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Diasporic Identity And Cultural Displacement In Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*

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Abstract

This paper engages the complex figuration of diasporic subjectivity and cultural dislocation in Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy*, which maps the psychic and affective disturbance of the titular Antiguan young woman as she attempts to survive in America. Close reading of the novel, this analysis investigates performances of colonial pedagogy, matricide struggle and cultural estrangement in reshaping Lucy's sense of self. Assuming postcolonial and feminist theory stands, the work is keen to examine how Kincaid theorizes the self as a site of resistance against external narrativity and cultural forgetfulness. Whereas much of what has come before has in fact analyzed postcolonial trauma and mother-daughter relations within *Lucy*, less has closely considered how Kincaid specifically defines diasporic identity as gendered and per-formative in the context of Caribbean migration to the Global North. This paper bridges that gap through an analysis of how *Lucy* uses her sexuality, language and silence as weapons of self-redefinition beyond colonial and family imperatives. The study contributes to broader conversations of identity in diaspora literature through a concentration on the overlap of memory, migration and gender. Future studies can continue down this avenue by contrasting *Lucy* with other Caribbean diasporic fiction namely, by women authors currently writing to trace shifting portrayals of postcolonial woman and shifting cultural politics of belonging in transnational contexts.

Keywords: Diasporic identity, Cultural, Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*, Postcolonial, literature.

1. Introduction:

The celebrated Antiguan-American author, Jamaica Kincaid, is an expert in blunt explorations of colonialism, gender, identity and displacement in life in the postcolonial Caribbean. Her novella *Lucy* in 1990 is about nineteen-year-old girl who travels from Antigua - America for serving as an au pair, as she seeks journey towards self-making through cultures' dislocation. Reflective and autobiographical in tone, *Lucy* reveals the psychological and emotional disintegration experienced by those dislocated from their homelands and thrust into new socio-cultural spaces.

The central theme of diasporic identity is embedded at the core of *Lucy*. Diasporic identity is a term that speaks to the construction of selfhood among those who reside outside their national or ancestral homelands. As Stuart Hall describes, diasporic identity is not grounded in the archeological, but in the re-telling of the past an identity based on rupture, memory and negotiation, not linear continuity (Hall 1994). Related to it is the concept of cultural displacement, when the people are physically and mentally detached from their original culture and tend to experience a crisis of belonging and identity construction.

2. Statement of the Problem and Research Methodology:

In *Lucy*, Kincaid (1990) deploys the migrant's journey, fraught maternal relations and dismissal of colonial histories in an attempt to represent diasporic identity as a gendered and broken process forged through the residual trace of empire. Through the representation of *Lucy*'s internal struggle and the development of self-awareness, Kincaid illustrates how diasporic subjects attempt to synthesize the clashing cultural agendas of heritage and the desire for autonomous self-hood. This essay contends that Kincaid not only overturns the colonial and patriarchal orders that have built *Lucy*'s history but also depicts diasporic identity as an ongoing act of resistance and re-creation in cultural displacement.

3. Results and Discussion:

3.1. Colonial Legacy: Identity Formation

In *Lucy*, Jamaica Kincaid condemns the past legacy of colonialism on identity formation, specifically through the experience of British colonial education for the main character. *Lucy* (Wase, 2021), trained in a curriculum that respects English literature and values, is taught to memorize poetry. I had never seen a daffodil and so couldn't imagine what it looked like, she remembers. Seeing a field of daffodils might have cheered me up, but this poem was written about daffodils I had never seen and yet

was forced to recite (Kincaid 1994). The tension between Lucy's living Caribbean experience and the imposed English landscape ideal of colonial education is a fundamental psychological alienation a forced internalization of images and values that disown her own identity and culture (Claire. 2021).

This alienation between the imposed colonial worldview and Lucy's experience is the basis for her internal identity crisis. Stuart Hall maintains that colonial identities are always constructed through the eyes of the colonizer and that they are fragmented, unstable and always in the process of formation. For Lucy, this colonial vision makes her perceive herself and her surroundings as inferior or invisible. Her anger at Wordsworth's daffodils represents her opposition to a cultural system that tried to wipe out her reality and substitute an alien one (Youssef, 2017). Even when she moves to the United States, the affective baggage of colonial pedagogy continues to influence how she negotiates memory and identity. Kincaid employs this tension to demonstrate how colonial histories continue to haunt the diasporic subject, long after physical borders have been crossed (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.1986).

3.2. Cultural Displacement and Emotional Alienation

Lucy's migration from Antigua to America is not merely a physical movement, but a deep emotional and cultural dislocation. While she seems to present herself as composed, her narrative voice betrays a constant sense of alienation from her surroundings and the people around her (Sugg, 2002). Her host family, especially Mariah the matriarch figure who attempts to show kindness symbolizes a benevolent but superficial grasp of cultural difference. Lucy begrudges being seen as an exotic other, observing, Mariah and her family were of the kind of people who thought they could be friends with their servants (Davis, 1990). This ironic observation is speaking to Lucy's attunement to the subtle power dynamic and racial and cultural biases at work behind the scenes in her interactions with her bosses.

Loneliness is not the only aspect of Lucy that slices through to the other side of her surface reality it seems to extend into the interior as well. While she physically distanced herself from Antigua, she's still psychologically wedded to unresolved conflicts of the past. She feels displaced as much by an awareness that she doesn't wholly belong to either world: one that she'd left behind and one that she'd arrived at. Homi Bhabha's cultural theory of the third space illuminates this in-between-ness in which diasporic subjects exist a space of hybridity neither here nor there (Bhabha, 1994). Lucy's broken sense of self aligns with this state of liminality, where home is not a place but a constantly changing, internal negotiation.

In addition, literary critic Susan Spearey argues that Lucy is a haunted by absence text the absence of home, of cultural acceptance and of emotional return in her adopted world (Boehmer, 2002). Lucy's alienation from her

world becomes a psychic self-preservation, as she seeks to recreate herself in a world that denies her full humanity. Kincaid reveals that for the diasporic subject, displacement is not so much a physical concern, but rather a chronic emotional condition of loss, yearning and resistance.

3.3. The Role of the Mother and Generational Estrangement

The dysfunctional relationship between Lucy and her mother is an effective metaphor for the cultural and generational disconnect experienced in the Caribbean diaspora. Lucy's mother is a symbol of home's traditions, values and emotional expectations, expectations to which Lucy comes to resent and distance herself. Physically absent throughout much of the novel, Lucy's mother is nonetheless a constant presence through memory and letter. Her persistent letters, replete with anxiety and recommendation, cause passionate emotional responses by Lucy, who admits, her letters made me feel so sad, so angry, so much in need of her and yet I wanted only to put her out of my life. This ambivalent yearning and repudiation sum up Lucy's larger conflict: to break free from the cultural scripts that has been laid upon her by family and history, yet to lament their loss.

The mother figure in *Lucy* is not only a character in the personal sense, but a figure of cultural continuity. Literary critic Diane Simmons contends that Lucy's repudiation of the mother's influence as a symbolic patricide of colonial power and patriarchal domination (Simmons, 1994). In this light, Lucy's emotional detachment is a political act, a battle to establish an identity unmediated by acquired roles. Her refusal to respond to the letters, and her wish to cease being heard from at home, indicate a necessity to silence the voice of tradition in order to redefine herself on her own terms.

In postcolonial fiction, the mother is often symbolized by the nation or the homeland. In this sense, Lucy's dismissal of her mother parallels her dismissal of colonial history and its accompanying constructs. Scholar Paula Morgan is in accord with this reading, pointing out that the maternal bond becomes a site of resistance and negotiation in diasporic texts, especially for female characters trying to assert agency in patriarchal and postcolonial spaces (Morgan, 2006). For Lucy, the voice of her mother although laden with love is a reminder of the duties that have been placed upon her as a daughter, a woman and a colonial subject. By silencing the voice, Lucy makes a painful but essential move toward cultural and emotional freedom.

3.4. Sexuality, Rebellion, and Identity Construction

In *Lucy*, sexuality is one of the most powerful arenas in which the protagonist claims her agency and retrieves her splintered self. Having abandoned the cultural and familial roles foisted upon her, Lucy employs her sexual relations not for attachment but as self-defining acts of resistance. Unlike the compliant, submissive woman colonial schooling and

her mother turned her into, Lucy her way in bed. She states that she only wanted to have pleasure and be amused. Her practical approach to intimacy serves to illustrate her refusal to conform to standards of womanhood and relationship.

Sexuality to Lucy is a resistance a way of reversing the cultural scripts of docility, dependence and propriety that trap women in colonial and diasporic sites. Scholar Allison Donnell observes that female sexuality in Kincaid's fiction functions as a counter-discourse to colonial and patriarchal constructions of the feminine (Donnell, 2006). Lucy's explicit refusal of emotional openness in sex creates a realm of mastery over her otherwise disempowering reality. She undoes the vision of the immigrant woman as obligated, submissive or accommodated. She refuses to either glamorize the new world she is living in or become attuned to social expectations within the culture of residence.

Furthermore, Lucy's deployment of sexuality as resistance reflects her larger attempts to dismantle the various layers of identity placed upon her—those of dutiful daughter, colonial subject and exotic other (Aghasiyev, 2023). Lucy's sexual independence, Moira Ferguson notes, is a declaration of independence, a claim to the body and voice denied to her by empire and family alike. Kincaid does not romanticize these encounters but depicts them as necessary steps toward finding freedom. Even while they expose the complexities and contradictions of finding agency in a power- and displacement-built world, they do so.

5. Conclusion

Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* is rich and intimate and examines the intricacies of identity construction in the Caribbean diaspora. From Lucy's struggle with colonial education, her affective dislocation in a foreign land, her severed maternal relationship, to her use of sexuality as self-fashioning, Kincaid charts the discontinuous and continuous nature of diasporic self. The novel presents identity neither as inherited nor fixed construction, but rather as one in perpetual transformation by memory, resistance, displacement and desire. Kincaid masterfully mines Lucy's internal struggles to critique the cultural, racial and gendered framings of colonial heritage and migration. Lucy's story reveals how diasporic self-fashioning involves navigating the in-between places geographically, affectively and ideologically struggling with being able to be an actor in a withheld full belonging. Her refusal to be forced into positions and not to be contained by her past or by her situation is a robust act of self-authorship, one that is harmonious with broader postcolonial and feminist literature. In a time of rising global migration, displacement and cultural hybridity, *Lucy* is a still-relevant and still-needed work. Kincaid's novel of the diasporic condition calls readers to continue considering how people from historically oppressed communities still navigate identity in a power-structured, memory-governed, and movement-

ridden world. Where borders are crossed physical, at least and psychological, too—Lucy insists that finding oneself is as political as it is personal.

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