) observes, moral and aesthetic elements – poetry, drama, and dance – underlying the mystery of making a life, of manufacturing what one wants to be.” (ROSARIO, 2010, p.108). Identities, then, may gain the proportions of the means and the aim of some writers who revisit their own lives to perhaps realize that what they are is, in great part, related to an endless spiraled chain of events in constant movement with a provisory set of significations, or niches of identifications, which, among many other things can also provide them with endless sources of inspiration.

Furthermore, as far as identities are concerned, it is not difficult to notice that names are a strong source of self-definition. Jamaica Kincaid, for instance, decided to play with the idea of names and meanings to the point of renaming herself in accordance with her artistic conceptions. However, with Esmeralda Santiago, this whole naming situation is very different. Esmeralda Santiago does not hedge herself behind a semi fictional character – and I am not necessarily implying that Kincaid does so –, nor does she write under a *nom de plume* to, in a way, separate her private life from her public, or let us say, artistic life. She is always Esmeralda Santiago, or at least, Negi.

In another very meaningful part of the book, while Santiago’s family is listening to the radio, she realizes that everyone in her family has a nickname, and those nicknames are given as a way to define a personal characteristic, or a personal detail which would be related to specific members of her family, but, apparently, she does not have a nickname. It is at that moment that she discovers that her name is actually Esmeralda:

> Delsa’s black curly hair framed a heart-shaped face with tiny pouty lips and round eyes with thick lashes. Mami called her *Muñequita*, little doll. Norma’s hair was the color of clay, her yellow eyes slanted at the corners, and her skin glowed the same color as the inside of a yam. Mami called her *La Colorá*, the red girl. I thought I had no nickname until she told me my name wasn’t Negi but Esmeralda. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 13).

Negi's[9] questioning comes from a mistaken sense of exclusion from a family custom which, despite being an innocent family game, also extracts meaning from the personal trait each individual in her family conveys. However, Negi cannot understand the origins of her name as well as the relation it is supposed to have with her nickname until her mother explains that she is "named after [her] father's sister who was also [Negi's] godmother." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p.13). Such an explanation only partially satisfies Negi's curiosity who insists on knowing more about her origins by asking, "Why does everyone call me Negi?" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p.13).

Negi's direct inquiry forces her mother to come up with a direct answer: "Because when you were little you were so black, my mother said you were a *negrita*. And we all called you *Negrita*, and it got shortened to Negi." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 13). Yet, Negi's mother's answer arouses more doubts in the girl who never stopped to consider that perhaps some people could look at her and infer that she also has African roots:

> Delsa was darker than I was, nutty brown, but not as sun ripened as Papi. Norma was lighter, rust colored, and not as pale as Mami, whose skin was pink. Norma's yellow eyes with black pupil looked like sunflowers. Delsa had black eyes I'd never seen my eyes, because the only mirror in the house was hung up too high for me to reach. I touched my hair, which was not curly like Delsa's, nor *pasita*, raisined, like Papi's. Mami cut it short whenever it grew into my eyes, but I'd seen dark brown wisps by my cheeks and near my temples. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 13).

Negi does not want see herself identified with a black person: "So, Negi means I am black?" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 13). As a matter of fact, it is very likely that Negi's prejudice comes from the fact that in the limited, almost non-existent, social scope of privilege where she lives, poor black people, and here it is advisable to remember that Esmeralda Santiago is talking about herself as a child who was educated this way, represent a minority that occupy an even lower layer in the Caribbean social pyramid of status. Thus, Negi's being seen as a black girl would represent a demeaning in her already low social status.

Maybe, even more complicated is the continuation of Negi's mother's response: "'It's a sweet name because we love you, *Negrita*.' She hugged and kissed me." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 13). If, on the one hand, Negi's mother's reaction may show the affection and love she devotes to her daughter, on the other hand one may sense an apologetic undertone that sounds like the repentance of a religious person who, out of a sudden, realizes that has committed a heinous sin. Indeed, to some people, the subtext of her mother's reaction may imply that she is actually sorry for having allowed her daughter to be compared to a black person.

[9] From this point on I am using Esmeralda Santiago's nickname to better distinguish the writer from her revisited self.

Hence, the Spanish term *negrita*, little black girl, in the text has two possible connotations: an euphemism of love and care and an euphemism of prejudice, connotations which evoke discussions of political correctness. In "Multicultural Differences: Canada, USA, Australia", Sneja Gunew remarks that initially political correctness was acknowledged as a "binary opposition between left and right, it has now become a more complicated spectrum of positions in which the left can sometimes sound like the right – as when Milles Harvey argues that PC actually contributes to sexism, racism and so on [...]." (GUNEW, 2011, p. 1).

Although some people may like being called *negrita* for they feel it as a demonstration of affection, there are those who could take offense at such term, for thinking it is somehow pejorative. Negi herself at first does not really understand what to infer from this word, how to understand the paradigm of meaning her mother is willing to use which, perhaps, indicates that discussions about political correctness will always transcend the realm of mere nomenclature to attain the realm of hermeneutics. Notwithstanding, it goes without saying that anyone using highly euphemistic or patronizing terms to arbitrarily classify a person on ethnical terms will run the risk of essentializing this person, failing to consider the specificities of each individual who in reality comprise this ethnical group. Gunew emphasizes that:

> Those groups and individuals defined by terms of race are, in a sense, defined by racism; they often have no choice than to be designated by the 'other', 'visible minorities' cannot choose to stop being black or shed other external characteristics that Joan Scott calls the 'mark of difference'; it is this difference that in turn precipitates the host that are involved in the paralysing process of stereotyping. (GUNEW, 2011, p. 3).

Therefore, it is easy to perceive that Negi transits in several sublevels of uneven dichotomies of control and subordination: USA x Puerto Rico, affluent Puerto Ricans x *jíbaros*, her mother x her father, her family x poor black Puerto Rican people. Each majority of power devising or automatically reproducing strategies of subjugation to subdue the immediate minority supposedly placed under each subdivision of power and/or social status.

Not rarely does the mentality of what is politically correct help disseminate the ideology of the stronger sides in these axes of power by disguising an imperialist *raison d'etre* with a pseudo altruistic rhetoric, a politically correct discourse which actually works to authenticate a false sense of righteousness which, patronizes the culture of the Other to reinforce its own cultural values. In other words, it is the case of those people who publically celebrate the Puerto Rican *jíbaros* as real representatives of a "Puerto Rican essence" but intimately think and, in private occasions, take for granted that they are nothing more than "unsophisticated ignorant Indians" who eventually will disappear smashed by the juggernauts of the big economic centers.

4. 3 Gender stereotypes

Besides the complications caused by the dichotomous ideological points of view Negi's parents have, their relationship is never harmonious, but for very short intervals which most of time, in the narrative pace of the book, work more as a prelude for the next crisis of the couple than as an indicator that the couple could eventually work out their problems and restore peace and balance to their humble abode.

Usually, the main reason for the couple's fights is Negi's father erratic behavior, principally his sexual escapades which naturally infuriates Negi's mother and also forces the reader to think about the gender politics in the time and place in which Negi grows up in Puerto Rico. José R. Rosario notes that in her memoirs the reader finds "Santiago working with and against the gendered scripts she experiences as a child. These scripts appear throughout her early writings as recurrent tropes and symbols that populate her childhood and adolescent memories." (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 109).

Many of those "recurrent tropes and symbols" foster stereotyped notions of gender roles that privileges men's position to the detriment of the women's. In many occasions in the book Negi's father does not go home for days, failing to adequately support his family, overloading Negi's mother with work, without even bothering to come up with a convincing justification for his inappropriate behavior. In one of these occasions Negi's mother scolds him for not giving money for a week's groceries to which he responded by saying that he "had to buy materials. And one of the men who works with [him] had an emergency" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 23), so Negi's father "gave him an advance." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 23).

Of course such a feeble explanation would be less than doubtful to satisfy a woman who was left alone and with no financial means to look after four children. Moreover, it is indeed hard to believe that a person would simply give an advance to an employee and let his wife and children starve. At this point, it is relevant consider that, according to the patriarchal politics of that society, men's misbehavior was something tolerated, even expected while women were not even supportive of each other. It is possible to consider that Negi's father does not think of a more reasonable justification for his lack of responsibility because in that social environment men usually think they do not need to do it: "Papi either couldn't think of another story or was too tired to try it." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 23).

Curiously, When Negi's mother insists on having a more satisfactory explanation, instead of acknowledging her life partner's guilt for his misdemeanor, she changes her focus of accusation, derogatorily labeling another woman: "No, we can't talk about this in the morning. You leave before the sun comes up, and you don't show up until all hours, your clothes stinking like that *puta*." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 23). Negi's mother calls Negi's father's lover *puta*, whore, because in that kind of society that is the kind of reaction women are expected to have, unfortunately preserving male's dominant role, by establishing a senseless competition between women. Negi's mother does not see that she is attacking another woman who is in a very similar situation to hers, and in lieu of combating sexist oppression with solidarity, she denies sympathy to a more coherent ally, another oppressed woman, ratifying men's gender supremacy. In "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women", bell hooks addresses issues of gender inequalities, proposing solidarity between women as a strategy of resistance:

> Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures: by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves, who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of sisterhood. (hooks, 1997, p. 396).

In fact, the "*puta*" in question was Negi's father's former life partner, Provi, with whom Negi's father has a daughter named Margie, who supposedly is the actual reason for Negi's father's disappearances. He says, "For God's sake, Monín. You know I have no interest in Provi. But, how can you object to my wanting to see Margie?" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 25). Naturally, this is a more sensible excuse for his absences; however, for some reason, Negi's mother does not believe him: "I know it is not Margie you want to see. It's her mother." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 25). Whether he is telling the truth or not is not clear in the text but the heart of the matter in this whole situation is that Negi's father comes from a broken home and lives in another home that is doomed to be broken because of his careless behavior and a social system which is more than lenient with male "carelessness", and, inadvertently, women, victimized by this system's politics, propagate these gender dynamics.

Even more intriguing is the fact that although the women in that reality do very little to change their oppressive situation, intrinsically they know that men are in great part responsible for it. And due to this reason, Negi learns another stereotype: "Papi, being a man, was always to blame for whatever unhappiness existed in our house." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p.

29). The way Negi puts it suggests that all man are irresponsible which is a notion that could be as essentialist as the one which postulates that certain kinds of women are whores:

> Men, I was learning, were *sinvergüenzas*, which meant they had no shame and indulged in behavior that never failed to surprised women but caused them much suffering. Chief among the sins of men was the other woman, who was always a *puta*, a whore. My image of these women was fuzzy, since there were none in Macún, where all females were wives or young girls who would one day be wives. *Putas*, I guessed, lived in luxury in the city on the money that *sinvergüenza* husbands did not bring home to their long-suffering wives and barefoot children. *Putas* wore lots of perfume, jewelry, dresses cut low to show off their breasts, high heels to pump up their calves and hair spray. All this was paid for with money that should have gone repairing the roof or replacing the dry palm fronds enclosing the latrine with corrugated steel sheets I wanted to see a *puta* close up, to understand the power she held over men, to understand the sweet-smelling spell she wove around the husbands, brothers, and sons of the women whose voices cracked with pain, defeat, and simmering anger. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 29-30).

In fact, what Negi learns is a generalization, she learns how to pre-judge, how to buy an absolute truth without the real knowledge of the social and personal factors that contributed to the behavior of the people her mother and other women in Macún are criticizing. Of course there are men who have a very questionable character which culminates in a very doubtful conduct, but to say that all men are *sinvergüenzas*, shameless people, or to imply all women with a more aggressive sexual posture are prostitutes, that is, necessarily sell their bodies to any men willing to pay their prices is a formulaic term of analyzes which actually condemns people who displeases or differ from the field of expectation those "judges" have. The issue of this kind of stereotyping in *When I Was Puerto Rican* may pose fundamental questions: If these women disapprove of their men's behavior why do they insist on living with them? Why do these "whores" have such power over their men?

To a certain extent those women are victims of a systematic disposition of social rules, or rather social traps, that lock them up in the psychological, emotional, and principally, financial walls of the patriarchal machine. Such machine engraves in some women's soul a supposed notion of male superiority, which establishes gender roles which invariably place men as the providers, the supporters of the family. In this dynamic, other women, who are slightly different from the objectified female pattern patriarchy wants to construct are to be instantaneously demonized by that sort of society, even by the women that transit in that very same society, and that many times have similar life contexts to the ones that they are repudiating. bell hooks states that:

> Between women, male supremacist values are expressed through suspicious, defensive, and competitive behavior. It is sexism that leads women to feel threatened by one another without cause. While sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men, it is also manifest when women who have repudiated this role feel contemptuous and superior in relation to those women who have not. Sexism leads women to devalue parenting work while inflating the value of job and careers. Acceptance of sexist ideology is indicated when women teach that there are only two possible behavior patterns: dominance and submissiveness. Sexism teaches women woman-hating, and both consciously and unconsciously we act out this hatred in our daily contact with one another. (hooks, 1997, p. 399).

hooks is right in deconstructing some of the strategies patriarchal systems use to psychologically – and many times physically – enslave women and foment ideas that deflect women's self-criticism, deviating their attention from the depth of their oppressive situation, (dis-) coloring their lives with the fatalist tone of passivity before a flat, unchangeable reality. As a matter of fact, gender codes, and subsequent female limitations are very well set in Negi's milieu. It is interesting to notice, how the processes of domestication are disguised under a moralistic discourse which often works to refrain personal freedom, standardizing social performance to a level of almost total uniformity. For instance, when Negi starts school she mentions that she could not explore the shadings of other adults and children with similar lives because she owes these people respect and *dignidad*.

It is nice that a child knows that she has to show good manners to other people. However, the way Negi defines *dignidad*, dignity, also reveals the systematic behavior pattern that selects who belongs to that social environment, and consequently what kind of implicit code of conduct they have to obey. Negi says that "*dignidad* was something you conferred to other people, and they, in turn, gave back to you." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 30). To put it in another way, according to the context of Negi's life, she suggests that dignity is also a form of recognizing people who are similar to whom they are, who share a similar system of values. The problem of this line of thought is that the moment that a person fails to abide by those rules, they run the risk of becoming what they want to destroy. Destroy, perhaps, as an attempt to erase from their inner paradigm of references a trace of the Other they do not want to see in themselves, even though such a trace cannot entirely define who they really are. Such a line of argumentation has a lot to do with the maxim that says that "we always tend to destroy what we do not understand".

The unfairness of this whole situation is that men do not need to be limited by this kind of moral sense. In this way, men are a kind of external parameter of character measure which test the dignity of the women in that atmosphere, defining the kind of virtue these women have, even though men do not really need to be so virtuous:

> It meant that men could look at women any way they liked but women could never look at men directly, only in sidelong glances, unless they were *putas*, in which case they could do what they pleased since people would talk about them anyway. It meant you didn't gossip, tattle, or tease. It meant men could say things to women as they walk down the street, but women couldn't say anything to men, not even to tell them to go jump in the harbor and leave them alone. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 30).

The irony of this condition is that although, perhaps, morally questionable, the *putas* do have the possibility to access a certain level of subjectivity, whereas "virtuous women" are

completely objectified by the male gaze, being denied even the right to defend themselves without being labeled as the kind of person they do not want to identify with.

In this sense men and *putas* are the immediate Other who help some women in the book find counterpoints of reference and define themselves by opposition rather than by identification. It all evokes the Sausurean notion that argues that "concepts... are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but *negatively* by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterizes each most exactly is *being whatever the others are not*'." (SAUSSURE, 1983, 114, my emphasis). Of course, in the general scope of *When I Was a Puerto Rican*, the aforementioned Saussurean notion does not basically refer to a set of concepts, but to those people who seem to define themselves by conceiving who they are primordially in opposition with whom they are not.

As far as human beings are concerned, the danger of this kind of opposition may lie in the fact that instead of promoting understanding and a more critical analyzes of the role of the Other and consequently the role of the self, celebrating the differences of the two – or more – sides in the game of alterity, it may promote the obliteration of what is different. In "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference", Trinh T. Minh-ha seems to endorse this idea by saying that:

> To raise the question of identity is to reopen the self/other relationship in its enactment of power relations. Identity as understood in the context of a certain ideology of dominance has long been a notion that relies on the concept that requires the elimination of all that is considered foreign or not true to the self, that is to say, not-I, other. (MINH-HA, 1997, p. 415).

Another gender stereotype Santiago denounces in *When I Was Puerto Rican* is that of the *jamona*. In a particular passage of the book, Negi's father is taking his daughter to her grandparents' house when they decide to stop in a market for a quick snack. As Negi is playing with the one of the stools of the market she loses balances and falls. At that moment a woman she had seen before with a sullen expression, ornamenting statuettes of Jesus Christ, approaches her and says that "Jesus Christ doesn't love children who don't behave." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 88). The counterman tells Negi to ignore that woman because "she's crazy" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 88), shouting at the madwoman to send her away from that place. Witnessing all this situation Negi's father coments, "That's what happen to women when they stay jamonas" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 89), instantaneously awakening Negi's curiosity who quick asks what a jamona is to which her father responds "It's a woman who has never married" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 89), triggering the following conversation:

> "I thought it was a *señorita*."

> "it's the same thing. But when someone says a woman is a *jamona* it means that she's too old to get married … Or she has waited too long… She ends up alone for the rest of her life. Like that woman in the *mercado*."
> "She was ugly, that's for sure."
> "That's probably why she stayed *jamona*."
> "I hope that never happens to me"
> "No, that won't happen to you… there's our *público*. Let's run for it." We dodged across the street holding hands, avoiding cars, people, and stray dogs sunning themselves on the sidewalk. "What do they call a man who never marries?" I asked as we settled ourselves in the front of the *público*.
> "Lucky," the driver said, and the rest of the passengers laughed, which made me mad, because I thought he was insulting me in the worst possible way." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 89).

According to the mentality of the envrironment Negi lives in, being a *jamona* is inversely proportional to being a *puta*, although equally demeaning. A *jamona*, the Spanish term for a spinster, means a failed woman, or someone who could not get married, **who could not find a husband**. Negi is afraid of becoming a *Jamona* because she knows that society's treatment of that that kind of woman is cruel even if that cruelty is not explicit. In "On the Ethnics and Poetics of How to Make Our Lives: Esmeralda Santiago and the Improvisation of Identity", José R. Rosario observes that:

> That meant that as a woman she had to avoid developing into, or being perceived as, something like a jamona. As she had learned from her father, there was no virtue or dignity in that label. It was an insult to be called or be viewed as a jamona, an unwanted woman, old, alone, and unable to marry. (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 120).

When Santiago writes about such memories, she also criticizes a patriarchal system that conditions a woman's happiness to a marriage to a man as if it were "a truth universally acknowledged" that a woman could only be fully successful, could only be accomplished in her own womanhood, if she mandatorily shared her life with a man. However, Negi's mother herself is not really married to her father, nor does she a have a happy or healthy relationship with Negi's father. As a matter of fact, Negi's parents follow a social convention that for many reasons forces them to remain together even if their relationship does not work anymore, mainly to Negi's mother who sees herself imprisoned in cell with no walls but that leaves her with very few options to change her claustrophobic situation.

The justification Negi's father gives to his daughter, besides politically wrong, does not entirely reflect the truth. He says women remain *jamonas* because they are too ugly or too old to find a man. First of all, aesthetically speaking, the concept of beauty is too individual for one to categorically classify another person as utterly ugly. Moreover, if there are homely women, surely there are homely men. As far as age is concerned, it is also something relative that a person has to be necessarily condemned to loneliness because of advanced age. After all, everybody gets older.

Perhaps, the truth of the matter is that, in the reality Esmeralda Santiago tries to naturalize in *When I Was Puerto Rican*, women are basically taken as mere objects whose

value is measured by the potential they have to satisfy their man who usually holds the financial control of the family and consequently the means to choose which kind of woman he will get from the patriarchal human marketplace. Thus, in this unilateral dynamic of power, it is not difficult to imagine why “ugly and old” women old are ruled out of the patriarchal game.

Furthermore, if marriage is a condition *sine qua non* for happiness, men do not seem to feel this way. When Negi and her father get into the bus, she asks has father how a man who never marries is called to which the driver of the bus maliciously answers, “Lucky”. Curiously, all the other passengers in the bus, presumably men, laugh in complicity with driver’s joke which infuriates the young girl who perhaps for the first time feels the implications of what to be woman in a patriarchal society entails.

It is interesting to notice that Santiago tries to picture a frame of the reality she grew up through the perspective of her younger self which, although already filtered by her diasporic adult self, overlays her work with an aura of credibility. José R. Rosario sustains that “Santiago became what she became, according to this perspective, because, as she made her life, she allowed the labels and identities circulating around her world to influence what she made of herself.” (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 118). Maybe, due to this reason, this feeling of honesty that pervades Santiago’s work, many readers worldwide have found a certain niche of identification while reading some of her books. However, Esmeralda Santiago also has her detractors.

To preserve the critical integrity of the present work, it is relevant to register that in “Esmeralda Santiago in the Marketplace of Identity Politics”, Maria Acosta Cruz, a specialist in contemporary Latino and Latin American literature and culture, particularly the Hispanic Caribbean islands, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic in the 19th and 20th centuries and whose work focuses on issues around gender, identity, and history, noticeably on issues related to ethnic studies and Hispanic women, states that Santiago, in fact, “reinvents the stereotype of the docile Puerto Rican.” (CRUZ, 2009, p. 171).

Cruz writes an essay which basically reviews Santiago’s novel, *América’s Dream*, but she also draws parallels with Santiago’s memoirs, *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*. Crus says: “This novel, thus cast as entirely fictional, characterizes Puerto Rico in the same terms as the two memoirs and represents itself as grounded in the ‘real’ experience of Puerto Rico.” (CRUZ, 2009, p. 174). Although Cruz recognizes that “Santiago’s work do portray the effects of socio-economic disadvantages on a class of women” (CRUZ, 2009, 185), the author claims that Santiago and other top Lantina writers such as Sandra Cisneros,

Denise Chávez, Julia Alvarez, and Cristina Garcia have become too “commercial” and due to this reason “Market forces turn their work into commodities that speak to the vogue for all things Latino in contemporary U.S. culture.” (CRUZ, 2009, p. 172). The Critic develops a very well written essay, trying to expose how Esmeralda Santiago relies on series of female stereotypes to construct an essential representative of the Puerto Rican woman:

> For an author who came to prominence in the 1990’s, it is striking how she deals in a kind of identity formation. For the most part of her terms ignore alternate forms of Puerto Rican feelings and values – except for her own – rendering a uniform identity that conforms to stereotypical expectations of a certain kind of Puerto Rican: i.e., uneducated and working-class. Ellen McCraken calls this kind of cultural production “‘successful minorities commodities,’ versions of the Latino Other that mainstream publishing companies authorize, market, and even, to some degree, foment”. (CRUZ, 2009, p. 172).

Cruz goes on, saying that the “culture industry ensures the reception of Santiago’s Puerto Rico as ‘authentic’ because it is taken as grounded in autobiography, which is already a problematic viewpoint for identity projects.” (CRUZ, 2009, p. 173). Although Cruz makes solid points, perhaps an attentive reader can find some fissures on her line of argumentation.

First, to the best of my knowledge, Santiago never proclaimed herself, or her characters, paragons of a Puerto Rican essence. According to Adriana Lopez in “Esmeralda Santiago: Finding Her Voice”, Esmeralda Santiago actually says, “I felt the need to tell my story. I had published some essays about being a Puerto Rican woman in the United States and a publishing company offered me a contract to write a memoir. That’s how *When I Was Puerto Rican* came about.” (LOPEZ, 2008, p. 3). In fact, it is possible to infer that Esmeralda Santiago portrays her idea of herself, be this idea reality-bound or not, if she is not entitled to do that, who is?

Second, as to the problem of commercialized repetitions of identity construction, there are, for instance, several filmic versions of, say, *Sense and Sensability* or *Pride and Prejudice* but nobody has ever accused Jane Austen of propagating of fixed sample of a female English identity. Moreover, of course there are different women in Puerto Rico, not all of them are working-class girls who invariably have to fight against oppression and poverty as Santiago usually shows in her books, but, if some people like what Esmeralda Santiago writes, to a certain extent they identify with some or many aspects of her work, and in the case of the memoirs, her life.

The process of identification has a lot to do with recognizing oneself in a given source of interest, and due to this reason, extract some meaning from those sources that somehow relates to an individual idea he or she has of themselves. As a matter of fact, some people remark that a good work of art may cause a different impression on different people. Thus, the

acknowledgement of a stereotype can have a different field of signification to those in touch with it. To illustrate this point, it is relevant to think of Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" (1968). In "Roland Barthes' Death of the Author and Art as Text", Emmanuel L. Paparella states that:

> Rather than speak of *the work* with its associations to the author as the origin of a single, determinate meaning, Barthes prefers the notion of text, understood as an ensemble of competing "writings" or discourses that the scriptor (who has replaced the dead author) does not create but quotes. That is to say, the scriptor can only quote, because his sole resources are the already existing discourses at hand. But rather than fashion them into a unified whole, as previous theorists conceived of the outcome of artistic creation, all that is left for the scriptor is to bind them into a mélange. The presence of such distinct, competing discourses in a single text is what the structuralist critic is interested in exposing to view. And so**,** in place of the author, no longer the source of meaning, Barthes enthrones the reader, who, by decoding the competing writings that constitute the text, achieves authority over it. (PAPARELLA, online).

Hence, according to Roland Barthes' viewpoint, it is not texts that give meaning to the readers but the readers that extract meaning from the texts they read. Perhaps, this whole process of meaning extraction is ignited by systems of identification some readers recognize in the pieces they read. Thus, there may be some stereotypes in Esmeralda Santiago's books, but they are not entirely of her fabrication. Behind the events she narrates in her books there are social systems that define social roles and the ones that will play those roles. Hence, it is not odd to suppose that some readers will see perhaps a part of themselves, perhaps most of themselves in those roles since it is impossible not to play social games. Perhaps, what some top Latina writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chávez, Julia Alvarez, Cristina Garcia, and Esmeralda Santiago do is actually to unveil some of these systems. Whether the narrative resources that might unveil those systems are "authentic" or not, the reader may always speak for him or herself and decide.

4. 4 The imperialist invasion

As far as postcolonial studies are concerned, perhaps one of the most enticing chapters in *When I Was Puerto Rican* is the one entitled "The American Invasion of Macún." This chapter shows how the United States approaches the rural zone in Macún where Esmeralda Santiago lives a happy life with her family in spite of all their poverty. In terms of structure the chapter in spiced with cultural "hybridisms" that reinforces the idea of cultural enforcement pervasive in the whole chapter. As a matter of fact, throughout the whole book there are allusions to the cultural entanglement Santiago always underscores in her books, principally if one remembers that Santiago abuses of the "code switching" strategy to the

point of initiating each chapter of the book with a Spanish saying or proverb immediately translated into English.

At school, even her teacher, Miss Jiménez, is presented as a kind of hybrid caricature who transit between Spanish and English fortifying the bicultural twist of the chapter as the teacher proceeds with her class: "'*Muy bien*!' She pulled down the map rolled into a tube at the front of the room. In English she told us, 'Now gwee estody about the Jun-ited Estates gee-o-graphee.'" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 63). It is also interesting to notice the ironic overtone Santiago uses in the whole chapter, treating the issue of transculturation with doses of humor and sarcasm. Santiago's playfulness starts when Miss Jiménez announces that her students and their parents were supposed to "go the centro comunal before school to get breakfast, provided by the Estado Libre Asociado, or Free Associated States, which was the official name of Puerto Rico in the Estados Unidos, or in English, the Jun- ited Estates of America." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 64).

In the community center, experts from Puerto Rico and the United States would teach them "all about proper nutrition and hygiene, so that we would grow up as tall and strong as Dick, Jane and Sally, the *Americanitos* in our primers." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 64). The characters in the student's school books then set models to be followed, American models, which evokes Saskia Sassen's words in "Analytic Borderlands": "Space in the city is inscribed with the dominant corporate culture." (SASSEN, 1999, p. 362). Through the enforcement of their cultural conventions the Americans ignore the Puerto Rican reality. For the vast majority of the women in Macún the simple act of attending the meeting would require a careful planning because they have nobody to look after their children, and could not count on their husband's help as the reader later discover since in the meeting "There were no fathers. Most of them worked seven days a week, and anyway, children and food were woman's work." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 64).

In the meeting, the experts, using a refined Spanish that most of the women who could be there barely understood, give careful explanations about, for instance, the proper way to brush their teeth. Their explanations although (politically) correct fail to observe the practical terms of the lives of those women who react with humor to emphasize that they would have to be different people, with different lives –perhaps Americans– to properly perform those habits of hygiene on the terms of the experts' exposition:

> "If I have to spend that much time on my teeth," a woman whispered loud enough for everyone to hear, "I won't have anything done around the house." The room buzzed with giggles, and the expert again spread his lips, took a breath, and continued his demonstration. (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 65).

As the demonstration turns to the topic of "good nutrition" Santiago's sarcastic criticism gets even more acid. The experts advise the Puerto Rican people to eat a bunch of products that certainly were part of a well balanced American diet, but would not work in Puerto Rico because "'none of the fruits or vegetables in [the experts'] chart grow in Puerto Rico." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 66). One of the experts suggest that the Puerto Rican women in the meeting "substitute their recommendations with [Puerto Rican] native foods" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 66), irrespective to the fact that those women could not have the expertise to do that kind of substitution. In addition to that, as the discussion goes on, it is clear that those experts do not have the slightest idea about Puerto Rican food, and dietary habits, ratifying the idea of the impossibility to transpose all the United States' cultural values to Puerto Rico. In the words of Joanna Barszewska Marshall in "'Boast now, chicken, tomorrow you'll be stew': Pride, Shame, Food, and Hunger in the Memoirs of Esmeralda Santiago":

> The episode that most exemplifies the politicized nature of food in the author's early formation is narrated in "The American Invasion of Macún," a pivotal chapter that has been anthologized and also remarked on in much criticism of *When I Was Puerto Rican*. It is most commonly read as a relatively straightforward assertion of Puerto Rican identity based on rejection of all things American, particularly in criticism preoccupied with the issues of ethnic identity in a colonial setting. Joan Torres-Pou, for example, reads the episode unequivocally as social criticism intended to expose the paternalistic, prejudiced and even racist colonial system that the United States has set up on the island (p. 416). Carmen Torres-Robles reads it as an episode intended to contrast Puerto Rico and the United States, to emphasize the colonial relationship, and to insist on rebellion against the imposed system (MARSHAL, 2007, p. 50).

After the meeting, each Puerto Rican mother receives a "sack full of groceries with samples from the major food groups," (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 67) according to the American experts' knowledge. Negi's mother denounces the uselessness of the whole situation by saying: "'I don't understand why they didn't just give us a sack of rice and a bag of beans. It would keep this family fed for a month.'" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 68).

Naturally, if the Americans really wanted to effectively help the Puerto Ricans, they could have done that in accordance with the Puerto Ricans' terms. The way they did that only turns their efforts into a palliative measure, to relieve some Puerto Ricans' necessities in specific occasions, as Negi's mother also observes: "'we'll save this,' she said, 'so that we can eat like *Americanos cuando el hambre apriete*.' She kept them there for a long time but took them down one by one so that, as she promised, we ate like Americans when hunger cramped our bellies." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 68).

The American experts also start a sort of a campaign to vaccinate the children of Macún against polio. When Negi was sent to the nurse to be vaccinated she meets her school friend, Ignácio Sepulveda, who helps the girl understand the populism behind the American

politics in their school. The boy, who apparently comes from a highly politicized family, says in a very low voice that "[his] Papá says the government's doing all this stuff because it is an election year." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 71). A little later, the boy says that the American president is an "'imperialist just like all other *gringos*!" This information intrigues Negi, because up to that point, she never really worried about politics.

Negi's newly found political awareness culminates in a very "didactic" conversation she has with her father in which the man summarizes the process of Puerto Rico's colonization by the United States, emphasizing some of the reasons why Puerto Rican people "call *Americanos* imperialists, which means they want to change our country and our culture to be like theirs." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 73). He concludes his explanation addressing the linguistic differences between *gringos* and spiks, the derogatory terms used to refer respectively to Americans and Puerto Ricans. When her father says that the Americans make fun of their accent when Puerto Ricans say that they do not "spik" English by calling them spiks, Negi does not seem to understand why she has to speak a satisfactory English, whereas Americans seem not to care about their poor Spanish command. Her father answers: "That's part of being an imperialist. They expect us to do things their way even if they are in our country." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 73).

The populist process of cultural imposition via food goes on. The traditional breakfast in Negi's school is substituted by an American mix of powdered eggs, powdered milk and peanut butter which sickens Negi, making the girl gag, release the glass cup in her hands which shatters on the floor of her school's cafeteria. The girl eventually throws up and is severely is scolded by one of the teachers who seems not to believe that Negi thinks that the American food prepared that morning is "*repugnante*" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 82). The teacher says: "'I suppose you'd find less repugnant to go hungry every morning!" (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 82). By doing so the teacher underestimates Negi's parents family means to feed their own children, igniting Negi's anger, in a reaction that can be translated as attempt to preserve her Puerto Rican roots by denying the imposition of the culture of the Other, thus preserving her own sense of identity, denying to be stratified by this teacher or the American culture. Negi responds: "'I never gone hungry!'I screamed. 'My Mami and Papi can feed us without your disgusting *gringo* imperialist food.'" Negi's infuriated answer is a mix of outrage and nationalist awakening which endorse her abjection for what disturbs her identity, her reaction is in fact a political act. In Marshal's words:

> Negi then translates the accident into choice as she tries to defend herself against adults who continue to humiliate her for her inability to control her body and her attitude. She refigures the involuntary shameful vomiting into a defiantly prideful purging, by converting the

> somatic response to food – which may physically have been caused by an illness that will be kept her bedridden, "racked by chills and sweats," and continuing to throw up in the next few days – into a political response. (MARSHALL, 2007, p. 54).

In the end of the chapter the hypocritical populism of the United States is confirmed as Negi attests: "after what seemed like weeks, I went back to school, by which time the elections had been won, the breakfast ceased, and my classmate had found someone else to tease." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 83). No sooner had the election in the United States ended than the "altruistic" campaign for the welfare of the Puerto Rican citizens finished; the empire seems to have lost convenient interest in the colony.

Although the last chapters of the book give an account of Negi's life already in the United States, that is, after her diasporic move, most of the settings of the entire book is in Puerto Rico. In other words, great part of *When I Was Puerto Rican* is based on Esmeralda Santiago's memories before she goes to the United States, which could endorse the idea of this book as a pre-diasporic book, a book narrated by a diasporic writer primarily related to time this writer was still in her homeland. In this sense, the chapter entitled, "The American Invasion of Macún", above all the other ones, seems to validate the idea of *When I Was Puerto Rican* as pre-diasporic work because, besides the issues of emotional dislocation also found in the other chapters of the book, in this chapter there is another form of diasporic dislocation.

In "Diasporas", James Clifford asserts "that dispersed tribal peoples who have been dispossessed of their lands or who must leave reduced reserves to find work, may claim "diasporic" identities." (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 253). By the same token, when the United States tries to impose the North American culture on the autochthonous culture of Puerto Rico, there is also a cultural dispossession which also endows some Puerto Ricans with a "diasporic identity", without a geographical dislocation. In addition to that, a diasporic experience sometimes reinforces a sense of nationality which contributes to the maintenance of some primal aspects the identities dislocated individuals may be willing to preserve. This notion can be further accentuated by Clifford when he recognizes that this diasporic impact – geographical or otherwise – may help solidify the idea individuals, who experienced different levels displacements, may have of their homeland and consequently of themselves:

> The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home. This sense of connection must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing process of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing. Many minority groups that have not previously identified in this way are now reclaiming diasporic affiliations. (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 255).

Thus, when Esmeralda Santiago retrieves the memories of her life in her homeland, she is creating a particular idea of the place she lived in with enough critical sense to

reevaluate her own life within the unfair social system that hindered – and to a certain degree also formed – her identity since, according to Wendy W. Walters in “Introduction: Diaspora Consciousness and Literary Expression”, “displacement creates a distance that allows writers to encode critiques of their homelands, and to envision new communities.”(WALTERS, 2005, p. 9). Either by depicting the construction of Puerto Rican stereotypes or denouncing the mechanisms of colonization to which Puerto Rico was submitted, Santiago does encode a critique of her homeland. As to the issue of envisioning new communities, Santiago develops that in more depth in her next memoir, *Almost a Woman*.

CHAPTER 5 – ON *ALMOST A WOMAN*

Some writing specialists remark that relying on the old *cliché* of the dictionary or encyclopedia definition has been used far too often to be as effective as it used to be when it was novel enough to be considered original. However, there are occasions in which those definitions are so complementary that any other source one might think of using to cause a specific effect or to translate or interpret a word or a concept do not reach the level of effectiveness, of precision, dictionaries or encyclopedias sometimes do.

Based on this fact, it is illustrative to observe that the *Collins Cobuild's Advanced Learners' English Dictionary* defines the word nostalgia as "an affectionate feeling you have for the past, especially for a particular happy time." (COBUILD, 2005, p. 975). Thus, it is not difficult to imagine that this "craving" for the past sometimes is related to a feeling of inadequacy, or even discontentment with the present, which normally endows nostalgic memories with a profound sense of melancholy. However, melancholy *per se* does not necessarily have to do with time, but with sadness. Perhaps, the combination of time and sadness is what guarantees the melancholy pathos usually associated with nostalgia, or in the words of Linda Hutcheon, in "Irony, Nostalgia, and the postmodern":

> […] nostalgia became less a physical than a psychological condition; in other words, it became psychically internalized. It also went from being a *curable* medical illness to an *incurable* (indeed unassuageable) condition of the spirit or psyche. What made that transition possible was a shift in site from the spacial to the temporal. Nostalgia was no longer simply a yearning to return home. As early as 1798, Immanuel Kant had noted that people who did return home were usually disappointed because, in fact, they did not want to return to a place, but to a time, a time of youth. Time unlike space, cannot be returned to—ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes a reaction to that sad fact. As one critic has succinctly put this change: "Odysseus longs for home; Proust is in search of lost time." (HUTCHEON, 2011, online).

Nostalgia is precisely the feeling the reader is left with after reading the first chapter of Esmeralda Santiago's *Almost a Woman*, for this chapter is in fact mostly about an introspective moment Santiago has when she visits Macún, the Puerto Rican rural city where the writer spent her childhood. In many senses, *Almost a Woman* (1994) is a sequence to *When I Was Puerto Rican*, or rather, *When I Was Puerto Rican* is a sort of prequel to *Almost a Woman*, because in its ending the former sets the mood for the latter, showing the beginning of Santiago's life in the United States, which, as matter of fact, will be tackled in more depth in *Almost a Woman*. Esmeralda Santiago came to the United States from Puerto Rico at age of thirteen, and once in this new country, she had contact with a new world which was very different from what she understood as "reality". In her memoir, *Almost a Woman*, Santiago

writes a riveting chronicle of her emergence from the barrios of Brooklyn to the theaters of Manhattan focusing on the difficulties she had to face to fit in an alien country. Negi leaves rural Macún in 1961 to live in a three-room tenement apartment with seven young siblings and an inquisitive mother. From the very beginning of the book it is easy to notice how the writer feels dislocated with her new life.

Following the same narrative strategy she used in *When I Was Puerto Rican*, Esmeralda Santiago starts her second memoir, closer to the present, with a very short first chapter, which summarizes some of the vicissitudes in her family's trajectory from her small town, Macún, in the rural zone of Puerto Rico, to New York, in the United States:

> We moved from country to city to country to small town to big city to the biggest city of all. We moved from apartment to apartment in search of heat, of fewer cockroaches, of more rooms, of quieter neighbors, of more privacy, of nearness to the subway or the relatives we moved in loops around the neighbors we wanted to avoid, where there were no Puerto Ricans, where graffiti warned of gang turfs, where people dressed better than we did, where landlords didn't accept welfare, or didn't like Puerto Ricans, or look at our family of three adults, eleven children and shook their heads. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 1).

After that, the nostalgic tone of these first pages of the book is more blatantly installed for Santiago recollects some vignettes of her own life in a similar flashback disposition to the one she used to initiate *When I Was Puerto Rican*. She remembers the time she left home, her Mami's house, with the rhyme of a Spanish song she used to listen to when she was a child framing the moment and making her ponder about the decisions she made in her process of self-discovery: "Four days after my twenty first birthday, I left Mami's house, the rhyme I sang as a child forgotten: '*Martes, ni te cases, ni te embarques ni de tu familia te apartes*.' On a misty Tuesday, I didn't marry, but I did travel and I did leave my family." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 2). The Spanish lyrics of the song entitle the first chapter of the book and set one of the first stylistic differences Santiago's debutant memoirs have.

Differently from *When I Puerto Rican* in which she uses some titles in Spanish, and starts all chapters with epigraphs in Spanish to then translate them into English, the first chapter of *Almost a Woman* is the only chapter with a direct code switching. It is the only chapter with a title in Spanish and throughout the whole book there are no epigraphs in Spanish, which could be taken as the first indicator of *Almost a Woman* as a post-diasporic book. The book gives an account of Esmeralda Santiago's life in New York, so the titles of the chapters are written in English perhaps to reinforce her diasporic move and the subsequent personal dislocations in an English speaking country. Santiago has to go through an odyssey of self-reconstruction which fragments her identity, but in *Almost a Woman*, it seems that she is getting used to her own fragmentations, accepting the fact that perhaps the lack of a pre-

established identity is actually the identity of a postmodern diasporic individual, or to put it in Stuart Hall's terms, in "The Question of Cultural Idenity", a "translated subject":

> I went to Florida, to begin my own journey from one city to another. Each time I packed my belongings, I left a little of myself in the rooms that shattered me, never home, always just the places where I lived. I congratulated myself on how easy it was to leave them, how well I packed everything I owned into a couple of boxes and a suitcase. (SANTIAGO, 1998**,** p. 2).

Santiago knows that now her identities are to be constantly reinvented and her "baggage" is in an endless process of remodeling so that it can better accommodate the contents of each new experience life may bring to her, which can explain why she revisits Macún in a more mature phase of her life. Perhaps the writer feels the need to gauge how much of her roots she still carries within herself. Thus, it is valid to suppose that this is another reason why the title of this chapter remains in Spanish, to allude to her infant days. This very first chapter also deals with Santiago's prodigal return to Macún as a sort of self-reflective exercise:

> Years later, when I visited Macún, I went to the spot where my childhood began and ended. I stepped on what was left of our blue tile floor and I looked at the wild greenness around me, at what had been a yard for games, at the corner where an eggplant bush became a Christmas tree, at the spot where I cut my foot and blood seeped into the dust. It was no longer familiar, nor beautiful, nor did it give a clue of who I'd been there, or who I might become whenever I was going next. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 2).

In an almost metafictional passage, the writer goes back to her homeland to try to revive her past but she discovers that home is a very elusive concept. Her home, as she knew it, does not exist anymore which suggests that roots may be internalized but never actually recovered because people cannot recover what never really left them, and that is perhaps the problem with nostalgia: it has probably more to do with an idealization of the past as attempt to perhaps relieve the burden of an unsatisfactory evading present – evading because time does not stop running – causing a chronological flux which usually, in Derridean terms, disembogues into a postponement of identity. To expand this point, it is interesting to notice how Linda Hucheon writes about nostalgia as related to the "irrecoverable nature of the past":

> Nostalgia, in fact may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power—for both conservatives and radicals alike. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an "historical inversion": the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected in the past. (HUTCHEON, 2011, online).

Hutcheon goes on by recognizing how entrapping human memories can be since they are prone to be orchestrated by personal urges which potentially constructs the past as it never really was: "It is 'memorialized' as past, crystallizing into precious moments selected by memory but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations."

(HUTCHEON, 2011, online). However, sometimes the whims of memory can make individuals remember what they want forget, and more precisely, in the case of Santiago's return to Macún, forget what they want to remember: "There was no sign we'd ever been there, except for the hillock of blue cement tile on which I stood. It gleamed in the afternoon sun, its color so intense that I wondered if I had stepped onto the wrong floor because I didn't remember our floor being that blue." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 2). Hence, Santiago revisits the place where she lived to find out that the only place she can actually find the girl she was is inside her own imagination.

5.1 Herself in New York

Perhaps the key difference between Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and Esmeralda Santiago's *Almost a Woman* as respectively post-diasporic life narrative and post-diasporic memoir is that *Lucy* is in fact more self-centered in Kincaid's narrating-I, whereas *Almost a Woman* has a slight feeling of contemplation. It does sound like a journey in which self and other exchange meaning as an attempt to understand an outer, alien world, that a person could have only imagined, but that now surrounds this individual in a way that is in shock with the field of expectation this person unknowingly tries to fulfill:

> New York was darker than I expected, and, in spite of the cleansing rain, dirtier. Used to the sensual curves of rural Puerto Rico, my eyes had to adjust to the regular, aggressive two dimensionality of Brooklyn. Raindrops pounded the hard streets, captured the dim silver glow of the street lamps, bounced against sidewalks in glistening sparks, then disappeared, like tiny ephemeral jewels, into darkness. Mami and Tata teased that I was disillusioned because the streets were not paved with gold. But I had not such vision of New York. I was disappointed by the darkness and fixed my hopes on the promise of light deep within the sparkling raindrops. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 4).

In comparison with the sensuous, colorful exuberance of Negi's homeland, New York has a blurred complexion with an urban atmosphere which mingles with the bulky concreteness every big city normally has. If the lights in Macún revealed the telluric landscape of a bucolic place contributing to the clear conception of reality Negi used to have, once in New York, Negi has to adjust her eyes to see beyond the layers of the blinding lights that occluded her vision, preventing the girl from finding some reality definition from what she tries to see in the conglomerate of diffuse forms that embraces her.

It all serves to show the ambiguity of Negi's situation, triggering the hybrid perspective Negi continuously develops throughout the whole book. However, the passage quoted above already hints that Negi is careful enough not to idealize her conceptions about New York and, as she overlaps images of darkness and light, conditioning her hopes to the

optimistic symbolic suggestion of light and water linked to the image of the "sparkling raindrops", she intrinsically knows, or senses, that she can eventually cope with whatever it takes for her to develop her identity even if this process requires that she expands her horizons of subjectivity, which, immediately, evokes Diana Brydon's words in "Canadian Writers Negotiating Home within Global Imaginaries": "How people see themselves and are seen is no longer limited (if it ever was) to the terrain of a national imaginary." (BRYDON, 2007, online). To reestablish the grounds of her identity Negi has to transcend the limits of Puerto Rico, to then suit herself in New York. Yet, it is not an easy process.

In New York, Negi starts to negotiate the terms on which she has to rethink her identity and something that strikes her power of self-perception is how she is seen by the other people in the United States. Two days after arriving in New York, she meets a girl who lives in the building next door and who asks Negi, "*Tú eres hispana?* (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 4), to which Negi answers "No, I'm Puerto Rican" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 4). Next, the comment this girl makes about Negi's response is a generalization which perhaps sets the first shock of reality Negi has to face in the US: "'Same thing. Pueto Rican, Hispanic. That's what we all are here.'" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 4).

In this sense, the terminology "Hispanic" works as a kind of umbrella term which supposedly contains everything related to the Latin culture as if "all things *Latino*" were the same or could be defined by an epitomical word that would represent a general cultural context. When discussing the drawbacks of the word "multiculturalism", Sneja Gunew, in "Resident Alias: Diasporic Women's Writing", also sees the dangers of essentialist buzzwords, principally when they are endorsed by careless notions of political correctness:

> While the terrain and terminology are hotly contested in the context of the PC debates, the catch-all term 'multiculturalism' is used to include ethnics (including Hispanic and Asians), Blacks (African-Americans who are united by their common history of slavery that has functioned as an excuse for occluding their contribution to the construction of the nation), indigenous peoples, feminists, gays and lesbians, ecologists, deconstructionists (usually meaning poststructuralists and postmodernists) and a generalised left. These motley groups are apparently united by their opposition to the West or Western values, also of fundamentalism, as though this were exclusively a non-Western or Islamic characteristic. (GUNEW, 2011, p. 3).

As Sneja Gunew once more implies, the danger of using these terms is that sometimes they fail to consider the particularities of each ethnic group and of each individual within specific sectors of those groups. However, Silvia Schultermandl, in "Rewriting Amercan Democracy: Language and Cultural (Dis)Locations in Esmeralda Santiago and Julia Álvarez", pointedly observes that although Negi tries to assert her own identity, retorting that she is actually Puerto Rican, she "lacks the words and concepts to describe her new identity amid a mix of cultures, customs, and language that results from her relocation to American

Grounds." (SCHULTERMANDL, 2004-2007, p. 3). As the girl next door and Negi jump rope, the two girls' conversation proceeds, making Negi's cultural displacement in the United States unarguably clear:

> "So, if you are Puerto Rican, they call you Hispanic?"
> "Yeah, anybody who speaks Spanish."
> I jumped a circle, as she had done, but faster. "You mean, if you speak Spanish, you're Hispanic?"
> "Well, yeah. No … I mean your parents have to be Puerto Rican or Cuban or something."
> I whirled the rope to the right, then to the left, like a boxer. "Okay, your parents are Cuban, let's say, and you're born here, but you don't speak Spanish. Are you Hispanic?"
> She bit her lower lip. "I guess so," she finally said. "It was to do with being in a Spanish country. I mean you or your parents, like, even if you don't speak Spanish, you are Hispanic, you know?"
> She looked at me uncertainly. I nodded and returned her rope.
> But I didn't know. I'd always been Puerto Rican, and it hadn't occurred to me that in Brooklyn I'd be someone else. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 5).

Negi shows that she is getting tenser with their conversation, given the augmenting intensity with which she jumps rope, revealing that she has some difficulties to cope with the concepts behind the term Hispanic because it somehow challenges the idea the girl has of her own identity. The vast field of comprehension of the term generalizes all forms of Spanish related cultures, reducing their idiosyncratic intricacies to an essentialist label which greatly contributes to the sense of identity fragmentation Negi experiences in New York, although the girl tries to deal with her own process of assimilation the best way she can by trying, for instance, to extract some meaning from her relativistic speculations about the term Hispanic which is somehow in accordance with what Stuart Hall thinks in "Cultural Identities and Diaspora" when he observes that "if signification depends upon the endless repositioning of its differential terms, meaning, in any specific instance, depends on the contingent and arbitrary stop – the necessary and temporary break in the infinite semiosis of language." (HALL, 2010, p. 240).

However, Negi's problems in the United States are in part initially related to her difficulty in redirect her inner paradigm of meaning systems once she is inserted in a new realm of cultural codes. In the words of Silvia Schultermandl: "Negi's attempts at formulating workable identity locations for immigrant experience are indicative of the exile's difficulty achieving placement within mainstream culture." (SCHULTERMANDL, 2004-2007, p. 3).

Still vexed by the conversation she has with the girl next door, Negi asks her mother, who she affectionately calls Mami, if they are in fact Hispanic to which her mother answers, "Yes, because we speak Spanish" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 5), which Negi counterarguments by saying that "a girl said you don't have to speak the language to be Hispanic" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 5). Mami, instead of focusing on her daughter issues, wants to know who this girl is and where Negi met her. In fact, Mami's concerns have little to do with Negi's

struggles for adaptation. Negi's mother thinks that the risks Negi could run in New York are of a different nature and because of that she does not want Negi to go outside because, in Mami's words, "*algo te puede suceder*." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 5).

Mami says that something can happen to Negi because she is naturally worried about the treacheries and the violence one can find in every big city, but, perhaps the greatest "danger" Negi faces is the exposition to New York that would pose a threat to her Puerto Rican self as Negi herself acknowledges: "I listened to Mami's lecture with downcast eyes and the necessary, respectful expression of humility. But inside, I quaked. Two days in New York and I already become someone else. It wasn't hard to imagine that greater dangers lay ahead." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 5).

Perhaps, what Negi senses is that a moment of subjective rupture is something that she cannot avoid, it is something that is even expected, principally if one alludes to Stuart Hall essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," where he writes that "we might think of black Caribbean Identities as 'framed' by two exes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture." (HALL, 2010, p. 237). Thus, Negi sees herself caught in a transitional moment in which she empirically knows that she is part the vector of continuity, the one that "gives us some grounding in, some continuity with the past" to then encounter the vector of difference and rupture that "reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity." (HALL, 2010, p. 237).

5.2 Language imposition

Another important factor to consider is how language is an obstacle for Negi to overcome as she tries to develop her subjectivity in the U. S. Negi could feel some of the intricacies of the culture of the new country she now inhabits, but to properly interact with native Americans she needs to have a satisfactory command of the English language which she does not. Due to this reason, Negi is frequently underestimated since she cannot verbalize who she really is. Although Negi is not a totally limited student, her poor linguistic performance generates a poor evaluation of her level of cognition: "I couldn't speak English, so the school counselor put me in a class for students who'd scored low on intelligence tests, who were behavior problems, who were marking time until their sixteenth birthday, when they could drop out." (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 8).

Therefore, Negi is taken as a bad student not because of lack of commitment or some other behavior disorder but because she simply cannot understand English. Ironically, in Puerto Rico, she was one of the best students of her class. However, it does not necessarily mean that the American educational system is far superior to the Puerto Rican educational system, what it does indicate is that one should speak the language of the colonizer if he or she wants to have a very improbable – but not impossible – chance of success in a culturally dominant host land. Without an appropriate usage of the language, Negi does not even have the chance to protect herself from dangers she could only guess prowl around her: when her teacher ordered her to sit in the middle of room Negi feels intimidated by her situation and by the animosity of the other students: "I didn't dare look anyone in the eyes. Grunts and mutters followed me, and although I had no idea what they meant, they didn't sound friendly." (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 8). Thus, it is fair to say that not only is Negi bullied by her schoolmates, but also by an education system that makes clear to some foreigners that they do not belong there.

Instead of happening naturally, Negi process of assimilation in New York happens drastically, sometimes even invasively. A case in point, are the occasions when Negi has to use the bathroom, in the three minutes' break the students in her school would have between classes, wearing a one piece uniform which is difficult to manage. Besides the problem of the short space of time and the unmanageable uniform, Negi also has to beware of boys who "constantly raided the locker room to see [the girls'] underwear." (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 9). The consequence of this whole situation is that to a person in Negi's situation, sometimes even basic things are denied. For instance, seldom does Negi have access to her own intimacy:

> With the gym suit on, proper hygiene during "the curse" was difficult, as we needed at least three hands, so most girls brought notes from their mother. The problem was that if you didn't wear the uniform on gym days, everyone knew you were menstruating. (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 9).

It is not difficult to imagine how this kind of situation must be complicated to an adolescent girl who starts living in a place where she is not exactly welcome. Negi does not even have privacy enough to have proper hygiene and when she thinks about a solution which would basically consist on bringing an extra uniform to school, her mother says that they would not "have money to waste on such a foolishness." (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 8). Thus, Negi is not only oppressed by the convolutions of her underprivileged diasporic situation, but also by her underprivileged financial status which could not offer the means for her to alleviate the impact of her many levels of isolation.

Back to the linguistic issues, but still discussing the issue of oppression, every Friday morning Negi and her school friends have to press their right hand to their breasts and sing the American national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner". As Negi puts it: "We were encouraged to sing as loudly as we could, and within a couple of weeks I had learned the entire song by heart." (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 9). The way with which Santiago narrates this segment suggest that the American anthem, in accordance to Negi innocent power of interpretation, might be used as a kind of brainwashing litany working to establish a forced notion of patriotism even to non-American citizens. However, Santiago subverts this conception making Negi, her young version of herself, render the following version of the American anthem:

> Ojos é. Can. Juice. Y?
> By the don surly lie.
> Whassoprowow we hell
> Add debt why lie lass gleam in.
> Whosebrods tripe sand bye Stars?
> True de perro los Ay!
> Order am parts we wash,
> Wha soga land tree streem in. (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 8).

Santiago ironizes the American patriotism with a "phonetic" version of their anthem, according to Negi's power of interpretation, which highlights that, in that school, Negi in fact apprehends a simulacrum of enforced nationalism for she is only able to render an irregular surface of the anthem she is supposed to sing enthusiastically. The content of the lyrics of the anthem does not seem to be relevant as Negi admits: "I had no idea what the song said or meant, and no one bothered to teach me." (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 8). Naturally, this whole segment can be read as Santiago's criticism of the American educational system, the same system that excludes students with a poor command of English, but at the same time, does not bother to provide them with an interpretative analysis of such an emblematic symbol as the national anthem itself:

> It was one of the things I was supposed to know, and like the daily recitation of the pledge of allegiance, it had to be done with enthusiasm, or teachers gave out demerits. The pledge was printed in ornate letters on a poster under the flag in every class room. "The Star-Spangled Banner," however, remained a mystery for years, its nonsense words the only song I could sing in English from beginning to end. (SANTIAGO, 2008, p. 8).

It seems that for the teachers in that school appearances were more relevant than the content the students should intellectualize. As a matter of fact, Santiago parodies the mentality of that school in the United States by ridiculing the politics of self-advertisement that privileged the simulacrum of nationalist propaganda to the detriment of what should be given as serious, effective education. In the words of Silvia Schultermandl:

> Santiago's *Almost a Woman* literally ridicules American democracy on the level of American legislature and internal cultural politics. In the portrayal of Negi's difficulty with the English

> language, Santiago calls into question the monolithic, monolingual discourse of mainstream American society and the underrepresentation of cultural and ethnic diversity within the political discourse of the United States. Certainly, language and the classification of linguistic standards and variety formations often reflect political hierarchies within homogenous definitions of societies. As Ashcroft and his coauthors assert, "[o]ne of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities" (7). In this context, Negi's ESL problems point to the exclusivist definitions of American democracy, which marginalizes people who do not fit into the hegemonic paradigm of the white founding fathers. Santiago makes apparent this marginal location of Hispanic immigrants within American democracy in Negi's inadequate rendition of the American national anthem. (SCHULTERMANDL, 2004-2007, p. 9).

Moreover, according to Peônia Viana Guedes, "The Spanish spoken in Puerto Rico and by Negi is a variation of the Spanish considered standard Spanish. Negi's English is defective and the oral form of the language seems to be impossible of being assimilated by Negi." [10] (GUEDES, 2010, p. 7-8, tradução nossa). Thus, Negi mixes English and Spanish, performing what some people call "Spanglish", as a communicative strategy in order to deal with her own limitations, and at the same time, offer to Esmeralda Santiago a narrative resource, common to many post-colonial writers, that would provide those writers with some means to resist total assimilation and preserve a certain extent of their cultural values.

Language, to a person like Negi, is necessarily a vehicle of self-representation that, in spite of asserting some important aspects of her identity, also places her in the marginal corner of a society that is not very tolerant with the other's culture. Hence, paradoxically speaking, language can be a source of self-affirmation and also a source of segregation, always depending on what language a person speaks and in how this specific language is spoken. In a way, Negi's language is a ranking inscription she carries planted deep in her soul and which necessarily signals her difference:

> Santiago's phonetic transcription of the essence of American democracy is a social commentary on the cultural displacements of ethnic immigrants in the United States. Calling the American Dream a "mystery" and considering the American anthem made up of "nonsense words" that are meaningless for, or at least do not represent the experience of, the economically and socially deprived Hispanic immigrants, Negi's highly amusing interpretation of "The Star Spangled Banner" resonates the hard realities of ethnic immigrants (*Almost* 10): it describes the sense of confusion, loss, and disillusionment felt once the words of the American anthem clash with the everyday experiences of poverty, racism, ghettoization, and violence in the barrios that Negi's family faces on a day-to-day basis. Hence, Negi's "mis-tribute" to the American flag stands for the exclusion of ethnic minorities from mainstream definitions of American democracy. In the pre-civil rights setting of Puerto Rican American experiences, Negi's commodified self-definition as "other" – official inquires offer "white", "black", and "other" as option of ethnic identification (*Almost* 56-57) – sums up her position as an undefined and indefinable subject according to the terminology provided by mainstream American society. (SCHULTERMANDL, 2004-2007, p. 10-11).

However, Negi situation is even more complicated than that because even inside her own house she cannot have the total comprehension of her family, principally her mother, who seems not to be flexible enough to accept that in her family's process of adaptation there

[10] The text in Portuguese: "O espanhol falado em Porto Rico e por Negi é uma variante do espanhol cosiderado como norma-padrão. O inglês de Negi é deficiente e a forma oral da língua lhe parece impossível de ser assimilada."

will forcefully be a certain cultural amalgam and, eventually, one cultural code will have to prevail. When Mami notices that some of her relatives spoke English among themselves she repudiates the way they speak, by also showing a degree of intolerance inversely proportional to the one Negi has to go through outside their house. Mami remarks that her aunt's and her children's Spanish were halting and accented, as if it were vanishing, losing space to the English language. In Negi's words: "Mami said they were Americanized. The way she pronounced the word *Americanized*, it sounded like a terrible thing, to be avoided at all costs, another *algo* to be added to the list of "somethings" outside the door." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 12).

Interaction with the American culture is perhaps the greatest "something" that Negi's mother fears because, according to her perspective, it would also indicate the loss of her family's Puerto Rican essence. Fear of changing and surrendering to the American cultural codes is thus Mami's most basic concern, but it is also something that she could not stop, as Negi's crescent language awareness shows in several moments in the book. Either for fear of changing or for total incapacity of learning English, it is curious to notice how language works in opposition to Mami's instincts of root preservation, as Negi points out: "Slowly our vocabularies grew, it became a bond between us, one that separated us from Tata and from Mami, who watched us perplexed, her expressions changing from pride to envy to worry." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 12).

In metaphorical terms, Tata, Negi's grandmother, and Mami represent a Puerto Rican emblem of purity which, to preserve its existence, forcefully has to deny the influence of the external. On the other hand, Negi and her siblings represent the unquenchable thirst for adaptation and discovery young people invariably carry within themselves. However, besides the inherent curiosity of her young age, Negi has other reasons to master the English language. One of them is to assure her family's financial means of survival, as the episode in the welfare office shows. Mami and Negi try to have their application for public assistance, and as her mother cannot use an intelligible level of English, Negi has to interfere and use her meager command of the language to guarantee the benefit to her family. It is then that Negi realizes the dimension of the importance of learning English: "a few days later our application was approved. By then I decided that even when it seemed that my head couldn't hold that many new words inside it, I had to learn English well enough never again to be caught between languages." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 21). Thus, language is a fundamental part of Negi's process of identity construction for it is the vehicle that opens the way for Negi to interact, assimilate, and eventually enjoy her new life, although it is not an easy process:

> It was good to learn English and to know how to act among Americans, but it was not good to behave like them. Mami made it clear that although we lived in the United States, we were to remain 100 percent Puerto Rican. The problem was that it was hard to tell where Puerto Rican ended and Americanized began. Was I Americanized if I prefer pizza to *pastellitos*? Was I Puerto Rican if my skirts covered my knees? If I cut out a picture of Paul Anka from a magazine and tacked it to the wall, was I less Puerto Rican than when I cut out pictures of Gilberto Monroig? Who could tell me? (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 25).

Actually, Negi's willingness to learn English as well as her acceptance of particular aspects of the American culture are the beginning of her break with her mother values, not exactly a conscious challenge to her mother, but the first indicators that in order to guarantee a healthy evolution as an individual, Negi would have to develop a hybrid perspective, resultant of the mingling between Puerto Rican and American cultural codes. Through language Negi realizes that she has to live on a cultural and social hyphen.

5.3 From mother to daughter

If in Jamaica Kincaid's books, her characters choose anger and disappointment to break the bonds with their mothers, who actually might represent the same kind of maternal stem from which Kincaid develops her protagonists' personal dilemmas, Negi's relationship with her own mother is a little bit less complicated, but equally intriguing. Naturally, Mami is a primal source of identification and an obvious reference to Negi, but to find her identity in accordance with her own terms, Negi knows that she has to draw certain limits to curtail her mother's controlling grasp.

However, Negi does so little by little, in small snippets of veiled disobedience, sometimes with actions that remain unbeknownst to her mother, but that give Negi a certain sense of emotional independence. Differently from Kincaid's characters, Negi never radically rejects or – literally or metaphorically – abandons her mother to assure herself. In fact, Negi observes and critically questions some of her mother's attitudes, perhaps to contrast and compare the pattern of reference her mother offers up with the other niches of identification she encounters throughout her life.

Of course, a good mother wants to protect her children from the dangers of life. However, there is a fine line between protection and overprotection. Perhaps, protection is more related to the person who is supposed to be focus of the careful zeal, whereas overprotection is a term which seems to be more related to the person who wants to protect than to the person who is to be protected. The problem with overprotection is that it may be

based on an idealization the protectors have about their *protégées*, as if they were permanently unable to take care of themselves, being in a constant need of another person who will have the unquestionable duty to protect them. Therefore it is fair to say that overprotection may castrate self-representation and hinder individual basis for identity constructions, and that seems to be the heart of the matter in Negi and her mother's relationship.

In "'Boast now chicken, tomorrow, you'll be stew': Pride, Shame, Food, and Hunger in the Memoirs of Esmeralda Santiago", Joanna Barszewska Marshall observes that "The move to New York, which coincides with Negi's becoming a *casi señorita*, is also accompanied by a broader shift in focus, from colonial to sexual politics." (MARSHALL, 2007, p. 56). Perhaps, the justification for such a shift has to do with Mami's sexual and gender politics. To a great extent, Mami ends up reproducing the hypocritical *cliché*: "do as I say not as do", because Mami wants by all means to prevent Negi from becoming a woman like herself. In this sense, Negi's going to New York is Mami's attempt to refrain Negi's approaching sexual awakening:

> Like every other Puerto Rican Mother I knew, Mami was strict. The reason she had brought me to New York with the younger kids was that I was *casi senorita*, and she didn't want to leave me in Puerto Rico during what she said was a critical stage in my life. Mami told her friend Minga that a girl my age should be watched by her mother and protected from men who were sure to take advantage of a child in a woman's body. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 14).

However, sometimes Mami crosses the boundaries of protection, adopting overprotective attitudes which very often end up causing awkward moments of deep embarrassment to Negi, who sees herself caught in the angry storms Mami usually rampages through her as Mami invariably overreacts to the smallest sight of what she considers indecent demonstrations of lewd behavior. Most of the times Negi's "lewd" behavior does necessarily mean that she is being deliberately sexually provocative but that she is trying to mingle with the other students behavior pattern which is enough to arouse her mother's ill temper because besides showing inappropriate manners for a decent girl, to a certain extent, Negi's willing to look like an American girl, in her mother's eyes, also means to deny her Puerto Rican Roots:

> Mami surprised me one day in front of my school. I trembled as she frowned at my skirt, which was midcalf when I left in the morning but now hovered above my knees. She scrutinized the smudged lines around my eyes, the faint traces of rouge on my cheeks. Every morning on the way to school, Yolanda and I ducked into the doorway of an apartment building on Bushwick Avenue and rolled up our skirts to the length of the other girl wore theirs. We drew lines around our lids with an eyebrow pencil stolen from Yolanda's mother. In school, the girls who took pity on those of us with old-fashioned mothers often shared their lipsticks and rouge and helped us tease our hair into beehives sprayed stiff. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 28).

As a matter of fact, Negi is trying to find a place of belonging, an attempt her mother violently spoils by grabbing her arm and dragging her across the street, turning Negi into the

target of the mockery of the "boys who laughed, slapped each other five, gave Mami the thumbs up and called 'Go Mamma' as [they] passed." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 28).

In her defense, Negi tries to appeal to her mother's good sense by saying that she should have waited until they get home and then preserve some her privacy, sparing Negi of the public humiliation she is submitted to, which makes the girl angrily slam her books hard on the floor. The response Mami gives to Negi's tempestuous behavior is a psychological blow against the construction of identity of a girl who is, above all things, trying to make part of a social milieu she does not ask to be inserted in, but because of her mother's needs, has to be there. Mami yells: "'Who do you think you are? […] Talking back like that? […] Don't think because you are here you can act like those fast American girls.'" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 29). It is not hard to infer that such a line of questioning contributes to the social and cultural gap between Negi and her schoolmates.

In her desperate attempt to preserve her daughter sexual integrity, Mami lacks sensitivity to notice the dimension of the delicate moment Negi is going through, denying any possibility of self-defense Negi can have, and shattering the fragile identity foundation on which Negi is constructing her subjectivity. By asking her daughter to define who she thinks she is, a question which, in that moment of her life, the girl is by no means ready to answer, Mami denies autonomy to her daughter who, at that point, needs peace of mind to find her selfhood.

Nonetheless, although Mami arduously tries to control her children's life and consequently limit the range of personal choices they could have, she cannot prevent them from facing the auguries of the external factors that stalk at their door, undermining the meager notion of freedom they might have in the surroundings of their domicile. Mami cannot control the flux of the external reality that is on a collision course with the indoor reality of her domestic idyll, threatening the ideal of security Mami so desperately tries to maintain, as Negi is able to register:

> Sometimes, in spite of Mami efforts to keep us safe from a violent world, *algo* happened. We mourned President Kennedy's assassination with the rest of the country and bawled when John-John saluted the coffin as it went past. The radio and television brought us news of how at least thirty neighbors heard Kitty Genovese screaming as she was being stabbed to death and no one came to help. For weeks afterward, Mami was in a state if we so much as went downstairs to the pizza shop. But she wasn't the only one who worried. When she got off the train from work, Don Julio or Hector was waiting at the bottom of the steps to walk her home. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 100).

When Santiago colors her life narrative with historical facts such as the riots of the sixties in New York, or the assassination of John Kennedy, she imbues her autobiographical *oeuvre* with a commonsensical notion of collective identification. In *Reading Autobiography*

Smith and Watson propose that “the life narrator becomes an eyewitness to events, both great and daily, a kind of interested social historian.” (SMITH;WATSON, 2006, p. 94). Of course the life narrator has to become “an interested social historian” because the events he or she witnesses are points of reality definitions that will set the political *zeitgeist* that enters the collective memory of the people who were contemporary to the life narrator, and those who absorb that cultural notion, which greatly fosters the comprehension of the reality they may have.

Hence, the way that Santiago remembers her past and also the historical reality that was passed to her greatly appeals to the sense of identification of the people who read her memoirs because their world views were either constructed by the notions of that kind of reality planted in their subjectivities or by subsequent the chains of events historical interpretations may trigger.

Therefore, it is possible to infer that historical vignettes in some literary pieces help naturalize the political atmosphere of the temporal reality some writers lived in, validating collective memory and historical registers – although they are not completely trustworthy – as points of reference for some people, as Linda Hutcheon observes in “Postmodernism and Feminisms”, when she writes that, “the representation of public historical events tends to take on political dimensions within the private fictional world of the characters, but because of metafictional self-consciousness, the synecdoche extends to include the reader.” (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 161). Although Hutcheon is talking about a fictional narrative, the same rationale of her line of argumentation could be used as a valid form of interpretation in this passage of *Almost a Woman*. Moreover, according to Smith and Watson, collective memory fortifies the social bonds and the meanings individuals sharing the same cultural space can extract from their locations:

> The collective nature of acts of remembering extends beyond the acknowledgements of social sites of memory, historical documents, and oral traditions. It extends to motives for and the question of those on whose behalf one remembers. Precisely because acts of remembering are implicated in how people understand the past and make claims about their versions of the past, memory is inescapably an intersubjective act, as W.J.T. Mitchell insightfully suggests: “memory is an intersubjective phenomenon, a practice not only of recollection of a past *by* a subject, but of recollection *for* another subject” (193 n. 17). Memory is a means of “passing on,” of sharing social past that may have been obscured, in order to activate its potential for reshaping a future of and for other subjects. Thus, acts of personal remembering are fundamentally social and collective. (SMITH;WATSON, 2006, p. 20-1).

An added consideration to the issue of historicity and collective memory is that as Santiago links personal memories to collective memories she intertwines her family’s private and the public lives to show that it is impossible to control all aspects of people’s life, which could then be a rather provocative answer to Negi’s mother’s dominating urges as well as a

relativist approach which puts in check her mother overprotective attitude. That sort of argumentation is likely to make one wonder if Santiago aligns some historical events with the murder of Kitty Genovese only by chance, or if there is something else behind her doing so.

Kitty Genovese was a New York City woman who was stabbed to death near her home in Qeens, on March 13, 1964. Besides her horrendous death, what is also flabbergasting in Genovese's case is that apparently the many neighbors in her vicinity did not react to her heinous assassination, which originated the terms "bystander effect" or "Genovese Syndrome" to designate social psychological phenomena such as this one in which people just impotently observe the unfolding of shocking events.

The point is that, perhaps, by way of illustration, the Kitty Genovese reference emphasizes that no matter how hard some people try to take control of everything around them, sometimes the most they can do is to impotently watch the shocking reality that sometimes unfolds before their eyes. Maybe, metaphorically speaking, Santiago means that regardless of her mother's attempts to safeguard all aspects of her children's life, there are some things that Mami cannot prevent from happening, there are some things she can only inertly witness.

However, it has to be noted the Mami really does everything she can to protect Negi and prevent her from becoming a person like herself. The problem is that, perhaps because of her limited range of psychological resources, Mami ends up reinforcing some social conventions that derogatorily label and systematically oppress women who do not fit in the social frame in which Mami was educated, or rather, "constructed" to think as female ideals of self-realization. Moreover, to protect her daughter from being "betrayed" by her own sexuality and give in to the cheap strategies of seduction some men are capable of providing, something that happened to herself, Mami constantly demonizes men: "Her mother reminded Santiago that men only wanted something from them. While the assumption is that female sexuality was at the center of masculine desire." (MORALEZ-DIAZ, 2002, p. 132).

In addition to that, not only does Negi's mother, but her whole environment contribute to the girl's complicated sexual and gender politics. Negi admits that "years of eavesdropping on her [mother's] conversations had taught [her] that men were not to be trusted they deceived with *pocavergüenzas*, shameless acts, […] squandering money on women not their wives, while their children went hungry." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 12). The main problem is that those are the terms which Negi heard her mother use to define her own father, the man Mami used to live with, in Macún, for several years. Perhaps, that could be taken as the first point of

suspicion Negi could have developed towards her mother who, although always criticizing men's misbehavior, is constantly pregnant or in a difficult relationship.

For instance, Mami's first relationship in New York is with a man called Francisco, "who lived across the street with his parents" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 12), and is two years younger than Mami, which Mami's mother, Tata, disapproves, perhaps because she is suspicious of the condition a man in Francisco's situation would have to help support a large family such as theirs. Mami's other lover in New York was Don Carlos, a man "who was not technically divorced" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 134), but to seduce Negi's mother, at first, said he was.

Moreover, in all her relationships, including her relationship with Negi's father, Mami was never legally married which, according to her own conceptions, is something inappropriate to "a decent woman." However, it is pertinent to notice that Negi always questions the discrepancies in mother mother's behavior: "Mami hadn't married in a church, but we were supposed to. We never went to church, but someday we would each stand in front of a priest and receive the vows she never had" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 34).

It is possible to observe that Mami lives in a world idealized by a dominant discourse which conceives gender roles in accordance with some constructed "signs of personal success". Negi's family is not particularly religious, but to her mother, a catholic wedding is perhaps the apex of self-realization, "the most beautiful moment in a woman's life." A moment that she could not have, but that she works hard to give to her children, whether they like it or not.

Nonetheless, Negi is able to spot the psychological game of guilt and gratitude her mother plays to mold her children's expectation in accordance with the idealizations of the life Mami herself could not live. Therefore, Mami expects that her children live the life she could not, and to talk their children into buying this forced standardized idealization, Mami emotionally blackmails her children to convince them that they are in a kind of debt with her, but that kind of strategy does not really work with Negi because the girl perceives her mother's mind game: "'I sacrificed myself to you' she told us over and over. A fancy church wedding for each of us was one of the rewards she expected for that sacrifice." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 34).

Consequently, it is possible to speculate that Negi, who develops a kind of critical distance towards her mother incongruous behavior by avoiding naive idealizations of her own mother, could have thought that, if according to her mother's point of view, sexually aggressive women, or women who live with a man without being legally married to him could

be taken as a *puta*, what is to say of the mother of nine children – by the end of the book eleven – with a history of several failed relationships which included suspicious and even married men, and who never had a legal union.

Notwithstanding, Negi knows that her mother does not have the malice, the calculating mind a *puta* does, so Negi learns another stereotype, that of the *pendeja*, which has to do with a woman who believes in everything a man says. Although Mami does not seem to believe in everything a man says, to a certain extent, she conditions her life to having a man by her side even if this relationship does not give the security she needs to protect her family and her own feelings, reproducing the codes of patriarchal societies which inculcate in some women the constructed mentality that they mandatorily need a man for emotional and, principally, economic support. Thus, Negi finds a way to perhaps better classify her own mother, as a woman who transits between two stereotypes, as well as counterpoints to establish the parameters of her own identity:

> Having heard countless stories about deceitful men and wily women, I decided never to become one of those calculating *putas*, but neither would I become a *pendeja*, who believed everything a man told her. There was a midpoint between a *puta* and a *pendeja* that I was trying to figure out, a safe space in which decent women lived and thrived and raised their families. Mami belonged there, as did her families and female relative. Her lectures, and the pointed conversations I was supposed to overhear, were meant to help me distinguish between a *puta* and a *pendeja*. But there was a always a warning. One false move, and I ran the risk of becoming one or being perceived as the other. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 14-15).

At this point, Negi recognizes that her mother is someone capable of being in between the two labels mentioned in the quotation above. However, the unraveling of Mami's life history, her constant pregnancies and liaisons with morally questionable men indicate that even though Mami might see herself out of the context of these labels, because she knows it is not her intention to behave like a *puta* or a *pendeja,* her life circumstances point out to the opposite, forcefully, in practical social terms, turning Mami into one of the stereotypes she so unremittingly attacks, even if she does not see herself like it.

According to José R. Rosario in "On the Poetics of How We Make Our Lives: Esmeralda Santiago and the Improvisation of Identity," Negi sometimes has to see herself forced to live within the heritage of a code of gender behavior, systematically reinforced by her own mother: "According to her inherited script, she was either a puta or a pendeja." (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 122). Moreover, Mami also tries to force their children into buying another stereotype that does not seem to work very well to her: the idea of the "perfect marriage." Thus, in Rosario's viewpoint, Negi is in opposition to three gendered labels:

> [S]he rejects not only the image of the puta or the pendeja, but also the model her mother imagined for her: a woman happily married after walking "down the aisle with a long white dress and veil." How she derives that very personal script is reminiscent of how Paul Ricoeur's "plotting" operates at the level of the story. For Ricoeur, plotting is a narrative tool

> available to an author. An author uses this tool to construct a coherent story out of the disparate pieces of a life's trajectory. The results, according to Ricoeur, are a holistic and connected narrative with overarching sense, meaning, and logic a synthesis of heterogeneous elements. (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 122).

Although Mami tries to brainwash Negi with what she thinks is the right pattern of female moral code, her own behavior contradicts and deconstructs the idea Negi initially has of her own mother as someone able to float between female labels. Naturally, questioning her mother as a female model fragments Negi's identity because the girl could not help seeing herself more and more distanced from her mother as a source of reference, as it is easy to attest given Negi's reaction when the family discovers that her mother's lover, Don Carlos, was already married:

> But what scared me most about Don Carlos's betrayal was that Mami was not immune to the seductive power of a man with a sweet tongue and a soft touch. "Men only want one thing," she'd said so many times that I couldn't look at man without hearing it. If she could fall under the spell, how could I, younger and less experienced, hope to avoid the same destiny. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 135).

Negi notices that she has to refuse the inheritance of the pre-established dichotomous gender roles bequeathed to her by breaking with her family's discrepant behavior pattern. Thus, although Negi tries not to be judgmental with her mother, she feels that she is a very different person:

> Birth control was the news because of the recently developed pill to prevent pregnancy. Whenever we discussed it at home, it was agreed by the adults around the table that "the pill" was nothing more than a license for young women to have sex without getting married. The fact that my mother, grandmother, and almost every other female relative of ours had sex without marriage was not mentioned. If I pointed that out to them, I was scolded for being disrespectful. In any case, I would never suggest that Mami avoid having babies. While being in a large family was hard for all of us, there was not a single sister or brother I'd rather not have. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 156-7).

Negi decides to be a different person based on her family's misfortunes which happened principally because the women in her family could not break the spell of traditional roles which dictated how a woman is supposed to behave regardless of her individual reality. Hence, Negi disregards her family's "commandments" and chooses to become the agent of her own life: "For myself, however, I decided that I changed enough diapers for a lifetime and planned to sign up for the pill as soon as there was any possibility I'd need it." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 157). This segment in the book reverberates in Enrique Moralez-Diaz's article, "Catching Glimpses: Appropriating the Female Gaze in Esmeralda Santiago's Autobiographical Writing", when he maintains that:

> Esmeralda Santiago writes to denounce the mandated gender dichotomy and establishes a platform from which others can speak and share their own experiences and development of their identities. The author breaks with the notion of categorizing women based on their relationship with phallogocentric society. (MORALEZ-DIAZ, 2002, p. 134).

It is relevant to observe that great part of the identities Esmeralda Santiago constructs is made through realizing that her family can still be a reference, but a reference by counterpoints, not by total identification. That is an idea that José R. Rosario seems to agree with. Rosario argues that Santiago is a direct product of the "cumulative effects" the many labels and models her family introduces to her, "but so is her opposition to those same labels and models. Santiago's identity was also fashioned in much the same way Eysturoy (Annie Eysturoy 1996) suggests identities are made: in opposition to the material she encounters." (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 122).

In this sense, Santiago memoirs are also an attempt to unveil the cultural and political strategies behind those labels. Following this strand of thought, it is possible to argue that the writer offers her own life account as another counterpoint, a counterpoint which is inversely proportional to the processes of stratification some hegemonies of power try to sell by masking individual subjectivity with social prescriptions of behavior patterns. Hence, according to the side of the dynamic of power Santiago writes from, she offers a "bottom-up" life account that demythologizes literary premises which marginalize working class subjectivity.

A moment that perfectly exemplifies the level of marginalization Negi has to deal with is when she has to accompany her mother to the welfare office to translate the questions the social worker asks her mother. When the social worker finds out Negi's mother is in fact an unmarried pregnant woman, who is also the mother of, at that point, seven children from another unofficial union, the official worker rates the children as "illegitimate", although Mami tries to "justify" all her pregnancies by saying, "'their father recognized them all'" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 43). Mami's drama does not touch the official worker's heart who seems to adopt a rather *blasé* posture towards the situation Mami presents. As for Negi, who witness and interacts with the whole situation, she cannot forget the word illegitimate which insists on lingering on her mind until she looks it up in a dictionary and discovers the implications such a word, in her life context, entails:

> When we came home, I looked it up. *Illegitimate* meant born of parents who were not married. But the way the social worker's lips puckered, *illegitimate* sounded much worse. It had a synonym *bastard*, which I'd heard used as an insult. Without my knowing it, the social worker had offended me and Mami. I wished I'd noticed, so that I could have said something. But what was there to say? She was right. We were illegitimate. I worried then that Mami wouldn't get the help we needed from welfare because she and Papi were never married, but a few days later the help came through. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 44).

Illegitimate, in the context of Negi's life, has diverse fields of signification. In the United Stated she is an illegitimate daughter, coming from an illegitimate family, and ultimately, to accentuate her level of dislocation due to her diasporic issues, as she does not

exactly fit in the "pre-requisites" that constitute the notions of the American Dream, she becomes an illegitimate citizen. Consequently, Negi feels belittled by the official worker and by the circumstances of her life. Her disappointment with her own situation causes a traumatic experience symbolized by the renitent word *illegitimate*, as Negi remarks: "The word however, stayed in my conscience a long time." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 44). As, at that specific moment, Negi does not have the means to change her condition, the development of a trauma is the only response she is able to concoct to cope with the social deadlock caused by the intersection of race, class, and sexual injustice imbued in her diasporic situation.

The reaction of the office worker aggravates Negi's sense of deterritorialization for she notices the reach of the censorship the official worker bestows on her and her family. In the subtext of the official worker's reaction there is a nationalist repudiation to everything she recognizes as non-American, that is, in a complete dissonance with the ideological values American culture construes as part of a system of self-recognition. Thus, the official worker recognizes Negi and her family outside their field of belonging, as if they were invading her home, to take some unduly advantage from the American welfare office. In "Home-Country: Narration across disciplines", Rosemary Marangoly George affirms that:

> What the hyphen in "home-country" makes explicit are the ideological linkages deemed necessary for subjects who are at home in a social and political space and even more acutely for those who, because of geographic distance or political disenfranchisement, *outside* their "legitimate" space. (GEORGE, 1999, p. 17).

Further contributing to the dabate, in "Disjuncture and Difference," Arjun Appadurai remarks that:

> Deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings laboring populations into the lower-class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and intensified sense of criticism or attachment to the politics in the home state. (APPADURAI, 2003, p. 35).

Appadurai's remark may explain the hostile reaction Negi and her mother find in the welfare office. Normally, xenophobic behavior is justified by the fear of losing "legitimate" space to those who do not belong to that specific space. Very often, some native people think that "foreigners are coming to our land to take our jobs and everything we built." No matter the intentions these "foreigners" have, fear of the alien usually raises a deep –often exaggerated– sense of nationalism that tends to segregate what is not part of that space of belonging.

In fact, Negi and her mother's going to the welfare or unemployment office, is a constant scene of identity questioning for there they are inquired about many things related to their origins which consequently culminated in meta narrative moments in *Almost a Woman*

since, in a memoir, Negi, Santiago's narrating-I and also a younger version of herself, has to retrieve the memories of her ancestors to have a more accurate definition of whom she is:

> When Mami and I went to the welfare or unemployment office, a box in the forms asked us to identify our race: White, Black, Other. Technically, Mami was white. Her skin was creamy beige, lacked the warm brown tones her children with Papi had inherited. My memory of my paternal grandparents was that they were white, but Papi and some of his sisters and brothers were, dark brown, evoking a not-too-distant African ancestor. Franky, Mami's son with Francisco was lighter-skinned than the seven older brothers and sisters. He had his father pale complexion, dark eyes and hair. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 56).

Here, it is impossible not to notice to amalgam of ethnicities that comprises Negi's looks and further epitomizes the notion of in-betweeness, typical of diasporic subjects. Negi says that "When I had to indicate my race I always marked 'Other', because neither black nor white was appropriate." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 57). In "Rewriting American Democracy: Language and Cultural (Dis)Locations in Esmeralda Santiago and Julia Álvarez", Silvia Schultermandl pointedly observes that:

> In the pre-civil rights setting of Puerto Rican American experiences, Negi's commodified self-definition as "other" –official enquires offer "white," "black," and "other" as options of ethnic identification (*Almost* 56-57)–sums up her position as an undefined and indefinable subject according by the terminology provided by mainstream American society. (SCHULTERMANDL, 2007, p. 11)

With this passage Santiago criticizes the mentality that invariably categorizes some individuals mostly based on skin color, generally privileging Caucasian traces and demeaning other ethnicities as if they were below the aesthetic and social levels of status acceptance. In Negi's Puerto Rico, the whiter the individual is, the closer he or she is to an idealization of ethnic purity, idealized by some Puerto Ricans:

> If I could pass which I couldn't, there was always the question Puerto Ricans asked when someone became too arrogant about the value of their white skin: "*Y tu abuela, donde esta?*" asking, "Where is your grandmother?" implied that in Puerto Rico no one really knew the total racial picture and claims of social purity were suspect. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 57).

Actually, Negi uses her mother to relativize the question of ethnicity, emphasizing that depending on where the individual is talking from, skin color can have a different field of signification. Her mother dislocation concomitantly privileges and condemns whiteness according the convenience of her situational position. For instance, in Puerto Rico Mami lighter's features make her pass as a white person, but once in the United States, being a white person means something different, as it is clear when Mami herself warns Negi against the possibility of her misbehaving in her new school: "'Don't think just because you are going to that school for *blanquitos* I'm going to put up against any *pocavergüenzas* from you.'" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 56).

If in Puerto Rico whiteness means racial purity and consequently a touch of social ascendance, in Mami's eyes, in the United States, it means otherness, which is something that

does not seem to really bother Negi who does not seem to share her mother's notions, and who is getting progressively more appeased with her own hybridity in many different levels: "I was neither black not white; I was *trigueña*, wheat colored. I had good hair, and my features were neither African not European but a combination of both." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 57). Perhaps, Negi's flexibility, her easy-goingness with her own assimilation of different cultural values, her miscegenation, and her openness to what is to come are the factors that do set the difference between herself and her mother.

5.4 The ballerina of letters

In an interview, registered by Adriana Bianco in "Esmeralda Santiago: Finding Her Voice", Esmeralda Santiago declared that when she was younger she "wanted to be a ballerina – now [she] is a ballerina of letters." (BIANCO, 2008, p. 2). In fact, Santiago recognizes the impact of education on her life as a turning point to her personal saga. According to Bianco, the writer says that, "For me, studying was the answer. I worked, studied, and also went to museums, conferences, the theater. I read a lot. Novels are great company and help you understand societies." (BIANCO, 2008, p. 4). It is not difficult to attest how Santiago seems to treasure education since her memoirs tackle her academic trajectory as a fundamental issue for her to amplify her cosmovision and guarantee a certain level of personal independence.

In *Almost a Woman*, Negi's life goes through a tremendous shift through education. Education is, in fact, a key tool to facilitate the path between Negi and her process of assimilation in the United States. Naturally, the English language and the American culture are so pervasive in her life that little by little the girl has to get more adjusted to her new life in New York. Thus, she realizes that in order to get a more comfortable life she has to enhance her cultural scope on the terms of the American social atmospheres she comes across, although she feels that this is not an easy process: "While written English was getting easier for me to understand, spoken English still baffled me, so I agreed to an academic education without knowing what it meant and too embarrassed to ask." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 35).

In Puerto Rico, Negi longed to be a *jíbara*, but in New York she senses that she cannot have a unilateral perspective, her diasporic identity forces her to have a compound perspective. Yet, how to achieve that is another matter. As Negi educational ambitions were limited to what she was willing to be in Puerto Rico, she never seriously thought about what

to do with her life. She never considered that she could have a vocation, or an inner drive that would mark the steps that she is supposed to follow to carry on with her life.

In José R. Rosario's words in "On the Ethics and Poetics of How We Make Our Lives: Esmeralda Santiago and the Improvisation of Identity": "It took a school counselor to show interest, press her with the right question ('so what do you want to be when you grow up?'), to point her to the right school […]" (ROSARIO, 2010, p, 113). The school counselor's questioning entices Negi's curiosity about her life plans which is intrinsically connected to the personal mechanisms with which she may construct her own identity because it makes her ponder on her future. Consequently, when the school counselor, Mr. Barone, suggests that she should apply to Performing Arts High School, in Manhattan, Negi senses that it is an opportunity she cannot miss because she visualizes the kinds of perspectives that step can give to her. In "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identity", Avtar Brah states that "Self-reflexive autobiographical accounts often provide critical insights into the politics of location." (BRAH, 1996, p. 180). Negi has to be self-reflexive about her future in the United States for she perceives that she is not only influenced by her family and her Puerto Rican origins, but also by an outsider view which places her hovering between the Puerto Rico of her past and the America of her present and future. Thus, her choice to get a better education represents the chance to evolve with a freer transit to the new cultural places she has to inhabit.

Once Negi is admitted to Performing Arts, she undergoes a process sub-fragmentation for more than having to deal with the identity collapse of living in a new country with an alien cultural code, her life starts being a dichotomous arena for in the Performing Arts School, she notices that she is not part of the dominant social caste of that place and, at home, she also faces the consequences of becoming a different person:

> When Mami accused me of wanting to go to a school for *blanquitos*, she guessed that most of the people in the Performing Arts would be white and, therefore, richer than we were. In Puerto Rico, as in the United States, whiteness meant economic advantage, and when Mami talked about *los blanquitos*, she referred to people from superior status more than to skin color. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 57).

Negi has to notice the odd turn of events her entrance in the Performing Arts School brings to her. At home, although Mami backs up Negi's decision to get a better education, she is suspicious about her daughter's future because she fears that Negi gets too "Americanized" to culturally belong to her own family. In fact, Mami is afraid that Negi is seduced by a world she [Mami] cannot understand and perhaps deep inside is afraid that people like them could never attain: "The implication that I was reaching higher than I ought to by going to

Performing Arts stung, but I wasn't about to defend myself to Mami." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p.58).

Similarly to Kincaid's books, in *Almost a Woman*, the mother-daughter interaction is also a strong point to emphasize Santiago's fragmentation, contributing to the writer's hybridity. Actually, when Peônia Viana Guedes writes about contemporary writers of postcolonial autobiographies she says that they "have explored multicultural stories that engender alternative notions of subjectivity, and **hybrid** subjects, […] a subject that inhabits two different places, expresses herself in two different languages and lives in two different cultures" (GUEDES, 2007, p. 173, my emphasis). In *Almost a Woman*, it is clear that Negi's mother represents Negi's traditions and her Puerto Rican heritage, the part of her culture that is more related to her roots. Nevertheless, her mother insists on preserving a part of her cultural memory that is getting more and more difficult to maintain as Negi assimilates the culture of the United States.

Hence, inside her house Negi feels that she has to be a person she cannot be in that school lest her mother and family think she is abandoning her Puerto Rican values. Due to her entrance in the Performing Arts School, the level of fragmentation in Negi's life gains another dimension because the girl starts inhabiting two realities inside the same geographical space, the Puerto Rican oriented reality of her home and the North American references that unavoidably grow inside her. Her dislocation then gets a different contour, solidifying the notion that there are diasporic levels of dislocations that transcend geography.

In a way, Mami's fear that Negi loses her Puerto Rican roots is justifiable by the fact that, in the Performing Arts, Negi has to progressively reinvent herself to belong to that new place. Since most of her classmates were native New Yorkers who learned to speak, act and behave in a specific way, Negi realizes that she has to construct a kind of social alter ego to survive in that milieu. As she decides to be an artist, she has to be ready to devise a part of herself as a blank slate prone to accommodate the new references she is in contact with.

Ironically, the versatility she has to develop as an artist symbolizes the identity openness she adopts to cope with her life in the United States. For instance, although her language is very connected to her roots and her Puerto Rican identity, she understands the necessity to modulate the way she speaks in order erase her accent: "Accent eradication was important, we were told to widen the range of parts we could play. An actor must be versatile enough to change the way he or she spoke to fit the character being played." (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 68).

In the Performing Arts school, Negi also learns about and suffers with the unfairness of the social system she is inserted in. She realizes that the politics of that location have strong mechanisms to isolate the Other, the ones who do not fit in the societal frame concocted by the idealizations of the WASP mentality: “Mami was right; it was a school where almost all the students and teachers were white.” (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 69). Among the 126 students in that school, fourteen were black, three Puerto Rican and two Asian. As far as teachers are concerned, the systematic ethnic exclusion is even worse: “two of the twenty-four teachers in the arts major and two of the twenty-three academic subject teachers were black.” (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 68).

In such a hard system, individual talent is not enough to guarantee that a person would succeed in life, and if one is part of an ethnic minority, that chance is even more reduced, as it is easy to attest given the poor number of black teachers, and the total absence of teachers of any other ethnicity in that school. Moreover, besides ethnicity, Negi lower-class situation does not help her send away the understandable consciousness of her condition of inferiority. Diaspora thus, once more transcends the geographic and ethnic field to reach another level of personal dislocation, the economic. In that school, Negi feels the pressure of being poor in an environment mostly occupied by wealthy people:

> I recognized and accepted the hierarchy based on talent. It was fair, unlike those set up along racial lines. But there was another distinction among the students – more subtle, though not invisible. I was keenly aware of being a poor kid where many were rich. In Brooklyn, most of my classmates came from my neighborhood and lived in similar circumstances, but Performing Arts drew from all over the city. As I talked to other students, the meagerness of my resources was made real. I knew my family was “disadvantaged”; it said so on the welfare applications. But it was at Performing Arts that I saw firsthand what being “advantaged” meant. (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 69).

Therefore, Negi becomes aware of the unfair social competition she is in. She feels the implications of what really means to be part of a minority, underprivileged in every possible way. In “Can the Subaltern Speak”, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that “Class consciousness remains with the feeling of community that belongs to national links and political organizations, not to that other feeling of community whose structural model is the family.” (SPIVAK, 1994, p. 72). However, to a person like Negi, when family ceases to be a source of class consciousness what is left is seclusion for she cannot feel a sense of communion without a national link, and her lower-class condition limits the links she could try to develop with the other people in that school who are so close to her, but concomitantly, very distant from her reality.

Class consciousness to Negi means being utterly disadvantaged, “It meant that if invited to a party given by a classmate, I said no, because there was no money to buy presents

for rich people. It meant never inviting anyone over, because I didn't want them to see the wet diapers hanging on ropes […]" (SANTIAGO, 1996, p. 70). Thus Negi realizes that her outsider perspective takes place because her condition of poverty hinders the identification she could have with the lifestyle of her schoolmates and almost annihilates her access to the reality of the "advantaged people." In Negi's view:

> Advantaged meant being able to complain about having too many things to do, all of them fun, being unable to decide whether to sleep over at Joanie's or to take an extra dance class a Madame's. It meant that papers handed in to the teacher were typed on crisp white pages, not handwritten with a cheap ball point pen on blue-lined notebook paper from Woolworth's. The advantage was not talent, nor skin color, it was money, and those of us who were disadvantaged had little or none. (SANTIAGO, 1996, p. 70).

According to Negi's view, although gender and ethnicity aggravate her seclusion, poverty is actually the factor that relegates her to the conflicting point of intersection in between the reality she sees in her house with her family and the reality she finds in the Performing Arts High School.

In this context of identity struggle, when Negi decides to become an actress the notion of herself as a hybrid subject becomes inevitable. She notices that she will have to deal with her own "in-betweeness" in order to survive as an individual. However, It comes as no surprise that acting is to Negi a very useful tool which blurs her public and private life, helping her live up to her mother's expectations and soothing the necessity to go through her newly found social milieu. Negi says, "[…] the minute I left the dark crowded apartment where I lived, I was in performance" (Santiago: 1998, p. 74).

It is pertinent to notice, that as far as representation is concerned, Negi's working as an artist and everything that goes with it, principally the artist's ability to juggle with different personas, can work as an identity compass, which helps her conceive her subjectivity as something more flexible and consequently more fluid, alluding to the cultural mobility Sandra Goulart Almeida, in "Cartographies of Diaspora: Dionne Brand's Global Village", talks about:

> It becomes possible, therefore, to speak not of a national or personal identity per se but of identities that will be defined by a process of being in the world – a kind of transient citizenship, a situatedness that points out to how subjects situate and position themselves in a specific spatial context. The experience of cultural mobility is, above all, not only a historical condition but also an intellectual reality, as Rey Chow puts it, "the reality of being intellectual." In the case of migrant and diasporic writings, culture mobility seems to be part not only of the fictional world described, but also of the writers' active roles as intellectuals. (ALMEIDA, 2006, p. 83).

Thus, it is possible to say that some diasporic writers' works also indicate these writers's ideological agenda which may be clearer in the case of memoirs. Moreover, art is the element that gives to Negi a more accomplished understanding of cultural mobility for, in her case, artistic and social transits are performances which complement each other providing

Negi with artistry and social skills to be someone else without losing track of herself. Perhaps, to a person like Santiago, there is a very fine line between life and art. Suffice it to say that Esmeralda Santiago is nowadays a very successful memoirist. In this way, Santiago's narrative evokes the concept of the *Künstlesroman* as developed by Ellen McWilliams in "The Coming of Age of the Female Bildungsroman". According to McWilliams, "a close relative of the Bildungsroman is the Künstlerroman, or novel of the development of the artist." (McWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 18). In this article, McWilliams recognizes the subversive quip of what she calls "female Bildungsroman" for it challenges traditional androcentric narratives, calling attention to some particularities of marginal systems of evolution just like Santiago does in her memoirs:

> From this highly politicized version of female *Bildung*, more recent studies of the genre have focused less on the female Bildungsroman as a straightforward appropriation of the traditional form and have placed greater emphasis on how contemporary female Bildungsromane challenge and renegotiate the traditional paradigm. One of the major complications of this approach to the female Bildungsroman does not relate to gender but to the attack on the humanist ideal of authentic selfhood. Abel, Hirsch, and Langland agree in their discussion of writing from this period that "Although the primary assumption remains underlying the *Bildungsroman* – the evolution of a coherent self – has come under attack in modernist and avant-garde fiction, this assumption remains cogent for women responsive to their needs" (13). Rita Felski takes up this argument in favour of the possibilities of organic development valorized in the classic Bildungsroman in her important essay "The Novel of Self-Discovery: A Necessary Fiction?" in insisting that the question "who writes?" although no longer fashionable in current critical thinking is one that should not be casually overlooked in discussions of women's writing. (McWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 20).

However, the path towards personal visibility demands constant renegotiations of identities. Dislocated subjects invariably have to pick up the pieces of the fragments of their ongoing personal evolution to remold the idea of who they are in accordance with specific stages of their lives. It is not easy to deal with certain levels of fragmentation and the price Negi constantly has to pay is that of isolation. By way of illustration, one can refer to a moment in the book when, after a successful night as an actress at the theater, Negi is celebrating with her colleagues and her family comes in, "The distance was not much, a few feet at most, but it was a continent. I couldn't walk away from them, but neither did I want to be with them and miss the camaraderie of the actors after the show" (SANTIAGO, 1998, p. 144-5). It is not difficult to notice that the symbolic distance she talks about places her in the middle of a cultural/emotional deadlock that raises the question of where exactly she belongs.

Negi's alternative to find her own sites of belonging is somehow related to the idea developed by Stuart Hall, in "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad," when the critic says that "The alternative is not to cling to closed, unitary, homogenous models of 'cultural belonging' but to embrace the wider process – the play of similarity and difference – that are transforming the culture worldwide. This is the path of 'diaspora' […] " (HALL,

1999, p. 18). Eventually Negi overcomes the barriers that occluded her path of self-discovery and heads towards her own subjectivity, as Santiago herself admits in an interview registered by Carmen Dolores Henandez, in "Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interview with Writers," where Santiago says:

> I didn't let the other things that stopped my sisters and brothers stop me. And I think that I had to overcome a lot of fear: a fear of New York, fear of being the object of prejudice and fear of being stereotyped, something that affects your self-esteem you cannot perform well if you are constantly worried about how people are going to perceive you, and one of the first things that I did way of my personality was to stop worrying about what other people were going to think: the Puerto Ricans in my neighborhood because I was leaving to study in Manhattan, my mother because I was becoming Americanized and doing things she didn't particularly agree with but which I knew I had to do. A lot of us never really lost that fear about what people were going to think. (HERNANDEZ, 1997, p. 167-8).

Santiago suggests that her personal ethic code cannot be understood or accepted on conventional terms. Her binary epistemology encompasses elements that are hybrid par excellence since her diaspora presupposes an identity division. However, this is the kind of division that does not sever, but compartments the sub-levels of one's identities. Therefore, it is possible to infer that Santiago learned to take advantage of all the fragments within her personality to use them as specific points of adaptation, which greatly contributed for her to come up with a more expanded cosmovision. By assuming her cultural hyphen, Esmeralda Santiago comes to terms with her own hybridity and her own multiculturalism as she admits in the aforementioned interview given to Adriana Bianco:

> I'm married to an American, my children grew up in the United States, but I feel the ties to Puerto Rico. I look for the good in the two cultures and take advantage of both […] That's my life …multicultural and bilingual. I think the world is changing to such an extent that we Puerto Ricans were the first to become globalized, because the world is moving toward forming partnerships and we are enriched by feeling that we can have two cultures. Without losing our roots, we can understand and celebrate other cultures. We are more complete individuals –adding not subtracting. (BIANCO, 2008, p. 2-3).

José R. Rosario sustains that some key events in Esmeralda Santiago's Life does not happen because she had a life plan or something like that, but that those events were ignited by acts which "tend to rely more on serendipity and spontaneity." (ROSARIO, 2010, p. 113). A case in point is the moment when Negi applies to Performing Arts High School. Although Negi's life in that school is depicted in more details in *Almost a Woman*, there is a passage in *When I Was Puerto Rican* that better illustrates the point Rosario's article makes. In the last chapter of her first memoir, Santiago writes that she decides to visit her school "A decade after [her] graduation from Performing Arts." (SANTIAGO, 2006, p. 269).

Over there, she meets her mentor at Harvard University who curiously was one of the teachers in the audition panel at the High School of Performing Arts at the time of Negi's audition. The teacher says that she remembers the moment when Negi approaches to her audition. She tells Santiago that the audition panel asked her to leave so that they could laugh,

“because it was so funny to see a fourteen-year-old Puerto Rican jabbering out a monologue about a possessive mother-in-law at the turn of the century, the words so incomprehensible because they went so fast.” (SANTIAGO, 1993, p. 269). The teacher adds that they admired the courage Negi had to do what she did. After listening to her tutor, Santiago playfully calls her courage “chutzpah” and laughs about the whole thing, showing the level of serenity she finds inside herself which, in turn, signals that although her life was quite hard, she manages to find her personal redemption.

Rosario is right when he recognizes that some facts in Santiago’s life happened by happenstance. However, Santiago’s courage and perseverance are perhaps what form that difference, to use Stuart Hall’s terms, “that difference that makes a difference.” (Hall: 1997, p. 59). Santiago’s memories depicts the trajectory of a girl who strives to cope with the many layers of dislocations she finds throughout her life and who tries to define the terms on which her identity is supposed to be developed. Santiago uses her memories as departing points for self-analyses and by doing so establishes a very particular writing style which sounds as a kind of “behind the scene” testimony which unveils the implications of a diasporic marginality sub-existing below the surface of mainstream American society.

The life history Santiago narrates in her memoirs is an account of the endurance of a person who succeeds against all odds because she has faith in herself and with that she contradicts hegemonic expectations which pre-condemns underprivileged subjects, like Santiago herself to a progressive descent into subjective invisibility which usually end up reaching total personal erasure. By retrieving her memories, Santiago speaks, and makes her voice sound loud and clear. Indeed, her voice can be heard by all those people with the inherent potential to reinvent themselves, without losing the focus of their own dreams. People who have the soul of artists, for they know how to make their own lives an art work and because of that, develop that kind of spirit not to be subdued, free enough to make the transitions life requires from all of us. People, who in spite of starting their lives dancing to the rhythm fate, eventually take control of their identities to become “ballerinas of letters.”

6 CONCLUSION

The issues investigated so far in this dissertation lead me to the conclusion that autobiographies provide some points of references to some writers, for they give those authors the possibility to revisit some events in their past, the ones which had a great impact on the way those writers conceive themselves. In these life revisiting processes, those writers have the opportunity to understand what they were from a chronological and, specifically talking about the case of the writers who inspired this dissertation, geographical distance. It is interesting to see, how their identities evolve into an ongoing path of self-discovery and how their realities, although difficult, provide them with a unique perspective that might sound highly unusual for some individuals accustomed to being in contact with conventional ways of comprehending the identities constructed by mainstream medias, which, for a long time, were only concerned with fixed, linear subjective depictions which invariably denied visibility to those people who do not take part in such identity impositions because they detected the systematic exclusion of the different, the non-hegemonic from the dominating poles of power.

As some writers who saw themselves out of the ethnic, social, cultural, and sexual hegemonic constructions of subjectivity stopped to think about the reasons that placed them in a kind of ideological opposition to the mechanisms of power and domination that invariably relegated the underprivileged, the subaltern, and the marginal to a lesser role in the stages of post-colonial realities, they might have realized that since the very beginning of their lives they forcefully had to go through processes of fragmentations for their personal trajectories did not follow the “script” established by the axes of power that dictate “behavior formulas for life in society.” However, when they resort to their memories to tell their life stories, not only do they subvert formulaic strategies for identity prescriptions, but they also reclaim the right to speak for themselves, to say that they have niches of identification which can only be understood in accordance with their own terms.

Nonetheless, the level of fragmentation that some marginal subjects go through can be even more dramatic if we consider the situation of those who were dislocated from what they used to call home to some places that in many levels could be considered the nemesis of that initial idea of home. Naturally, when an individual is out of hegemonies of power, living in an environment of subaltern politics, home is by no means a fixed and unified concept, and the process of deterritorialization, of geographical dislocation, can further shatter the construction

of a selfhood which is already floating over visions of unequal sites of possible identifications. Once some subjects start inhabiting host lands, they might see themselves forced to look at the Other whilst being the Other. Therefore, autobiographies can be a very useful vehicle to give voice to the people who transit in this identity shattering process of self-(re)construction because, by writing about their lives, some diasporic subjects can understand how their subjectivities lead them to construct their fields of identifications and share their non-linear realities with people who somehow identify with the things they have to say. In this sense, Jamaica Kincaid's and Esmeralda Santiago's narratives offer very meaningful points of investigation to understand the singular identity questions that resulted in the kinds individual constructions both writers were capable of providing, given their natural talent for self-expression.

As matter of fact, the two writers have similar life trajectories. The two of them started their lives in countries which were subordinated to imperialist matrixes and felt the power of these matrixes, which by cultural enforcement, tried to impose their systems of values on their colonies as it is easy to attest when the writers mentioned the schools their narrating I's have to attend in Antigua and Puerto Rico which systematically sold the cultural and ideological *ethos* of the imperialist centers to which they were subjected, endorsing Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffen's words in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, when they state that:

> English literature was used by the British colonial power all over the world to help control and subjugate the colonized subjects through using Western literature as an example of the model culture with which the 'natives' should try to emulate. Thus, "native' culture was to model itself upon the image of the Imperial power (ASHCROFT et al, 2002, p. 10)
> .

To resist being stratified by the imperialist powers that, direct or indirectly, invaded their home countries, the two writers' protagonists had the values and cultural codes of their homeland which, to a certain extent, were embodied by their mothers. Curiously, at first the maternal figure was a very strong point of reference to Kincaid and Santiago's narrating voices, but later they started questioning how "healthy" the almost unconditional admiration they devoted to their mothers would be for them to develop their own identities according to their own views.

Notwithstanding, because of the clash between the two different cultural codes, that of their homelands and that of colonizers' systems of values being progressively installed in their lands, Annie John and Negi came to develop hybrid perspectives that refused imperialist and social stereotypes and forcefully questioned the discrepancies of both cultural niches they had to inhabit. In this sense, they experienced an emotional diaspora because their sense of

identity had to transit between two cultures, which may validate the idea of *Annie John* and *When I Was Puerto Rican* as pre-diaporic books because even without a geographical dislocation, the sense of deterritorialization and even assimilation legitimates a certain diasporic claim that pervades both books.

In Kincaid's *Lucy* and in Santiago's *Almost a Woman*, both narrators also avoided being labeled with essentialist stereotypes which assured a certain level of autonomy in their journeys of self-construction. Once in the United States, Lucy's and Negi's identity negotiations gained different contours because they have to adapt themselves to alien milieus which, sometimes tacitly, sometimes overtly, relegated them to a level of minor importance in understood hierarchies of citizenship and other social interactions. Lucy's process of adaptation was a little bit more individual, more introspective than Negi's because the Antiguan girl had to live with another family, thus she did not have the support of her own family to help her adjust her identity perspectives to the new locale she started to live in, which was not something entirely harmful because by understanding the epistemology of that family, Lucy had a sample that helped her have a good notion of the idiosyncrasies of the American society. In a way, it was that family that somehow mediated Lucy's inner transition from Antigua to the United States.

However, although Negi traveled to the United States with her family, it did not mean that she had an easy process of adaptation to that new place. Her family's meager financial resources and her mother complete denial of everything related to the American culture principally, the English language, were social deterrents that prevented Negi from mingling with the American society she was inserted in. Yet, as little by little Negi perceives that she has to play social roles in order to survive in the cultural hyphen she lives, she used education to mediate her transit in the bicultural dilemma she saw herself caught in. Hence, Negi's personality and the identities she came to develop are deeply linked to the binary and antagonistic input she receives in the United States since, on the one hand, she has to partake in her family environment, an ambience largely related to her Spanish oriented origins, which sometimes holds the hybrid vim she felt growing inside her; on the other hand, to guarantee a certain relative private identity independence, Negi expands her horizons of subjective possibilities when she decided to become an actress for it gave her a personal flexibility that facilitated her interaction with other Americans as well as the assimilation of their cultural values.

Therefore, Kincaid's *Lucy* and Santiago's *Almost a Woman* could be taken as post-diasporic books for both of them give voice to their protagonists while they were living in the

United States, that is, after their diasporic moves. Both writers retrieve their memories to synthesize the fragments that encompass the idea they have of what kind of individuals they are in an exercise of self-definition by self-investigation, which may work as a chronological tracking of their identity evolutions and critical analyses of their lives and of their whereabouts, trying to extract some meaning from the events that happened in their lives and greatly contribute to the formation of their personalities.

Kincaid and Santiago have rather similar life stories in that both writers come from underprivileged origins, from colonial realities, and later had to go to a first world country with oppressive politics of cultural enforcement. However, Kincaid and Santiago developed their subjectivity in singular ways which showed two different individuals with some points in common, proving that nowadays it impossible to understand the Other without individualizing the situational aspects that allowed those individuals to be who they are. I believe this may justify the crescent interest in autobiographical narratives since these works offer a rare opportunity of an awareness of the life of the other in accordance with the other's views, which, although not devoid of partiality, are at least legitimate enough to restrain external impositions and privilege the underprivileged in accordance with their aesthetic and ideological discursive sites.

Perhaps, the rationale of individualization of experiences is the greatest contribution of autobiographical narratives to discussions about identity in diasporic studies, for they can help open the way for a theoretical field of investigation which is progressively more concerned with the exceptions, with the de-centered, with the marginal voices, than with the rule(r)s that were always more interested in the maintenance of traditional configurations of universalist tendencies and power relations, excluding those, who like Jamaica Kincaid and Esmeralda Santiago, have the potential to, by expressing their difference, make a difference.

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