

## A FEMINIST-POSTCOLONIAL READING OF MATERNAL RELATIONS IN *LUCY*"

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### Abstract

*This paper compares maternal relations in the novel Lucy, by Jamaica Kincaid (1990), using the feminist-postcolonial approach. It states that the strained relationship between Lucy and her mother is not merely personal but a merger of patriarchal power and colonialism. The discussion revolves around the role of the mother as a nurturer and transmitter of repressive cultural ideologies, and repression of the maternal authority by Lucy as a form of feminist rebellion and postcolonial resistance. The research applies a qualitative textual analysis that consists of a close reading of Lucy and feminist theories and the postcolonial perspective (Bhabha, Fanon, Spivak). As the results show, the resistance manifested in the story, such as the way Lucy rejects the letters of her mother, her attraction to sexual agency, and her exile, underscores the subject of women, both gendered and colonized, to dual colonization. The study makes a contribution to feminist and postcolonial theory by revealing the contexts in which Kincaid locates the issues of identity and resistance, and the definition of self in the close but also political realm of maternal relationships.*

**Keywords:** Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*, feminism, postcolonialism, maternal relations, resistance

### Introduction

One of the most visible and widely-read contemporary writers of the Caribbean, Jamaica Kincaid has gained critical acclaim around her biting descriptions of the colonial and postcolonial worlds, especially when they come in contact with gender and identity. Annie John, A Small Place, and Lucy are her works that struggle with the themes of exile, displacement, and the legacies of colonialism that persist even today. Lucy was published in 1990 and narrates the life of a nineteen-year-old Antiguan girl who goes to the United States to serve as an au pair. With the seemingly simple story of migration and appropriation, the novel at first seems just another migration narrative, but there is, it seems, something more. The major concern over the novel raises an issue of power, belonging, and identity is an ambivalent relationship of Lucy with her mother, which is central in her story.

The mother-daughter relationship is an area that has been a centre of feminist literary criticism as it has given an insight into how women are conditioned into power structures, social norms, as well as cultural descent. Contrary to the father-child relations, which are commonly analyzed in terms of patriarchal power, mother-daughter ties are full of contradictions, love and dependency, authority and opposition. In Lucy by Kincaid, the role played by the maternal character is not merely that of a parent but also of tradition, morality, and colonialism. It is the mother-daughter dynamic that makes the mother-daughter relationship a particularly intriguing object of literary analysis: it shows how interpersonal relationships may reflect a certain level of tension both historically and culturally. The fact that Lucy refuses her mother's authority does not just stand out as a rebellious move of an adolescent but also serves as a metaphorical response to the two sire forces of patriarchy and colonialism.

The combination of the feminist and the postcolonial viewpoint permits making a subversive interpretation of this conflict of motherhood. The feminist approach emphasizes the fact that Lucy strives to achieve a sense of independence, denies the role of housewife and the moral

requirement of her mother, and declares sexual independence. This opposition is in line with the feminist issues at large of negotiating agency as a woman in a patriarchal framework. Meanwhile, a postcolonial lens is used to demonstrate that the mother of Lucy passes the values of colonialism, including the admiration of British literature, respectability, and obedience, to her daughter, all of which perpetuate oppression. By doing so, the Mother figure serves as a cultural mediator, and the colonial ideologies are furthered even on the inside of the family. The combination of these two important views sheds light on how the internal conflict that Lucy experiences with her mother is a reflection of the wider conflict of the colonized female subject with multiple forms of domination.

Thus, this paper deals with the overlap of the personal and political in Kincaid when it comes to describing maternal relationships. In what ways does Kincaid develop the mother-daughter relationship as the place of intersection of gendered expectations and colonial rule? And to what extent is the resistance of Lucy to her mother a feminist rebellion and a postcolonial comment? These are the key questions that are involved in explaining the development of an individual, Lucy and the commentary that Kincaid writes in general concerning the legacies of an empire and patriarchy that shape the lives of women.

The present paper will rest on the argument that the mother-daughter relationship in the case of Lucy may be viewed as an imperative metaphor of the patriarchal-colonial intersections in the construction of female subjectivity. Kincaid depicts the rejection by Lucy of her mother as a twofold resistance, not only to the forces of the patriarch suggesting that women accommodate themselves to obedience and respectability, but also to the heritage of colonialism that still defines identity and cultural affiliation. Through this, the novel places the intimate world of family turmoil into a broader political conflict to show the inevitability of selfhood as something that cannot be found outside the histories of gender and empire.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the relationship between the mother and daughter between Lucy and her mother as a type of juxtaposition of patriarchal power and colonial heritage, which affects the sense of identity and subjectivity of Lucy.
2. To examine how the feminist resistance to feminine roles and postcolonial resistance to cultural domination is reflected in Lucy's opposition to her mother.

### **Research Questions**

1. What does the mother-daughter relationship depicted in Lucy tell us about the interplay between patriarchalism and colonialism on the identity of Lucy?
2. How does this rejection of her mother by Lucy act as a feminist resistance and a figurative response to the colonial rule?

### **Significance of the Study**

This work is relevant to feminist literary criticism and postcolonial studies because it shows that the zone of intimacy between mother and daughter can be used as an allegory of large-scale power arrangements. The emphasis on the motherly relations in Lucy by the research study explains the intersection of gender and empire in constructing female subjectivity, as it provides a better perspective on how subjective lives illustrate the broader socio-political context. This is a feminist issue in that by requiring Lucy to fight her mother, to feminists, this is symbolic of the struggle that all women have to fight against the prescribed gender roles and establish control over their own agency.

In the postcolonial approach, the study highlights the way in which the mother of Lucy is a representation of the colonial past, passing on her cultural values and norms, which are

bequeathed by imperialism. By examining the case, the analysis reveals that the resistance of Lucy to her mother is not just a personal rebellion but a symbolic gesture of decolonization, which is a threat to the internal authority of the empire.

The study by merging these two views adds to the interdisciplinary literary study. It applies feminist views of maternal relationships to the context of the postcolonial and adds more layers to the postcolonial interpretation of Lucy by focusing on the gendered aspects of the colonial inheritance. Finally, the study demonstrates the inseparability of the personal and the political in Kincaid, thus extending the critical analysis of the field of diasporic literature, identity building, and feminine opposition.

### Literature Review

Critics have always perceived Jamaica Kincaid to be predominantly focused on maternal relationships and the tensions that they produce, love mixed with power; intimacy mixed with power. A number of introductory essays set up the mother-daughter dyad as one of the key locations of Kincaid's socialization as colonial and gendered. In her influential essay, Moira Ferguson interprets Lucy as being engaged in entangling the figure of the biological mother with the figure of the colonizer: the mother not only humiliates but influences the narrator to a large degree, and the authority of the mother turns into a symbol of the colonial power, which Lucy will have to negotiate and, eventually, to oppose (Ferguson, 1993). The position of the maternal as a metaphorical extension of imperial rule is presented in the account given by Ferguson, who advances the argument that the struggle by Lucy with her mother is not just personal but a psychic aftereffect of colonialism. The work by Ferguson is built on and diffused by more recent work, which demonstrates how maternal relations work within bigger pedagogical and cultural apparatuses. According to Ozkan (2020), maternal pedagogy in Lucy interacts with the colonial pedagogy to lay the attitudes of Lucy towards the language, body and sexuality; the maternal teaching and the colonial curriculum cooperate to create some sort of disguised oppression that Lucy will later attempt to reverse through the writing and reconfiguring of the self.

Feminist critics refer to the fact that Lucy declares agency in the face of prescriptive gender norms. According to scholarship, the fact that Lucy refused to conform to traditional femininity, including her sexual decisions, freedom of movement, rejection of sentimental domesticity, and so forth, is the sign of feminist rebellion. Kristen Mahlis (1998) understands Lucy in terms of the dual concepts of gender and exile and understands the estrangement of Lucy by her mother as relating to the protagonist in trying to decolonize herself and to establish bodily and sexual independence, Mahlis reveals that the estrangement of Lucy by her mother increases the severance of the break with maternity and is a place in which Lucy can express alternative ways of being a subject (Mahlis, 1998).

Other feminist narratives (e.g. scholarship gathered in journals and edited volumes) are concerned with the ambivalence of female agency in the work of Kincaid: on the one hand Lucy resists, on the other hand, though, she is plagued by the strategies of survival and internalized norms that have been handed down to her, creating a complex portrait of emancipation that takes into account both structures of constraint and acts of refusal (e.g. scholarship in feminist literary journals and editions). All these works together define Lucy as an effective character to read feminist literature that connects sexuality, mobility, and self-narration.

The postcolonial critique has placed Lucy in the context of exile, hybridity, and legacies of imperial culture. Critics discuss the influence of colonial education (canonical texts, language modes, and colonial education) on the interiority of the main character and the confusion of belonging which comes with migration. Some of them claim that Kincaid in her story depicts

the existence of a twofold bind: Lucy is initiated into the world of colonial values (as a result of schooling, motherly rules, cultural memory), but she also has to deny them to become self-identified in the context of diaspora (e.g., Youssef, 2017; general postcolonial critique). The readings highlight the formation of postcolonial subjectivity at the point of historical recollection and modern displacement.

Such a theoretical perspective as hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence by Homi Bhabha is often used in this literature: the fact that Lucy is moving between the Antiguan and U.S. environment and her divided attitude towards the home and the host culture is a good example of the negotiation of the idea of identity that Bhabha discusses (Bhabha, 1994). Similarly, the internalization of colonial psychology that Fanon gives an account of in his descriptions of the colonies depicts the process of internalizing colonial values and exile and resistance set to break these values. These canonical postcolonial materials make sense to interpret maternal relations in Lucy as cultural texts, in which colonial inheritance and colonial decolonization efforts are practised.

Most scholarship does not consider the feminist and postcolonial implications of Lucy together, with feminist critics emphasizing the issue of sexual agency and maternal rebellion, and postcolonial critics emphasizing the issue of exile and cultural inheritance. However, more and more studies begin to examine the two together and ask how gendered power and colonial power mutually constitute each other in the novel. The pedagogical account by Ozkan (2020) specifically charts the collaboration of maternal and colonial education; Mahlis (1998) demonstrates the role of exile in enhancing gendered ruptures, and other articles of the recent past analyze the story of Lucy as an autobiographical narrative and a political one, arguing that both gendered emancipation and cultural decolonization coexist in the story of Lucy breaking with her mother. Collectively, these writings give one an interdisciplinary feminist-postcolonial reading.

Despite the abundant commentary above, there is a relative lack of longer-term studies that make the mother-daughter relationship itself the focus of a combined feminist-postcolonial argument (that is, not as the context of one or the other of the aforementioned concerns, but as the site of their intersection and in which Lucy forms or loses identity). Numerous studies focus on maternal relationships as at once representative of colonial power (Ferguson) or feminist independentist (Mahlis and other feminist critics), but fewer attempt a close, theoretically informed reading of feminist approaches to motherhood (e.g., the difference between motherhood as experience and motherhood as institution) and postcolonial theories of cultural pedagogy and internalized imperial discourse. To fill this gap, the current paper interprets maternal relations in Lucy as a complex crossbreeding: the mother both passes gendered socialization and colonial ideologies. This resistance by Lucy should thus be interpreted as feminist and postcolonial.

### Research Methodology

The research design followed in this study is the qualitative research design and is based on the textual analysis of a literary text. The qualitative methods are especially suitable as the research does not attempt to measure and quantify any data but extracts the meanings, representations, and power relations reflected in the text. Close reading is the main technique, and it allows paying close attention to language, imagery, silences, and narration techniques that express the problems related to gender and colonialism. Close reading is especially appropriate to this research since it reveals nuanced points of convergence of personal and political in the prose of Jamaica Kincaid.

The main writing I will use in this study is *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid (1990). This novel is chosen due to the fact that it directly deals with the issues of mother-daughter relations, female



agency, colonialism, and cultural misplacement that provide a plentiful basis for feminist-postcolonial analysis. The research is based on secondary sources besides the main text, where secondary sources provide a critical and theoretical foundation for interpretation. These are academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and critical essays about Jamaica Kincaid and her works, along with groundbreaking and modern theoretical works in feminism, including those of Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow and Marianne Hirsch, and postcolonial theory, including those by Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak. In addition, critical analyses of *Lucy* that explore the themes of gender, identity, colonialism, diaspora, and resistance will also be included to make the engagement with the existing literature comprehensive. Peer-reviewed and reputable sources will be given priority to guarantee the academic reliability of the study.

Textual analysis with close reading is the main method of analysis in the study. The analysis is performed in a number of steps. To begin with, in passages in *Lucy* that emphasize maternal relations, gender roles, cultural inheritance, resistance and identity formation, passages that focus on identifying these aspects in the work are systematically determined. These are then clustered in thematic groups, including maternal authority as patriarchal control, maternal authority as colonial transmission, female agency and sexuality, resistance and self-definition and exile and cultural alienation. The thematic clusters are analyzed within the selected theoretical frameworks after they have been determined. Feminist prism examines the bargaining of maternal authority of *Lucy*, her defiance against gender conventions, and her fight against independence. The lens of postcolonial is used to read into the figure of the mother as a bearer of colonialism legacies as well as the resistance to it that *Lucy* is engaging in as a symbolic gesture of decolonization. Lastly, feminist-postcolonial synthesis focuses on the interplay of gender and empire amid the mother-daughter relationship. In this context, the research will determine the personal struggle of *Lucy* as a reflection of the large-scale arrangements of patriarchy and imperialism, and in this way, the research objectives and questions will be achieved. This study is limited to *Lucy* as the main text, instead of being expanded to comparative studies with the whole body of literature of Kincaid. Other novels like the *Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and *Annie John* (1985) also touch upon the maternal relations, but with only one character of *Lucy*, it is possible to analyze them in detail and adhere to their limits. It is a textual and interpretive study as opposed to an empirical one, and the conclusions are limited to *Lucy*, but can have larger implications for feminist-postcolonial literary studies. The limitations of this study are also one of using English-language publications as well as focusing on the academic publications published mainly in the past three decades, which would ensure that the research is addressing the modern discussions and the research is relevant to the modern critical discourse.

As this is a literary work, there are no human participants or sensitive information involved in this research. The moral duty resides mostly in proper referencing of all sources, crediting of the intellectual property, and true reproduction of the original text without changing its meaning. The research will be compliant with the tenets of scholarly integrity because it is transparent in the manner of using sources and adheres to the rules of using academic citations, namely, APA 7th edition.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research relies on the feminist theories that critically examine motherhood as an experience and an institution. Adrienne Rich (1976) creates a difference between motherhood as experience, emphasizing embodied, affective, and relational components of maternal life, and motherhood as institution, encompassing the ideologically imposed expectations and control. This contrast plays an important role in reading *Lucy*: the protagonist can feel her mother as a very personal and close person of love and betrayal, who is also an agent of institutionalized

norms, passing down the values of patriarchy, religion, and colonialism. The fact that Lucy is ambivalent about her mother, therefore, echoes the feminist criticism about the way maternal authority is turned into a form of reproduction of culture and gendered control.

Further, the mother-daughter relationship is placed in the center of the feminist psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Chodorow, 1978), which underlies the formation of female identity. The fight to break free of maternal control can be interpreted as a struggle by Lucy to create an identity beyond the roles. The conflicts between mothers and daughters are also believed to carry feminist messages by female critics who believe that tensions between mothers and daughters tend to carry messages pertaining to female agency, sexuality and generational difference (Hirsch, 1989). Using these understandings, the current paper will analyze the negotiations of maternal power that Lucy has as she tries to claim that she has control over her body, sexuality, and voice.

A complementary perspective to explain maternal and colonial relations is possible with the postcolonial theory. The concept of ambivalence and hybridity, as proposed by Homi Bhabha (1994), highlights that the post-colonial subjects exist in in-between areas where the culture is avoided and reproduced. The relationship between Lucy and her mother is an example of that: the mother represents the colonial inheritance in terms of religious and moral education, yet Lucy acquires the lessons of resistance to the same lessons by refusing to accept them.

Frantz Fanon (1967) assists in explaining the psychological aspects of this inheritance. His contribution on the internalized colonial inferiority and the epidermalization of inferiority shows the way subjects perceive themselves through the gaze of the colonizer. The shame, rebellion, and anger of Lucy towards her mother may be interpreted in part as a reaction to the maternal inculcation of colonial values, i.e. admiration of the British literature and the female obedience rules.

In her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Spivak (1988) tries to answer this question. It is also quite educational in the light of voice struggle among Lucy. Being a young Caribbean woman in exile, Lucy has to talk inside and outside the mainstream discourses that have attempted to silence or position her. Her dismissal of what her mother says is a means of countering the patriarchal and imperial silence.

Coupling feminist with postcolonial theories allows one to read Lucy in such a way that the maternal relations can not be diminished to either gendered or colonial struggle, but are the specific spot where the two meet. The inter-generational relationship between mother and daughter symbolizes the passing of the gender roles (feminist issue) and colonialism (postcolonial issue) at the same time. The rebellion of Lucy against her mother is a rebellion against two things: patriarchal restrictions and imperial domination. This theoretical framework places the maternal bond in Lucy in the intersectional location. Here, gendered and imperialist systems interact to construct and struggle over female subjectivity, sexuality, and agency.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Lucy by Jamaica Kincaid (1990) is a dramatic piece that brings out the multifaceted intertwining of personal memory, motherly authority and colonial legacies. The problematic relationship between Lucy and her mother is central to the novel and it is a metaphor of the mixed colonialism legacies. The maternal relationship is no longer an individual and family matter but a political and cultural struggle, where gendered power cannot be separated and isolated as imperial rule. The analysis applies a feminist-postcolonial reading to the relationship between Lucy and her mother as it illustrates how the novel reveals the connection between the two, patriarchy and colonialism, with patriarchy and colonialism colliding in revealing female agency and resistance in the novel.

### **The Mother as a Patriarchal and Colonialist Vehicle.**

The mother of Lucy, described by Kincaid, is a strong but uncertain woman who cares and suppresses at the same time. Lucy remembers her mother trying to prescribe her actions, her sexuality, and her dreams, which are, of course, portrayed as maternal care at one level and at the other level as extensions of patriarchal and colonial demands. The idea of the so-called institution of motherhood by Adrienne Rich (1976) comes in handy here, as motherhood is personal and personal nurturing at the same time, yet motherhood as an institution is commonly used to control female subjectivity. In Lucy, this institution is depicted by the mother who passes the principles of obedience, chastity and inferiority to the male authority.

Meanwhile, the mother of Lucy is also the embodiment of colonial power. Kincaid tends to figure female characters, as postcolonial critics observe, as allegories of the imperial center (Ferguson, 2003; Paravisini-Gebert, 1999). In the case of Lucy, the control of her mother reminds the cultural power of the British colonial education system that also determined what the young Caribbean girls could know, desire and become. The concept of a cultural transmission as introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994) is apparent in this process: it is the mother who introduces Lucy to the concepts of colonial discipline and morality. This twofold role indicates how patriarchy and colonialism are intertwined in the context of maternal relationships. Women

### **Agency, Sexuality and Resistance.**

The story of Lucy leaving the Caribbean to become an au pair in the United States is symbolic and a physical separation from the maternal and colonial power. The fact that she did not accept the letters from her mother is a deep form of rebellion. The article by Marianne Hirsch (1989) on matrilineal narratives states that daughters tend to make their identity by referring to their attachment to their mothers and separation. The fact that Lucy openly rejects the communication of her mother is an indication that she is trying to disconnect herself from the symbolic umbilical cord that links her to the patriarchal-colonial domination.

This opposition is also manifested by Lucy as a sex agent. In contrast to her mother, who represents the traditional female decency, Lucy accepts her sexuality as a place of liberation. This has been supported by the feminist interpretations of the novel that emphasize the fact that Lucy claims to have control of her own body (King, 2002). However, Kincaid makes this liberation a complicated issue by putting the sexual engagements of Lucy in the wider context of racial and cultural inequality in the U.S. to the argument that the freedom of the maternal authority is not what makes her free of the forces of domination.

### **Exile, Identity, and Alienation in Culture.**

The alienation of Lucy by her mother is combined with her position as a stranger. The experience of alienation by colonialism that Frantz Fanon (1967) described assists in understanding why Lucy felt out of place all the time. The fact that she does not return the love of her mother indicates that it is not just her personal bitterness but rather the fact that she cannot come to terms with her identity as a Caribbean and the colonial traditions that her mother represents. As some scholars like Ferguson (2003) argue, exile is a metaphor Kincaid considers to signify female subjectivity in colonial modernity, whereby belonging is never complete.

Simultaneously, the state of Lucy shows the notion of the subaltern of Gayatri Spivak (1988). Lucy stands at a peripheral stage; neither can she be completely assimilated to the U.S. nor can she associate herself with her Caribbean cultural background. Her denial of maternal authority can therefore be interpreted as her trying to speak as a subject herself, denying both the patriarchal and colonial identity definitions. But this rejection provides her with a marginal status, highlighting the price of opposing the world in a world that is organized around multiple oppressions.

### **Feminism and Postcolonialism Intersection.**

The most notable input of Lucy is her discovery that the issue of feminist and postcolonial struggle cannot be perceived in isolation. The rejection of motherhood by Lucy is feminist rejection of patriarchal domination as well as a postcolonial rejection of imperialistic inheritance. By the fact that in many instances, Kincaid has her heroines resist the process of double colonization, being women as well as colonial subjects, as King (2002) notes. These two oppressions come together in the mother-daughter relationship in Lucy.

The result of this study is the acknowledgement of the fact that maternal relations in postcolonial situations are highly political. The personal rebellion that Lucy has is a dramatization of the greater struggle faced by Caribbean women to mediate identities that are gendered, colonial, and diasporic at the same time. In combining feminist and postcolonial arguments, Lucy is shown to be having a maternal struggle that represents the person struggling and the history of the struggle of women against patriarchy and the empire.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explored the issue of maternal relations being constructed by Lucy (1990) by Jamaica Kincaid as a location between patriarchy and colonialism. The fact that Lucy is defiant of her mother is feminist and postcolonial. The feminist-postcolonial perspective has demonstrated that the ambivalent relationship between Lucy and her mother is not just a personal issue but a very political allegory of the colonial legacy and female subjectivity. The mother becomes a nurturer and oppressor: she represents the love of the mother, but also passes the patriarchal norms and colonial ideologies, which produce systems of domination.

Lucy rejecting her mother, especially not wanting to read the letters of her mother, is a way of trying to cut off these oppressive legacies. Her sexual independence, defiant behaviours and use of exile are a form of resistance that anticipates her inability to establish her identity outside of the controls of both gendered power and imperial culture. However, this opposition is rather full of ambivalence because Lucy is exiled, which makes her alienated and fragmented, highlighting the price of resisting in a world where there are various hierarchies of power.

This study has uncovered how Kincaid dramatizes the state of being a female who is also a colonial subject in her effort to colonize the feminist and postcolonial perspectives. The novel shows that postcolonial relations of the maternal could not be detached from history, power, and identity. Lucy's rebellion against her mother thus represents a broader cultural and political struggle: the effort of Caribbean women to articulate new forms of subjectivity in the face of intersecting oppressions.

Ultimately, this study contributes to scholarship by bridging gaps between feminist and postcolonial readings of Kincaid's work. It underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches, recognizing how gender and empire influence women's lives and narratives. *Lucy* stands as a powerful literary exploration of resistance, identity, and self-definition, reminding us that the personal is always political and that the intimate ties of family are deeply implicated in the legacies of colonialism.

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