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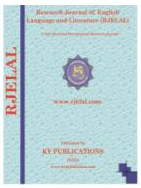
(RE) CONCEPTUALISING TIME AND SPACE IN POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS OF ZAKES MDA AND JAMAICA KINCAID

Arnold TUMASANG NGWA
University of Dschang, Cameroon
Email: sangnold@yahoo.com



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Abstract

This study examines the concepts of time and space in selected works of Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid. It stems from the observation that many critics discussing the works of African and Caribbean writers do not perceive time as a continuum where past and present merge but they consider the Eurocentric perception that delimits time into the past, the present and the future. Besides, according to African philosophy, time and space are intrinsically linked. This creates the necessity for postcolonial scholars to incorporate time in the examination of space. This research is therefore predicated upon the hypothesis that Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid in similar ways use the African perception of time in the construction of future hybrid spaces in their novels. This claim has been supported with evidence from four texts— two from each author, and critical material from other postcolonial critics. This study has adopted New Historicism and the concepts of time and space from an African philosophical perspective. New Historicism has enabled the novels to be studied from historical and cultural perspectives. The concepts of time and space have been used to show how Mda and Kincaid define new spaces by linking the present with the past as they establish a non-linear and cyclical time. As a contribution to postcolonial studies, this paper reiterates the need to examine time and space from the African perspective as represented in postcolonial discourse.

Keywords: Time, Space, Ideology, Postcolonial Discourse, New historicism, non-linear/cyclical time

Introduction

This study examines time and space in selected works of Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid and advocates a rethink in the analyses of postcolonial literatures. The concepts of time and space have been variedly analyzed in the sciences, social sciences and the humanities, and these controversial concepts are the bases for ideologies, discourses, actions and reactions in these various domains. Throughout history, and in all civilizations, human perceptions and activities are carried out in particular spaces, with the purpose of attaining a more convenient life.

People who undertake any venture relate to the past, the present, the future, the weather and even the seasons in order to guarantee the accomplishment of their endeavors. Time and space form a caldron for the evolution of society due to their relevance in politics, economics, geography, anthropology, sociology, religion, education, literature and other areas of culture. However, these different domains present diversities and myriad examinations of time and space. Some literary critics have also examined certain aspects of time and space from a colonialist or postcolonialist point of

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view. This research will probe into an integrated discussion of these concepts, in order to show how time defined socio-ideological spaces in pre-colonial African/Caribbean societies, colonial society, and the post-independence society. This is because as time passes by, space is redefined.

Research Problem

The problem underlying this research is the often ignored necessity to consider the African perception of time in postcolonial literary studies. In most cases, the important concept of time as seen by African societies is ignored while emphasis is always laid on the spaces that exist and those that are to be constructed[1]. In this case, many critics discussing the works of African writers[2] no longer consider time as a continuum where past and present merge, but use the Eurocentric definitions that delimit time into the past, the present and the future. There is also a symbiotic relationship between time and space because the former determines the definition of the latter. This is often ignored in most studies which focus on the European conception of time.

Objectives of the Study

This work seeks to examine how Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid in their novels make recourse to the African perception of time in resisting master discourses of colonialism and in defining a space of justice, hope and reconciliation.

Besides, it shows how time influences the construction of spaces in South Africa and the West Indies in the novels of Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid.

Research Questions

What is the nature of space in moments of colonial contacts as portrayed in the works of Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid?

How does time determine resistance strategies against colonialism as represented in the works Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid?

How does the African perception of time influence the creation of affable landscapes and the utopic future spaces in the novels of Mda and Kincaid?

Hypothesis

This work is predicated on the hypothesis that Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid in similar ways use the African perception of time in the construction of future spaces in their novels. Time determines the nature of space in the novels. The construction of a "third space" in colonial and post-colonial settings is determined by temporal factors. Consequently, time becomes a caldron that shapes and determines the outcome of conflicting binary attitudes in colonial and post-colonial societies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach used in this study is new historicism and the postcolonial concepts of time and space examined from an African philosophical perspective. New historicism places the texts in their contexts and examines them as historical objects in order to redefine the concept of time in relation to space from an African perspective.

[1] Due to colonialism, African and Caribbean societies have adopted European attitudes and their perception of time. These formerly colonized societies are replicas of the capitalism that the Western economic system represents. This system, which is linked to industrialization, characteristic of contemporary Western civilization, that posits a futuristic vision of time has been adopted by some members of African and Caribbean societies.

[2] African writers here refer to writers of African descent who were born in Africa or the diaspora. Just like many African writers who write about the past because their characters are stuck in a death-like state due to the 'decayed' post-independence Africa, many Caribbean and American authors like Jamaica Kincaid, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Caryl Phillips, who write from societies with the rootlessness of the descendants of former slaves seek a home in the past, and in this case, Africa. These authors ally with the African time perspective whereby a revivification of their communities could only be possible if they make recourse to the past.

For new historical literary critics, then, the literary text, through its representation of human experience at a given time and place, is an interpretation of history. As such, the literary text maps the discourses circulating at the time it was written and is itself one of those discourses. That is, the literary text shaped and was shaped by the discourses circulating in the culture in which it was produced. Likewise, our interpretations of literature are shaped by the culture in which the text is produced.

Lois Tyson, (2008) writes:

> For new historical critics, a literary text doesn't embody the author's intention or illustrate the spirit of the age that produced it, as traditional literary historians asserted. Nor are literary texts self-sufficient art objects that transcend the time and place in which they were written, as New Critics believed. Rather, literary texts are cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which the text was written. And they can do so because the literary text is itself part of the interplay of discourses, a thread in the dynamic web of social meaning. For new historicism, the literary text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text (the literary work) and context (the historical conditions that New historical and cultural criticism produced it) are mutually constitutive: they create each other. Like the dynamic interplay between individual identity and society, literary texts shape and are shaped by their historical contexts.(291)

Basically, this is an approach that stemmed from a reassessment of the social, intellectual and institutional elements behind and within literary works. The term New Historicism, was used by Wesley Morris in his "Toward a New Historicism" in 1972 but it has been adopted widely after by Stephen Greenblatt who applied it to a series of historical renaissance studies in 1982. According to Ralph Cohen in *New Directions in Literary History*, a literary work is "an event, an action, a relation established between a reader and what he reads, audiences and performance" (1). This statement means that there is interaction between the reader and the text. Other critics like Robert Weimann assert that the 'pastness' of the work is part of the present meaning and must inform any reading for "there is no getting away from the inevitable tension between the historical and modern points of view" (*New Literary History* 106). A work of art is therefore influenced by the past although it cannot be read meaningfully without the recognition of its present context.

In the texts discussed in this paper, characters exhibit certain attitudes due to their ability to journey back into the past. This epoch harbors the necropolis of African spirituality, rites and customs and its spirit of community. In this case, attention will be paid to John Mbiti's discussion of time. In his *African Religions and Philosophy*, he examines the non-linear concept of time. In the African cosmos, this entails the actual and potential time (which is basically a continuum where past and present merge).

In discussing the African concept of time, Mbiti posits that it is the key to understanding the African ontology, their beliefs, practices, attitudes and the general way of life of the Africans. The conception of time in most Africa communities, especially in the Kikuyu and the other East African communities studied by Mbiti is non-linear and cyclical. Africans have an actual time composed of a past and present. The past is seen as very important as actual time moves backward rather than seeking future occurrences. Mbiti illustrates that:

> This time orientation, governed as it is by the two main dimensions of the present and the past, dominates African understanding of the individual, the community and universe. Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth. (17)

The significance of actual time (past and present) shows the pragmatic and utilitarian nature of African

people. "Endlessness" or "eternity" for the Africans is something that lies only in the region of the past. This means that what is eternal lies beyond the horizon of events making up human experience or history (Mbiti 21). The past in the African world is not limited to what in English is called the past. It could be referred to as "Macro-Time" or "Big Time" as it overlaps with the present and the two are not separable. The present "feeds and disappears into the past" (22). The past is "the period of myth, giving a sense of foundation or security' to the present and binding together all created things, so that all things are embraced within the Macro-Time. The 'golden age' lies in the past, and not in the otherwise very short or non-existent future" (22-23).

As highlighted above, there is the Zamani (Swahili for past), which Mbiti refers to as the Macro-Time. He asserts:

> Zamani is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, the dimension in which everything finds its halting point. It is the final store house of all phenomenon and events, the oceans of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before. (23)

From the foregoing, if Zamani is the necropolis of time, it then means that with the Zamani, the Sasa[3] ends, and events move backwards from the Sasa into Zamani. A glance at African myths reveals this. The myths of African peoples say nothing about the future but much about the past. Mda is South African and Kincaid is Antiguan but the African perspective of time is applied in the appraisal of the novels of both authors because of similarities mostly seen in the reconstruction of black characters' identities in the writings of many writers of African descent. Reflecting on the past for cultural renaissance runs through the works of African writers like Mda and Ngugi, Caribbean writers like Jamaica Kincaid and Caryl Phillips, and African American writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

Analyses and Discussions

Landscape Tropes and the Reconstruction of Time and Space

This section aims at presenting the manner in which landscape is used by Mda and Kincaid in the construction of a new place. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a trope is "a word or phrase that is used in a way that is different from its usual meaning in order to create a mental image or effect. Examples are metaphors and similes" (1598). In this study, landscape tropes refer to the various physical and psychological symbols (signs, shapes or objects) used to reconstruct time and space. As seen in the novels, actions do not only take place in the physical settings but the minds of characters are active sites in the construction of time and space.

In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda makes use of landscape to construct new spaces. He uses the Cooperative and Holiday Camp as arenas for development in Qolorha because they represent the binary groups. Despite his level of education, Camagu learns the art of fishing. This is one of the activities that the people of Qolorha-by-sea have been indulging in for a long time. It was an activity of their ancestors and today it can still be a source of economic empowerment to this people if it is properly managed with the help of available modern technology. Instead of insisting on acquiring a job in the city, Camagu retreats to a remote countryside to promote the art of fishing and the production of isiXhosa traditional attires for business purposes because to him authentic development can come to African countries if they use their own natural resources and heritage to make a living. Foreign technology can be used as a means to facilitate the production and distribution of their produce. The Cooperative is therefore a place where the people's past comes to terms with their present realities.

The Cooperative and Holiday Camp bring to light the idea of hybridity. These are centers where people of different backgrounds congregate. The Cooperative and Holiday Camp are for the common good and transcend all barriers that create divisions among the people. These centers are therefore

[3] Swahili for present

avenues for cultural exchange, reconciliation and growth. This proves that despite the oppositions between the Believers and the Unbelievers, there are factors that can instill the sense of fraternity and hope for a brighter future. The Cooperative displays the people's vision which is the will to construct a new society void of tribal and racial discrimination. We thus see the idea of nationhood which is based on the people's will to work for the common good. The people of Qolorha must erase their violent past which can be an obstacle to reconciliation, unity and development. In the Cooperative, the villagers jointly work together and exchange ideas. The people are entirely involved in decisions about their welfare and their future, as they participate at every level. The Cooperative and Holiday Camp serve as centers for indigenous development for they are run by the villagers themselves. Ngugi wa Thiong'o abides by this type of development model in his *Homecoming*:

> My thesis as we come to today's Africa is then very simple: a completely socialised economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people is necessary for a national culture; a complete and total liberation of the people, through the elimination of all exploitative forces, is necessary for a national culture. (13)

If we relate Ngugi's model for African development to the Cooperative and Holiday Camp, we notice that these establishments make use of local labor, natural resources and management. No foreign influence is needed to promote the development of these centers except the technical knowledge which Camagu acquired when he studied Economics in the United States of America. The use of both cultures permits the villagers of Qolorha to evolve and give their own contribution to the development of the country.

Just as Mda constructs the Cooperative and Holiday Camp in order to erase the long lasting rivalry between the Believers and the Unbelievers in Qolorha-by-sea, he also seeks reconciliation in *The Madonna of Excelsior* which has whites, blacks and coloreds (who are considered not white enough by the whites and not black enough by the blacks). In this new dispensation, reconciliation is the only avenue for the construction of a peaceful South Africa. In this post-apartheid society, characters are expected to work in the same administrative structures irrespective of their ethnic and cultural divergences. The racist Tjaart Cronje with other whites have to cooperate with blacks like Viliki and Sekatle, as well as with coloreds like Popi in order to discuss developmental projects, construct schools, build roads, libraries, hospitals, organize trade fairs, agricultural exhibitions and involve in the improvement of other social facilities like electrifying the locality and the building of houses for the underprivileged in their community. Although white supremacists and those harboring nostalgic feelings for the apartheid system like Tjaart find it difficult to work with other races in the board, they end up cooperating because of the political atmosphere in the new South Africa and also due to the necessity for them to perpetuate their stay in South Africa. The board is expected to be like the pre-colonial South Africa where there was freedom and tranquility. Kincaid also uses landscape to present the reconciliation of binary cultures.

In *Annie John*, a space of reconciliation is seen in Annie's trunk and the far away land Zanzibar, found in the story that Annie recounts. Annie John's trunk is painted with many colors inside and outside. The trunk is also a collection of several items, some of them from Annie's grandmother Ma Chess who is an obeah woman. The items from Ma Chess serve as a spiritual protection to Annie John. Other things in the trunk are Annie's dressings, jewelry and certificates of merit from Sunday school. The collection in this trunk gives a summary of Annie John's world. She is a combination of the pre-emancipation West Indian culture (represented by the influence of her grandmother Ma Chess), and the British values brought unto her by colonialism. She has to reconcile both her West Indian and British cultures in order to evolve in her contemporary society.

One of the common issues in Caribbean societies that are also reflected in their literature is the search for roots. This search derives from the people's past of slavery which affects their everyday life as Kincaid puts it in *A Small Place*. Disillusioned

by colonialism, some members in society think that a utopic atmosphere can be attained if they can relocate to Africa. In *Annie John*, Annie remembers a story of a girl without parents. The agony of this girl can be compared to that of the West Indian under colonialism. Annie John narrates that all the troubles she passes through become very insignificant because in the end everything is "resolved happily for the girl and she…would sail off to Zanzibar or some other very distant place, where, since they could do as they pleased, they were forever happy" (86). Annie John imagines that the utopic space for the West Indian is not the West Indies, but a foreign land which is found somewhere around Africa. This reiterates the fact that to people of African origins, their roots and history cannot be ignored and that in moments of frustration, salvation can easily come when they detach themselves from their colonial society and return to their roots, which guarantee comfort, peace and respect for humanity. This African space reduces the psychological trauma of the black characters. It is a sort of happiness that they acquire when they think that they are a noble race from Africa, whose pride and beauty remain untainted.

Development in South African and Antiguan societies can be attained if the members of these societies reconcile their past and cultural heritage with certain aspects of their contemporary societies. This points to the fact that benevolence, good faith, togetherness, the acceptance of difference and the veneration of one's background and heritage are necessary tools to the construction of new South African and West Indian societies.

As seen in the novels under study, Mda and Kincaid make recourse to the non-linear cyclic time and to flashbacks in their reconstruction of indigenous space. The societies of their characters and even the characters themselves have been oppressed and the passage of time has not healed their pain. However, they now have a common responsibility. They have to look into this past, and seek avenues for development so that they can attain a better future. The past presents duality for there were also moments of communion and fraternity, especially in pre-colonial societies as seen in the works of Zakes Mda and Jamaica Kincaid. These are moments which could serve as a stepping stone for the construction of a peaceful multi-ethnic South Africa. As presented above, Mda and Kincaid use landscape as an avenue for the construction of a future space. The next sub-section shows how these authors use supernatural events, art and flashbacks to express the realities of their societies.

The Uncanny and the Reconstruction of Time and Space

This section examines how Mda and Kincaid use magic realism as an avenue for the construction of space. Lindsay Moore in an online article entitled "Magical Realism" claims that the term 'magic realism' was first used by the German critic, Franz Roh in the 1920s for artists who try to show reality in a new way. He described magic realism as a form in which "our real world re-emerges before our eyes bathed in the clarity of a new day" (1). The Venezuelan literary critic, Uslar Pietro, first applied it to Latin American literature, but it really caught on when Miguel Angel Asturias used it to describe his novels which treated the fantastic as normal without amazement. Otherwise, this is the occurrence of uncanny events in a realistic story. Magic realism has become a major characteristic in postcolonial literatures. For Michael Dash in his essay "Marvelous Realism, The Way Out of Negritude", magic realism

> …would signify for the Third World writer an investigation of his past which goes beyond the documented deprivations of slavery and colonisation to a more speculative vision of history in which the consciousness of the dominated culture would predominate. *(The Post-colonial Studies Reader 200)*

This means that magic realism is used by postcolonial writers to deconstruct the hegemony of imperial power by introducing other forms of art that reflect the background of the colonized, and portray aspects of their culture. Magic realism plays an important role in the novels under study as it is either present in the plot, characterization or setting. Some moments when reference is made to the past through magic realism will be discussed below.

In *The Heart of Redness*, the first instance of magic realism is the legend of Nongqawuse. Prophetesses Nongqawuse and Nombada reveal that some strangers claiming to be their ancestors ask them to forward their instructions to their people on conditions that they will ensure the salvation of the amaXhosas. The prophecy leads to reactions concerning its origins and authenticity. For the Believers, these strangers were truly the ancestors who sent a salvation message. For the Unbelievers like Twin-Twin, Nongqawuse's prophecy is a manifestation of her psychological problems. White colonizers like Sir George Grey think that Kings Moshoeshoe and Sarhili who want to set the people against the English have manipulated the prophetesses. The kings for their part think that the English have made up the prophecy to extinguish the natives without participating directly in the murder.

The variety of opinions on this prophecy shows that there are still some doubts about the truth of the story. However, what is of importance is the fact that Nongqawuse's prophecy makes room for the analysis of the history of South Africa and its place in today's world. Yesterday, the ancestors bitterly opposed any co-habitation with foreigners and that further fragmented society. Today, Believers and Unbelievers, whites and blacks have different ideologies but they have a common responsibility in South Africa. They have to find means and ways to live together.

Another significant aspect of magic realism is seen through the trances of the Unbelievers. The abathwa have a dance that allows them to get into trances. The Unbelievers use their dance to get into trances so as to find themselves in the past, in the period of Nongqawuse and during apartheid. This dance enables the Unbelievers to live and reflect on the sufferings that their people underwent, while seeking to ensure a brighter future.

Magic realism in *The Heart of Redness* is also presented through the scars inherited by the descendants of Twin-Twin. These "scars of history" in the 1850s, show the continuity of history. Xoliswa Ximaya who has been acculturated due to her studies and time spent in America is also a descendant of Twin-Twin. She is pulled back to the past like her father and other members of her family to pay tribute to this tradition through the appearance of the scars on her back. This shows that one cannot make a way forward without considering the negative and positive aspects of the past for they are the base of our present lives.

Another aspect of magic realism in *The Heart of Redness* is the uncommon but very significant birth of Heitsi. The young Qukezwa gave birth to Heitsi although "the grandmothers said [she] was a virgin". Camagu, who is identified as the baby's father, "has only known a woman since [he came to Qolorha] in the biblical sense, that is in his messy dreams" (128). In the past (i.e. in the 1850s) Qukezwa and her son Heitsi were pillars of the amaXhosa culture and advocated the liberation of the people from the British. The contemporary Qukezwa and Heitsi who are descendants of the ancestors embody the same ideology. The birth of Heitsi is paralleled to that of Jesus in the Bible. Just like Jesus Christ who reconciled the Jews and the Gentiles, Heitsi, the new liberator, will reconcile the Believers and the Unbelievers. He is therefore a source of reconciliation and economic empowerment to the amaXhosas.

In the novel, the amaXhosas believe so much in gods, prophets, soothsayers and ancestors. There are so many gods presented in *The Heart of Redness* like Qamata, Mdalidephu, Thixo and Tsiqwa. There are also prophets like Nongqawuse, Nombada, Mlanjeni, Nonkosi and Nxele. All these belong to the supernatural universe. Furthermore, during their exodus, the twin brothers and their families are guided and protected by the seven sisters which are the stars from which the Khoikhoi descended (51). In the present-day Qolorha, the Believers still make reference to the supernatural beings and always consult them before engaging in any important decision. The Believers always pay tribute to Nongqawuse and still look upon her prophecies as an authentic move towards nationhood. This is why they reject the propositions of the developers to build a gambling resort but instead wish to preserve their forest against destruction. To them, preserving their natural heritage will lead to an ecological balance and

therefore to a significant aspect of development in this new era.

In Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Niki estranges herself from the violence and corruption of her society and makes recourse to the supernatural in order to device a better future for her society. The post-apartheid community of Excelsior is deep into the corruption that has become a way of life of the new elite ruling South Africa. Niki prefers not to partake in vengeance and corruption so she goes into bee-keeping. However, she is part of this society and by her own strength, she cannot resist the temptation to contribute to the moral decay of her society. She started bee-keeping because she wants to live a simple life opposed to the capitalist race in her community.

This new practice is fortified by the influence of her ancestors:

> Popi was insisting that her mother be left alone to keep bees in her own way, using the wisdom that her ancestors had given her. Clearly, her ancestors were talking to her through the bees and it would be interfering with this communication if she were taught European ways of keeping bees, Popi had reasoned. (230)

In this new society, Niki realizes that healing cannot be attained solely by the efforts of the members of her community for they are all corrupt in one way or the other, and some have not been able to forgive because of the trauma and dehumanization of apartheid. She turns to her ancestors who fortify the bees in their process of producing honey. The ancient society was one of fraternity and had the spirit of community. This spirit infused in the bees will create honey that Niki does not sell to empower herself economically but she shares it to all members of her community. This disrupts the focus on economics and punctures the value ascribed to capitalism—for capitalism and the race for money is the new challenge faced by this new regime in South Africa. The sharing of honey to this local community is a metaphor for nationhood in South Africa. South Africans must reflect upon their pre-colonial community and develop love for one another in order to attain a better future. There are also instances of magic realism in the works of Kincaid.

Magic realism in Kincaid's *Annie John* expresses certain beliefs and customs of the blacks towards death and the supernatural world of the obeah women. Annie describes her fear of the dead by showing how they could show up at anytime. They could either appear in a dream to give a warning or they could appear standing under a tree and as people pass by, they follow them right to their home. In this case, they will never give up until you join them. In the opening pages of the novel, Annie John says:

> I was afraid of the dead, as was everyone I knew. We were afraid of the dead because we never could tell when they might show up again. Sometimes they showed up in dreams, but that wasn't so bad, because they usually only brought a warning, and in any case you wake up from the dream. But sometimes they would show up standing under a tree just as you were passing by. Then they might follow you home, and even though they might not be able to come into your house, they might wait for you and follow you wherever you went; in that case, they would never give up until you joined them.(4)

This citation shows that in Caribbean society, people believe the dead could appear at any time and haunt them. They also believe that ghosts that appear in dreams are less dangerous because they are a warning of imminent danger. But the ghosts that follow people around, end up taking them to the land of the dead. This constitutes the belief system of many African communities and it does not only create fear in people concerning the dead but it also instills a spirit of respect for the departed. In most African communities, people do not speak ill of the dead even if these departed were irresponsible or malicious during their days on earth. This is because they believe the dead lurk around the living and could harm those who speak evil about them. The dead are not buried into the graveyard of time but they go beyond the past and live on, thereby constituting part of the present society.

Another aspect of magic realism in *Annie John* is seen through the obeah motif. Obeah is the local spiritual system that relies upon the use of herbs as well as sorcery and spells. In *Annie John*, moments when Western religion and medicine intervene in the life of Annie John are always complemented by rituals from Ma Jolie, Ma Chess or another obeah woman. Annie and her mother usually take special baths in a dark room with a strange smelling candle to protect themselves against bad spirits. They usually perform these rites when the obeah women confirm that the look of things around them shows that there is impending danger. This interaction with the supernatural world presents the Antiguans' belief system and how it affects their way of life. This also shows that Christianity that they indulge in is just an imposition of colonialism for they have other values they fervently stick to. When Annie John falls sick Ma Jolie and Ma Chess perform a lot of rituals to send away bad spirits and also to protect Annie John from anyone who might know about her condition and wish to attack her.

Later on in the novel, Annie John presents the story of her late uncle Johnnie. Some believe he died because his mother Ma Chess, who is an obeah woman never attended to him in his moment of sickness. According to Annie John's account,

> When Uncle Johnnie got sick, Ma Chess was sure that a doctor was the last thing he needed. Pa Chess was sure that a doctor was the only thing he needed, and Pa Chess got his way. For two years, Uncle Johnnie lay in bed, each day looking rosier and rosier. Then one day he died. On the day he died, he had never looked better. When he died, a large worm bored its way out of his leg and rested on his shinbone. (125)

Those who adhere to obeah like Ma Chess perceived the fact that Annie's uncle could not be cured by Western medicine. In the case when Annie John falls sick, Western medicine was associated with treatment from obeah women to heal her. According to Annie John's mother, Annie's uncle was followed around by ghosts, so he needed protection from obeah women. Their superstition is further heightened by the fact that a strange worm crawls out of his leg when he dies. A reader who is not from this cultural background might not see any truth in this story but to the Antiguans, this constitutes reality and has constituted the belief system in their society. People's beliefs actually make them what they are and these beliefs develop a spiritual effect that conditions the way people think and the things that affect them in their daily lives.

Obeah reappears in *Annie John* and *The Autobiography of My Mother.* In *Annie John,* Kincaid presents it from the way that Annie's mother takes a bath (14), the healing of Annie (116), to the obeah blessed clothing that Annie wears on her way to England (134). We also see this motif in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. Obeah is a powerful part of the native culture that remains, despite the cultural dominion of the British Empire. In particular, obeah links the Caribbean society to its pre-colonization people, while simultaneously suggesting the blend of Caribbean and African cultures that make up the islands. Annie's grandmother particularly seems to dwell in a mystical world of obeah that fully defies the logical world of the colonial culture. She arrives and leaves Antigua on days that the ferry does not run, for example. In pre-colonial times, practitioners of obeah could travel from one place to another by disappearing and appearing. This is similar to the flight motif presented in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), where characters have the ability to fly spiritually to their homelands. The belief in the existence of obeah is simply a shift to pre-colonial time and space, and demonstrates the power of the local spiritual beliefs to survive, despite the colonial conditions.

Indigenous traditional culture is exemplified in the contrast Ma Chess makes between traditional culture and Western/urbanized culture. When Ma Chess asks Annie's father what he really did for a living, he replies that he builds houses and she says: "A house? Why live in a house? All you need is a nice hole in the ground, so you can come and go as you please" (126). This remark shows the freedom in traditional cultures versus the need for protection in Western cultures and the simplicity of traditional cultures versus the complexity of modern

ones. This freedom and simplicity were characteristics of pre-colonial times.

In *Annie John*, the mother is an agent in the imposition of colonial values on her daughter, thus liking the tensions between the mother and the daughter to the tensions between the coloniser and the colonised. Corroborating this idea, Bénédicte Ledent asserts that in this way the relationship between the conforming mother and the resisting daughter is seen as "metonymic of colonial condition" (*Kunapipi* 59). In her interview with Allan 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" (*Face to Face: Interviews with Contemporary Novelists* 86). Consequently the relationship between motherhood and the colonial metropolis as motherland has been recognised as the overarching theme of Kincaid's fiction. Women are carriers of culture through the generations, usually through the tradition of oral storytelling. They have 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 Caribbean and African cultures and provides "a model of African based female power, that of the obeah woman" (Diane Simmons, *Jamaica Kincaid* 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.

Kincaid still probes into the supernatural world in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. Xuela's stepmother gives her a necklace which Xuela suspects of being bewitched and she prefers to put the necklace on a dog's neck and "within twenty-four hours it went mad and died" (35). Xuela concludes that this woman wished her dead. Besides, a mermaid lures a young boy and he swims towards her and disappears with the mermaid in the sea never to be seen again. Xuela recounts the story thus:

> The school I attended was five miles away in the next village. We had to cross a river. One day when the river was very high and we were crossing naked, we saw a woman in the part of the river where the mouth met the sea. It was deep there and we could not tell if she was sitting or standing, but we knew she was naked. She opened her mouth and a strange yet sweet sound came out. She was surrounded by fruit. She beckoned to us to come to her. Someone said it was not a woman at all, that we should not go, that we should run away. And then this boy, whose face I could remember because it was the male mask of heedlessness and boastfulness that I have come to know started forward and forward, and he laughed as he went forward. He swam toward her and the fruit, and each time he was almost near, she became farther away. He swam in this way until he began to sink from exhaustion; then we could see nothing at all. And then the woman vanished too as if she had not been there. The boy disappeared; he was never seen again. It came to exist only in our minds, an act of faith, like the Virgin Birth for some people, or other such miracles; and it had the same power of belief and unbelief, only unlike the Virgin Birth we had seen this ourselves. *(Autobiography 35-6)*

This story brings the uncanny into a narrative of the experiences of a group of people in this novel. This shows the intersection of the magical and real events in the lives of Africans and West Indians. These stories which constitute an essential part of their daily folk culture are considered legends even when some of them are myths. In the citation above, the boy is lured away by the mermaid because he admires her beauty and the fruit and refuses to heed to the counsel of not swimming toward the mermaid. Readers recognize that such stories constitute the informal medium through which

African and Caribbean people had been educated for so many generations, and they still use this to transmit the wisdom needed to face the challenges of life.

Through all these moments into the world of the supernatural, Kincaid seems to highlight the fact that there are aspects of the past cultures of the West Indians and Africans that must not be ignored for people can better appreciate what they really possess than what is imposed on them by a foreign culture. As seen in *Annie John* and *Lucy*, the bringing together of the Western culture and that of the West Indians can lead to development for there are positive aspects in both cultures that may empower the West Indians. The examples of supernatural occurrences cited from *The Autobiography of My Mother* demonstrate the extent to which the West Indians are intrinsically linked to a belief system which is mainly superstitious, and the stories they recount which may seem quite unreal to a Western reader constitute their folklore, transcribed, framed and merged into the stories about their day-to-day lives.

The attempt of Mda and Kincaid at using magic realism to rewrite time and space and the consequent laws of cause and effect, is a substantial step in the creation of novels that suppress binary oppositions such as self / other, male / female, centre /periphery, white/ black, privileged/ underprivileged or magic/ reality. While all these binaries are interrogated in their novels, they point to the absurdity of life in a world where reality and the supernatural are reconstructed by individuals. The supernatural and the real in the *novels of Mda and Kincaid* are the means of transcending the forces of history at a particular moment of time. These authors also use certain forms of art in the construction of a future space.

Mda and Kincaid use time to create a future space of peace and harmony in their novels. These authors have made recourse to the 'Macro-time', which is embedded in the pre-colonial, colonial, contemporary epoch and the near future. This oscillation across different historical timeframes has been facilitated by the use of narrative strategies such as flashbacks, magic realism and art. These strategies seek to rewrite the histories of oppressed characters. They reveal the various aspects of the history of South Africans and the Caribbeans that fostered development and the spirit of community, or that could be used to redress contemporary modes of behaviors. In so doing, we have examined the means that these people have adopted to improve their relationships that have been affected by apartheid, colonization and the challenges of their post-colonial societies.

Conclusion

This paper set out to defend the hypothesis that the construction of a "third space" or an imagined community in colonial and post-colonial settings is determined by temporal factors as seen in the novels of Mda and Kincaid. This hypothesis claims that time determines the perspective, nature and considerations towards the realization of space in society. Time becomes a caldron that shapes and determines the outcome of 'free-floating' binaries in colonial and post-colonial societies. This claim was also sustained by the fact that through the use of the characters, landscape and certain narrative strategies, these authors seek to construct hybrid locations which erase the existing dichotomies of master/slave, dominant/subaltern, man/woman, civilized/primitive, superior/inferior, centre/margin. They thus create spaces that lead to self-assertion and national development. This study also revisited some aspects of the history of the colonized that fostered the spirit of community that is indispensable for the construction of a future space of reconciliation and peace.

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