

## Globalization, Creolisation and 'Manichaeism delirium.'<sup>1</sup>

Jamaica Kincaid's dialogue with postcolonial "radically non-racial humanism"<sup>2</sup> in *The Autobiography of My Mother*

The advance of globalization impacted the way in which we theorize about the relation between nationality/ethnicity and culture. Globalization has challenged the purity and integrity of cultures and thus redefined the meaning of identity that in contemporary times is placed at the crossroads of cultural flows. This identity is no longer static; it comes into being through movement and migration. To describe cultural processes triggered by massive movements of populations across the modern world a whole plethora of terms has been used such as: hybridity, syncretism and creolisation. They have been the cognitive tools with which theoreticians tried to make sense of the "aesthetic of chaos," to use Edouard Glissant's words, that emerged after breaking down ethnic, racial linguistic and national boundaries. These terms have been borrowed from the critical discourse on Caribbean culture, popularized by postcolonial studies and reused by metropolitan critics and theorists who had looked to the Caribbean for models to theorize about the articulation and inscription of diverse cultural identities that come into being in metropolitan contact zones.<sup>3</sup> These critics of post-nationalist stand have conferred on the Caribbean taxonomy a new and positive valence. Deracination and the lack of identifying relationship with a place, the experience of exile and migration, traumatic as they may be, in the long run are the condition *sin qua none* for creation of a hybrid identity that transcends the concepts of ethnicity or nationality which most contemporary critics find confining and debilitating.

The strong purchase of Caribbean critical formulae in the western academia has helped to increase the popularity of Caribbean writers whose lives and creations have been hailed as a model of postmodern metropolitan existence. They are considered a vanguard of globalization and a paragon of cultural diversity that nowadays has become the most salient feature of great metropolises. The concept of hybrid identity, which they embody, is no longer the hallmark of the Caribbean and the term Creolisa-

<sup>1</sup> "Good – Evil, Beauty – Ugliness, White – Black: such are the characteristic pairings of the phenomenon that, making use of an expression of Dide and Guiraud, we shall call 'Manichaeism delirium.'" Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. p 183. Hereinafter cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gilroy. *Against Race: Identifying Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. (15) "Radically non-racial humanism" or "planetary humanism" is Gilroy's vision of a future in which such "outmoded principles of differentiation" as race will have lost their value.

<sup>3</sup> Louise Mary Pratt's term.

tion and its synonyms, which they have coined, are more frequently used to describe the aftermath of globalization and global mobility than to describe the problematic entangled cultural heritage produced by the fundamental inequalities offered by imperialism: slavery, colonization and indenture.

Some Caribbean critics<sup>4</sup> object to the extraction and expropriation and of these concepts by metropolitan critics, considering such scholarly syncretism "theoretical piracy,"<sup>5</sup> but they disregard the fact that the transposition of these terms was encouraged by some of the most prominent figures of Caribbean literary corpus. For example, Edouard Glissant, an influential writer from Martinique, supported the radical shift in the applicability of the concept of Creolisation, announcing in 1996 that "the whole world is creolising itself."<sup>6</sup> Glissant has divided the New World into Meso-America of the indigenous people (in Quebec, Canada, the USA); Euro-America made of the descendants of European settlers and European immigrants who cultivate their European customs; and Neo-America comprising the Caribbean, the Brazilian North-East, the Guianas, Curacao, the southern US, the Caribbean coasts of Venezuela and Columbia, and a considerable part of Central America and Mexico. Neo-America is, in Glissant's opinion, the major site of creolisation in the New World. In Neo-America, the African legacy is of paramount importance because "what is interesting in the creolisation phenomenon, in the phenomenon that constitutes Neo-America, is that people of this Neo America are very special. In it Africa prevails" (*Introduction* 14). According to Glissant, the collective memory of slavery acted there as a catalyst for the process of racial, linguistic and cultural mixing – it made Neo-America open to unceasing transmutation that Glissant called Relation. It is this constant flux and mixing of different cultural tributaries that makes Neo America the prototype of the global village. The Caribbean, argues Glissant, "may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly, one of the explosive regions where it seems to be gathering strength."<sup>7</sup>

Glissant pits Neo-America against Euro-America, where creolisation takes place but proceeds, to his mind, at a different pace and is far from being complete, as it is clear from Glissant's Neo- American vantage-point. For Glissant creolisation is essentially a positive development,

provided that the cultural elements that that are put into contact [are] necessarily 'equivalent in value' so that creolisation can take place successfully. That is to say that if some of the cultural elements that are put in relation are seen as inferior to others, creolisation does not really occur. It happens but in a bastard and unfair way. In

<sup>4</sup> Alison Donnell and Mimi Sheller for example.

<sup>5</sup> As Mimi Sheller argues in her chapter "Theoretical Piracy on the High Seas of Global Culture": "The explosive, politically engaged and conflictual mode of conceptualizing Creolisation in the nationalist period of the 1970s has been met with a later usage, from a different (metropolitan) location, in which Creolisation refers to any encounter and mixing of dislocated cultures. This dislocation has enabled non-Caribbean metropolitan theorists to pirate the terminology of Creolisation for their own projects of de-centering and global mobility." (Sheller 191)

<sup>6</sup> Eduard Glissant. *Introduction* 15

<sup>7</sup> Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. 33.

countries of creolisation like the Caribbean or Brazil, where cultural elements come into contact as a result of slave trade, the African and the black constituents were consistently denigrated. Under these circumstances, creolisation still takes place but leaves a bitter and uncontrollable residue. (*Introduction* 18)

Glissant puts high value on all ethnocentric movements, which, in his opinion, revalorized indigenous and black cultures making it possible for them to meet with Euro-American culture in terms of absolute equality: "creolisation demands that the heterogeneous elements that are in relation 'intervalorize' each other; i.e. there be no denigration or diminution of being, either from within or without in this contact or intermixing" (*Introduction* 18). Movements like Négritude, Black Arts Movement, African Personality Movement, or Harlem Renaissance were, in other words, the prerequisite of creolisation. Yet, as Glissant points out racial absolutism and essentialism were nothing more than transitory phase.<sup>8</sup> For Glissant the future of the denigrated and the dispossessed was in creolisation, as he eloquently argues in his book *Caribbean Discourse*, which repeatedly urges Caribbean people to break away from the confining notions of roots and concentrate on the plurality that is a multitude of infinite relations that cannot be accounted for by the all-subsuming idea of black essence.

Glissant believed in the vistas of Creolisation and saw syncretism as an asset, and there are not many writers who would dare to challenge this icon of postcolonial critical orthodoxy and contest his diagnosis of affairs. Jamaica Kincaid is one of these few dissident authors with Caribbean pedigree whose deepest view of life are not in accord with Glissant's cautious optimism. In her putatively autobiographical fiction she focuses on the underside of Caribbean reality, where Creolisation does often occur in an unproductive manner, and she often dramatizes the feasibility of creolisation and exposes it as a fallacy and utopia. In this essay, I want to offer a reading of Kincaid's 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother*<sup>9</sup> that grapples with the issues raised by Glissant. I chose this novel not only because of its subject-matter but also because it received a surprisingly mixed critical response. I was astounded by the vehemence of negative critical commentaries which censured the novel as a misanthropic tale, pervaded by nihilism and ensnared in the Manichean logic of Western color consciousness.<sup>10</sup> I intend to argue that in this controversial novel Kincaid writes against the grain of the postcolonial writ that would like to see creolisation as a cultural program for the Caribbean region and the whole world. Kincaid's stance is not

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, nobody puts it in better words than Sartre who announced in his famous essay *Orphée Noir*, preface to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1948. p. xl ff; qtd in Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* p. 132-3) that Négritude was "a position of negativity" and "anti-racist racism;" It was "a transition and not a conclusion, a means, not an ultimate end" and "a minor term of dialectical progression" (p.xl ff.).

<sup>9</sup> The novel, which is ostensibly a biography of Kincaid's mother, in spite of its title departs from Kincaid's autobiographical project and presents the life of a fictional woman –Xuela -- who, as Kincaid observed in one of her interviews, could have been Kincaid's mother, or Kincaid herself (interview with Brady).

<sup>10</sup> Cathleen Schine *New York Times Book Review* wrote that it is "a brilliant fable of willed nihilism,"

congruent with the currently fashionable ideology of identity formation and her novel --*The Autobiography of My Mother* -- shows that the historical prejudices continue to plague people of postcolonial origins such as Kincaid. Against the uplift and rapture of critics who exult in the potential of creolisation, Kincaid projects a contrary view, which is, to a certain degree, similar to that of nationalistic thinkers for whom creolisation or the so-called métissage or hybridity are, to misquote Gilroy, a litany of pollution and impurity.<sup>11</sup>

I also want to contend that Kincaid's novel engages in critical dialogue with those conciliatory Caribbean critics who thought that black people should cast away the weight of the past in order to face a better future, a pathway marked out by cultural syncretism in which "[t]here is no Negro mission; there is no white burden" (Fanon 229). Among them is Frantz Fanon, whose seminal study *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is generally considered to be a subtext to Kincaid's novel. In his book Fanon asserts in that in modern societies where scientism rules history does not matter (Fanon 130-2). Consequently, in Fanon's opinion, it is futile to dwell on the past and to expect whites to be sorry about the past. It is wrong to try to punish whites for what their ancestors did to the black race or to claim reparations for the wrongs inflicted on the black race. For Fanon, the black man should be "[his] own foundation," (Fanon 231) somebody who does not allow "the massiveness of the past" to "bog [him] down" (Fanon 230). I propose to read Kincaid's novel in the light of the following citations:

In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself man of any past. I do not want to exult the past at the expense of my present and my future. (Fanon 226)

and:

I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. (Fanon 229)

*The Autobiography of My Mother* is also an explicit response to Derek Walcott, to whom the novel is dedicated. Derek Walcott was familiar with Glissant's work and he found there a corroboration of his own notions about the captivating and destructive power of history and the future vested in Creolisation. Like Glissant, Walcott was skeptical about the search for racial origins and "roots" and about the whole nationalistic concept of cultural continuity. For both of them, the obsessive preoccupation with history of loss and uprooting was a dangerous activity grounded in Western ideology. In keeping with Fanon and Glissant, Walcott claimed that past can never be recovered, it can never be a key to the present. Walcott's thoughts on history expressed in his essay "The Muse of History" add a necessary context to Kincaid's dedication:

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<sup>11</sup> Ethnic, racial and national purists believe that there is an unbridgeable gap between histories and experiences of black and white people and hybridity, caused by miscegenation and fusion of different cultural forms, is a sign of contamination.

But who in the New World does not have a horror of the past, whether his ancestor was a torturer or a victim? Who in the depth of conscience is not silently screaming for pardon or revenge?" ("The Muse of History" 4)

In the revised version of the same essay published in *Critics on Caribbean Literature*, Walcott adds:

In the New World the servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of the slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters. [. . .] The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a culpable force ("The Muse of History" 39)

Kincaid's novel presents an unexpected stand within the framework of contemporary postcolonial criticism -- it can be branded as a literature of recrimination and revenge. It not only foregrounds history as culpable force but also rages against the descendants of victors whose guilt persists through generations and cannot be redeemed through expiation. According to Paravisini-Gebert, the novel can make the readers doubt whether Kincaid and "her characters are [. . .] ready to move beyond the accusatory stage in which the victims energy is consumed by the anger and frustration ranting against the evil of the past" (Paravisini-Gebert 42).

I intend to demonstrate that the fact that the novel is dedicated to Derek Walcott is an infallible indication of Kincaid's disavowal of ideas disseminated by critics such as Glissant, Walcott and Fanon whose oeuvre can be seen as an attempt to erase the past and consequently, to Kincaid's mind, give the West a clear conscience. Giovanna Covi, who in her comprehensive study of Kincaid's work -- *Jamaica Kincaid's Prismatic Subjects, Making Sense of Being in the World* -- maintains that such a personal novel should have been dedicated to Kincaid's mother, misses the irony of the dedication. Kincaid, who admits that *The Autobiography of My Mother* is a bitter and angry book, a book that she nevertheless felt compelled to write, commented that: "the book is not autobiographical except in this one way -- [it] derives from the observation that my own mother should not have any children" (interview with Garner). My perception is that this novel departs from autobiographical precepts and advances an attack on the self-serving humanism of metropolitan humanism which is aimed at "a leveling of the West and the Rest by the experience of dislocation" (Donnell 85).<sup>12</sup> Kincaid does not endorse hybridity and relationality in postcolonial theory of late and her attitude is certainly not *au courant* in postcolonial circles. She refuses to play up to the widely accepted of postcolonial dogmas thus putting into reverse gear the thoughts of readers single-mindedly intent on finding in her novel a corroboration of Walcott's ideas.

Kincaid once denied being a political writer: "when I write I don't have any politics. I am political in the sense that I exist. When I write I am concerned with the

<sup>12</sup> According to Donnell "[it is] a concept understandably alluring for postcolonial metropolitan critics both western and none western, who have been plagued by their painful awareness of their own privilege and their inability to respond productively to their freedom and power in the face of the oppressions and restrictions which govern the lives of their indirect subjects of study." (85)

human condition as I know it" ("Jamaica Kincaid and the Resistance to Canons"). It seems that Kincaid's concern with truthful rendering in literature of the human condition as she knows it and as she experienced it was what drove her to take a stance against Creolisation and concomitant attempts to renounce the reckoning of the past for the sake of a better future. Unlike Glissant, Walcott and Fanon, Kincaid is very cautious about any project in which the personal integrity of a black man or woman depends upon the oblivion of the past. In her essay "In History" published in *Callaloo*, Kincaid poises a question: "What history should mean to someone like me?" -- a question that she only partially answers: "Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound and each breath I take and expel healing and opening the wound again, over and over, or is it a long moment that begins anew each day since 1492?"

For Kincaid's protagonist -- Xuela, likewise, the past had a far stronger hold than the future -- she lives in "the spell of history" (AMM 218). Contrary to what she was taught at school she realizes that "history was not a large stage filled with commemorations [. . .] with the sounds of victory [. . .] history was not only the past: it was the past and it was also the present" (AMM 138-9). "It made me sad to know," says Xuela, "that I did not look straight ahead of me, I always looked back, sometimes I looked to the side, but mostly I looked back" (AMM 139). And while she gazes wistfully back, "sifting" the past, "trying to forget some things and never succeeding, trying to keep the memory of others more strongly alive and never succeeding," (AMM 102) she learns that it is impossible to loosen the past's grip on the present and the future. In words of Covi, Xuela is one of these subjectivities who "cast a gaze on their own past, into their own origin, instead of aiming at an idealized goal in the future" (Covi 101).

The novel, which contains the quintessence of Kincaid's dark vision of the influence of the vicissitudes of history on the Caribbean people, elucidates the pernicious effects of colonization on the colonized but also colonizing peoples. It explores the "bitter and uncontrollable residue" that the incomplete creolisation<sup>13</sup> leaves in its wake and counters West Indian colonial history with "Kincaid's furious condemnation of evils produced by domination."<sup>14</sup> The main protagonist of the novel -- Xuela Claudette Richardson -- is the embodiment of the history of miscegenation and victimization -- "the historical process that has led to widespread deformity" (Paravisini-Gebert 148). She is a daughter of half-Scottish half-African father and a Carib mother whose death at childbirth leaves Xuela forlorn and vulnerable. Her father, a policeman and a magistrate, is a cold, pitiless man whose presence "was a sign of misfortune."<sup>15</sup> He has dedicated his life to amassing a fortune and creating a dynasty and in doing this "he wears the mask of benign colonial power that covers his pleasure in robbing and humiliating others" (AMM 40). While the father epitomizes anguish produced by ethnic confusion, Xuela's mother embodies the tragic fate of Caribbean Indians as representative of the human cost of colonization. Both of them remain to Xuela unknown-- nobody

<sup>13</sup> The term is borrowed from Erna Brodber who used it to describe one of her female characters Miss Manda. *The People of My Jamaican Village, 1817--194*. p 73.

<sup>14</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Jamaica Kincaid, A Critical Companion*. 42.

<sup>15</sup> *The Autobiography of My Mother* 101. Hereinafter cited parenthetically as AMM.

ever recalls her dead mother or her people; nobody can pierce through the pretense of her father's identity, not even himself. It is this loss of maternal and paternal connection that makes Xuela suffer from incomplete creolisation.

Xuela, who is the narrator of the novel, is engaged in the process of psychic self exploration, as she recounts the story of her life from the vantage point of her old age. She is seventy years old, as the novel commences, and she is lonely and childless, having consciously repudiated the heritage of miscegenation and defeat that is the birthright of the Dominican people – "people regarded as not real, the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low" (AMM 30-1). In words of Lisabeth Paravisini-Gebert "she refuses to bear children through whom the chain of destruction and degradation can perpetuate itself" (Paravisini-Gebert 151). She has chosen not to give birth the next generation of men and women, who will continue to spread ethnic confusion and who will carry around the stigma of defeat attributed to colonized people. Xuela treasures racial purity, which she associates with her idealized dead mother, and thinks that mixing of races, embodied in her father, leads only to depravity and degeneration.

Whereas Xuela is "the abstraction of Caribbean people history of wretchedness and denigration," (Paravisini-Gebert 157) described in detail by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, other characters have also historically assigned roles. They illustrate what Fanon called, different conditions of colonizing and colonized people. They stand for specific historical archetypes, their identity is confounded by the history of subjugation and victimization. The book is about roots and uprooting and the difficulty in negotiating a meaningful identity without "an ancestor as foundation," to use Toni Morrison's phrase, without deciphering the past and disentangling many different threads of which the present is woven. Xuela, whose ancestral lines have crumbled (AMM 200), would like to bridge the fissures created by the upheavals of history: "to know all [about the past] is an impossibility, but only such a thing would satisfy [her]. To reverse the past would bring [her] complete happiness" (AMM 226). Xuela's predicament demonstrates that the way subjectivity is construed is contingent on the operations of history and that spiritual repossession of the past under the given circumstances is an impossible task.

Creolisation implies that the idea that one's self can be articulated through others who represent different cultural tributaries that shape the present. Against all odds, Xuela, orphaned by her mother and estranged from her father, tries to find out who she is first and foremost in relation to the people who made her. She tries in vain to recuperate the past by conjuring up the events of their life and by deciphering the remnants of the past encoded in her very name:

And your very name, whatever it might be, eventually was not the gateway to who you really were and you could not even say to yourself 'My own name is Xuela Claudette Desvarieux.' This was my mother's name, but I cannot say it was her real name, for in a life like hers, as in mine, what is a real name? My own name is her name, Xuela Claudette, and in the place of Desvarieux is Richardson, which is my father's name; but who are those people Claudette, Desvarieux, Richardson? To look at it, to look at it, could only fill you with despair, the humiliation could only make

you intoxicated with self-hatred. For a name of a person is at once her history recapitulated and abbreviated, and on declaring it that person holds herself high or low, and the person hearing it holds the declarer high or low. (AMM 78-80)

Xuela's views on creolisation conform to Victorian tenets, when creolisation was believed to bring about evil and corruption. According to that 19<sup>th</sup> century racist ideology, miscegenation threatened the pre-established cultural and national identity, and moreover it led to moral depravity, duplicity, viciousness, unmerited power and greediness. This notorious stereotype of Creoles and hybrids is fleshed out in the character of Xuela's opportunist father Alfred, named after Alfred the Great, fathered by a Scotsman and Mary of African people, surname unknown. The only thing that Xuela can say about her father for sure is that "the distinction between man and people remain[ed] important to Alfred, who [was] aware that the African people came off the boat as a part of a horde, already demonized, mind blank to everything but suffering," while the white man "came off the boat of his own volition, seeking to fulfill a destiny, a vision of himself he carried in his mind's eye" (AMM 181). Alfred has also a vision of himself in his mind's eye and that vision induces him to reject completely the African people and their culture and customs as "the belief of the illegitimate, the poor, the low" (AMM 38). He comes to "despise all who behaved like the African people; not all who looked like them, only all who behaved like them, all who were defeated, doomed, conquered, poor, diseased, head bowed down, mind numbed from cruelty" (AMM 187).

When Xuela thinks of her father's face she pictures the evils of mixing of races. His skin is "the color of corruption – gold, copper, ore" (AMM 181). His red hair is the mark of his father – a Scottish drunk who left in his wake many red-haired, mostly illegitimate children. His face is likened to a map of the world that encompasses continents, sleeping volcanoes, treacherous mountain ranges and deserts; to go beyond the horizon outlined by that face "was to fall into the thick blackness of nothing" (91). His mixed blood is to Xuela "a parable of moral impurity" (197).

By forging an alliance with the colonizer for the sake of material gains, the father contributes to keeping the social hierarchies bequeathed by colonialism intact. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the Carib people who lost not only "the right to be themselves," but also "themselves" (AMM 198). They "had been defeated and then exterminated, thrown away like the weeds in a garden" (AMM 16). They are despised by both blacks and whites for their inadequate survival skills. The African people, who pride themselves in having survived, suffer nevertheless generation after generation the humiliating effects of slavery and colonization. They are not only dispossessed but also served from the intuitive cognition of the world they inhabit. They have "come to believe in the ghost of the people who conquered them." (AMM 133) Having internalized their religious beliefs and ideas of the colonizer, they are "reduced to shadows," they "are walking in a trance, no longer in their own minds" (AMM 133). They are compared to zombies, the living dead, intoxicated not by Obeah sorcerers but the religion and beliefs of the white man. They "have lost connection to wholeness, to an inner life of [their] own invention" (AMM 133) and therefore they no longer trust what



they instinctively know because, for example, to admit having seen a *jablesse*<sup>16</sup> "was to say that [they] lived in a darkness from which [they] could not be redeemed" (49).

In Xuela's opinion, for the creolized people, half dead and half alive, to despise themselves "was almost a law of nature" (52). Xuela's black teacher, "humiliated, humble and small," best illustrates what Fanon calls "an existential deviation of the Negro" that is the source of his/her neurosis. The African teacher is abjectly apologetic about her roots, which she was taught to believe, were "a source of humiliation and self-loathing." Thus the teacher "[wears] despair like an article of clothing, like a mantle, or a staff on which she [leans] constantly, a birthright she [will] pass to [the children put in her care]" (AMM 15). She is a living proof that colonial education and attendant acculturation have led "to a humiliation so permanent it would replace your own skin" (AMM 78-80).

In spite of Xuela's compound Carib-Scottish-African origins, she repeatedly professes her affinity with the exterminated Carib people. She expresses a wish to see people in whose faces she can recognize herself and most of all she would like to see the face of her diseased mother, who often comes to visit Xuela in her sleep showing her only the hem of her dress and her heels, as she descends a ladder. Xuela never sees her face which emphasizes the futility of her wish – the tragic verdicts of history are irreversible and the crime of creolisation can not be wiped out. When Xuela thinks of her mother's skin, which "was not the result of a fateful meeting between conqueror and vanquished" she pictures it as "only itself, an untroubled fact" (AMM 197) and she in vain tries to envisage the simplicity of life before the conquest. Conversely, when she sees her father's face she thinks of the degenerative effects of interbreeding.

Yet in spite of Xuela's mystification of the pre-Columbian past and her dissidence from the politics of opportunism embodied by her father, Xuela cannot help but notice how much in common she has with him: "I was like him," she admits. "I was no like my mother who was dead. I was like him. He was alive" (108). Xuela's mother who was brought up by French nuns to be "long-suffering, unquestioning, modest and whishing-to-die-soon person" (AMM 199) was like other native people dead even as she was alive. Xuela imagines "her sadness, her weakness, her long-lost-ness, the crumbling of ancestral lines, her dejectedness, the false humility that was really defeat" (AMM 200). Xuela never chooses to go to her mother's people "the living fossils" (AMM 197) penned in a reservation, not far way from her father's house. Instead she constantly finds herself in her father's orbit drawn to him by his irresistible inner power, his ability to negotiate a space for his own subjectivity. In his fate, she sees an outline of her own life. Her motherlessness is comparable to his loss of his only son and heir; death makes them both – Xuela and her father -- small, insignificant and helpless against life. They both turn to self-love as a means of fending themselves against the cruel verdicts of fate. Xuela does not love her father and never believes in his father's love of her, but she is awed by the sheer power of his will:

<sup>16</sup> In Afro-Caribbean folklore *jablesse* is a she-devil that lures people to death. The word comes from the French *diablesse*.

My father had taken the world as he found it and made it subject to his whims, even as other men made him subject of their whims in the world as they had found it. He had never questioned these worlds within worlds. . . . He was a rich man; there were men richer than he was, and men richer than that. They would all come to the same end, nothing could save them. He had lived long enough to have lost the belief that they had some future value, but this dabbling in the material gains of this world was like a drug: he was addicted to it, he could not just give it up. (124)

Despite being inebriated by the white man's dreams, the father is alive because he succeeds in exercising agency and though it is wrong agency that he is exercising, for Xuela, it is preferable to no agency at all, to impotence, helplessness and passivity that characterize the native population. Like her father, who set himself on the course of becoming a master of his own life, so childless Xuela, "who becomes her own lifelong abortionist" (Lore Segal 24) becomes "an expert at being a ruler of [her] own life in this one limited regard" (AMM 115). Her agency is also wrong, but the authority she wields with respect to her life and her body is the only authority she can have. Xuela decides to stay childless as it is only in this limited way that she can manifest her dissent from the world as she knows it: "Each month my body would swell slightly, mimicking the state of maternity, longing to conceive, mourning my heart's and mind's decision never to bring forth a child. I refused to belong to a race, I refuse to accept a nation" (AMM 225-6).

Contrary to Fanon's mulatto women for whom it is "essential to avoid falling back into pit of niggerhood" (Fanon 47) and who therefore endeavor "to whiten the race" by marrying white men and bearing fair-skinned children, Xuela does not marry the white doctor Philip with a view to becoming a mother and whitening the race. Neither does she aspire to raise her social standing and become a lady – a category of human beings that she vehemently despises. Her dislike of ladies is most conspicuous in her treatment of Moira – Philip's first wife whom she stealthily poisons: "She was a lady and I was a woman and this distinction was to her important; it allowed her to believe that I could not associate the ordinary, the everyday – a bowel movement, a cry of ecstasy – with her, and a smallest act of cruelty was elevated to a rite of civilization" (AMM 158-9). Xuela understands that the division of human beings into women and ladies is analogous to her father's division between men and people, and that both divisions eventually lead to subjugation and humiliation that Xuela tries to avert with her defiant self love and eroticism.

Xuela's agency is most fully defined by her relationship with her white husband Philip, a "master" who yearns to become a "friend;" a man who, to misquote Fanon "has no ontological resistance" in Xuela's eyes (Fanon 111). Unlike Moira, who believed that "with the arrival of her and her kind, life had reached such perfection that everything else that was different from her, should just lie down and die," (AMM 208) Philip does not feel entitled to "special privilege in the hierarchy of everything" (AMM 131) on account of his being English. Philip has a sense of justice and is burdened with the feeling of his own complicity with the imperialist scheme. To a certain degree he, too, is a victim of colonialism as he suffers from his displacement from the colonial metropolis.

Philip's meekness and passive suffering as well as Xuela's desire for revenge bear witness to the fact that there is after all, to misquote Fanon again, "the white man's burden" as there is a "black mission." Philip's burden is his sense of responsibility for the past, whereas Xuela's mission is to bring him in contact with his own nemesis. Xuela acts out her revenge on him by wrapping around him her own sense of alienation as she refuses to reciprocate his love for her and locks him in complete isolation. The social ostracism that follows their marriage, which is a misalliance, is never compensated by the intimacy of conjugal life: "I blocked his entrance to the world in which he lived," says Xuela, "I blocked the entrance into all the worlds he had come to know" (AMM 224).

According to Louise-T Achille, quoted by Fanon, the underlying reason for certain interracial marriages is that the partner will achieve "deracialisation" (Fanon 71). In Kincaid's narrative, however, it is not the colored spouse – Xuela – who would like to "wipe out color prejudice" (Fanon 71) but the white spouse – Philip – who by marrying somebody of a race and class inferior to his own, would like to escape his morally problematic whiteness and to alleviate the throes of victimized blackness. Xuela never allows that to happen because she thinks that the wrongs committed by Philip's race are irreparable and therefore unpardonable. Xuela rejects the Christian idea of atonement – guilt persists through generations like defeat:

no one can truly judge himself; to describe your own transgressions, is to forgive yourself for them; to confess your bad deeds is at once to forgive yourself, and so silence becomes the only form of self-punishment: to live forever locked up in an iron cage made of your own silence, and then from time to time, to have this silence broken by a designated crier, someone who repeats over and over, in broken or complete sentences, a list of the violations, the bad deeds committed. (AMM 60)

For Xuela there is no escape from "the big, dark room [of] history" (AMM 61-2) which she seems to enter each night, after dark to

hear the sound of those who crawled on their bellies, the ones who carried the poisonous lances, and those who carried a deadly poison in their saliva, [to] hear the ones who were hunting, and the ones who were hunting, the pitiful cry of the small ones who were about to be devoured, followed by temporary satisfaction of the ones doing the devouring. (AMM 43)

What would Fanon say about Xuela, had he a chance to comment of Kincaid's novel? His words about Mayotte Capécia, the protagonist of the autobiographical novel *Je suis Martiniquaise*, could undoubtedly also pertain to Kincaid's protagonist: "it would seem indeed that for her white and black represent two poles of the world, two poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely Manichean concept of the world [. . .]" (Fanon 44-5). What can a black person do to get out of what Fanon calls after Dide and Guiraud "Manichaeism delirium"? He/she must "rise above this absurd drama that others have staged [. . .] to reject two terms that are equally unacceptable, and through one human being, to reach for the universal" (Fanon 187). For Fanon "freedom requires an effort at disalienation" (Fanon 231). As a black man from Martinique, Fanon yearned

to transcend binary oppositions, to go beyond white and black, the master and the slave, the colonizer/the colonized, and towards common humanity. For Xuela and, by inference Kincaid, to have faith in such a future flies in the face of common sense. Those who "[have] faith in the future," claims Xuela, are only those "who [can] not imagine," (AMM 121) those who refuse to take account of most blatant fact that everybody lives "under the spell of history" (AMM 218). Only nature is outside the sway of history and one can only wish "to be a part of such thing that can deny the wave of the human hand, the beat of the human heart, the gaze of the human eye, human desire itself" (AMM 218). The human world is the product of historical forces whose workings have made the black race and white race two antagonistic forces.

*The Autobiography of My Mother* is indeed configured by the "Manichean logic of Western color consciousness" that was implanted in the Caribbean in the colonial times and perpetuated by the rhetoric of ethnic absolutism, but it is my contention that Kincaid's narrative takes issue with the nationalist discourse and eventually exposes it as impossible to sustain. The novel takes place at a time of the awakening of class and race consciousness among Afro-Caribbean people, and it anticipates anti-colonialist and essentialist movements. While Xuela's father was amassing his fortune "other people who could be labeled as native [. . .] had become *bogged down* in issues of justice and injustice, and they had become attached to claims of ancestral heritage, and the indignities by which they had come to these islands, as if they mattered as if they really mattered"(emphasis mine AMM 117). In line with Fanon, who claimed that self-consciousness "can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that the conflict implies," (Fanon 218) Xuela asserts that a black man who wants to change his world should be a revolutionary ready to live and die for his goals because "no matter how glorious your presence had been, if at any given moment, no one cared about it enough to die for it, enough to live for it, it did not matter at all" (AMM 118). Xuela intuitively predicts the failure of the nationalistic project which failed to engage in "a battle against exploitation, misery and hunger" (Fanon 224). Even though Xuela herself is a person who indulges in futile exploration of personal and communal history, a person who "*bogged down*" under "the massiveness of the past," (emphasis mine Fanon 230) Xuela does not share agenda with the nationalist project because she has no sense of pride on behalf of the people among whom she has spent her entire life. Moreover her personal experience makes it clear that "what makes the world turn" (AMM 131) is not a dedication to revive ancestral heritage or to restore the dispossessed to their proper place. What makes the world turn is greediness, as exemplified by her father's life story, or personal vendetta, as evidenced by hers. Throughout her life Xuela remains a solitary advocate of denunciation: "I am not a people. I am not a nation. I only wish from time to time to make my actions be actions of people, to make my actions be the actions of a nation" (AMM 216).<sup>17</sup>

The novel, in which all characters are constituted by the process of colonization and imperialism, demonstrates that the epistemic violence in the form of Manichean

<sup>17</sup> Perversely, Xuela's solitariness can also be seen as Kincaid's response to Fanon's postulate that a black man should be his own foundation.

logic of binary coding wreaked on the Caribbean people resulted in psychological damage and trauma that shall not be redressed by the sheer belief in the redemptive potential of creolisation. Kincaid denounces creolisation as a power-imbalanced interaction, in which the African, as well as the native, will always be put at disadvantage. For Kincaid creolisation is and will remain a product of entropic colonial society, in which syncretism leads only to zombification, which is Kincaid's metaphor for cultural alienation, spiritual death and passive resignation.

*The Autobiography of My Mother* offers an important counterpoise to a flurry of articles and books that look into future at the expense of the past, ignoring "the bottomlessness of pain and misery that the conquered experiences" (AMM 193). For Kincaid's protagonist Xuela "no amount of revenge can satiate or erase the perpetration of a great injustice, for those who have lost are never hardened to their loss, they feel it deeply, always into eternity" (AMM 193). Xuela's stinging indictment against creolisation is meant to bring home to all academic critics engaged in "radically non-racial humanism" (Gilroy 15) the longevity of colonial ideological foundations, of Manichean aesthetics that gave rise to present configurations of race. As long as these Manichean divisions hold their place creolisation will remain an unattainable ideal, a figment of imagination of unduly and exuberantly optimistic critics. It seems that for Kincaid, who is well known for her criticism of sociopolitical realities in the Caribbean, the fact the world is still divided into developed and underdeveloped countries makes it evident that imperialism survived the demise of colonialism and still continues to fuel "Manichaeism delirium," making mockery of the idea of creolisation. For a person like Kincaid it must be bitterly ironic that metropolitan centers from which imperialism continues to issue forth are the same places where the critical trend towards creolisation is gathering strength. Amidst the welter of change that is transforming the metropolitan centers into apparently creolized societies, *The Autobiography of My Mother* revises the discourse on creolisation, and, by evoking and flaunting the binaries of the past that critics would like so much to topple, it serves a timely reminder that at present historical juncture it is imperative to take a more realistic stance on the issues of postcolonial humanism and creolness.

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