

## Case Study: Teaching Two Caribbean Texts in Kenyan Universities

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**Abstract:** This essay uses Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* and Erna Brodber's *Myal* to discuss the approaches I used in teaching black diasporic literature in two Kenyan universities. It argues that the best approaches are those that encourage students to use higher-order learning processes spontaneously and create an appropriate teaching environment suited to the region's historical, geographical, and cultural context vis-à-vis black diasporic cultural, historical, geographical, and literary backgrounds for students with some grounding in African literature. The selected methods take into account challenges concerning students' access to learning resources, students' individual strengths and interests, medium or large class sizes, and the need to provide adequate background information for literatures that originate from different geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts than those of the class members. *In Another Place, Not Here* and *Myal* illustrate the main concerns and issues that arise when teaching black diasporic literatures in Kenyan universities. Although the texts are mostly taught within an implied comparatist, multi-disciplinary, and translational mode, they also provide context for postcolonial inquiry into the wider black cultural and historical encounter with European imperialism and the resultant power dynamics that continue today.

**Keywords:** black diasporas, postcolonialism, comparative approaches, Dionne Brand, Erna Brodber, teaching and learning, Kenyan universities

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## I. Introduction

This paper reflects on my experiences teaching four semesters of Caribbean literature at the University of Nairobi between 2006–07 as well as a course in postcolonial discourse theory at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology between 2008–10. I taught these courses within the postcolonial tradition informed by the history of teaching African and black diasporic literature at the University of Nairobi, the first public university in Kenya. Together with their colleagues, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Taban Lo Liyong, and Henry Owuor-Anyumba led the campaign to abolish the English Department at the University of Nairobi and replace it with the Department of African Literature and Languages. As a result of these efforts, the Department of Literature and the Department of Linguistics and African Languages were formally established on 24 October 1968. Following the establishment of the Department of Literature, black diasporic writings have figured prominently in post-secondary Kenyan literature curricula.

The reshaping of the department and the literature curriculum from the colonially-oriented Department of English into the radically Africanist-oriented Department of Literature saw the traditional bias toward European, especially English, literature replaced with a focus on world literature. Courses in Caribbean, African American, and Latin American literatures were included in the curriculum and mostly taught as core courses. As additional universities were established in Kenya, the new Departments of Literature followed the University of Nairobi’s example. No research has been done, however, to evaluate the pedagogical issues that arose from this curriculum shift. This essay interrogates the way that Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* and Erna Brodber’s *Myal* can be taught to illustrate some of these issues.

While the University of Nairobi is the oldest public chartered university in Kenya, Masinde Muliro University is a relatively young institution that belongs to a group of new universities that were established under the higher education expansion programme that began in 2001. After having five national universities until 2001, the number of public chartered universities in the country rose to twenty-two, along with nine constituent colleges, by 2013. Despite this expansion, however,

university enrolment has continued to climb. This means that class numbers remain on the higher margin across programmes. The literature courses I teach are offered to students in the Bachelor of Education programme. Usually, classes dealing with postcolonial discourse, African American literature, and Caribbean literatures are available to these students in the final two years of their four-year programmes. By this time, they have been introduced to a wide range of courses covering literatures from Kenya, East Africa, and other parts of Africa. The programme curriculum is designed to help students appreciate both the specific and general trends and concerns in African literature. Upper-level courses become more diverse in terms of regional focus. It is thus possible to take a comparative approach when teaching black diasporic literatures. The postcolonial theoretical prism has also proven productive in conceptualising the various concerns of both African and black diasporic literatures.

There are risks and rewards associated with using these approaches for teaching the courses given that class enrolment usually ranges from fifty to one hundred or more students. To be taught effectively, these approaches require close one-on-one learner-teacher interaction and adequate time to ground learners in the cultural and literary trends of the region. The other challenge to delivery is associated with strategies of effectively introducing and teaching courses that deal with culturally and geographically removed spaces. It is important to recognise the many mediating factors that can influence the success of a particular approach. The disposition of the class, how well versed they are in black diaspora history, and their knowledge of and interest in globalisation issues play a role. In this essay I explore how teaching strategies that prioritise student-led learning activities can be used to teach black diasporic literature in relatively large classes. I use Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* and Brodber's *Myal* to demonstrate how these approaches can be applied. My own practice emphasises comparison as a method of structuring the course and postcolonial theory as a common reference point. My goal in the course is to create interconnections and help students appreciate the new materials by linking them to what they are already familiar with. As John Biggs and Catherine Tang suggest, a strong

knowledge base is complex in structure and is constructed by “building on the known, making use of students’ existing knowledge, emphasising structural interconnections between topics and confronting misconceptions students may have” (93). Approaching the material in this way encourages students to see the possible relationships between cultural and historical links, on-going dialogues, and ways in which contexts have reshaped the evolution of specific cultures and literatures.

## **II. Teaching Brodber and Brand Comparatively in the Context of Black Diaspora**

Takayuki Yokota-Murakami argues that to analyse “two or more literary phenomena that transcend national, cultural, or linguistic boundaries, the discipline of comparative literature must depend on “the legitimacy of an act of bringing two items together” (1). The ground for comparison depends on seeking and establishing “a certain ‘common’ axis” between the compared items (1). In terms of teaching Brodber’s *Myal*, which is set in the Caribbean, and Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*, which is set in the Caribbean and Canada, it is crucial to introduce students to both the obvious and (potentially) not-so-obvious common “axes” between black diasporic societies’ history, culture, and literatures and their own. As Yokota-Murakami asserts, “we begin comparing when we identify, not when we differentiate, two objects” (1).

In order to use this comparative approach in class, it is important that students have a clear understanding of the meaning and complexity of the concept of diaspora as an entry point for understanding the nuances of black history and the cultural and literary development in the Caribbean. Over the first two weeks of the semester the course is introduced mainly through a general discussion of the background of Caribbean and African diasporic culture, history, and literature. I then introduce the main writers we will study, focusing on their backgrounds, biographies, and writing. This is done mostly through lecture and Socratic questioning. The questions help to structure the students’ responses to these particular elements and reinforce their importance. Students’ responses are, in turn, used to stimulate class discussions. Their errors and misconceptions are constructively used to fill knowledge gaps

and thus maximise their awareness of their own knowledge. I also recommend online sources and ask students to access them individually. They take notes on their findings and share their summaries in groups. These sources include encyclopaedias, both online and those on the university library shelves, which provide brief and concise introductions to key concepts, as well as sites that provide background information on Brodber, a Caribbean female writer and teacher based in Jamaica, and Brand, a female writer originally from Trinidad and based in Canada. I emphasise that the late post-independence Caribbean period in which the authors wrote is significant in terms of understanding their texts' central concerns. *Myal* was first published in 1988 and *In Another Place* in 2000. This particular era has come to redefine the postcolonial writing of both the Caribbean and Africa. The early independence period was predominantly represented by male writers who were preoccupied with nationalistic themes and the immediate history of colonialism from which both societies were emerging. Writings from the 1980s onward have arguably been shaped by the emergence of more female writers and growing concerns with the gender dynamics that had been subsumed in the nationalistic and male-dominated literature of the early independence era (Boehmer 3; Straton 2).

The second part of the course seeks to involve students in the learning process. This component of the course involves more complex discussion, an understanding of key concepts such as "diaspora," and an awareness of the ways in which such concepts relate to Brodber's and Brand's cultural and historical contexts, respectively. This section of the course contextualises the idea of the "African diaspora" in relation to the authors and the settings of the two texts, since *Myal* takes place in Jamaica and *In Another Place* is set in Trinidad and Canada. In general, I draw on Robin Cohen's writing to provide a working definition of the concept of diaspora. According to Cohen, the constituent elements of a diasporic consciousness include one's awareness of or perspectives on dispersal from a homeland, in the case of African Caribbeans by violent forces; the making of a memory and a vision of that homeland; and marginalisation in one's new location. An active commitment to the maintenance/restoration of the homeland, a desire for return, and/

or a continuing relationship and identification with the homeland shapes the consciousness and solidarity of any diasporic group, actively or symbolically (Cohen 31–42). Cohen notes that the black diaspora in the Americas has evolved historically from what he terms a “victim diaspora” to a “cultural diaspora” (33). “Victim diaspora” refers to the displacement occasioned by slavery, the uprooting of black people from Africa across the Atlantic into bondage (33). Diasporic cultural identities are constructed and produced over time by the people themselves; Cohen argues that the black diaspora in the Caribbean and other parts of the world such as North America and Europe has evolved into a “cultural diaspora” through “their roots and branches through their rooting and branching” (153). Cohen privileges the role of the migrant’s agency in transforming victim diaspora into cultural diaspora through what we can term “cultural optimization processes.” Victim diaspora space-places are generally sites of subjugation characterised by contending power relations. Michel Foucault asserts that as a mode of action upon the action of others, “[p]ower exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action” (340). In victim diaspora characterised by slavery, the enslaved were situated in production and signification that resulted in power relations that debased and marginalised them; they were subjugated by a dominant power that was enacted on them, which undermined their agency (*power over*). This situation eroded their capacity of being acting subjects (applying own *power to* act). As Foucault notes, “[t]he power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorises the individual, marks him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognise and others have to recognise in him” (331). The dominated usually reconstitute and empower themselves by deploying their power against the oppressors’ power over them. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf argues that such reworking “means that a construction of black identity emerges not through the logic of domination but through capacities that enables agents to alter their existential context and create an alternative mode of being” (“In the Sea” 6). Cultural optimisation processes occur when “the individual and community appropriate their inner resilience to develop meditated positions and continually re-position themselves by adopting and adapting to feasible pathways

in constructing identity and asserting belonging in contexts of social difference and diversity” (Omuteche 48). Through resistance, resilience, renegotiation, and repositioning the victim diaspora turns into viable communities by re-working its identity and belonging through available pathways. Cultural diasporas thus emerge over time through processes of cultural optimisation, dialogic processes that involve continuous re-positioning as identity and belonging are re-worked and renegotiated.

After discussing a conceptual definition of diaspora, I introduce relevant critical texts, essays, and online sites and blogs that the students read critically and connect with debates about issues of diaspora and black history. The material also provides contextual information about Caribbean literature and language. In one particular class, students read Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley’s “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World” and Stuart Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in groups of approximately eight and noted key issues that the authors raised in respect to these concepts and the debates. Each group then made a brief presentation that summarised what they identified as the essays’ key statements about diaspora in the context of black/Caribbean history. Patterson and Kelley note that the context of the development of what they term “black Atlantic” culture and identity was a product of the West’s “racial capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism” (13). They also argue, however, that although Western capitalist and imperial actions shaped the emergence of African diasporic experiences, the western and African cultural encounters transformed both African (and African diasporic) and western cultures. Thus they suggest that “the black Atlantic” is not just a counterculture but “an integral part of the formation of the modern world as we know it” (13). Central to the essay is the argument that the development of African diasporic identities and consciousness has been informed by continuous reinvention through cultural work, migration, transformations in communications, and the globalisation of capital (14). Students noted that the nature of diasporic consciousness and identities and the transformational connections linking diasporas are determined by specific historical contexts: a shared and ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance

influences the ways in which a real or symbolic homeland is represented and the teleology of origin and return is articulated. Many students related these ideas to the treatment of characters, themes, and contextual details in both *Myal* and *In Another Place*.

Another issue dealt with in the essay that caught students' attention is the vexed question at the heart of debates about the concept and label of "African/black diaspora." Patterson and Kelley ask if "the fundamental and still unresolved question in histories of the African diaspora and the making of the modern world is to what degree New World black people are 'African' and what does that mean?" (18). Read in relation to discussions around the concepts of survival, transformation, syncretism, hybridity, and difference, the question points to emotive, muddled, and slippery debates. Concerning the debate about the cultural survivals framework of describing black diaspora, Patterson and Kelley note that, "[i]ronically, the question of African ethnicities shaping New World black culture has been met with hostility, given the intense 'anti-essentialism' that pervades the new generation of scholars concerned with locating hybridity and difference within black cultures" (18). In class, I urge students to take note of the authors' position that, rather than preoccupy ourselves with the search for or denial of African cultural survivals in the New World, we must acknowledge that diasporic identities are socially and historically constituted, reproduced in particular places and times, and contingent and constantly shifting (19).

The third point in the essay the students noted in their groups is Patterson and Kelley's discussion of the relationships between concepts and manifestations of diaspora, globalisation, and migration. The authors argue that these confluences become evident if we consider diaspora as both a process and a condition, key features in contextualising Brand and Brodber. They write:

As a process it [diaspora] is constantly being remade through movement, migration, and travel, as well as imagined through thought, cultural production, and political struggle. Yet, as a condition, it is directly tied to the process by which it is being made and remade. In other words, the African diaspora itself

exists within the context of global race and gender hierarchies which are formulated and reconstituted across national boundaries and along several lines. (20)

The reconstitution occurs in legal, economic, and social spheres. Immigrant citizenship is curtailed in polities that claim to be democratic and systems define and limit access to citizenship, as well as economic and other social opportunities based on race and gender in both open and segregated societies (20). These trends are best understood in the context of global developments in that the “black world” can be appreciated in the framework of the larger world and vice versa (26). As the students read *In Another Place* they often find that this point contextualises and illuminates the novel’s multiple settings.

As we delve deeper into the concept of diaspora and connect it to issues of cultural development, we rely on Stuart Hall’s theorisation of cultural identity. Hall argues that cultural identity is “enunciated” and proposes that we are always positioned and position ourselves in relation to time, place, and “a history and culture which is specific” (222). Hall develops two pillars of understanding cultural identity that students find instructive in reading *In Another Place* and *Myal* in the context of the African diaspora: “shared collective” and “difference” (223). “Shared collective” describes an aspect of diasporic consciousness, “a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (223). Hall explains how this understanding applies to the identity and consciousness of the African diaspora:

Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This ‘oneness’, underlying all other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence of ‘Caribbeanness’, of the black experience. (223)

Hall states that “[t]here is a second, related but different view of cultural identity” that

recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather—since history has intervened—‘what we have become’. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side—the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean’s ‘uniqueness’. (225)

As such, Hall contends, identity is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’” (225). These arguments, together with Patterson and Kelley’s claims, usefully elucidate the becoming and nature of diasporic beings, subjects that are arguably significant components of both *Myal* and *In Another Place*.

Students also note Hall’s articulation of the main three “presences” that inform the diasporic Caribbean cultural identity and consciousness: *présence Africaine*, *présence Européenne*, and *présence Americaine* (230). The different interplay of these presences in the construction of Caribbean diasporic identity and consciousness lead Hall to suggest that diaspora does not imply purity or essence, but “a recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (235). These arguments contextualise the nature of the diasporic being as is experienced in the black diaspora. The pertinent issues Hall highlights inform students’ understanding of the complexities of diasporicity as it emerges in the course texts.

From the outset of the course, the role of the teacher is to help the students see the historical and cultural genesis of the singular elements of the particular cultural settings of *Myal* and *In Another Place*. Brodber’s *Myal* is set principally in Grove Town, Jamaica. It revolves around a number of characters and families but is centred on Ella O’Grady and

her mother Mary Riley. It is a story of growing up in a colour-conscious society in which race has historically been used to assign social privilege to white communities and marginalise black communities. The novel addresses several themes, including gender, spirituality, religion, and neo-imperialism. Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* is set on a Caribbean Island and in Canada. The narrative focuses on two protagonists, Elizete and Verlia. Although they come from different backgrounds their lives briefly coincide, which leads to a mutually fulfilling friendship. Amidst Trinidad's political turmoil and estranging experiences of immigration in Canada, the memory of the friendship remains alive for the two women. Their stories and reminiscences highlight the different impacts of neo-imperialism, sexual and material oppression, non-belonging and homelessness, and gender in the contexts of immigration and diaspora.

I chose these novels for the course in Caribbean literature because of the way they lend themselves to a number of course objectives: developing an understanding of Caribbean literature as African or black diasporic literature; foregrounding postcolonial theory; examining the ways in which literature depicts contemporary cultural and political issues; and viewing literature as a way of discussing both historical and contemporary issues of globalisation and immigration. The novels also raise issues of gender, which is important when we consider the predominance of male writers in African and Caribbean literature courses. Therefore the texts make an important ideological point as they reflect similar trends when treated comparatively with African women writers who became prominent from the 1980s onwards.

To create this comparative link, the course tries to understand the texts within the context of what has already been discussed in students' previous courses. As the course progresses, we relate the novels and their contexts to African literary texts that the students are familiar with from their earlier courses in the undergraduate programme. Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986) and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* (1994), for example, prove useful when discussing issues of identity, history, and gender in relation to particular national histories and the artistic responses of female writers in hitherto predominantly male creative representational spaces.

Macgoye and Ogola are Kenyan female writers to whom students are introduced in their early literature courses. In the Caribbean literature course, they usually provide a transitional reference point and offer an opportunity for the students to reflect on the known before venturing into an unknown field. The students are encouraged to focus on how literature generally works and situate the identifiable similarities, affinities, and differences between these selected representative African and African diasporic literatures and their aesthetic aspects within the role that writers and literature play in society in given contexts. Macgoye and Ogola, like Brodber and Brand, are female authors writing in complex patriarchal socio-cultural environments. Both have taken it as their artistic role to reinterpret the place of women in Kenyan society. Their works demonstrate a conscious creative effort to raise the awareness of and emancipate women in spaces in which they are marginalised or oppressed. Including the work of Macgoye and Ogola enriches the initial comparative aspect of the course because of their artistic visions that encompass questions of gender and foreground the role of female protagonists in representations of historical transformation.

Through appreciating the contextual matrix in comparative analysis, students ideally come to grasp the complexity and diversity of the contemporary world. They focus on relationships and differences rather than the overriding universalism that Yokota-Murakami ascribes to comparatist practitioners who are apt

to find in the Other what we already know in our own system of signification. For, if finding and knowing a difference is painful, universalising one's own paradigm upon another is a pleasure. Comparison, then, is realised through the imposition of the observer's paradigm upon the other. (188)

The comparative model I adopt when teaching the course underscores the linguistic, cultural, political, and historical complexities and diversities that characterise the globalised and transnational world in which the texts are grounded. This is a non-reductive transnational analytical paradigm. Emily Apter notes that the postcolonial comparatist approach is of necessity "location-conscious, translational transnationalism"

(56–57). Such an approach makes it possible to “link the cultures of decolonization, immigration, and globalisation within a conceptual framework that seeks common denominators—while remaining suspicious of simplistic generalizations” (Lionnet 105). Hence, the core lesson that the course emphasises is that studying African diasporic literature exposes students to a range of cultural and artistic trends that could be meaningful within their own cultural and historical realities despite how geographically, historically, and culturally disparate the texts’ originary contexts may be. Over the course of the semester, students are encouraged to critically and selectively identify experiences and models of responses of select characters in the two novels that they may come to appreciate and identify with. *In Another Place* and *Myal* paint complex pictures of the historical experience of home for the Caribbean characters that indict the violent displacement of slavery and the disembodied repression and exploitation of colonialism. Students also grapple with contemporary realities of gender relations, class, immigration, and identity that are closely connected to European imperial activities on the African continent and the related emerging issues that African writers such as Macgoye and Ogola are conscious of as they write across the pre-colonial/traditional era, colonial period, and post-independence era. Macgoye’s *Coming to Birth* spans twenty-two years and covers the colonial era and independence era. The narrative follows the central character, Paulina, from her marriage at sixteen through years of ignorance, abuse, exploitation, self-education, and reassertion. Paulina develops and matures through individual effort and support from fellow women. Ogola’s *The River and the Source* depicts four generations of women. Akoko is the only daughter of a pre-colonial Luo chief. The narrative follows Akoko’s childhood, married life, and widowhood in a decidedly patriarchal traditional society on which colonialism has begun to encroach. The subsequent generations of Akoko’s family reflect the cultural and historical evolution the country undergoes as well as the ways in which gender issues and the role of women in society are transformed. Colonialism, formal education, Christianity, political independence, urbanisation, and globalisation all have an effect on the nature of family and the individual identities of Akoko’s descendants.

The stories of the different generations of women depict the re-creation and change that comes from deliberate efforts on the part of the female protagonists to construct and take charge of their individual destinies, those of their families, and the societal realities in which they find themselves.

Comparison is our main approach at this stage in the course. We focus on particular passages from *Myal* and *In Another Place* as well as the two Kenyan texts. Students are encouraged to engage in critical speculation and abstraction to test out a variety of ideas and find relational meanings or interpretations that are essential for comparative understandings of the novels. Nevertheless, it is most productive to focus on a few aspects for comparison as this is a transitional phase of the course meant to emphasise similarities and differences between the texts that may or may not be due to both historical and ongoing cultural dialogues concerning issues such as globalisation. Limiting the comparable variables further reduces the shock students may feel when encountering unfamiliar literature. With the aid of the teacher, students split into groups and choose an aspect of one Caribbean text and one Kenyan text on which to focus: scene or setting descriptions, characterisation, or particular thematic concerns. The students tease out and identify related or differing depictions in the texts they are examining, and they make brief notes as they discuss. Here, the individual's historical, cultural, and geographical knowledge of Kenya and the Caribbean come in handy. The teacher circulates during the brainstorming and uses the notes made in the observation and assessment of each group to guide the students in further reading and points of focus or refocus. The teacher must prompt the students, remain conscious of individual students' interests, encourage individual independence in information gathering, and ensure the active learning and participation of all group members.

In the next lesson, the groups report back to the class in fifteen-minute presentations. The floor is then opened up to the class to interrogate the different interpretive positions presented. This approach enriches the knowledge base for the whole class and allows the tutor to identify difficulties the students may be having and promptly address misconceptions and gaps. In this particular class, several groups noted the centrality

of female protagonists in both the Caribbean and Kenyan texts. Others were intrigued by thematic similarities such as a preoccupation with history, family, intergenerational relationships, social etiquette, and the struggle between individual values and community beliefs. Still other groups noted differences in the artistic strategies deployed by the writers and the texts' mood and atmosphere.

### III. Entering the World of Caribbean Literature

When students begin reading Brodber, Brand, and other Caribbean writers, they are often struck by the way that language and dialogue work in the texts. Indeed, language use in fiction reflects an important aspect of Caribbean literary culture. For comparative purposes, and to illuminate a challenging aspect of studying the Caribbean texts, I draw students' attention to the use of Pidgin English (PE) in West Africa and how writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have deployed it in their fiction. In reference to how the two Nigerian writers incorporate PE in their works, Tony Obilade contends that literature tries to represent all aspects of human experience and that it is therefore natural to encounter the complexities of language use as writers depict the sociolinguistic situations that gave rise to the language in the communities they depict (14). PE has a stylistic function and is a vehicle for expressing certain meanings. In texts such as *Girls at War* and *A Man of the People*, for example, Achebe uses PE primarily as a means of presenting characters' human aspects. The frequency with which a character uses PE reveals his or her behaviour and capabilities. Obilade argues that it typifies particular individuals within their social settings (14). On the other hand, Soyinka uses PE for character portrayal and humorous effects. In Soyinka's work, Obilade asserts, the characters use PE "because they can express deeper meanings in that medium" (18). Referring to Soyinka's plays *The Trials of Botha Jero* and *Metamorphosis*, especially in terms of the characterisation of Chume, Obilade concludes that PE is "subtly employed to explore deeper meanings, to explain the reasons behind a character's actions, and project and foreground certain themes that are central to the plays concerned" (22). Both Achebe and Soyinka employ PE, dialect, and Standard English in a postcolonial

context. The colonial experience of language engendered a situation that encouraged hierarchies of relations based on individuals' abilities to use Standard English. Due to its connection to colonial power and privilege, Standard English became the aspirational norm amidst the multiplicity of indigenous languages. PE then developed to bridge the gap. Although a minority could access colonial and missionary education and achieve adequate command of Standard English, the necessity of economic and other forms of social interactions cultivated the use of PE in West Africa. Obilade writes that "PE plays a very important role in West Africa—especially in areas where there is no other common language" (14). In Achebe's and Soyinka's work, PE is used in the context of multilingualism; it ensures the effective representation of a certain social group that would otherwise be marginalised in fiction that employs English as its medium. Incorporating PE into a text enables the depiction of the consciousness of characters like Chume, who can express themselves in both Standard English and PE but articulate their deepest feelings in the latter (Obilade 18). Students are often already familiar with this language situation in West African literature, and it often serves as a useful reference point when they begin interacting with Caribbean literature.

To that end, Kenneth Ramchand's work provides informative historical and cultural background for the language situation in the Caribbean and its manifestation in literature. Ramchand writes that, historically, Standard English was used as a yardstick to dismiss the speech of the slaves as "bad English" (83). He argues that when Africans first came to the Caribbean, they maintained dialects of African languages. These dialects were eventually displaced by English and other European languages, depending on which island the slaves were brought to. On British-controlled islands, English became the base of the Creole dialect that emerged among the blacks born in the Caribbean. Ramchand suggests that while the dialect's vocabulary grew closer to English, its grammar took on its own unique Caribbean shape (87). An important point in understanding the historical context of dialect use in Caribbean literature is that the earliest attempts were made by European writers. Their efforts to represent "Negro English" in their fiction, however, resulted in the circulation of black stereotypes, which ranged from the "comic

Negro” to the “lowly or unsophisticated Negro” who was often distinguished from the “superior or sophisticated white narrator” (Ramchand 88). Yet Caribbean writers such as Samuel Selvon, Wilson Harris, V. S. Naipaul, and George Lamming, Ramchand notes, closed the gap between the language of the implied narrator or author and the characters: the Creole “dialect is used in so many different human contexts by West Indian writers that it has been freed of stereotypes” (88).

Much like the contemporary West African authors discussed above, contemporary Caribbean authors write in a multilingual context. Ramchand observes that “with the formal establishment of popular education in the latter half of the nineteenth century, we can trace the beginning of a new connection on a grammatical level between the upper reaches of Creole English and Standard English” (91). As a result, the writers belong to a social group of educated Caribbean peoples who are “sufficiently educated to control the grammar and lexis of Standard English [but] retain the ability to pronounce in their natural West Indian Standard way; above all, however, they are more or less instinctive speakers of or thinkers in a West Indian dialect or dialects” (94). Knowledge of this linguistic phenomenon enables the students to appreciate the depictions of different levels of narrative voices in the two novels. The authorial narrator and the first person character narrators, for example, reflect the linguistic reality of the societies in which the texts are set.

Ramchand notes that in the twentieth century, there was a growth in popular education and “a change in social and psychological conditions” that contributed to the use of dialect in literature and popular expressions such as Calypso and lessened the desire to imitate Standard English (94). The different strategies of deploying dialect are evident in *Myal* and *In Another Place*. Brodber uses dialect for the narrator/implied author’s and characters’ dialogue and stream-of-consciousness/thought patterns. Brand, on the other hand, uses dialect to focalise Elizete and situate her consciousness within the Caribbean space-place both culturally and historically. Elizete tells her story primarily in dialect. Her perceptions, experiences, and consciousness are thus represented with realistic immediacy. This portrayal of Elizete emphasises her personal experiences that

accompany the search for a viable home, identity, love, and belonging. This is significant when we consider Edward Brathwaite's elucidation of the role of Caribbean Nation Language. Brathwaite argues that Nation Language has been a strategy from the moment the black people landed in the Caribbean and were forced to use certain kinds of language in order to disguise themselves, disguise their personalities, and retain their culture (16). He asserts that people from the Caribbean use Nation Language as a method to reclaim, or form and assert, their identity as a people. Brodber's and Brand's novels demonstrate that literature reflects this Caribbean linguistic situation quite clearly.

In class, I highlight a stream-of-conscious passage from *Myal* that focalises Mary Riley (Brodber 49) to concentrate the discussion on language use and its significance to Caribbean history and the assertion of a viable cultural identity. As a signifier of location, culture, and history, dialects and accents that deviate from standard language or language students are familiar with must be contextualised for other aspects of the work to be meaningful to them. I impress on the students that many Caribbean writers use language as a marker of class, social status, and its connection to the wider history of colonial and neo-colonial experiences that deploy different prejudices for exclusionary purposes. Their use of dialect, I suggest, is deliberate and hence ideological. The writers enrich their work and reveal the consciousness of the characters therein by exploiting the possibilities of the folk tradition (Ramchand 96). The main characters use dialect and/or are depicted in social contexts in which dialect is the norm. This approach eliminates stereotyping and can arguably be understood in terms of postcolonialism; Ramchand, for example, contends that West Indian writers use dialect to meet wider expressive needs, including literary, ideological, and political desires, chief among them the desire to privilege "the centrality of the Black or Coloured character and the articulation of this hitherto [fictionally] obscure and stereotyped person" (96). Hence the focalisation of Mary Riley's thought pattern in dialect is significant as it reveals her deepest consciousness as a woman considering the life step of marriage. The moment reveals the gender dynamics present in her society and her assertion of her individuality from a personal perspective.

As Chantal Zabus notes, the manifestation of different Creole variants of Standard English in postcolonial societies reflects an aspect of contestation between “margins or periphery and the centre” (31). Consequently, the use of language in literature is not just mere reflection of a group, “writing an accent,” but is ideological commentary on the group’s history and the reality of their lived experience: “[V]ariants result from the transformation of language through local use, itself the result of social change” (Zabus 34). This is a form of “abrogation and appropriation,” and hence a part of the artist’s conscious strategy of decolonisation (34).

As such, the rehabilitation of Creole polyrhythms in Caribbean literary works “reflect[s] the multiple instabilities of the region’s colonial history” (Zabus 38). The use of “accent” in the work of authors from the region reflects the search for political liberation and assertion of identity that is underscored by the historical, political, and gender issues present in the novels. The class witnesses this in *In Another Place*, for example, during Elizete’s nostalgia for the Caribbean while in Canada, where she experiences a strong sense of exile:

Mind you, Verlia had a love that make she thin. It wasn’t for me, it was the revolution. Is the only thing that could make she leap that bounds. Once we was walking in the night near L’Usine St. Marie, the cane boiling smell sweet, sweet, sweet and the breeze playing with the new growth, and just so I hear she say rock-stone cold, ‘You know how much of our people buried under this field. This place is old as water and since then Black people drown here in their own sweat.’ The field gurgle, the smoke from the factory so sweet it stink, my blood crawl from Verlia’s certainty. She didn’t say anything else and I didn’t say nothing neither. That was Verlia’ love, the people buried in the field. I was cold beside she, for this love make she feel lonely even as we was each other’ company. (Brand 83–84)

The generation and rehabilitation of language in the literature seeks to erect “a national language” from that of the marginalised community. It asserts a voice, perspective, and worldview.

The students relate the deployment of language that they observe in *Myal* and *In Another Place* to the use of PE in West African literature. They also begin to explore cultural and political components of the novels. In this particular class, the students commented on the fact that Elizete's escape from the Caribbean to find a more economically accommodating home in Canada was closely connected both to her psychological trauma and the physical marks of violation her body bears as a result of slavery, such as lash marks, branding, and physical disfigurement. Specifically, they noted her account of her time with Verlia, which she recalls while in Canada:

'Don't feel sorry for me,' she'd said, 'and don't look at my legs.'  
All over from one thing and another, one time or another, is how Isaiah whip them for running, is how he wanted to break me from bad habit. Whip. 'Don't move.' Whip. 'Don't move.' Whip. 'Run you want run! Don't move.' Is how the cane cut them from working. Same rhythm. (Brand 55)

Similarly, students identified a yearning or search for meaning in the historical black Caribbean experience present in the occult telepathic conversation between Ole African and Reverend Simpson in *Myal* (Brodber 66–67). The passage highlights a rupture in the identity of the colonised as well as the need for assertive emancipation and holistic cultural regeneration. Taken together, the passages illustrate the ways in which the diasporic condition concerns “lived experiences of embodied beings and bodily practices” (Bakare-Yusuf 147). For the diasporic individual who has been uprooted and re-routed, the reworking of identity and belonging is always an ongoing quest.

As the class delves deeper into the course's two major texts, the students note the centrality of the quest for decolonisation, the need to forge individual gender identities, and the reassertion of agency by groups that find themselves in marginal spaces or oppressed due to different mechanisms of imperialism and neo-imperialism. Relating Brodber's and Brand's texts to the work of Oludhe and Ogola, Kenyan writers whose works depict related issues, helps students realise that the Caribbean/diasporic works evidence “laws valid for all,” as François Lionnet terms

it (105). Lionnet's observation enables us to consider Caribbean and diasporic literature in terms of "world literature" within a transnational and globalised frame. This in turn foregrounds diversity and differences even as we celebrate the equally diverse but related common denominators that define the different individual cultures. In terms of *Myal* and *In Another Place*, what is interesting is that we not only apply an analytical approach that foregrounds transnational and globalised perspectives, but that the works are inherently transnational and are in-hered in a globalised setting and timeframe from the Kenyan students' perspectives. Yet they provide an opportunity to discuss issues of history, imperialism, religion, colonialism, identity, sexuality, gender, and neo-imperialism that correlate with issues that preoccupy the African writers with whom the class is familiar. Focusing on the interrelatedness of African and black diasporic literatures validates Roland Greene's assertion that comparative literature "concerns itself with the exchange out of which literatures are made: the economies of knowledge, social relations, power and especially art that makes literature possible. Not literature but literatures; not works but networks" (214). Greene suggests that studying literature comparatively involves an element of negotiation that emphasises the connectedness of different literatures. When evaluating such literatures, "one must posit something of each literature in itself as well as of literature in general" (Greene 214). In each case, the conclusions drawn from discussions are not projected as universal truths; rather, the works speak to different concerns in different voices and "weigh differently against one another" (Greene 216). As students take note of the relationships between literary works and the contexts of their production, they are able to see that texts are a launch pad from which to engage in dynamic conversation about the world and phenomena that inform contemporary reality.

#### **IV. Postcolonialism and Black Diasporic Literature**

The class's familiarity with postcolonial theory and knowledge of the historical role of European imperialism in the displacement and dispersal of black populations across the Atlantic enables a rewarding comparative discussion of *Myal* and *In Another Place* as examples of

black diasporic writing. The general theoretical framework developed by postcolonial critics is quite amenable to interdisciplinary analysis of the two works. In the universities' literature curriculum, the works of writers such as Brand and Brodber have replaced what were usually fronted as "masterworks of the great men of European great powers" in the Eurocentric schema of knowledge construction (Damrosch 43). The postcolonial model adopted in current courses can be described in terms of Rey Chow's argument that in postcolonial studies, comparison is not a taxonomic arrangement of multiple spheres but "a type of discursive situation" that is firmly located in a specific cultural framework that is simultaneously transcultural (301). Because of this, our class discussions focus on issues that the texts illuminate about their locations, in addition to close readings and analysis of the texts' literary elements. When covering *Myal*, for example, we debate the ways in which economic and power relationships arguably grounded in colonialism and patriarchy impact the identities of the characters. The complex intertwining of historical, cultural, political, and spiritual issues produces the conflict and its resolution. Similarly, students view the political and gendered shifts in *In Another Place* as resulting from complex ideological awareness. Such shifts connect to history and history's role in the reassertion of identity and agency.

Both Brodber and Brand invoke the mythical, the supernatural, and the magical as they wrestle with language to create realities in the realm of the fantastic. Students observe that through strategies such as magical realism, the writers not only affirm the specificities of the cultural realities of the societies they depict but challenge imperialism and refute its constructions of the colonised people's history and culture. Several passages in *In Another Place* illustrate this, but our class focused on the passage that delineates Adele's reincarnation, which acts as a form of live remembering and an embodiment of the spectral haunting that lingers in generations of traumatised populations (Brand 40–41). Elizete, the girl who burns rice at the window, is part of the history of the displacement and trauma of slavery. The recovery of the memories of traumatic pasts such as colonial violence that dismembered individuals, families and communities and their cultures by African writers is usually

depicted as spectral haunting. Hence, when interpreting and contextualising such passages in the Caribbean texts, I encourage students to comparatively consider the ways in which African writers depict issues of memory, culture, and history as well as their pre-existing interdisciplinary knowledge.

As communities struggle to shade influences of imperialism, the questions of identity and belonging become urgent. They inform the nationalist movement and cultural and economic liberation that come to preoccupy Verlia and Elizete and affect their relationships profoundly. But unlike in the earlier male nationalistic fictions, there is a shift in focus. Like in *Ogola* and *Macgoye*, the Caribbean female writers underline the way national and political issues are implicated with historical gender undertones that subordinated the voice and role of the woman.

The need to draw the students' attention to a range of interdisciplinary perspectives in interpreting texts is a result of my previous experiences teaching the course. It became apparent from students' performance in assessments, contributions to discussions, and feedback at the end of the semester that bare focus on the close reading of texts resulted in lukewarm responses from students. When the texts were not related to wider societal realities, students failed to connect to the works and their contexts. As a result, I now provide students with handouts on globalisation, the history of imperialism and its aftermath, and debates on diaspora to inform their interpretations of the texts. This development is in line with the "self-monitoring" and "reflective" aspects of reflective teaching: my selection of texts and background reading is adjusted over time based on feedback from previous classes.

At this point in the class, I introduce Bakare-Yusuf's exploration of diasporic identities to illuminate the discussion from an existentialist perspective. Her work helps students understand the ideas of embodied identities and emotional experience present in *Myal* and *In Another Place*. Bakare-Yusuf argues that diasporicity is at work in every gesture and movement of a diasporic being as the experiences it entails touch on every aspect of being-in-the-world for the diasporic individual (147). When people are uprooted and re-routed to another place, their identities are dis-positioned: "Embodied orientations are dis-oriented, and

bodies of culture can no longer continue as they did [T]hey have to be reoriented and remobilised afresh in each new location” (Bakare-Yusuf 147). To understand the characters and conflicts in *Myal* and *In Another Place*, we must see “their black diasporic identity and expressive agency” as “grounded in effective social practices, experiences, relations of power, and habits of bodily being” (Bakare-Yusuf 147). I ask students to focus on passages and descriptions that depict the physical and psychic effects of “uprooting, rooting and re-routing which are experienced with mixed emotions and responses” (147–48). Elizete’s dis-orienting and emotionally alienating experience in Canada, for example, demonstrates the complex dis-positioning and re-positioning involved in immigration:

Here you could live just on one street and never know another. You could stay in one spot and never have to see the whole thing. You could walk up and down one street, go to one store, take one bus and never have to see the rest or never want to after a while. The width of the street devastates you, the concrete-grained deserts high and wide sap your will[.] (Brand 63)

Elizete’s alienation in Canada illustrates the argument that lived experiences are rooted in place. Bakare-Yusuf writes that “the study of the ‘being’ of diasporic agents, allows for a contextualization of emotions that is more than just psychologistic or individualistic. The emotional schemas of diasporic existence are in this way diagrams of the deep intertwining between dis-placement and its effects on reflective and pre-reflective formations of the self” (148).

When Elizete arrives in Canada, she finds that she is already marked out and constituted as a diasporic subject in terms of gender and power because when anyone arrives the receiving space is “always already imbued with values, traces, and forms of significance” (Bakare-Yusuf 150). It is evident that racial and gendered hierarchies transcend local spaces in a world that has been significantly influenced by overarching European imperialism. Like Elizete in Canada, Ella O’Grady, Mary Riley’s daughter, has to confront racial and gendered forms of reductive positioning in Jamaica. Ella finds herself developing her identity in a socio-cultural reality that is informed by historical racial colour-connotations and

damaging gender and power dynamics. Ella's father is said to be Ralston O'Grady, "one of those Irish police officers whose presence the authorities must have felt kept the natives from eating each other" (Brodber 6). Ralston, new to the area, had hired Mary as domestic help: "As was usual, this new officer came to town with no wife and needed a housekeeper. As is also usual, the housekeeper was before long in the family way" (6). Mary and Ella do not succumb to the predetermined order of things and Mary refuses to move to "Kingston's anonymity to be kept by her baby-father," which causes speculative consternation among her community (6-7). Her refusal is significant as a symbolic rejection of the historically predetermined gender and racial roles that undermine the individuality and agency of black women.

Ella re-works her embodied experience in a cultural context already imbued with traces, values, and forms of significance that precede her, all of which influence the sociality of her being and her emotional response. Mary's refusal to adapt to the easy option offered by the racial and gendered history that situate her as an object of pleasure and exploitation demonstrates the possibility of agency opened up by her reassertion and determination of her identity as a woman and an individual.

An individual's relationship to a given situation is not just of incorporation but of improvisation and innovation. That is, "[t]he body takes up the possibilities offered by the world and repeats and transforms them" (Bakare-Yusuf 151). In this respect, Bakare-Yusuf notes that "[t]he lived body is therefore the site for the reassertion of a world that is always experienced anew across and within different groups. The lived body is therefore the site of an originary contestation of the meaning of the world" (151). As such, Mary renegotiates the colonial mindset and its cultural power that positions her as a racial and gendered Other. She resists the engendering power relations of neo-imperialism and its psychic debilitating effects. The narrative demonstrates the ideological strategies of contestation as Brodber deploys irony to expose the gullibility of those who blindly accept the racially and sexually demeaning order of things. Moreover, the episode challenges the way in which the Irish policeman is historically constituted, in the fashion of Hall's conception of postcolonial diasporic art: "[C]olonial discourse, the literatures of

adventure and exploration, the romance of the exotic, the ethnographic and travelling eye, the tropical languages of tourism, travel brochure and Hollywood and the violent, pornographic language of *ganja* and urban violence” (Hall 233). Postcolonial art deconstructs these neo-imperial social relationships that are historically grounded in colonial, racial relationships. Mary’s refusal to settle in Kingston as Ralston’s mistress deconstructs the racialised master-servant relationship that privileges the white male as the master-designate. Her rejection of the traditional gender-race role also challenges the power and gender arrangements that positioned the black woman as an object of pleasure for the white man. Hence in Mary’s action we read a new affirmation of a sense of pride and assertiveness and a movement away from neo-colonial positioning.

Brand’s Elizete encounters forms of gendered and racialised exclusions and oppression in Canada and the Caribbean: in workplaces, in residential areas, on streets, and in her dealings with emigration and police agents. It is within these gendered power relations that diasporic individuals and communities have to re-work their embodied emotional responses to new space-places. As Patterson and Kelley observe, the African diaspora exists within the context of global race and gender hierarchies. This idea is reinforced in *In Another Place*:

For the life of you then, you could not recover that smell. And you thought that you were sloughing off skin over the Atlantic dressing in your real self. Here. Impermanence, which perhaps you felt all along. Perhaps it was built into you long before you came and coming was not so much another place but traveling, a continuation, absently, the ringing of iron bracelets on stones, the ancient wicked music of chain and the end of the world. (Brand 65)

Elizete’s experiences demonstrate the dialectics of unhomeliness and re-negotiation of home in which the diasporic subject must continually engage as well as the imperial racist myths and stereotypes dealt with by the black diaspora. This imperial backdrop also carries gender connotations that Elizete must grapple with. In her story, we can read the postcolonial condition of displacement, invasion, estrangement, and

reconstitution of the subject position that have come to characterize diasporicity in the globalised age.

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