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Laura Barrio-Vilar

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“Everything remains the same and yet nothing is the same”¹: Neocolonialism in the Caribbean Diaspora through the Language of Family and Servitude

By Laura Barrio-Vilar²

Abstract

This essay examines Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, a novel that tackles the process of decolonization from old and new forms of colonialism through the language of servitude and family (specifically, mother-daughter relationships). The novel's protagonist is not only an example of the wave of West Indian migration and the feminization of labor, but her agency also provides Kincaid with the necessary platform to deploy her views on U.S. imperialism. I propose reading *Lucy*'s evolution toward self-determination as not only an individual but also a collective experience. I interpret the novel as an allegory that can help us better understand the nuances, tensions, and challenges involved in the historical journey of former British colonies in the Caribbean, from colonial rule, through political independence, and into the current challenges posed by neocolonialism. Kincaid's *Lucy* suggests the need for Caribbean countries to question, if not reject, the influence of American culture, economics, and politics, in order to achieve absolute independence and freedom to determine their own fate. This allegorical reading also illustrates how race, class, gender, and national origins are intertwined in Kincaid's rendition of the Caribbean migrant experience. What makes the novel more relevant to discussions of current Caribbean migration patterns is how the author also weaves in the significance of the colonial past in approaches to the new globalization culture. Although *Lucy*'s story reflects a yearning for a borderless world where cultural differences do not restrict the individual's choices, Kincaid does not allow her readers to escape the legacy of colonialism, challenging them to consider the complex nature of current U.S.-Caribbean relations. *Lucy* thus becomes a symbol of the neocolonial condition, experiencing the economic and social challenges that both Caribbean peoples and postcolonial writers face in today's globalization era.

Keywords: Postcolonial studies, gender, Caribbean literature.

Introduction

Although many of the former European colonies in the Caribbean have obtained their political independence, the process of decolonization continues to this day. Not only are the newly formed nations economically and culturally tied to their European metropolis, but the diasporic communities resulting from the old and new global economy further complicate the process of self-determination and development in the Caribbean. Since the second half of the twentieth

¹ Kincaid 78.

² Dr. Laura Barrio-Vilar is an Assistant Professor of English at University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Her research and teaching interests include African American literature, Afro-Caribbean literature, postcolonial studies, gender and women's studies, and critical race theory. Her research explores how race, gender, and class affect migration patterns and the notion of citizenship in the African Diaspora. Her most recent publication, "'All o' we is one': Citizenship, Migration, and Black Nationalism in the Postcolonial Era," appeared in *Callaloo*.

century, the movement of workers across national borders has increased dramatically. The new global economy has led many individuals from developing countries to migrate to industrialized nations in search of better job opportunities, but economic factors are not the only defining characteristic of these transnational migrations. As geographer Brenda Yeoh points out, “there has been a feminization of many of these flows as a result of changing production and reproduction processes worldwide” (69). Reproductive labor³ has indeed become one of the fastest growing sectors that contributes to the economic and social co-dependency between developed and developing countries, including those in the Caribbean basin.

Studies on decolonization and neocolonialism in the Caribbean often have a socioeconomic and political approach, as well as emphasize ethnographic and gender analyses. This essay contributes to those conversations by exploring literary interventions. Specifically, I focus on the analysis of Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, *Lucy*, the story of a West Indian teenager who tries to escape her mother’s control by moving to the United States to work as an au pair for a White couple with children. Kincaid’s narrative tackles the process of decolonization from old and new forms of colonialism through the language of family and servitude. The novel’s protagonist is not only an example of the wave of West Indian migration⁴ and the feminization of labor, but also Lucy’s agency provides Kincaid with the necessary platform to deploy her views on U.S. imperialist practices. I propose reading Lucy’s psychological journey toward self-determination as not simply an individual but a collective experience too. I interpret the novel as an allegory that can help us better understand the nuances, tensions, and challenges involved in the historical journey of former British colonies in the Caribbean, from colonial rule, through political independence, and into the current challenges posed by neocolonialism. I am not suggesting that Lucy’s choices and stages in her journey are all encompassing and necessary for this evolution. In fact, they are often problematic and contradictory. However, they do provide us with a roadmap of the options available in the journey towards Caribbeanness. Accordingly, Kincaid’s *Lucy* suggests the need for Caribbean countries to question and reevaluate the influence of American culture, economics, and politics, in order to redefine a new and empowering concept of Caribbeanness.

This allegorical reading illustrates how race, class, gender, and national origins are intertwined in Kincaid’s rendition of the Caribbean migrant experience. However, what makes the novel more relevant to discussions of current migration patterns is how the author also weaves in the significance of the colonial past in approaches to the new globalization culture. Despite the difficulties behind Lucy’s employment situation and because of her eagerness to escape the controlling and possessive tendencies of the mother figures in her life, Lucy asserts her right to self-determination and eventually sets off for a new life journey in which she will reinvent herself through her creative work, much like Kincaid herself. Although Lucy’s story reflects a yearning for a borderless world where cultural differences do not restrict the individual’s choices, Kincaid does not allow her readers to escape the legacy of colonialism, challenging them to consider the complex nature of current U.S.-Caribbean relations. Lucy thus becomes a symbol of the neocolonial condition, experiencing the economic and social challenges that both Caribbean peoples and postcolonial writers face in today’s globalization era.

³ Reproductive labor ranges from childcare and care for the elderly and infirm, all the way to ensuing hospitality and sexual services in the tourism industry.

⁴ The U.S. Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated the “national origins” restrictions, opened the doors to a new wave of immigrants, mostly female and from developing nations, such as those in the Caribbean. West Indian migration to the United States also intensified as a result of the restrictive immigration policies in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the geographic proximity between both areas of the Americas makes travel much easier and faster compared to the challenges of moving to and from the United Kingdom.

Developing a Neocolonial Consciousness

In general, economic, political, and social factors are the main forces behind migration, but at the core of these often lie family needs, especially in the case of female labor migrants, who sacrifice their lives “for the sake of the family” and seek employment abroad. As geographer Brenda S.A. Yeoh contends, “The notion of the migrant as a ‘martyr mother,’ ‘dutiful daughter,’ or ‘sacrificial sister’ holds considerable currency in fueling the desire to help the family, whether this takes the form of bettering the family’s material well-being, supporting elderly parents, or furthering their children’s or siblings’ education” (63). In this sense, female migration might help sustain the patriarchal status quo. However, female migration also has the potential to counteract patriarchal structures and open new doors for female empowerment. In the case of Caribbean women who migrate to the United States seeking jobs and educational opportunities, they often encounter new possibilities that facilitate their economic and social independence, away from the family constraints and social expectations that limited their choices at home. This is particularly the case of women who seek sexual citizenship outside of the restrictive norms of female sexuality, as well as the case of women who seek alternative forms of family arrangements including same-sex family structures with children.

In *Lucy* Jamaica Kincaid relies on the dynamics and language of family to reflect the typical motivations behind female labor migration and on mother-daughter relationships to create an allegorical critique of colonialism in which gender plays a key role. Not only have numerous literary critics read the mother figure in Kincaid’s works as symbolic of both the positive and negative aspects of colonial culture in the Caribbean, but also Kincaid herself has offered such an interpretation. For example, in her interview with Allan Vorda, Kincaid confesses, “I’ve worked through the relationship of the mother and the girl to a relationship between Europe and the place that I’m from, which is to say, a relationship between the powerful and the powerless” (12). Reexamining the evolution of her works, in an interview with Moira Ferguson she shares that the mother-daughter relationship has become “an obsessive theme, and I think it will be a theme for as long as I write. ... [I]t came clear to me ... the mother I was writing about was really Mother Country” (176-77).

Like in her previous works, throughout *Lucy* Kincaid’s protagonist constantly refers to her desire to escape from her family, particularly her mother, and Antigua’s colonial legacy, as well as her need to become economically and emotionally independent. Nevertheless, Lucy’s experience in the U.S. proves not to be as liberating as she had hoped. Not only does she have to confront cultural differences and the challenges of her newly found independence, but she also realizes that she cannot escape the memories of her past or the constraining influence of a mother figure. Kincaid uses the imagery of motherhood to criticize the detrimental effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on the colonial subject. Although moving to the U.S. allows Lucy to escape the oppression by her biological mother, and by extension, the colonial values of the mother country she represents, Lucy later becomes oppressed by her U.S. surrogate mother and the American imperialist values she embodies. Migrating, I contend, forces Lucy to confront these two forces of British colonialism and American neocolonialism, which she ostensibly rejects in the end by cutting all ties with her “mothers” and developing a liberating form of Caribbean identity.

Lucy’s individual experience reflects the collective histories of many Caribbean peoples who suffered the damaging economic, political, cultural, and psychological consequences of European colonialism, and who later developed a postcolonial consciousness that would help them to achieve a certain degree of independence from the European motherland. Indeed, Lucy’s growth

from dependent child to independent adult mirrors the process of many colonial peoples from colonial through anti-colonial to postcolonial subjectivity. Unlike other postcolonial texts, however, the novel also tackles the impact of U.S. imperialism and globalization on the postcolonial condition through the lens of gender, revealing the first steps in the development of an anti-neocolonial Caribbean consciousness.

As critics such as Holcomb, Mahlis, and Lenz have already pointed out, throughout her childhood Lucy exhibits the attitudes of the colonized subject, idealizing and obeying her biological mother, Annie, and adopting her values. Annie inculcates in Lucy values that reflect the British education and colonial values imposed in the Caribbean. Far removed from the remnants of Arawak or African complementary gender dynamics, Annie's expectations for her daughter are based on Western patriarchal notions that reinforce gender oppression and limit the options and expressions of the colonized. In fact, as Kristen Mahlis argues, "Lucy's mother acts as an agent of colonial discipline, expecting Lucy to fulfill the role of good wife and good colonial subject" (169). Whereas Lucy's parents hope for their sons to go to college in England and become doctors or lawyers, they do not worry about Lucy's education because they expect her to embrace traditionally female roles and become a nurse. Lucy's parents consider their daughter's professional career options and needs subordinate, rather than complementary, to their sons'.

As a result of colonial indoctrination, Annie's main concern is her daughter's (sexual) reputation. Just like British colonizers identified non-Western peoples as hypersexual, Annie has unconsciously internalized this stereotype and does not expect Lucy to be able to control her sexual impulses, unless she regulates Lucy's sexuality and "civilizes" her. However, her teachings later prove to be futile and the main source of contention between mother and daughter. In a letter to her mother, Lucy accuses her of not having fulfilled her role as a mother: "I pointed out the ways she had betrayed herself. I said I believed she had betrayed me also. ... [M]y whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut; I then gave ... evidence that my upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable" (Kincaid 127-28). Resenting her mother's values and feeling betrayed, Lucy turns into Annie's worst nightmare: a proud, sexually active (single) woman. Indeed, according to Mahlis's psychoanalytical interpretation of the novel, "By rereading and critiquing the narratives of self-definition surrounding her, she finds a provisional space [the space of the female exile] for her particular subjectivity. That subjectivity is grounded in Lucy's bodily experiences, especially in her assertions of her gender and her sexuality" (175). Mahlis concludes that it is through the affirmation of her sexuality that Lucy resists her mother(land) and the colonial culture she represents.

Along the lines of Mahlis's argument, Moira Ferguson recognizes Lucy's sexual affirmation as a rejection of "colonialism's desire to control 'the natives'" (122). Ferguson contends that Lucy's economic independence allows her to be in control of her experiences, including her sex life. I certainly agree with Ferguson's postcolonial analysis, as well as Mahlis's psychoanalytical interpretation of the novel, which concludes that exploring her sexuality is Lucy's way to turn against her mother and reaffirm her anti-colonial perspective. However, I also argue it is migration that triggers Lucy's break with her mother(land) and facilitates the move from colonial to postcolonial consciousness.

As an adolescent, Lucy decides to break away from her mother's oppressive influence and migrates to the United States, like many other West Indians, in search of freedom, education, and economic opportunities. But unlike most West Indians, she chooses to cut all ties with her family and become emotionally and socially independent. After receiving one of Annie's letters, she

muses, “I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be *free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face?*” (Kincaid 31; italics mine). Lucy does not search for an oppositional space or attempt to develop a culture of resistance in Antigua like the Black Power Movement did in Trinidad, the Rastafarian Movement in Jamaica, or indigenous feminist movements and environmental movements throughout the Caribbean. Instead, inspired by her own personal experiences, Kincaid has her character Lucy move from Antigua—still a British colony in the late 1960s, when the story takes place—to the U.S. in order to develop a new identity.⁵ Once Lucy puts time and distance between her and her mother(land), she begins to contrast her past (colonial) experience in Antigua with the new one in the U.S. Lucy is then able to understand and articulate her disdain towards her mother(land) and the “hundreds of years” of colonization that she associates with her mother and Antigua. Thus, she claims, “I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to make me an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (Kincaid 36). According to Laura Niesen de Abruna’s reading of Kincaid’s representations of the mother-daughter relationship, “the alienation from the mother becomes a metaphor for the young woman’s alienation from an island culture that has been completely dominated by the imperialist power of England” (173). In Lucy’s case, separation from her mother(land) constitutes the first step from an anti-colonial attitude towards the development of a postcolonial consciousness.

Nevertheless, Lucy can never leave her mother(land) completely behind, illustrating the futility of her geographical move as well as one of the psychological consequences of colonialism. Here most critics refer to the episode in which Lucy recalls her recitation of William Wordsworth’s 1804 poem “Daffodils” at Queen Victoria Girls’ School. After Lucy finishes and her audience praises her performance, she realizes, “I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true” (Kincaid 18). Lucy’s duality, which she is forced to revisit and experience in the U.S., echoes Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry. The result of colonial education and power hierarchies, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 266). As Lucy mimics the “civilized” ways of Great Britain (the mother country) and manages to deliver the poem with the “right” pronunciation and intonation, she becomes, in Bhabha’s terms, an “authorized version of otherness” (268). Nevertheless, behind the ambivalence inherent in colonial mimicry lies a threat to the authority and authenticity of colonial discourse, giving the colonial subjects agency to challenge the very essence of what they can never become (in our case, British subjects). Lucy actually recognizes this ambivalence and agency, as she ponders the implications of the “difference between being British and being Anglicized” (Bhabha 269).

Lucy’s awareness of her “two-facedness” exposes the colonial system’s ambivalence and challenges its authority, as she develops a camouflaged anti-colonial consciousness on the island. Later in the U.S., when her employer, Mariah, insists on making her see the beauty of daffodils, Lucy tries to explain her colonial experience:

“Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?” As soon as I said this, I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she

⁵ Kincaid herself moved from Antigua to the U.S. in 1966 to work as an au pair.

had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes. ... But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness. (Kincaid 30)

Daffodils epitomize the essence of colonial education for Lucy, but Mariah fails to see that “she is objecting to a history of cultural imperialism in which her own culture has been erased and written over in the hand of the colonizer,” as Brooke Lenz points out (113). The scene, at any rate, helps underscore the long-term psychological effects that colonial education has on the colonized subject, who can never completely escape the haunting memories of such an experience. At this point of her evolution, Lucy still thinks in absolute terms and chooses to reject this symbol of cultural colonialism, rather than reclaim it as part of her personal and communal history and reverse its meaning, like other “marginal” groups have done with terminology and symbols originally developed by the dominant culture to oppress them. Lucy seems to follow Audre Lorde’s premise, “*the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (99).

Nevertheless, even when she believes she has managed to leave the memories of her mother(land) behind, Lucy unconsciously continues to take comfort in such memories, as we can see in her relationships with men in the U.S. In conjunction with the readings of critics such as Kristen Mahlis and Gary E. Holcomb, who argue that Lucy’s sexual adventures are a source of empowerment, I propose a parallel reading that both complements and problematizes theirs. I contend that Lucy’s sexual experiences are a symptom of Lucy’s inner struggle with her mother(land) and the colonial values with which she grew up. Holcomb argues that Lucy’s sexual behavior and interest in photography are the starting point of her adventure towards self-invention, and constitute a counterpoint to “the model of the male Western travel writer-creative artist” (300). Her lack of emotional attachment and romanticism towards her lovers—attitudes traditionally acceptable only for men—help her to be in control of her environment and experiences (304).

What both Holcomb and Mahlis miss is the fact that Lucy becomes attracted to all three of her lovers once they establish a connection with her homeland. She first notices Hugh because he does not talk about the Caribbean as a homogenous and vague cluster of islands for tourism, as most people do; instead, he recognizes the specificity of the West Indies (Kincaid 65). In the case of Paul, not only do his eyes remind her of a lucky marble she used to have (99), but as he moves his hands in a fish tank, she remembers the story of her friend Myrna in Antigua, of whom Lucy had been jealous because a town fisherman had sexually abused Myrna, choosing to make her “special” instead of Lucy (Kincaid 102-09). Finally, Roland reminds Lucy of her father as soon as she sees him; not to mention he was born in Panama, of parents from Martinique (Kincaid 116-17). Lucy unconsciously keeps gravitating towards her mother island through the memories of experiences she had in the Caribbean that these men trigger.

But more problematic than Lucy’s sexual affairs is her relationship with her American employer Mariah. Although Lucy initially finds comfort in the freedom and support that Mariah provides for her, she soon realizes that her surrogate mother is not much better than the mother she has just left behind: “The times I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother” (Kincaid 58). Similar to the tensions found in the relationship between England and its colonies, Lucy recognizes the problematic and contradictory nature of her relationship with her mothers, which is simultaneously

productive and detrimental. As Brooke Lenz notes, “Representing Antigua and the past, Lucy’s mother embodies authority, imperialism, and control; representing American privilege and the present, Mariah embodies a problematic benevolence ensnared in its own social trappings” (111). Initially Mariah is presented as the complete opposite of Annie: She is a privileged, upper-middle-class White woman, with a formal education and feminist ideas, whereas Annie is a colonized, working-class Black woman, with no formal education and patriarchal values. Mariah’s presence in Lucy’s life is a breath of fresh air for Lucy, who initially considers her employer empowered, modern, and fascinating.

Nevertheless, Mariah insists on convincing Lucy that, by encouraging her U.S./Western feminist views, she means the best for her, much like the manifest-destiny rhetoric often found in the justification for U.S. international politics. Mariah’s imperialistic values and paternalistic rationalizations, which I will address in the next section, eventually remind Lucy of the oppression she suffered in Antigua: “I could see the sameness in everything; I could see the present taking shape—the shape of my past” (Kincaid 90). By establishing a direct connection between Lucy’s past and present, not only does Kincaid expose the suffocating nature of mother-daughter relationships in the novel, but she also emphasizes the similarities between the effects of European neocolonialism and of U.S. imperialism on the Caribbean. Lucy has to come to terms with the fact that both her biological and her surrogate mother have contributed to the development of her character. Her love-hate relationship with these two women and the two cultures they represent has been a determining factor in her decision-making both in positive and negative ways. Like Lucy, Kincaid begrudgingly has to admit the crucial role that both systems have played in the development of a Caribbean subjectivity, which is inextricably connected to the cultural values of the two regions.

Significantly, it is only in the U.S. and through her experience with Mariah that Lucy finds the distance, objectivity, and language necessary for her to understand and analyze the complex relationships she maintains with the mother figures in her life and the colonial powers they embody. In the novel, migration initiates the postcolonial stage, in which Lucy (the colonial subject) breaks away from British modes of thinking and influence. When Annie’s goddaughter visits Lucy in the U.S. and tells her how much she reminds her of Annie, Lucy complains: “I am not like my mother. She and I are not alike. She should not have married my father. She should not have had children. She should not have thrown away her intelligence. She should not have paid so little attention to mine” (Kincaid 123). At this point, after months in the U.S., Lucy is finally capable of breaking away from her mother(land) and provide an explanation for her hatred towards her, by identifying all major points of contention in their relationship. However, what is most problematic about the novel is the suggestion that developing this postcolonial consciousness can only happen through migration or geographical uprooting, when in actuality thousands of individuals and groups have managed to develop oppositional spaces and cultures of resistance within the Caribbean.

By the end of the novel, once “free” from the colonizer’s influence and in the States, Lucy becomes increasingly aware of the oppression triggered by U.S. values in her new life. Although she has left British imperialist values behind, now she runs into the new ones: Mariah/the U.S. indeed proves just as suffocating as Annie/the British Caribbean colony. As Lucy explains, “I began to feel like a dog on a leash, a long leash but a leash all the same” (Kincaid 110). Once Lucy realizes the control Mariah tries to exercise over her, she cuts ties with her, as she did with her biological mother. Right before Lucy moves out of Mariah’s house, she notices, “Mariah spoke to me harshly all the time now, and she began to make up rules which she insisted that I follow ...

insisting that I be the servant and she the master” (Kincaid 143). Kincaid thus underscores the effects of U.S. neocolonialism, establishing a parallel with old forms of colonialism and oppression, which transformed Caribbean individuals into servants, and colonizers into masters.

Can the Outsider within Be Like One of the Family?

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards many post-industrial service economies, including the United States, have experienced an increasing need for childcare providers and domestics in general. Such a demand can be explained as the result of a combination of several social and economic factors at both the local and global levels. Under the new global economy, as Mary Romero points out, countries like the U.S. have seen “an increase in the number of two-career families and single working mothers, an economy demanding an extended work day, longer commutes to and from work, and disappearing employment regulation and benefits” (16). In order to pursue their career and educational goals, many middle-class families from industrialized areas rely on working-class women from developing nations to take care of household chores and childcare responsibilities. Hiring practices reveal that it is mostly women who not only take care of the selection and salary negotiation process but also the everyday interactions with maids and nannies. Furthermore, because in most cases the employers are White and their domestics are immigrant women of color, these employees’ experiences provide a perfect scenario for the analysis of the intersection of gender, race, class, and citizenship in the new global economy.

Given their foreign status, not only are migrant domestics of color a perfect example of the outsider within⁶, but their racialized and gendered bodies are also paradoxically rendered invisible and often prone to exploitation in mainstream American society. In the case of Kincaid’s novel, Lucy’s outsider-within perspective enables the author to criticize the impact of neocolonialism in the Caribbean. Lucy is a poor Black Caribbean woman working amidst an upper-middle-class White American family. Lucy’s status as a foreigner and an au pair gives her American employers the upper hand in their employer-employee relationship. As it is the case with most live-in servants, Lucy lacks privacy and is under constant surveillance. However, she also gains an invaluable insight into the world of a wealthy, educated, White American family to which otherwise she would not have access. The racial, class, and legal dynamics of the White mistress-Black maid relationship reveal a complex power struggle between both characters and the values they represent. What originally seems like a beneficial cultural and economic exchange for both women, mirroring the economic and cultural relationship between the U.S. and the Caribbean, eventually becomes a political conflict of interests, which leads Lucy to reclaim control over her life and develop a multilayered political consciousness.

Throughout the story Lucy constantly struggles with her inability to connect with Americans because of her racial, class, and migrant background. Shortly after her arrival in New

⁶ Here I am referring to the notion of the outsider within as developed by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins. The concept applies especially, although not exclusively, to the experience of Black domestics, who, despite their White employers’ best intentions to treat them “like one of the family,” often face discrimination and are seen as outsiders because of their race, gender, and class. Despite the obstacles they may face, however, Collins reminds us that Black servants also enjoy a unique and empowering perspective on the intricacies of White racism and class privilege to which they only have access thanks to their job as domestics inside White households: “accounts of domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation they experienced at seeing white power demystified—of knowing that it was not the intellect, talent, or humanity of their employers that supported their superior status, but largely just the advantages of racism” (Collins 14).

York, Lucy notices how “they began to call me Visitor. They said I seemed not to be a part of things, as if I didn’t live in their house with them, as if they weren’t like a family to me, as if I were just passing through” (Kincaid 13). At night Lucy is supposed to go to school to be certified as a nurse. The family provides Lucy with her own room and bathroom so she can have some privacy. From the very first day they encourage her to “regard them as [her] family and make [herself] at home” (Kincaid 7). Nevertheless, Lucy never forgets her outsider and unequal status. The small maid’s room she is given reminds her of “a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped” (Kincaid 7), foreshadowing the sense of imprisonment she will feel in the new house, as well as reminding her of the oppressive racial legacy she has inherited: the middle passage of the slave trade.

As much as Mariah’s family wants Lucy to feel “like one of the family,” they fail to recognize the gap between them. Lucy is certainly not colorblind and notices “their six yellow-haired heads of various sizes” (Kincaid 12), along with their seemingly eternal bliss and economic comfort. She resents the White privilege they enjoy when they can choose to ignore racial and class differences to their advantage. For example, when they visit the dining car in the train to the Great Lake, Lucy notices, “The other people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah’s relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine. . . . Mariah did not seem to notice what she had in common with the other diners, or what I had in common with the waiters” (Kincaid 32). Although she eats dinner at the table with the family, accompanies them when they go out for fieldtrips or on vacation, and spends most of her time with Mariah and the children, Lucy is very much aware of her status as a servant: “I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left my home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant” (Kincaid 95). No matter how much Mariah makes Lucy her confidant and treats her like a friend, Mariah is still her boss and Lucy never forgets her role in the house: she is the au pair, the visitor, a member of another family and another culture.

Aware of her outsider-within status, Lucy shares a certain degree of emotional intimacy and time with Mariah, which eventually leads her to connect with her employer, despite her best efforts to remain self-sufficient. Similarly, many Caribbean countries welcome American popular culture and engage in business with the U.S. (and the international organizations it leads) to encourage development, although they are perfectly aware of the long-term economic dependency and cultural impact that such exchanges might produce. Lucy’s constant attempts to live independent from adult supervision of any kind fail as she gradually and unwillingly develops a bond with the only woman that is always physically present in her life. As their relationship progresses, Mariah and Lucy share personal details about their lives, including their sexual experiences. Given that sex is a taboo subject according to the Victorian ideal of womanhood that Lucy’s mother inculcated in her, discussing her sexual life with Mariah highlights the degree to which Lucy trusts her employer. Lucy also takes her employers’ children to school, feeds them, plays with them, reads to them, and even tells them the same fairy tales her own mother told her when Lucy was a child. Like many other nannies, Lucy acts like a surrogate mother to Mariah’s children and bonds with them.

As she develops an emotional relationship with the children, Lucy gradually begins to consider the mother-daughter relationships in which she finds herself from the perspective of the mother, and not the child. She recognizes the toll that emotional labor has on her, and reconsiders her job as a temporary means to financial independence, rather than a defining quality of her identity: “There was nothing wrong with my life as I lived it with Mariah and Lewis, but I could hardly imagine spending the rest of it overseeing their children in one situation or another”

(Kincaid 110). By the time she decides to find another job, she is confronted with her employment history: “I had no experience, except being a student and a nursemaid” (Kincaid 157). By referring to herself as a “nursemaid” instead of an “au pair” (as she does in the beginning of the novel), Lucy positions herself as part of the legacy of Black women who often had to not only nurture but also breastfeed White children during slavery and segregation. Often at the risk of neglecting their own families, Black nannies were expected to devote their time and energy to the White children they supervised. After a year of working for Mariah, Lucy realizes she is putting her life on hold for the sake of her employer’s family. Lucy’s unwillingness to continue performing her duties as a proto-mother to Mariah’s children enables her to regain power and control over her life, and to disrupt the historical legacy of which she is a part. Rather than remaining at the mercy of the White family’s needs and wants, and navigating the racial differences between them, Lucy sets off for a new, independent life away from them.

Breaking away from Mariah’s family is not an easy task for Lucy, who is made to feel indebted to and dependent on them for social and financial survival in a culture that is not her own. Behind Mariah’s generosity and concern for Lucy, in fact, lies a maternalistic attitude that further complicates their relationship. As much as Mariah tries to make Lucy feel welcome and comfortable by giving her the opportunity to enjoy new experiences, showing her new places, and giving her gifts, her motivations are not as altruistic as they might seem. Mariah often treats Lucy like another one of her children, hugging and kissing her goodnight, and “gave [her] lectures about what a bad influence a person like [her friend] Peggy could be” (Kincaid 63). Mariah (who represents U.S. values) thus infantilizes Lucy (who represents Caribbeanness) and fails to recognize her as an independent adult, an equal. Furthermore, as sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo explains, “Without leaving her affluent neighborhood or following anyone else’s schedule, [the maternalistic homemaker] employer can construct a sense of herself as generous, altruistic, and kind—key attributes of the ideal bourgeois feminine personality” (187). Mariah is in fact read by many of my White American students as a generous soul attempting to rescue Lucy from a life in the Caribbean that presumably would provide her with no resources, no opportunities, and no freedom. They tend to dismiss Lucy as a selfish passive-victim, ridding her of any agency. To some, Mariah might symbolize Lucy’s only chance to participate in “a modern, democratic, classless, and color-blind society” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 208). However, such an interpretation of Mariah’s democratic values does not take into consideration the complexity of the relationship between the upper-middle-class, White American employer and the working-class Afro-Caribbean employee. Not only is Mariah’s maternalistic behavior overlooked by some of her American compatriots, but so is the neocolonial legacy of which both characters are part.

Lucy’s race and foreign status help validate Mariah’s lifestyle and seemingly liberal ideology. The physical presence of Lucy’s Black body in the house is a constant reminder of Mariah’s attempt to support and save the “Third World” to both the family and visitors. Having Lucy as a nanny also helps reinforce economic and racial hierarchies. Hiring a servant of color, especially one from a foreign country, allows wealthy, White employers access to a different world without leaving the comfort of their own. From the safety of their own homes, where they can control and set the limits of the relationship with their servants, employers often use domestics and nannies as windows to exotica. Sociologist Judith Rollins comments on the privileged position that mistresses hold in the relationship with their domestics, who are often expected to share intimate details about their private life, family, and native culture: “For many [employers], their contact with their domestic is the closest relationship they have with a lower-class or Third World person. Talking with the domestic is a chance to explore what they assume is a very different lifestyle”

(164). Learning about other people's lives and cultures can certainly be an enriching and empowering experience, of which Kincaid's Mariah takes advantage. However, Mariah's motivation for such a curiosity is not always clear to us, since the novel is written from Lucy's point of view. Is Mariah trying to find out more about Lucy and "her people" because she genuinely cares for her? Or is she merely trying to satisfy her curiosity about the Other and corroborate her prejudices? Chances are Mariah's intentions are a combination of these two options.

Jamaica Kincaid hints at the problematic way in which employers become interested and involved in their servants' lives. Mariah's concern for Lucy's life outside the employers' home raises a series of questions regarding Mariah's intentions. She monitors Lucy's every move to make sure the nineteen-year-old stays out of trouble, which Lucy interprets as a sign of concern at first, but later rejects as a controlling mechanism. In this sense, Lucy reflects the attitude found not only in many adolescents, but also in many of Jamaica Kincaid's Afro-Caribbean characters, who often resent the intrusion of White Europeans and Americans into their land and lives. The friction in their relationship escalates as Lucy begins to explore her sexuality and Mariah worries about the potential consequences, constantly reminding her to use protection: "She had taken me to her own doctor, and every time I left the house on an outing with Peggy, Mariah would remind me to make sure I used the things he had given me" (Kincaid 67). On the one hand, Mariah is empowering Lucy to explore and enjoy her sexuality freely. On the other hand, she is interfering in a personal matter and assuming that every time Lucy leaves the house she will engage in sex.

Lucy might enjoy the company and learning opportunities that Mariah's family provides for her; however, they are not her real family and their relationship is ultimately that of employer-employee. As Lucy reminds us, "I was living in a home, ... and it was not my own" (Kincaid 112). Lucy's thirst for financial independence and control of her own experiences outweighs any of the economic and educational opportunities from which she can benefit. Her decision to find her own place and a new job is not well received by her employer. Mariah may have tried to treat Lucy like one of the family, but as soon as Lucy decides to move on, she immediately reminds her of her employee status and responsibilities, thus reasserting her control in the relationship. Lucy's determination to leave a house and a family that are not her own, though, interferes with Mariah's plan and Lucy eventually leaves.

When she moves out of the house, Lucy reflects on the significance of her "small stack of official documents: my passport, my immigration card, my permission-to-work card, my birth certificate, and a copy of the lease to the apartment. These documents showed everything about me, and yet they showed nothing about me" (Kincaid 148). Lucy is aware of the importance that official documents (and the legal status they grant her) have on her present and future life. However, resisting her employer's and the U.S. government's power to determine and constrict her actions and choices, Lucy maneuvers the system and finds a way out. Indeed, Lucy's main goal is initially to escape her mother's and the colonial culture's repressive influence by moving to the U.S., where she would obtain the necessary education to pursue a career of her choice, regardless of her gender. The process of self-discovery she undergoes only adds another incentive to her goals.

Household workers in general enjoy a unique perspective into their employers' lives, to which they would usually not have access. As geographer Geraldine Pratt illustrates in *Working Feminism*, "domestic workers possess a type of 'double vision,' forced as they are to move between their own intimate worlds, and those of their employers" (4). Thus, it is through Lucy's outsider-within status that Kincaid can expose the class differences that exist not only in the U.S., but more so between the U.S. and other developing nations. Early in her relationship with Mariah,

Lucy notices her employer's "luck" and privileged lifestyle. Soon Lucy realizes that Mariah's confidence stems in part from her wealth and privileged social status. She thus marvels when she finds out that Mariah bought her vintage kitchen table during a trip to Scandinavia and had it shipped back to the U.S., "it amazed me to think that someone could find an old piece of kitchen furniture at one end of the world and like it so much they would go to so much trouble to make sure it was always in their possession" (Kincaid 58-59). For someone with few material possessions as Lucy, shopping internationally for items that are easily available in one's country is a ridiculous luxury.

Kincaid turns Lucy's position as a servant and her status as an outsider to American culture into a source of empowerment. As Brooke Lenz argues, Lucy enjoys

a privileged standpoint as an outsider within that allows the reader to see particular truths or realities that are not apparent to someone more fully assimilated into dominant ideologies. ... Her lack of a stable or easily categorized identity ... allows for multiple and changing standpoints that inform one another and offer a more complex and powerful understanding of her position vis-à-vis American (and Antiguan) culture. (101-02)

Lucy's unstable identity speaks to the tensions of being caught in between different categories and different spaces, which lead her towards developing a new and empowering notion of Caribbeanness. Thus, Lucy notices how Mariah's apparent generosity is undermined by her constant attempts to obliterate the social and economic inequalities between her and others, especially servants. Lucy is, after all, a nanny working for Mariah, which affects the power dynamics of their employer-employee relationship.

In a pathetic attempt to connect with Lucy and erase racial (and even class) differences, Mariah claims to have "Indian blood": "Mariah says, 'I have Indian blood in me,' and underneath everything [Lucy] could swear she says it as if she were announcing a trophy. How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?" (Kincaid 40-41). Lucy immediately recognizes the absurdity of Mariah's statement and purpose, and begins to question Mariah's intentions behind her approach. "Mariah only understands race as identity, as blood, whereas Lucy sees instead relations of domination between 'victors' and 'vanquished'," as Helen Scott points out (984). Lucy, in effect, cannot help but noticing that her relationship with Mariah resembles that of the privileged/underprivileged, powerful/powerless, center/margin, colonizer/colonized.

Lucy's position as an outsider within and an Antiguan migrant becomes more crucial and problematic when Mariah tries to provide her with tools to fight patriarchal oppression. Since Lucy wants to break away from her mother's traditional values and gender discrimination, Mariah offers her the perspective and works of Western feminists in an attempt to help her. However, Lucy does not accept these ideas or see any value in them when applied to her own experience, not because they are feminist, but because they are Western. As feminist sociologist Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues, Western feminisms tend to engage in discursive colonialism when they rely on privilege and ethnocentric universality granted by "the global hegemony of Western scholarship" (175). Whereas "Western feminists alone become the true 'subjects' of ... counterhistory" (190), they reduce "Third World" women to the status of "object" without political agency by representing them as a "homogenous 'powerless' group" and ignoring the socio-historical, material, and cultural specificities of their experiences (Mohanty 179).

As her relationship with Mariah develops, Lucy begins to notice her employer's savior mentality and Western biases. Lucy complains, "Mariah wanted to rescue me. She spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere. But I couldn't speak, so I couldn't tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether" (Kincaid 131-32). Lucy may not have developed a language complex enough to reflect her reality; however, she is not willing to be rendered a powerless passive victim. Rejecting the possibility of being silenced and further colonized, Lucy asserts the differences between herself and privileged White American women such as Mariah, by saying, "Mariah had completely misinterpreted my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book" (Kincaid 132). Although Lucy gradually develops a voice and a language that enable her to criticize economic and cultural inequalities, there is a degree of contradiction in the process through which she has to go and the location in which that process takes place. Like many postcolonial intellectuals and writers whose work has been developed in and influenced by the West, Kincaid's novel suggests it is only outside of her motherland that Lucy can develop the ability to speak against both old and new forms of oppression. The possibility of challenging hegemonic colonial structures and values, and of developing oppositional knowledge and movements within Caribbean spaces is therefore obliterated by Kincaid, who focuses only on the potential for resistance in exile. The erasure of social justice movements and activism that exist in the Caribbean basin makes the text rather problematic.

Conclusion

Lucy eventually escapes both Annie's and Mariah's influence and begins a new chapter of her life. Although she gains her longed-for independence, Kincaid does not specify exactly how her character will continue her existence. The two mothers, after all, have given Lucy opposition off of which she has built her identity. Lucy takes the notebook Mariah has given her as a farewell present and realizes "my life stretched out ahead of me like a book of blank pages" (163). Kincaid thus implies that Lucy has only begun the process of (re)creating her new identity as a free woman. Certainly, as Lenz points out, "[Lucy's] determination to create her own hybrid identity ... responds to certain cultural realities—Lucy can never entirely shed her origins and fully embrace the privileges of the colonizer, nor can she recover and embrace a traditional island identity that has already been appropriated and/or erased by imperialism" (110). Consequently and despite the problematic geographical uprooting of the protagonist, I argue that by the end of the novel Lucy encapsulates the current postcolonial consciousness and experience, searching for freedom as well as economic and political independence from imperialist powers, and moving towards a new concept of Caribbeanness. Lucy goes from colonized to anti-colonial (in Antigua) to postcolonial (in the U.S.) to anti-neocolonial in the end, an allegorical journey that partially encapsulates the process in which many postcolonial writers and thinkers find themselves today, and which Kincaid cannot resolve in her work but certainly desires.

The end of *Lucy* speaks to the challenges facing postcolonial writers, intellectuals, politicians, and economists, along with average Caribbean people, who struggle to reconcile the tensions brought by colonialism and its lingering effects. Lucy is aware of her past history and self-growth; she knows where she has been and the situations to which she does not want to return. But she has yet to figure out and delineate her new identity. Instead of completely rejecting or denying her past, Lucy opts for accepting her history as an undeniable part of her subjectivity. Accepting this legacy, though, does not mean she agrees with it. Instead, Lucy clings to her

capacity to adapt to and overcome new challenges, as proven by her evolution. Lucy's tears at the end of the novel imply a new beginning, rather than the end of a journey. Likewise, taking into account my allegorical reading of Lucy's journey toward a new Caribbean subjectivity, Caribbean countries are in the process of defining their futures as independent nations, adapting to the challenges of the globalization era in which borders seem to efface, at least according to some vague terms. Jamaica Kincaid develops one specific story, that of an Afro-Caribbean domestic in the U.S., and relies on the familiar rhetoric of mother-daughter relationships in order to underscore the racial, gender, class, and national ramifications of the process. Like her character, both Kincaid and her readers explore the past and the present, but have yet to discover what lies ahead.

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