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POSTCOLONIAL, FEMINIST AND TRANSATLANTIC STUDIES
– A CONFLUENCE OF IDEAS IN JAMAICA KINCAID’S FICTION

My essay will provide an overview of a variety of critical approaches to Jamaica Kincaid’s polyphonic fiction. Postcolonial as well as psychoanalytic theories have been the cognitive tools by means of which most critics tried to make sense of Kincaid’s complex narratives that are at once local and relational. There can be no doubt that psychoanalysis and post-colonialism are important framing and structural devices that account for the inner life and socio-cultural situation of Kincaid’s protagonists. The concern of my essay, however, will be how Jamaica Kincaid, an African Caribbean writer living in exile in the United States, addresses through her writing such issues as the relationship between the postcolonial theory and transatlantic slavery and the black Diaspora that it engendered, which have been the focus of a relatively new school of literary criticism – Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic. Kincaid’s trans-cultural experiences – her long residence in America as well as her obsessive preoccupation with her Antiguan past – make her texts a natural site of interplay between various cultural influences and critical paradigms. In my essay, I will try to demonstrate that Kincaid’s texts based on her Caribbean and American experience outline the relationship between postcolonial, transatlantic and feminist studies and create a plane on which these praxes are naturally conflated. I believe that using both postcolonial praxis and the Black Atlantic can produce sounder and more comprehensive readings of Jamaica Kincaid. It can also expand on Gilroy’s critical paradigm which so far has been mostly applied to texts by Afro-American males.

Therefore my essay tries to achieve two interrelated goals. First of all, I propose a fresh reading of Kincaid’s storytelling through the lenses of the Black Atlantic. Secondly, I extend the range of Gilroy’s theory by using it to analyze texts by a West Indian female writer.

Jamaica Kincaid has often claimed that that she sees her work as being universal. She openly admits that she has no sense of the rich tradition of West Indian literature and criticism and that she does not see her work fitting in with any critical practice. In her interview with Cudjoe, Kincaid stated:

I don’t really see myself in any school. I mean, there has turned out to be rise in West Indian literature, but I wouldn’t know how to fit in it, I am very glad that there is such a thing, but on the other hand, belonging to a group of anything, an “army” of anything, is deeply disturbing to me. (Cudjoe 221)

My particular focus in the first part of this paper will be to “fit” Kincaid’s fiction into several dominant critical paradigms which framed the reception of

her novels. It is my observation that Kincaid's writing, her thematic concerns and her aesthetics, developed in tandem with different cognitive tools that shaped both contemporary American gender studies and postcolonial discourses. In other words, I want to position Kincaid alongside some cultural processes that configured feminist and Caribbean writing at the end of the 20th century and created critical and ideological trends of 21st century.

After a brief review of readings of Kincaid's texts framed by those critical models, the second part of my paper will attempt to situate Kincaid's fiction in the critical turn towards migration and Diaspora, heralded by Paul Gilroy's 1993 influential study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and the Double Consciousness* that helped to generate interest in diasporic black women writers, such as Kincaid, and enhanced their position in the Western academia. To my mind it could be argued that Kincaid, an Afro-Caribbean diasporic writer who wrote many bestsellers and has been affiliated with North American institutions of higher learning, is, albeit unwittingly, one of the major beneficiaries of the demand that *The Black Atlantic* created for black migrant tales. But, however much Kincaid benefits from the fashionable status of diasporic author, she remains as un-cooperative and as non-committal as ever. Kincaid and her creations seem to float in the Black Atlantic world without any desire to find shelter under the aegis of any critical praxis. Yet the topography of the Black Atlantic is incorporated into Kincaid's creative world, most notably, into her third novel *Lucy*, which accounts for the mobility of Afro-Caribbean women in the postcolonial world. I will try to demonstrate that this woman-centred text, based on Kincaid's Caribbean and American experience, reformulates the meaning of the Diaspora/ migrant identity and expands the Black Atlantic model by adding an important counterpoise to its male dominated discourse.

Different attempts have been made to introduce Kincaid's writings to contemporary critical theory. The publication of Kincaid's first books in the late 1970s coincided with the renewed interest in psychoanalytic theories put forward by Nancy Chodorow's landmark studies. In *Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Chodorow documented the pattern of absolute dependence in a primary love relationship that links the child to the nurturing mother paying special attention to the role the mother plays in the formation of gendered identity. According to Chodorow, mothering is a process geared to producing female children who would fit into private domestic world, leaving the male children to the public world (Chodorow 174). In Chodorow's argument, growing up into womanhood means coming to terms with "ideology, meanings and expectations that go into being a gendered member of our society" (Chodorow 98). Girls are expected to be "continuous," "more like" their mothers than boys and they are not supposed to individuate themselves as distinct from their mothers (Chodorow 166). Diane Simmons, who applies Nancy Chodorow's model to Kincaid's *Annie John*, claims that Annie's mother treats her daughter as "narcissistic extension" of her-

self (25), “both women [experience] boundary confusion, both, on some level [suffer] from the failure to establish a firm sense of the self, one that does not rely extensively on a relationship with the other to exist” (26-7).

Those readers who are familiar with Kincaid's earliest autobiographical novels – *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) and *Annie John* (1985) – know that they provide evidence consistent with Chodorow's paradigm. All Kincaid mother figures want to mould their daughters into exact replicas of themselves and channel their activities into forms acceptable in patriarchal Caribbean communities. All the daughters resist, trying to cast off the patriarchal bonds.

Admittedly, the findings of feminist psychoanalytic theory formed an important framing and structural apparatus that illuminated the inner life of Kincaid's young protagonist. Even so some critics questioned the applicability of white feminist prescriptive models to a Caribbean context on the grounds that white feminist critics tend to consider all texts written by female authors as receptacles of universal values rather than manifestations of racial, ethnic, economic and regional differences. The literary critic, contended Laura Niesen De Abruna, must take into consideration various issues – not only gender, but also race, class or postcolonial theory – as these issues come forth in literary work. In words of Elizabeth V. Spellman “what one learns about one's gender identity is the gender identity appropriate to one's ethnic, class national and racial identity” (Elizabeth V. Spellman 88)

This being the case, after the initial attempts to bring feminist psychoanalytical theories to bear on Kincaid, her work found itself under the nationalist critical trend and its preoccupation with the search for national and cultural identity and with the foundation of national tradition that was supposed to offset imperialism. Nationalistic and cultural critics enquired in what ways Kincaid has anchored the imaginative re-workings of mother/daughter tensions within the culture of her homeland. Their reading concentrated not so much on the psychic development of the girl-child or the acquisition of appropriate gender roles, as on how Kincaid imaginatively combined the theme of the daughter's resistance to the mother with the theme of her resistance to the colonial culture.

The mother was seen as not only the teacher of gender roles but first and foremost the most important transmitter of culture. In *At the Bottom of the River* and *Annie John* the mother is censured for forcing on her daughter a proper colonial identity, for mimicry of white ways, i.e. for emulating the mores of white colonial élites and for being an accomplice in the process of her daughter's deculturation. The major goal that the mother sets for her daughter is social success which she understands as upward class mobility, an ambition that can be realized exclusively through a marriage with a respectable male. In order to be a desirable candidate for wife the girl must obey colonial codes – she must pour scorn on those who are already beneath her in the social hierarchy, she must show reverent respect for those who are above her, she must cherish her sexual purity, resist

her natural impulse to “become a slut,” and avoid “sluttish” behaviour. She must behave like a lady and have impeccable manners. European norms, Christianity, Sunday school, piano lessons are essential for the daughter’s upbringing, whereas African Caribbean customs should be desisted, as they can reduce the daughter’s acceptability and respectability. Therefore, she should show disdain for the local folklore – the culture of the dispossessed and the uneducated.

The mother then was an agent in the imposition of colonial values on her daughter, thus linking the tensions between the mother and the daughter to the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized. In this way the relationship between the conforming mother and the resisting daughter was seen as “metonymic of colonial condition” (Ledent 59), an interpretation which Kincaid herself encouraged. In her interview with Vorda, Kincaid said: “I’ve come to see that I’ve worked through the relationship of the mother and the girl to a relationship between Europe and the place I’m from, which is to say the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. The girl is powerless and the mother is powerful” (Vorda 86). Consequently the relationship between motherhood and the colonial metropolis as motherland has been recognized as the overarching theme of Kincaid’s fiction.

Some cultural critics, in line with the concept of woman as a carrier of culture, treated Kincaid writing as a paean to matrilineal bonding that connects women through the generations usually through the tradition of oral storytelling. Matrilineal bonding supposedly guaranteed the continuity and authenticity of indigenous culture by generating resistance to foreign cultural codes. In *Annie John* for example, Annie’s maternal grandmother Ma Chess is a symbol of cultural and religious syncretism that merges systems of beliefs deriving from Amerindian and African cultures and provides “a model of African based female power, that of the Obeah woman” (Diane Simmons 31-32). Ma Chess links Annie to the island’s pre-Columbian past and to Obeah – African cultural practices. She is an embodiment of the vibrant energy of the native culture, resisting both colonial and patriarchal domination. Ma Chess counterpoises the mother’s genteel aspirations, her conventionality, her indiscriminate acceptance of colonial notions as well as her consciousness of class hierarchies.

Reading Kincaid’s early fiction as a celebration of black women as a collective force is in keeping with the narrow nationalism that characterized Caribbean literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Anne McClintock observes that those two decades were dominated by male writers and that fact accounts for the particular orientation of cultural theories and literary studies. She asserts that nationalist and patriarchal discourses equated women with an “authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward looking and natural) embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity.” The men, on the other hand, were “the progressive agent[s] of national modernity (forward thrusting, potent and historic)” (Anne McClintock 359) According to another Caribbean feminist critic – Miriam J.A. Chancy – some

voices of Caribbean women, especially those coming from within the Caribbean continue to be "often lost to the cause of nationalism (more or less male defined) or co-opted to the male version of women's identity" (Chancy 5).

Moreover interpreting Kincaid's *Bildungsromane* as political allegories, in which the separation from the mother/motherland is a metaphor for the protagonists' de-colonization, aligns Kincaid with the equally conservative tradition of national coming-of-age stories, in which the growth of the protagonist mirrors the growth of the nation. For instance, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argues that "Annie's struggles to separate from the mother are mirror of the island's movement from colonialism. It is not a triumphant process, much is lost and many struggles end in defeat, but it none-the-less leaves Annie – and perhaps Antigua – poised to define herself on their own terms" (31). Moira Ferguson makes a similar comment about *Lucy* – Lucy, who reveals "the duplicity of the colonizing economy" represents "at transcendental level [...] Antigua of 1967, a territory freeing itself from the colonizer, already tentatively entering an early postcolonial phase" (Ferguson 131).

Applying such a critical framework to Caribbean growing-up narratives disfigured them, as Alison Donnell claims, in one important way – "it has arrested the discussion of sexuality" (Donnell 182). In her study – *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* – Donnell convincingly argues that representations of sexuality have been effectively banished from the national discourse and that coming-of-age novels such as *Annie John*, but also George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* or Merle Hodge's *Crick, Crack Monkey* (1970) have created distinct sexual silences (Donnell 182). These *Bildungsromane* relate the protagonists' progression towards achieving a political, cultural or even gender awareness, bypassing the development of sexual identity. They leave the protagonists on the threshold of adult life depriving them of the most important rite of passage, that of sexual initiation.

In this essay I wish to argue that Kincaid's sequel to *Annie John*, entitled *Lucy*, has broken the reticence about sex and sexuality and opened up a forum for discussion of the social and cultural meaning of female sexuality in the Caribbean and in the black Diaspora. It is my contention that by placing Lucy – the titular protagonist of her 1991 novel – on the threshold of adolescence and openly discussing her sexual life, Kincaid has not only broken the Caribbean taboo but also has mapped out some new territories of the Black Atlantic world by narrating a female version of black diasporic experience in which female sexuality is a pivotal identificatory category. I am going to show that in the Caribbean literary canon, *Lucy* represents an important shift from the dominant male intellectual tradition to a female diasporic perspective.

The last decade of the 20th century was of crucial significance for Caribbean women writers. In the 1990s, the first book-length studies on female authors started to appear. This surge in postcolonial feminist criticism was concurrent

with the success of black diasporic studies, the corollary of which was that exiled Caribbean authors, such as Kincaid, rose to new levels of critical attention. My perception is that *Lucy* seems to be particularly fertile ground to examine the confluence of black feminist and diasporic theoretical agendas.

The Black Atlantic contested the agenda of cultural literary nationalism and incited a hasty strategic withdrawal from nation-based texts and cultural criticism. Gilroy persuasively argued that cultural studies, which repudiate the concept of fluidity of identities and insist on their invariability, are a flawed product of the Western academia, a product "configured by the appeal to national and often racial particularity" (Gilroy 8) that insists on national character of all modes of cultural production. He proposes to do away with the premise that "all cultures always flow into patterns congruent with borders of essentially homogenous nation states" (Gilroy 5). Such nationalist and ethnically absolute approaches characterized not only the cultures of Great Britain and the United States respectively, they had also for years informed black political culture world-wide: "modern black political culture," contends Gilroy, "has always been more interested in the relationship of the identity to roots and rootedness than seeing identity as a process of movement and meditation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym 'routes'" (Gilroy 19).

The Black Atlantic theory seeks to amend this deficiency. It studies the mobility of black peoples and cultures across the postcolonial world and accounts for movements, flows and routes that govern the construction of modern hybrid identities. According to Gilroy, the Black Atlantic is "one single complex unit of analysis" (Gilroy 15), and "a formal unity of diverse cultural elements" (Gilroy 16). This global perspective is transcultural and international and therefore it is antithetical to established cultural studies. The Black Atlantic "challenges the coherence of all narrow nationalistic perspectives and points to spurious invocation of ethnic particularity to enforce them and ensue the tidy flow of cultural output into neat symmetrical units" (Gilroy 29). It seeks to deconstruct ethnic, national and regional typologies into which, in Gilroy's opinion, all black cultural forms have been artificially segregated.

To illustrate his theory Gilroy turns to texts of Black American men such as W. E. B. Du Bois or Richard Wright, who, once they ventured beyond their place of residence in America, had their concept of race and identity as well as their attitude to modernity radically transformed. Their accounts of their transmutation from racial absolutism to cultural syncretism that resulted from their transatlantic mobility gave rise to "the Black Atlantic affirmative political culture," (Gilroy 31) that is an anti-ethnocentric strain in modern black intellectual tradition that has frequently been overlooked and ignored by cultural purists.

As Alison Donnell has observed, "[t]he conception and consolidation of the Black Atlantic paradigm has become one of the most important critical moments of postcolonial studies in recent years [...]" (Donnell 80). As soon as Gilroy

enunciated the tenets of the black diasporic model, it immediately grasped the imagination of postcolonial and Caribbean critics, though not without reservations. The fact that Gilroy bypasses the Caribbean, turning to American literary archives for examples, while at the same time castigating Afro-Americans for their steadfast belief in their own exceptionalism, was seen as an obvious deficiency in Gilroy's methodology. John Cullen Gruesser, for instance, claims that Gilroy who decries Afro-American exceptionalism could be seen as engaging in a form of it himself. Feminist critics on the other hand, censured Gilroy's preoccupation with the male exile experience. "It cannot be ignored," maintains Donnell, "that Gilroy privileges male experience and that his Black Atlantic is the scene of a wonderful black male intellectual odyssey" (Donnell 83).

Soon, however, there appeared some critics who extended the applicability of Gilroy's theory and mapped it onto the Caribbean context, showing its usefulness in reading texts by contemporary diasporic authors. Postcolonial theorists grounded in the Black Atlantic model saw the Caribbean as the quintessence of the hybrid, syncretic and mobile model of black culture that Gilroy celebrates in his study. Migration and Diaspora are a part of Caribbean reality and the exile, as both writer and character have been a central trope in Caribbean literature. In words of Boyce Davies "Caribbean identities [...] are products of numerous processes of migration. As a result many conclude that the Caribbean is not so much a geographical location but a cultural construction based on series of mixtures, languages, communities of people" (Boyce Davies 13). Gilroy's political agenda seemed particularly apposite in reading those contemporary Caribbean writers who wrote and published in various metropolises of the world. Beyond all question, the Black Atlantic created a new boom for these authors, domiciled outside the Caribbean, comparable to that which took place in the 1950s among London-based Caribbean exiles. Nevertheless, contrary to that first generation of exiled male writers who wrote cultural nationalist romances,¹ the second generation were immigrant women who settled in North America, mostly the USA, rather than in their "motherland" – Great Britain. The difference between the condition of exile of the first generation Caribbeans and that of migration of the second is crucial in understanding the difference between the male and female version of diasporic experience. Whereas the first wave of predominantly male authors obsessively thematized the loss of their connection to the country of their birth, the women writers of the second wave are less nostalgic about their homelands, and though they often describe their feelings of homesickness, those descriptions are often undercut by their stress on their inbetweenness, their rootlessness, their "migrant" or cosmopolitan status. In other words, it seems that these female writers more consciously situate themselves and their writing in the Black Atlantic Diaspora and more emphatically stress their and their charac-

¹ According to Kenneth Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, (1970) they were Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul.

ters' transatlantic identity. To quote from Gilroy, they re-possess and re-construct what was initially considered a curse – a curse of exile or a curse of homesickness – turning it into a privileged standpoint.

The extent of critical attention directed to Afro-Caribbean women writing in the USA or Canada is a measure of the success of black diasporic studies. Carole Boyce Davies describes the new visibility of these authors as contingent on the popularity of the Black Atlantic model:

Black women writing [...] should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographically, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing. In cross-cultural, transnational, translocal, diasporic perspectives, this re-working of the grounds of 'Black women's Writing' redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality. Black women's writing/existence, marginalized in terms of minority and majority discourses, within the Euro-American male or female canon [...] redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members, brings together black women dis-located by space and time (Boyce Davies 4)²

The writing of Caribbean diasporic women embedded in the postcolonial conceptualization of postnationalism and transatlanticism achieved two inter-related goals. Firstly, it liberated Caribbean culture from the confines of nation state. Secondly, it empowered these women writers who, once they found themselves far away from their birthplace, were able to "politicize their discourse" (Chancy 5). As Boyce Davies claims:

Black female subjectivity then can be conceived not primarily in terms of domination, subordination or 'subalternization,' but in terms of slipperiness, elsewhere-ness [...] Black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the border, journeys, migrates and so re-claims as it re-asserts. (Boyce Davies 36)

The aim of this essay will be to clarify that what Caribbean African women writers re-claim and re-assert, as they travel away from their roots, is first and foremost female sexuality. For them migration becomes a regenerative condition which turns their novels, to use Chancy's words, into "a tapestry of sounds and perspectives on what it has meant for African-Caribbean women to take control over their bodies and their lives" (Chancy 93).

Jamaica Kincaid is considered one of the most important spokespersons of the contemporary Caribbean diasporic community that extends globally and her *Bildungsroman Lucy* is representative of self-determined female sexual identity which is associated with diasporic metropolitan communities and which challenges and subverts, as I am going to demonstrate, both Caribbean and Western sexual scripts.

² Davies's work – *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* was published in 1994, a year after Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*. Her study shows influences between the Black Atlantic model and black feminism, even though she denies having been influenced by Gilroy. To Alison Donnell who is one of the most vocal critics of Gilroy, this proves that "[e]ven though [feminist critics] do not situate themselves within the Black Atlantic framework many of the critics who published on the Caribbean women's writing in the 1990s were inevitably drawn in its wake" (Donnell 132)

Lucy is a black female Ulysses who through her assertion of her entitlement to her body achieves a modern diasporic identity. Lucy transgresses traditional Caribbean gender roles and liberates herself from the traditional scripting of West Indian femininity. Her hedonistic attitude to sex -- at her pleasure and exclusively for her pleasure, her strong embrace of her identity of a slut, marks out a black female traveller's route to her hyphenated metropolitan identity. Lucy frees herself from patriarchal domination (enforced in case of Lucy by her abusive and coercive mother) and subverts both the Western tradition glorifying white intrepid travellers as well as the modernist tradition worshipping male exiled writers.

Lucy is sensitive to the gendered asymmetries of power that characterize West Indian societies, where men enjoy greater social and sexual freedom than women. Like Lucy's father, they have numerous extramarital affairs and father many illegitimate children. As Pyne Timothy makes clear, "[m]ale sexuality has no consequences whereas for females the consequences are severe" (Pyne Timothy 162). This constant urge to curb female sexuality originated in times of slavery when white men's unscrupulous sexual exploitation of black women was absolved by the latter's presumed natural propensity for promiscuity. This racist and sexist notion has continued to take its toll in colonial societies and postcolonial nations. As Donnell points out, female sexual lasciviousness "was a racialised trait that already had been powerfully inscribed in colonial narratives" (Donnell 192). In a similar vein Evelyn O'Callaghan has pointed to the complicity of male Caribbean writers in perpetuating this harmful stereotype in the postcolonial era: "female sexuality in the work of West Indian prose writers," stipulates O'Callaghan, "is either shrouded in secrecy and shame or is a matter of casual and unfeeling acquiescence to male pleasure (O'Callaghan 297). This sense of shame created by colonial literature, enhanced by repressive sexual mores of the Victorian times and internalized by postcolonial patriarchal writers preserved a tradition that values female virginity and controls female sexuality through marriage.

When Lucy arrives in New York "contact zone" -- a place where different forms of subjectivity and identification "previously spatially separated by geographic and historical disjunctures [...] intersect" (Mary Louise Pratt 7), she immediately seizes the opportunity that her separation from her mother/motherland and her anonymity create. Though in American society the oppression of women is also normative, which is exemplified by Lucy's employer's deception and manipulation of his wife Mariah; modernity, as it will turn out, does not have such a firm grip on female sexuality as the tradition in which Lucy grew up. Modernity allows more space for female sexual exploration and self invention, and it offers Lucy new pathways of development.

When Lucy embarks on her sexual spree, that in the Caribbean context is exclusively a male preserve, she rejects the Caribbean tradition and embraces

the ethos of a modern sexually emancipated woman. She calls herself “a slut” to emphasize her resistance to, and rebellion against, her Caribbean past and to emphatically stress the un-romantic, loveless quality of her sexual adventure. Each sexual encounter becomes for Lucy a scene of conquest “for issues of power and control predominate in every relationship” (O’Callaghan 295).

It could admittedly be argued that Lucy’s potent gesture of dissent, her adamant refusal to be aligned with the national tradition and her provocative sexual liberation might be seen as bringing Lucy dangerously near the white racist archetype of wayward black female sexuality that I discussed earlier. All the same, I want to suggest that Kincaid intentionally connects Lucy’s international meanderings with her sexual self-exploration. Lucy, as a black female sexual traveller, upsets the received notions that informed the Western tradition of travel literature and the modernist trope of self creation through exploration of new lands and encounter (often sexual) with the racial Other.

The traveller in Euro-American modern literary tradition has been glorified as an epitome of human restlessness with a constant drive towards untrammelled freedom. He was reputedly free of any political or ideological agenda, therefore the judgments that he passed on the countries he visited were believed to be impartial and unbiased. The fact remains, however, that the memoirs and diaries of these great intrepid buccaneers were ideologically charged – they pitted non-European civilizations against the grand history of the West to show that they were lagging behind in the great narrative of Occidental progress. These accounts acquired special political valence with the advance of colonization, and they can be credited with paving the way for new conquests and establishing dichotomous hierarchies of colonialist thinking.

In these stories of exploration and subjugation, there has been a consistent sexual coding – the explorer was usually a man, the land he explored was personified as a woman -- it was luscious and virginal at the same time. He was the agent of the patriarchal world, the harbinger of progress and civilization. The feminine land, on the other hand, was associated with the matriarchal world of nature, malleable and passively waiting to be possessed. The rape of this green matriarchal world, which is a well-known postcolonial signifier, goes beyond its purely literary and figurative connotation because intercoursures between European settlers and native women were, as we all know, very intimate. Dark sensual beauty, often eroticised as the embodiment of the conquered land, is a familiar icon of colonial discourse that can be found, among others, in Paul Gauguin’s relation of his sexual adventure in Tahiti.

Lucy is an explicit response to Gauguin’s narrative *Noa Noa*, which is exemplary of the modernist travel writing. Gauguin pictures himself as an artist/traveller who escapes the corruption of the western civilization. He relocates himself into a “primitive” culture, where he re-discovers his own sexuality through an affair with a native woman, which brings his life to new heights of artistic

creativity. In Kincaid's novel, Gauguin introduces the theme of self-exploration through travel as well as of the connection between sexuality and creativity. His life story and his art stimulate Lucy to think in a new way about her exile and her sexuality and induce in her an ambition to become an artist herself. In the words of Kincaid herself, the novel is about "a person figuring out how to be an artist, an artist of herself and things" (Kennedy 67).

Though Lucy would like her life to develop according to a similar pattern as Gauguin's, she quickly realizes that she has none of Gauguin's attributes:

[...] immediately I identified with the yearnings of that man, I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prisons and wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a heaven? I wondered about details of his despair for I felt it would comfort me to know. Of course his life could be found in the pages of a book. I had just began to notice the lives of men always are? [But] I was not a man; I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant. (*Lucy* 95)

Lucy knows that she has more in common with Gauguin's Tahitian lover Tehura – also a poor, young, coloured woman from the fringes of the world; a woman whose sole role in Gauguin's life was to cater for his needs and put him in touch with his more primitive instincts. But Lucy does not allow this logic of metropolitan encounter with the sexual Other to delimit her relations with men. Instead, she clings to the modernist idea of self-creation through sexual exploration of new landscapes, and her exploration is meant to benefit only herself:

I understood that I was inventing myself, and I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition. I did not have anything exact in mind, but when the picture is 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. (*Lucy* 134)

Lucy assumes the guise of a sexual traveller, wishing to turn her life into adventure, and her adventure into art. In this way Lucy, and, by inference Kincaid, turns the tables on the Western tradition of travelogues and the modernist tradition of writing in exile and beats white male travellers at their own game.

Kincaid makes Lucy launch her sexual adventure among New York artists, the very people from whom she had wrenched the privilege of the quest for self-invention. Paul, whom Lucy chooses to be her lover, typifies the predatory, white, male sexuality and Gauguinesque lust for oriental women. He has a reputation of a pervert, and sex with him is, according to Lucy, violent and thrilling. It is also described by Lucy in terms of adventure: "[w]hat an adventure this part of my life had become, and how much I look forward to it, because I had not known that such pleasure could exist and what is more be available to me" (*Lucy* 129).

Like his modernist antecedents, most notably Gauguin, Paul exemplifies the same Eurocentric ideas and attitudes. In line with Gauguin's admirers, Paul looks up to restless wanderers who traversed "the great seas, not only to find

riches, but to feel free and this search for freedom was [according to him] a part of the whole human situation.” (*Lucy* 129) Paul shares with Gauguin and other modernists love for unfettered mobility, the foreign, the exotic and the extraordinary – he treasures West Indian weeds he grows in his apartment and immediately takes interest in Lucy, who is aware that the attention he lavishes on her is skin-deep, a mere mimicry of Gauguin’s Eurocentric gaze.

Understandably, Paul and Lucy’s sexual adventure does not follow the pattern established by Gauguin and Tehura, but it ends with a similar though reversed barter. Lucy does not become for Paul a catalyst for his creativity, instead Paul does for Lucy, to a certain degree, what Tehura did for Gauguin – he helps her to extricate herself from the rigid patriarchal structures bequeathed to her by the colonial tradition and to transform into the kind of woman that not so long ago she would have poured scorn upon. To what extent Lucy’s self invention is dependent on the reversal of colonial and patriarchal gender roles is made clear by her blatant refusal to be caught in the conventional dialectic of female dependence. For example, when Paul shows her the photograph of her standing in the kitchen half naked and cooking, Lucy is instantly revolted by such a representation of herself. She says: “[t]hat was the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the moment I grew tired of him” (*Lucy* 155). Seeing that Paul’s masculinism and Eurocentrism threaten to inscribe her in the traditional dynamics of race and gender subordination, Lucy makes up her mind to end her liaison with Paul.

It is my contention that Lucy’s conduct highlights new forms of resistance and assimilation. Lucy retains and reconfigures the modernist archetype of sexual traveller, but Kincaid’s aesthetics complicates and extends this paradigm. Kincaid’s traveller --Lucy -- is an indigent black woman who comes from a place that used to be a destination for the white traveller and artist. She comes to a metropolitan centre, whence white travellers used to depart and commences her own sexual adventure. She empowers herself by appropriating the tradition that endeavoured to keep her disempowered. Lucy’s trajectory from the socially enforced identity of sexually timid and inhibited West Indian female to that of an emancipated cosmopolitan artist capsizes the imperialist and patriarchal hierarchies and redefines the positionality of a female member of the black diaspora. The fundamental question that remains unresolved, however, is whether Lucy’s empowerment, her new sense of strength and cohesion, was not purchased at too high emotional cost.

One cannot help but notice that Lucy’s portrayal of her intimate life as a great adventure is at times unconvincing and strained. Lucy’s attitude to sex seems to be more ambivalent than she cares to admit, as it becomes perfectly clear when she reminisces about her secret sexual life on the island. The memories abound with deeply disturbing instances of abusive male sexuality. Lucy’s first sexual experience with a boy named Tanner induces in her a mixture of contra-

dictory reactions: "[Tanner] pressed his lips against mine, hard, so hard it caused me to feel pain [...] I had two reactions at once: I liked it, and I didn't like it" (*Lucy* 50). The episode which most directly reveals Lucy's confusion about her sexuality is Mr. Thomas's abuse of Lucy's schoolmate Myrna. What ensues from Lucy's retelling of the story is that Mr. Thomas, a local fisherman, had a regular clandestine meeting with Myrna, whom he paid for allowing him "to put his middle finger up inside her" (*Lucy* 104). When Lucy becomes Myrna's confidant and hears the story, she describes her strong reaction to it: "I, of course, had many feelings about this amazing story – all the predictable ones, but then one feeling came to dominate others: I was almost overcome with jealousy" (*Lucy* 105). "This should have happened to me," claims Lucy who, in retrospect, sees it would have been a fitting beginning of her career of a slut that she presently finds so appealing. Yet in spite of her jealousy and regret, Lucy is outflanked when confronted by a real slut Myrna, who trafficked her body and valued the experience for the material gains she had from it. When Lucy asks Myrna, if she was hurt by Mr. Thomas, Myrna reacts with a scornful look that completely baffles Lucy, who says: "the look she gave me – I was the one who felt like dirt" (*Lucy* 86). The implication of this statement seems, of course, rather obvious – deep inside Lucy thinks it is Myrna who should feel dirty, a reflection not likely to come from a genuine slut. The fact that this memory is brought back by Paul's hands, which remind Lucy of Mr. Thomas's hands, sheds a new light on Lucy's inner, subconscious life.

It seems that the fact that Lucy's sexuality is implicated in the negotiations of her immigrant diasporic identity has a detrimental effect on Lucy's emotional well-being. Lucy rationalizes her sexual exploits in an effort to turn her anger and despair into art. Loneliness and an emotional void is the price Lucy pays for her hard-won independence. "I was alone in the world," claims Lucy. "It was not a small accomplishment and I thought I would die doing it. I was not happy, but that seemed too much to ask for" (*Lucy* 161). With the strategic use of her sexuality, Lucy escapes the colonized gender identity and becomes a transcultural traveller, albeit one whose individuation and integrity is contingent on "the awful emptiness inside" (*Lucy* 8). In this way Lucy's experiences seem to validate O'Callaghan's observation that in the Caribbean literature "[s]ex is rarely described with any degree of explicitness and certainly without [...] joyful eroticism" (O'Callaghan 297)

The resolution of the novel is open-ended and the negotiations of Lucy's identity seem far from being complete. Upon her arrival in America, Lucy asserted: "I didn't want to love one more thing in my life that could break my heart into a million pieces at my feet" (*Lucy* 23). At the end of the novel, Lucy writes in her notebook: "I wish I could love somebody so much I could die from it" (*Lucy* 163-164). When she adds: "[a]s I looked at this sentence a great wave of shame came over me, and I wept so much that the tears fell on the page and

caused the words to become one great blur..." (*Lucy* 164) the suggestion is that the future is still out of focus to her, that the black female traveller is still, to use Gilroy's analogue, searching for a "route" to a more comprehensive definition of her identity. If *Lucy* is a success story, achieved at the cost of detachment from home and isolation from every human being, it seems that there is too little joy in it to sustain Lucy in her future life.

This open-ended resolution brings to mind Stuart Hall's observation that identity is not the state of being but the process of becoming. It is no longer a fixed category – it is changing, flowing, always in a flux. It cannot be considered a stable point of reference in an unstable world. It is an artefact -- an outcome of creative transformation, which Kincaid's life and texts make clear: "I can't imagine that I would invent an identity based on the colour of my skin... There are so many things that make up identity," (Cryer) said Kincaid -- "I can really no longer speak of race because I no longer understand what it means" (Jones 75). In another interview, Kincaid expressly stated that she refuses to be pigeonholed: "It is just too slight to cling to your skin colour or your sex when you think of the great awe that you exist at all" (Cudjoe 401). Kincaid's remarks echo and validate Gilroy's observation about Du Bois's identity transformation:

Du Bois travel experiences rise in the sharpest possible form a question common to the lives of almost all these figures who begin as African-Americans or Caribbean people and are then changed into something else which evades those specific labels and with them all fixed notions of nationality and national identity. Whether their experiences of exile is enforced or chosen, temporary or permanent, these intellectuals and activists, writers, speakers, poets, and artists repeatedly articulate a desire to escape restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even "race" itself. Some speak [...] in terms of the rebirth that Europe offered them. Whether they dissolved their African-American sensibility into an explicitly pan-Africanist discourse or political commitment, their relationship to the land of their birth and their ethnic political constituency was absolutely transformed. (Gilroy 19)

Kincaid does not politicize her stance and, as I tried to demonstrate in this essay, the bonds that *Lucy* breaks are of a different nature. Yet the novel can be considered as important contribution to Gilroy's counter-culture to modernity, as *Lucy* is engages in critical dialogue with both the Caribbean tradition and Euro American modernity. *Lucy* rejects the sexual repression of her homeland but retains a recognizably Caribbean anger against imperialism and neo-colonial exploitation. Similarly, she refuses Euro-American verities that come from fashionable theories: Freud's psychoanalysis, Simone de Beauvoir's feminism, Gauguinesque notions of what constitutes heroism, and she exposes the inner contradictions of modernity, for example, when she ridicules Mariah's ecological concerns. On the other hand, however, she accepts the feminist ethos of a modern sexually emancipated woman.

Kincaid's re-conceptualization of black female identity has brought sexual self-representation into the corpus of West Indian literature. *Lucy* is a counter-

point to the de-sexualized tradition of growing up narratives – it marks the emergence of female fiction from the nationalist male-controlled discourse as well as the shift from a nationalist to a feminist diasporic perspective.

By focusing on the place of sexuality and gender in the process of identity formation *Lucy* has validated Mills's observation that in the metropolitan contact zones the most prominent form of contact is sexual encounter (Mills138). It has raised also some other questions about the Black Atlantic praxis. Rather than the Afro-American male who travels from the New World to Old, Kincaid's protagonist is a young Caribbean woman who settles in the USA, where she undergoes a process of self invention. Kincaid ignores the British vertex that Gilroy places at the heart of his Black Atlantic model and charts a different route for Lucy, whereby direct connections are established between the Caribbean and the US. Moreover Lucy's transformation is pictured in more personal and emotional terms.

My analysis of Kincaid's woman-centred exploration of cultural and social issues that Gilroy did not address in his study has allowed me to pose questions about the gender configurations of the Black Atlantic model. It seems that the space that Gilroy delineated for negotiations of identity is too narrow to accommodate the experiences of female travellers. Lucy bears witness to the fact the dialectics of **Diaspora identification should also include the discussion of gendered and sexual identity. Therefore I think we need further studies to examine the intersection of feminist and black diasporic studies.**

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