



Female Body and Sexuality as a Site for Feminist Resistance in Postcolonial Caribbean Perspective in Jamaica Kincaid’s Novel *Lucy*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the Caribbean young women in the novel Lucy (1990) resist the conventional Caribbean upbringings by using their bodies. Lucy in Kincaid’s novel brushes off all the Caribbean decencies and righteousness that define the restrictions of female sexuality anticipating and returning men’s sexual advances. The central character, Lucy, in the novel ascertains that only sex cannot emancipate her from societal restriction, and that she has further closeness to the Caribbean principles and society than she comprehended. Fictional illustrations of Caribbean moral and ethical prospects of the sexualities of women are studied by means of their involvement into sexual activities. Lucy routines sex as an element of her shift towards emotional mellowness. This paper attempts to explore the female body and sexuality in postcolonial Caribbean perspectives by analyzing the female body as a site for feminist resistance. She revolts against the conventional female structure and Caribbean norms by initiating sex with the young boy, so she overcomes these barriers of tradition and history. The female body then turns out to be the place of confrontation for gaining control over the patriarchal mindset. Lucy’s corporeal space comes to be the solitary option for combating and confronting colonial patriarchal structures. It shows that literally every feature of female individuality and attempt for freedom and self-determination is influenced by the restraints of female sexuality. Lucy’s choice of debasing the significance of her body as an act of resistance examines the ways by which a female’s body functions as an act of defiance to oppressive Caribbean patriarchal structures.



Introduction

Lucy (1990), a novel by Jamaica Kincaid, concentrates on the protagonist that how she as an immigrant overcomes all the burdens of conventional, colonial, cultural norms of Caribbean society. She realizes her past sexual experiences before starting the journey to America. She experiences a significant change in her after immigration from Caribbean to the United States of America. After arriving at America, she considers herself absolutely free and her sexual liberation initiates. After leaving home, she enjoys great edge of her sexual liberty without any restrictions and limitations in a new place; and she portrays her body as a display and as a jubilation of female sexuality. She starts resisting the patriarchal norms that were imposed on her by her mother, by her society being a female. Her insubordination and disobedience to her mother illustrate the resistance to both the colonizers and the patriarchal society and this act of defiance and sexuality take her out from subjugation and make her self-determining and liberated woman. She defies the authority of her mother as she conceives her as a symbol for colonial subject who acquiesce without any remonstrance the dictation of colonizers and surrender to colonizers.

Research Methodology

This paper qualitatively analyzes female body in terms of resistance against the colonial patriarchal society by portraying a female body as a site for resistance in postcolonial Caribbean perspective. The woman, who migrated from Antigua to the United States, in the novel uses her body as a metaphor for resistance. Under the influence of colonizers, the postcolonial cultures are used to reinforcing colonial-patriarchal norms to suppress the women. But, Lucy being a postcolonial Caribbean figure throws off these norms by letting herself free and strongly withstands using her body to resist her mother's patriarchal authority.

Review of Literature

The idea to get control over female body is associated with colonial domination of land like a virgin, and is deeply rooted in the discourse of patriarchy and colonialism. Ketu H. Katrak (2006) writing about female subjects in his book *Politics of Female Body* states, "For female subjects, experiences of colonial domination are gender specific and rooted in the control of female sexuality throughout a woman's life. In most postcolonial cultures, a traditional, pre-colonial patriarchy is reinforced by colonial Victorian mortality" (Katrak 42). And Lucy is not one of these subjects, as she defies and resists to the patriarchal systems of the society and does not let any man to get control of her body and sexuality or to have authority over her throughout her life – the one way of resistance of female body in the postcolonial perspective is to resist against the colonial patriarchal cultural authority of the society. Katrak also articulates his views about female virtuousness and chastity in his book *Politics of the Female Body*, "Sexuality is also mystified in other arenas of 'cultural tradition,' for example, the Indian customs of kanyadan, that is, a virgin daughter is given as a gift along with dowry to a husband" (Katrak 44).

The present study is developed around the illustration of female body in terms of sexuality which resists against the domination of patriarchy like colonizers. Moira Ferguson (1994) argues about the novel, *Lucy* stating that, Lucy who discloses "the duplicity of the colonizing economy" signifies "at transcendental level (...) Antigua of 1967, a territory freeing itself from the colonizer, already tentatively entering an early postcolonial phase" (Ferguson 131). By freeing herself from the social constraints of the patriarchy she freely involves into many sexual relations like her father who has numerous illicit relationships with the women and have many illicit children; so she does

so in order to challenge the patriarchal domination. That if a male can enjoy the illicit relationship why not a female – an act of resistance to challenge the norms of patriarchy and the colonizers.

The restrictions imposed over women starts from the time of slavery. Pyne Timothy (1998) writes, “[m]ale sexuality has no consequences whereas for women the consequences are severe” (162). This act of restriction over female sexuality initiates from the time of slavery when white men’s immoral and unethical sexual abuse of black women was liberated by the latter’s supposed accepted inclination for involving into many sexual partners. This idea of racism and sexism has sustained to hold its chime reverberates in colonial communities, and in postcolonial states.

Alison Donnell (2006) describing the female libidos indicates female lustful sexual lubricious libidos as “a radicalized trait that already had been powerfully inscribed in colonial narratives” (Donnell 192).

Analysis

In *Lucy*, the female body of the protagonist takes a pivotal place against the patriarchal conventional norms of the Caribbean culture. Her sexual journey can also be demystified in figurative expressions as an insurgent who fights against the established authority (the colonizers) as Lucy chooses to migrate from Caribbean to America, to work and labor in America than cherish her life in her homeland, that is evocative of Milton’s Satan who resists and revolts against the supremacy of God by enunciating “it is better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven” (*Paradise Lost* 1. 263). She considers her mother as an embodiment of the colonizers and so she resists by defying the cultural, conventional customs and traditions of the Caribbean society – the male dominated society.

To study the female body as a site and as an act of resistance, this paper endeavors to focus that how a female body is portrayed by Kincaid to redress and re-explore the status of a female in patriarchal society by her body and sexuality; and it also concentrates on the female body as an exaltation of sexuality and as a resistance against the supremacy of the Caribbean patriarchal colonial society.

Lucy, at the age of fourteen, leaves her homeland and migrates to America. She undergoes a chain of experiences that present her body and sexuality as an emblem of self-exploration and resistance. The novel portrays Lucy’s body and sexuality as a metaphor for resistance, reclaiming her status and identity. The portrayal of female body is the subject matter of this paper that denotes that how the female persona discovers herself within the realm of patriarchy and how she gets in touch with males and women.

In the homeland, Lucy experiences colonial mentality, patriarchal domination, a society dominated by males, in relationship with her father. Her mother too like her, acquiesces and surrenders herself to the patriarchal structures and resides with the same patriarchal subjection. Exasperating over it, Lucy says, “In marrying a man, my mother had thought very hard not so much about happiness as about her own peace of mind” (Kincaid 81). This is the main cause due to which she rejects the patriarchal supremacy and escapes from her home and migrates to America. She does not like to experience the same physical violence at all as experienced by her mother. When she reaches America, she wrestles her best to erase and pull out herself from the connections of her homeland just to retain and possess the new identity that rested before her in a new place.

She becomes entirely a different person after arriving at America, frees herself from every type of bondages, captivities, confinements and oppression of bitter colonial patriarchal norms, and she undergoes a whole pathway of her sexuality, and this sexual festivity is self-evident in all the sexual relations in which she involves in. Whereas according to the social interpretation of a sexual act, it is the male who takes pleasure and enjoys the dynamic performance by playing the active role and his machismo or manliness is evaluated and decided by his power and supremacy over a female in a sexual performance. But here in case of Lucy, she subverts the whole patriarchal structure by getting domination over it.

Nevertheless, in *Lucy*, the central character (Lucy) reverses the course of sexual act on several surfaces. Her sexual intimacies and intercoursing illustrates that she does not succumb herself out of any emotional connection. She overturns the whole equation of sexuality. It is she who takes initiative in every sexual action because of primary physical requirements of the body. After Reaching America, Lucy's sexual liberation commences, and she cherishes the freedom free from all Antiguan patriarchal conventional customs and traditions. Before her migration to America, she realizes her former voluptuous sexual experiences when she thinks about a young boy called Tanner, "the first boy whom I did everything possible you can do with a boy" (Kincaid 82). Her first sexual experience with Tanner invokes in her ambivalence reactions: "[Tanner] pressed his lips against mine, hard, so hard it caused me to feel pain [...] I had two reactions at once: I liked it, and I didn't like it" (50).

The limitations and the boundaries that were imposed on the female sexuality in Antigua in the past postcolonial realm did not let her to practice more. As a result, she enjoys the excessive benefit of her sexual liberty and self-determination in her new place after she abandons the home and family. Hugh is the man with whom she evolves sexual relations and physical intimacy, and it takes place when they encounter each other for the very first time: "He kissed me on my face and ears and neck and in my mouth. If I enjoyed myself beyond anything I had known so far, it must have been because such a long time had passed since I had been touched in that way by anyone; it must have been because I was so far from home. I was not in love" (Kincaid 66-67). It happens for a second time in her performing of irregularly partaking sexual intercourse with a man she had only familiar for two hours.

Here, Lucy appears to be more anxious and interested about the necessity of sex instead of relishing the very act of sex, and she prefers sex over love. She constructs her personal domain where men do not form the focus of her realm different from any other female persona in the novel. Through sexual intimacy, Lucy not only discovers her sexuality but also analyze the anatomy and structure of the body in the course of a sexual act, and she looks as if she had been least concerned about sexual pleasure. Lucy tries to discover the body of the 'other' sex by indulging herself in the sexual act, and she asserts that she had been exposed when she kisses a boy, as she herself explains: "At fourteen [she] discovered that a tongue had no real taste" (Kincaid 43). By the age of fourteen she did not discern what to pursue out in an erotic sexual act.

Someone should have told me that there were other things to seek out in a tongue than the flavor of it, for then I would not have been standing there sucking on poor Tanner's tongue as if it were an old Frozen Joy with all its flavor run out and nothing left but the ice. As I was sucking away, I was thinking, Taste is not the thing to seek out in a tongue; how it makes you feel- that is the thing. (Kincaid 43-44)

In this manner, it describes how Lucy chooses to satiate her physical desires over her emotional desires, and Lucy's body develops into a territory for herself to act her freedom and power against the patriarchal social structures. One more way, in which Lucy rejoices her sexuality and simultaneously she resists the patriarchal authority and supremacy of the dominant power, is when she rejects to empower anybody who wants to have authority and control over her body; and throughout the entire time of sexual act, she does not permit anyone to hold control over her body. Possibly, this may be the one cause of resistance why she does not come to be indulged passionately in her sexual activities. She states, "I was naked from the waist up; a piece of cloth, wrapped around me, covered me from waist down. That was the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the moment I grew tired of him" (Kincaid 155). This boredom is due to her lack of passionate involvement in the sexual intercourse, and her body becomes the place to resist the patriarchal authority.

Unlike other female characters in the novel, she is the only character who resists against the patriarchal standards and norms of the society whereas other female characters like Lucy's mother and Mariah appear to be completely acquiesce with the patriarchal dominance and surrender their bodies and sexuality to the men. And the husband seems to be the instrument of corporeal and sexual violence, and Lucy's mother is the perfect illustration of physical mistreatment where the female body is vulnerable, exposed, oppressed and maltreated and victim of patriarchal domination, whereas Mariah's sexuality is threatened by Lewis.

The question of virginity and purity is of utmost important in postcolonial literature when comes to deal with the representation of female body, and writing about female body and double colonization – one is literally colonization and other is the colonization of female body by getting power and authority over her – has been the subject for many postcolonial writers. It also fortifies the role of patriarchy of a male over female because a female depends upon a male to lose her virginity.

One more important aspect of any postcolonial feminist text is the notion of the male gaze, and the male gaze presents and re-presents the body and the sexuality of a female in accordance with the patriarchal locution, and Katrak expresses his thoughts about the male gaze in these words, "Fanon's insight, though sympathetic to women ironically are in line with any male gaze – colonial or native – interpreting women's bodies and the veil as an icon of cultural identification" (Katrak 114).

Kincaid's *Lucy* is an important text to analyze the female status, racism, immigration and mother-daughter relationship. These are all the most important themes of *Lucy* and another important theme of this novel is female body and sexuality as an act of resistance in postcolonial literary texts. This paper pinpoints the sexuality and female body as a rebellious act and a source of independence for the character Lucy. The conservative Caribbean communities have imposed moral restrictions on the girls, particularly prohibiting sex prior to marriage and extramarital relationships. The novel *Lucy* represents Lucy as a character who reckons female body and sexuality as the most important element of resistance against Caribbean patriarchal morality, particularly against her mother. This paper offers a close study questioning the connection among female body, sexuality and resistance, and how this relationship develops in Lucy's ripening to maturity. For Lucy, sex acts as a reminiscent of her past as it discards her mother's moral codes, lectures, and lessons, and Lucy enhances the awareness of her body "as a source of resistance and of sexual pleasure" (Mahlis 165).

Lucy tries to forget what she left behind, and in rebelliousness against her mother she becomes friend with Peggy who “introduces Lucy to the pursuit most dreaded by Lucy’s mother – sex for the fun of it, or, as the mother would put it, ‘sluttishness’” (Simmons 131). And also she involves herself in informal sexual affairs with many sexual mates, and in fact her tenaciousness not to remain in contact with her mother and her stubbornness to rebel her desires illustrates her unwavering attitude not to comply with the patriarchal society and also with colonial structures. Here rejection of her mother is construed figuratively as a source of resistance to both the patriarchal community and the colonizers, where she is fated to dwell at home in Caribbean and in diaspora.

Lucy does not possess any domination over her gender, class or race the way she retains full domination over her sexuality; being a black woman in America sexuality is the only thing over which she has the full control, for her keenness “to increase the number and variety of her sexual experiences” (Kincaid 43). She incorporates the icon of the solitary Black licentious woman in American community. Gary Holcomb, whose research concentrates upon travel literature, considers she is represented as a sexual traveler who willingly accepts the identity of the slut (297). The idea of sexual migration represents “the role of traveler that deeply informs Lucy’s anxieties about being an immigrant” (Holcomb 298). In American society her existence is presented through her yearning for physical pleasure; and her desire to empower herself through her involvement with many sexual partners is strongly affected through her relationship with her mother, who continuously tries to impose on her the traditions, customs and norms of the patriarchal Caribbean society, which constrains Lucy to depart Antigua in first place. As she herself states, “An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back” (Kincaid 10).

Lucy begins her journey in her unrestrained indulgence in sexual frolic, which in Caribbean perspectives is entirely a male sanctuary; she casts off the patriarchal Caribbean customs, traditions, conventions and norms and accepts the principles of a modern woman who is sexually liberated at all. She announces herself as a “slut” to accentuate her rebellious attitude and resistance to her Caribbean past and to emphasize unequivocally as not inappropriate for romance, and experiences loveless relationships of her sexual venture. Her every sexual act turns out to be a prospect of domination over the patriarchal norms because “issues of power and control predominate in every relationship” (O’Callaghan 295).

Lucy portrays her family and community’s expectations and prospects of her by stating, “I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse, for example; a sense of duty to my parents; obedience to the law and worship of convention” (Kincaid 133). She defies all these expectations of the society by going against these patriarchal colonial morals. These moral restrictions were imposed by the colonial patriarchal system in which women are subjugated and marginalized, and they are supposed to follow these ethics and morals strictly. The element of resistance is deeply rooted in Lucy’s mind that resists all the patriarchal norms particularly one imposed by her mother on her.

The primary feature of that convention is not to involve in pre-marriage sexual actions, and Lucy aggressively asserts that her “whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing (her) from becoming a slut” (Kincaid 127) and that she had conceived erotic and sexual pleasure which were “unavailable” (113) to her until she practices them in reality. Her sexuality becomes one way of discovering her self. By involving herself into sexual activities she inverts the myth of purity. Lucy is fully conscious of the various moral and ethical prospects her Caribbean society has of both male and female because she listens to the discussion on the matter of morality because society has

different prospects for males and boy children. Whereas young female desires to reject and disobey the society moral codes and dismiss these codes, demanding for themselves a sexual freedom. The strict moral codes are taught to the girl children in Caribbean society, and Lucy practices the extreme manners to resist against these moral codes. Her premarital sexual relationship with male partners is an act of rebellious attitude or resistance to the patriarchal norms of the Caribbean society.

She overturns the female myth of purity and virginity by stating that for “the first time she did everything you can do with a boy” and she “did not care about being a virgin and had long been looking forward to the day when I could rid myself of that status” (Kincaid 82-83). It indicates that she unwillingly acquiesced with the order of remaining a virgin only because she lacks the opportunities. She is least concerned about her virginity and it has no importance to her whereas virginity is important for her mother and for her society. It elucidates that Lucy’s concern is to use sex as a tool for resistance against the moral codes. Her act of rebellion against the Caribbean norms in the homeland is one way of resistance, and she enjoys the full fruition of sexuality of her body when she left Caribbean for America in an exile that she herself imposed on her for her acquittal.

After her arrival at America, she starts to distance herself from her society, her mother, her island, and their ideals and morals. She resists against her Caribbean society and also against the personal anger that she has against her mother. In America, she develops sexual relationships and does sex with men whenever she desires to have sex and whenever she gets the opportunity. After spending couple of weeks in America, she reflects, “almost everything I did now was something I had never done before and so the new was no longer thrilling to me unless it reminded me of the past” (Kincaid 31–32). For her, sex acts as a reminiscent that makes her think about her past because by doing so she rejects her mother’s lessons, lectures and the moral codes of the society.

Indeed, the physical pleasure of sex frequently surprises her because she remarks that “I had not known that such pleasure could exist and, what was more” (Kincaid 113) be available to her. While she willingly accepts her sexuality, she asserts on sex without love, and truly she attempts to keep her emotional detachment and lack of emotional commitment by distancing herself from all the relationship she has in her homeland. Although, her rebellious attitude indicates her wish to transgress and have vengeance in order to offend and to bring disgrace for her family and the Caribbean patriarchal colonial mindset. In this way, Lucy announced a war by not becoming saint as she established sexual freedom.

She is a paid worker and the economic liberation leads to sexual liberation. In a letter to her mother she declares by giving details about her that her “upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable . . . I would not come home now, I said. I would not come home ever” (Kincaid 128). With this reply and the details she describes in the letter she strives to be disloyal to her mother and pay back certain degree of the pain and agony she lingers to sense at the mother’s behavior with her sons that she prefers her sons over Lucy. It shows her rebellious attitude towards her mother and it also acts to destroy the ideal and perfect image of her daughter. Lucy’s becoming of a slut is her own choice and she revolts the female conventional structure that was a barrier for her liberation and she overcomes by these barriers of tradition, patriarchy and history. Lucy turns this whole structure of patriarchy upside down by resisting the structure by catalyzing her sexuality. She represents the modern postcolonial Caribbean female figure who in a sexual act takes an initiative like a man subverting the whole structure.

She is self-confident and announces “I never wanted to live in that place [the Caribbean] again, but if for some reason I was forced to live there again, I would never accept the harsh judgments made against me by people whose only power to do so was that they had known me from the moment I was born” (Kincaid 51). She as an act of resistance against the patriarchal system frees herself from her home society and the moral codes and rejects authority over her choices.

For Lucy, sex is the part of the passage to adulthood, and blatantly defiant act which rejects the orthodox ideas of the male-dominated society. Although this resistance is primarily concentrated on sexuality and female body, its objective is as much an emancipation of identity – an unequivocal expression of oneself as it is an act of sexual liberation. Even the man whom she knows for just two hours she has sex with him: “And then something happened that I had not counted on at all. At the store where I bought the camera, the man who sold it to me—he and I went off and spent the rest of the day and half of that night in his bed” (Kincaid 116). She conceives it as an accidental happening, and she considers herself very proud in her promiscuous attitude as she “planted a kiss on Paul’s mouth with an uncontrollable ardor that I actually did feel [later that day] – a kiss of treachery, for I could still taste the other man in my mouth” (Kincaid 117). This is the one cause that she is in love with one notion of not confine herself to only one man in an emotional or physical way.

Contrary to her Caribbean patriarchal society where she could not accept her own licentious sexual desires, she slowly and steadily provokes the idea of being a “slut” as a segment of her Black American experience. In cultural tradition, female sexuality is controlled through the idea of marriage that permits the men to have dominance, power, and control over women. Because of this reason, Lucy demonstrates a sense of being emotionless and heartless that is the forms of resistance by not letting her bodies being controlled by males when she comes in contact with men for sexual intercourse.

Conclusion

The reality is that, for Lucy, sex is the most significant element of her resistance against the patriarchal colonial Caribbean mindset. This is an attempt to break the bondage and burden that she has with her family, the patriarchal colonial structure and the society’s moral codes. The acceptance of illicit sexual relationships and premarital relations with men partners illustrates the depiction of morally and ethically conservative Caribbean society, both in her homeland and in diaspora. She resists by adopting the men’s model for sexual freedom knowing that her involvement in adulterous premarital sex will banish her from her mother and the society. She uses sexuality and female body as a tool for resistance against the colonial Caribbean patriarchal structures by blowing off the directions of that morality of patriarchal system that was imposed on post-colonial Caribbean women. She resists against the every conservative patriarchal colonial mindset, and Caribbean society’s morals and authorities by violating the moral codes.

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