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The mother-daughter bond, Blackness, and dual identity in Jamaica Kincaid's "Lucy"

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Abstract

The main purpose of this thesis is to analyze Jamaica Kincaid's semi-autobiographical novel *Lucy* (1990), which discusses the life of Lucy, a Caribbean young woman who starts working as an au pair in the United States to escape from her controlling family and become independent.

Specifically, this work wants to examine the relationship between mother and daughter, focusing also on gender roles within a strongly masculine and patriarchal society, which Lucy's mother, Annie, seems to respect and abide by.

Furthermore, the thesis also highlights how migration influences the process of emancipation and self-discovery. Indeed, when Lucy stays in America, she starts to explore her own identity free from any family constraint and stimulated by the meeting with Peggy, her new friend.

Eventually, this paper also aims to investigate the stereotypes to which the girl is subjected as a black woman coming from the Caribbean, and it tries to explain the phenomenon of "dual identity" which occurs especially when people, who have emigrated to another country, try to define themselves in the new society.

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Introduction

This work aims to explore the relationship between mother and daughter in the postcolonial society, where the impact of stereotypes related to race and identity is still strong. Specifically, starting from the female characters described in *Lucy* (1990), a short novel written by Jamaica Kincaid, it examines the tensions between a controlling maternal figure and an oppressed daughter who just wants to leave her homeland behind, even though she feels nostalgic for the place she was born. Along with this short narrative, some insights from other works are included to get a broader overview of the main topics. This is because this work also wants to take into consideration the evolution of the relationship between mother and daughter in the life of the author, whose stories are very often autobiographical and therefore reveal some details about Jamaica Kincaid's true self.

The first chapter intends to present some salient features of the author's life, paying particular attention to the works that accompanied the writer in her transition from being Elaine Potter Richardson to becoming Jamaica Kincaid. Moreover, it also gives a brief description of Antigua, an island in the Caribbean which was colonized by the British Empire and suffered its control until 1981, when it became an independent nation within the Commonwealth. Since Antigua stayed a colony for many centuries, the effects of colonialism are quite evident in Jamaica Kincaid's writings. Her works deal with themes related to Otherness, capitalism and the strive for independence and her tone shows her frustration and anger towards British educational and cultural practices, as they have changed Antiguan traditions and behaviors. Through Kincaid's critique of colonialism, the chapter addresses issues such as the British domination and the humiliation suffered by Antiguan because of these practices of control and submission.

In the second chapter, the figure of Lucy, a Caribbean girl who has moved to America to work as an au pair, is analyzed. One of the concepts that is taken into consideration is the role of the au pair, as it is quite controversial. In fact, when au pairs are sent to work for a family, the first role they assume is the role of the employee, so they are treated with respect, as they are living in the same house as the host family, but they are not shown affection by the family itself. However, it is difficult to establish the exact moment when the au pair is not only seen as a worker or a visitor, but also as a

member of the family, because there are many factors involved in this process. Therefore, this work attempts to identify where Lucy stands in this new environment, while exploring the feelings she has towards her host family too. In addition, a comparison between Lucy's mother Annie Potter and her American foster mother Mariah is brought into the discussion. Particularly, the two women both play an important role in Lucy's life, because she manages to define her own identity by associating with and distancing herself from their personalities: Lucy takes the two female characters as examples in her life, especially when she starts experimenting her sexuality by bonding with various men through the course of the novel. As a matter of fact, self-discovery and mother-daughter relationship are two of the main themes of the book, together with the colonial subject. For this reason, this work proceeds by examining the stereotypes to which Lucy and other individuals are subjected because of their status of women.

Finally, the third and last chapter focuses on the theme of identity. Being a black person in an environment in which the majority has a fair complexion can lead to facing many problems in daily life. However, race is not used by Kincaid to describe one person's identity, but on the contrary, it is what allows to create original personalities which escape the limitations given by racial labelling. Kincaid's books are especially known for the racial consciousness that permeates them, because the author herself is a black woman who experienced a condition of inferiority and subjugation when she lived on the island of Antigua.

This work also aims to give a detailed explanation of the emotional baggage Lucy brings with herself when she decides to leave her homeland. In particular, the lack of freedom she feels because of her oppressive mother which pushes her to leave everything behind and move to the United States soon turns into a sense of alienation and detachment from her native land, at the same time linked with a sort of nostalgia for the little things she was used to. Moreover, as soon as she starts engaging with people such as Mariah and the new environment in which she finds herself, she begins to develop a double identity, which is taken into consideration in this chapter. Specifically, the focus of this discussion is on the inner conflict Lucy experiences when she attempts to define her identity because she tries to relate to images and information which she cannot completely understand as they are out of her cognitive background, but she also tries to maintain a connection with her cultural traditions and with her origins.

1. An overview of the author's life and work

1.1 Antigua, a Caribbean postcolonial society

Antigua, situated in the Caribbean area, is the main island of the country of Antigua and Barbuda and its capital city is St. John's. Its native inhabitants also refer to this place as Waladli or Wadadli¹ which is quite similar to the Amerindian word "wadli" meaning oil, because Antigua was supposed to have many areas where to collect natural resources and oils used for various purposes in daily life.



Figure 1 - Map of the Caribbean (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean>)

According to some research, the first Indigenous group which possibly settled on the land were the Arawak,² who started working on the fields and harvesting crops, as well as doing pottery and fishing.

¹ See the webpage of the Consulate General of Antigua and Barbuda: <https://www.antiguabarbudaconsulate.com/antigua-and-barbuda>.

² American Indians of South America and the Greater Antilles. When Christopher Columbus first arrived on the island of Hispaniola (today politically divided into the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic), he encountered the Taino, an Arawak subgroup. The decline of Arawak is often linked with diseases brought by the colonizers, but also with the violence and oppression they had to suffer because of the Spanish. See following note.

However, they are said to have left the country around 1100 A.D. since the population of the Caribs³ invaded the island and imposed their control over it using weapons and force. Both populations were excellent at sailing and building boats to move around the Caribbean Sea, that is why it is easy to find their traces all around the Caribbeans and South America, even though they were gradually eliminated by diseases, slavery, and other problems related to the arrival of the Europeans.

The first European to arrive in the island was Christopher Columbus,⁴ who passed by it during his voyage in 1493 and decided to name it ‘Antigua’ in reference to the Church of Santa Maria de la Antigua in Sevilla, Spain. He gave names also to other islands of the Caribbeans such as Montserrat and Guadeloupe as part of a vow he had to honor. On the other hand, the interest of British people over the island started in the 1630s but they encountered some resistance from the Caribs, who still considered the territory as their own, but after a while they were able to conquer it and annex it to the British Empire.

The Europeans changed its economy by making Antigua a sugar colony: there was a real ‘sugar revolution’ which started with some small plantations and turned into an amount of 70,000 acres occupied by cane by 1676, with Betty’s Hope⁵ being one of the most known full-scale plantations in the land. However, it is essential to remember that the production of sugar was made possible first by the exploitation of native people, who struggled a lot because of malnutrition and other diseases, and then of African slaves brought there through the slave trade because “Africa supplied labor that was generally superior to both whites and Indians in capacity, endurance, and immunity to disease” (Sheridan 1972, 19). According to Sheridan (1972, 19), slavery in its early stage was much more bearable than when intensive cultures were brought into the sugar industry. Indeed, labor conditions became harsher, and many slaves succumbed to

³ American Indian group who lived in the Lesser Antilles and in the South American coast when the Spanish arrived in the area. Their history is quite complex to define because there are no reliable written sources that testify their behavior or their way of life. Some missionaries have argued that they were a violent tribe who moved around the Lesser Antilles and killed male inhabitants to take their women as slaves. See *Cannibal Encounters* (Boucher 2009) for a more detailed report of the history of Caribs.

⁴ He was an Italian explorer who embarked on a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean under commission of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain in 1492 and he is known especially because he began a new era of exploration and contact between Europe and the Americas.

⁵ Betty’s Hope was a sugar plantation established in 1650, which belonged to the Codrington family.

malnourishment, diseases, and terrible sanitation. Moreover, the birth rate in the plantations was quite low, therefore there was the necessity to bring new slaves every year to maintain the labor force and guarantee the production of sugar.

To give a brief summary of how the transatlantic voyage worked, we can consider some extracts from the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano,⁶ a former enslaved African who also suffered the trauma of working on the plantations under the control and the brutality of colonizers. In the second chapter of his autobiography, he recalls the first impression he had when he boarded the boat:

When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain (Equiano 2007, 24).

After understanding that he did not have any chance of going back to the land, he started dealing with the sickness given by the situation which he encountered on the boat:

I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing (Equiano 2007, 25).

From this last excerpt, it is possible to understand the conditions in which the African slaves were kept before reaching the shores of America. Equiano mentions the stench that impregnated the area under the decks, which was where the slaves had to stay all together and where they attended to their basic needs: this is one of the reasons why many slaves fell ill and arrived severely undernourished and weakened in America. Then, he continues his narrative by stating that he met some fellow compatriots who explained to him the reason behind their being on that ship:

In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men, I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them (Equiano 2007, 25).

⁶ Olaudah Equiano published his autobiography first in 1789 as a two-volume work. The edition of the book which is cited in this work is the one published by Dodo Press in 2007.

Moreover, he often talks about the fact that everyone spoke their own language, making it hard for people to understand each other. Despite this fact, slaves attempted many times to join hands and plot against the colonizers and the forced labor. For example, as Gaspar (1978, 308-309) writes in his article, there was a conspiracy in 1736 which was led by an African-born slave called Court: he plotted a general uprising on the night of the commemoration of King George II and he planned to use gunpowder with the help of Tomboy, a Creole slave, to blow up the gentry at the ball, while having other slaves to kill the whites around the city. However, the ball was postponed and his plan was discovered, so some of his accomplices and he were executed. This conspiracy was extensively studied by David B. Gaspar, who tried to give many details about the relations of power and the Antiguan slave society in the 18th century: through his work *Bondmen and Rebels* (Gaspar 1993), he provides a clear image of the master-slave relations in Antigua and he underlines the idea that the conditions of slaves changed a bit during the 18th century. In fact, as Richards (1995, 143-144) says in his review of the book, the amount of white people had decreased more and more while the number of black people had increased because manpower was needed, as markets and trade were expanding a lot. Therefore, there were many opportunities for slaves to make the most of their skills and acquire freedom. However, when this system failed because of economic distress, the spread of diseases or even because of climatic issues that damaged the crops, then the slaves rebelled because they knew the military power of whites was not as strong as before and they would have won the conflict.

The sugar trade started facing some problems with the American War of Independence (1775-1783), because the conflict took place both in North America and in the Caribbeans; moreover, at the beginning of the 19th century Great Britain decided to abolish the slave trade through the Slavery Abolition Act, signed in 1834. However, even though slaves emancipated themselves in 1834, the transition from slavery to free labor was not an easy process as the sugar market experienced significant fluctuations around the 1840s and the wages of many Black laborers, who were still discriminated by whites, remained fixed while prices started rising (Lightfoot 2004). According to Lightfoot, in 1858 there was a confrontation between the Antiguan stevedore Henry Jarvis and his Barbudan counterpart Thomas Barnard because the Barbudan crew was getting more jobs in the St. John's harbor than the Antiguan one. Soon this turned into such a violent four-

day fight involving also other Antiguan and Barbudans that a newspaper printed in the island of Dominica talked about Antigua as in ‘a state of siege’. The 1858 riot⁷ aroused some concern among the white elites, as more clashes and a possible takeover in the capital were feared, especially because the Antiguan black middle-class was known for changing political sympathies depending on the problem and how it could affect them. Even though black laborers had their own freedom, they were highly aware of the inequalities existing between them and white elites and they were also conscious they occupied the lower parts of the social hierarchy, which was still based on race, so sometimes they participated in these violent upheavals because they desired to reach a higher social status. Lightfoot (2004) argues that women also played a role in the insurrection, but they were not given the same space in the records of Antiguan history, as the descriptions focused on men and their reasons for rebelling. So, as sources suggest, it is possible to say that there were significant gendered differences even in the post-emancipation Antigua.

These episodes of violent resistance against colonialism and white elites show that the working-class black Antiguan had developed their own identity of class and race and they probably wanted to see those promises of freedom become reality in their daily life. Despite the abolition of slavery and slave trade, Antigua remained part of the Commonwealth for a long time, and it gained its independence from the United Kingdom only in 1981, but the influence of British traditions and English language remained in the land.

Since Antigua stayed a colony for a long part of its modern history, its economy and its traditions are often looked at through the colonizer’s perspective. However, this is not appreciated by Antiguan, as it is possible to see in the words of Kincaid uses in her book *A small place* (1988) in which she denounces colonialism and the tourism industry because it impacts the welfare of Antiguan. Specifically, she targets a possible tourist visiting Antigua, a tourist who is classified as a white American or European man coming for holidays to escape from “a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression” (Kincaid 1988, 16) and to do so she uses the second person appellation ‘you’, to shake the supposed superiority of the reader/tourist (Osagie and Buzinde 2011, 219).

⁷ See Lightfoot 2007 for a more detailed report of the uprising.

The book seeks to oppose many studies which claimed that Antigua was created in that way to meet the needs of capitalism and for this reason the land was exploited, as well as the people for manpower. Osagie and Buzinde take into consideration the work of Harrigan (1974), who talks about “tourism dependency economies in the Caribbean as a legacy of the histories of imperialism and slavery” (2011, 215) relating in that way to the ideology of Kincaid. In fact, Kincaid focuses on the prosperity of Antiguans, and she uses her book to participate “in the struggle to forge a sustainable future” (2011, 216) for those people who are oppressed by problems related to tourism, such as pollution, cultural contamination, and economic and political instability.

Kincaid uses strong words to show how those tourists who now enjoy Antigua for its warm sun and its wonderful landscapes were once the people who exploited slaves and imposed their own traditions over the land, without considering the wellbeing of natives. All over the book, Kincaid makes sure to show her point of view as an Antiguan woman by using witty remarks and constant provocations towards foreigners:

You have brought your own books with you, and among them is one of those new books about economic history, one of those books explaining how the West (meaning Europe and North America after its conquest and settlement by Europeans) got rich: the West got rich not from the free (free—in this case meaning got-for-nothing) and then undervalued labour, for generations, of the people like me you see walking around you in Antigua but from the ingenuity of small shopkeepers in Sheffield and Yorkshire and Lancashire, [...] and so you needn't let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday. They are not responsible for what you have; you owe them nothing; in fact, you did them a big favour, and you can provide one hundred examples (Kincaid 1988, 10-11).

In fact, this passage aims to show how colonizers often thought of themselves as superior because they believed they had been the ones who brought prosperity to the Third World through their civilizing mission, while colonized people only thought about all the sufferings and violence they had to go through to survive slavery and domination. However, Kincaid also condemns the Antiguan government for being unable to separate itself from Western countries, allowing powers such as United States and Europe to create a new form of colonialism, the ‘neocolonialism’⁸ to control Antigua, which still depends on foreign economies despite reaching independence.

⁸ When talking about neocolonialism, we refer to all the forms of dependence in which some countries, nominally independent, find themselves in relation to other more powerful and more advanced states. In particular, after the Second World War, many European countries were struggling to maintain a political control over their ex-colonies, therefore they preferred to create commercial and financial alliances which could be beneficial to them, because they brought

Kincaid recalls the complex history of Antigua in her provoking essay *In history* (1997) and she reflects on what history is for her and if it should be considered an “open wound” (1997, 1) for Antiguan or something else. In this essay, she gives an insight about the way Europeans, and specifically Columbus, look at Antigua, which appears very different from the way Kincaid and her fellow compatriots feel about the land they inhabit. She discusses that Columbus thinks of Antigua and generally the Caribbean as the ‘New World’ and she argues, “That it is new only to him, that it had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual, before he became aware of it, does not occur to him” (Kincaid 1997, 1). This is to say that Columbus approaches ‘new’ lands as if he was the first European to set foot on them, but he does not consider at first that those lands were inhabited and therefore permeated by history and cultural traditions. In fact, as Kincaid suggests, Columbus feels the need to give a name to everything he sets his eyes on, as a way to acquire knowledge of those things, because “this world he saw before him had a blankness to it, the blankness of the newly made, the newly born” (Kincaid 1997, 2).

From the essay it seems obvious that Kincaid does not appreciate the method Columbus uses to identify things when he meets something unknown to him, because he deprives objects but also people of their own historical and cultural background by renaming them. Columbus seems to look at these Caribbean islands from afar, as if he is not interested in getting to know the essence of those places but only wants to conquer them and subjugate them to the power of “his patrons, the king and queen of Spain” (Kincaid 1997, 2). Indeed, when Columbus reaches the West Indies, he observes his surroundings with wonder focusing on the landscapes, but he empties the territories of their people and their customs, thus destroying the meaning natives gave to each single detail. In fact, Kincaid shows her thoughts about the matter when she states:

My world then – the only world I might have known if circumstances had not changed, intervened, would have entered the human imagination, the human imagination that I am familiar with, the only one that dominates the world in which I live – came into being as a footnote to someone just passing by (Kincaid 1997, 3).

Columbus feels the need to ‘conquer’ not by leaving his militias in the territory, but by modifying society from a cultural and cognitive point of view to make it more like what he is used to in Europe, therefore he behaves as if he were facing an uninhabited

economic prosperity, but they also allowed an informal control over other territories. See more at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism>.

territory and turns Antiguans' 'whole world' into a simple Spanish colony with no previous history:

Up to this point I and they that look like me am not yet a part of this narrative. I can look at all these events: a man setting sail with three ships, and after many, many days on the ocean, finding new lands whose existence he had never even heard of before, and then finding in these new lands people and their things and these people and their things, he had never heard of them before, and he empties the land of these people, and then he empties the people, he just empties the people. It is when this land is completely empty that I and the people who look like me begin to make an appearance, the food I eat begins to make an appearance, the trees I will see each day come from far away and begin to make an appearance, the sky is as it always was, the sun is as it always was, the water surrounding the land on which I am just making an appearance is as it always was; but these are the only things left from before that man, sailing with his three ships, reached the land on which I eventually make an appearance. (Kincaid 1997, 4)

Kincaid does not know where she stands in this 'new history' because she realizes that two different narratives start to form when Columbus arrives on the land: the first one is the one of Antiguan people, who have always lived in that land and suddenly see themselves being deprived of their own past and the second one, the one of Columbus, who 'forcibly' enters someone else's history and, pretending not to see what has already been developed, gives his own version, made up of paradisiacal landscapes and continuous novelties.

1.2 Elaine Potter Richardson and the transition to Jamaica Kincaid

Elaine Potter Richardson is an Antiguan American writer who was born on May 25, 1949, in St John's, in the Caribbean island of Antigua. In her early life, she grew up in a British environment, as Antigua was still under the domination of Great Britain, and that is why she started to develop a dislike towards colonialism. She was removed from school at the age of 16 because her mother needed help in supporting the family and one year later, she was sent to work as an au pair in New York City.

While experiencing the American life, she started taking photography classes, but she soon moved to New Hampshire to enroll in Franconia College, an experimental liberal arts college in the United States, which remained open from 1963 to 1978. According to Ferguson, the first time Kincaid wrote something was when she was in college, as she mentions in the interview, "I began to write of my photographs – what I would take and [how] I would set them up" (1994, 163): she started by writing technical notes for her photographs and later she continued with poems and narratives.

After some time, she decided to go back to New York and she started working for various magazines, such as *Ingenue*. Later, in an interview, she revealed that she got the opportunity to write for *The New Yorker*, only with the help of George W. S. Trow, who was already writing for the same magazine. The moment she started writing also became the moment in which she decided to change her name into Jamaica Kincaid, as it is clearly possible to see in this passage from an interview with Selwyn R. Cudjoe:

I had always hated my name and then it turned out that my mother had named me after someone whom I particularly came to loath—a Lebanese woman, one of these people who come through the West Indies to get something from it but they don't actually inhabit it. I know this sounds awfully racist, but I just can't stand those people. At any rate, I had always hated my name and wanted to change it, but it was only when I started to write and actually started to sign my name to things that I decided I just couldn't do this. Since my family disapproved of my writing, it was easy for me to change names (Cudjoe 1989, 398).

In fact, she mentioned various times that her friends did not support her in this new journey, because most of them had started working decent jobs and creating their own families, and they did not understand her wish of getting recognition for her writings. Moreover, her family, especially her mother, criticized her for continuing doing a job with which she would have hardly been able to help her family back in Antigua. These are some reasons why she decided to adopt a new name, as she wanted to completely detach herself from her roots and start a new life in which she could explore her own self.

As she tells Ferguson, she did not regret leaving her family and her country, even though that meant doing underpaid jobs and being in trouble when expenses piled up, because that was the only way she could feel free and not laughed at for the choices she made in life (1994, 179).

In the interview, she also revealed why she chose the name “Jamaica” and not another name:

By the time I decided to change my name, that part of the world had become very remote to me. It was a kind of invention: I wouldn't go home to visit that part of the world, so I decided to recreate it. “Jamaica” was symbolic of that place. I didn't come from Jamaica. I changed my name before Jamaica became fashionable—at least, before I was aware of it (Cudjoe 1989, 400).

She recreates her desire to change name also in the book *Lucy* (1990), where the protagonist wishes to change her name from Lucy, which she disliked for being “slight, without substance” (Kincaid 2002, 149) to Enid “because that name seemed the most unusual of all the names I thought of” (Kincaid 2002, 150). However, unlike the author,

Lucy keeps her name and at the end of the narrative she somehow recognizes herself in the meaning her mother associated to it.

During her career, Kincaid always kept on exploring controversial themes regarding the social and political spheres, therefore she gained recognition, but she was also criticized by many scholars because of her complex works and the critique they contained. However, when asked if she thought that writing was “a form of political activism” (Ferguson 1994, 171), she replied that she was not much concerned with politics, but she had always focused on the relationship between the powerful ones and those who are seen as victims, because “I am interested in the defeated and identify with the defeated even though I don’t feel defeated myself” (171).

For what concerns her writings, she has revealed that her works are quite autobiographical because:

For me it was really an act of saving my life, so it had to be autobiographical. I am someone who had to make sense out of my past. It is turning out that it is much more complicated than that when I say my past, because for me I have to make sense of my ancestral past – where I am from, my historical past, my group historical past, my group ancestry (Kincaid in Ferguson 1994, 176).

She has also argued that sometimes she unconsciously includes themes which are not directly linked to the main topic of her book: for example, when writing about the relationship between her mother and her, she ends up talking about the binomial powerful/powerless (Ferguson 1994, 176).

This thesis analyzes one of Jamaica Kincaid’s novels, *Lucy* (1990), which focuses on the mother-daughter relationship and the process of emancipation of the main character Lucy. This is considered a semi-autobiographical narrative because there are some features in common with the author’s life: for example, Kincaid initially has a happy relationship with her mother, but this deteriorated over time just like for Annie and Lucy, and she also decided to leave for the United States to have an experience as an au pair.

The novel tells the story of Lucy Potter, a young woman who decides to embark on a journey to find her identity and to escape from her oppressive family. Therefore, in 1969 she leaves her hometown located on a Caribbean island to immerse herself in a typical urban American environment where she starts working as a nanny for the four children of Mariah and Lewis, a wealthy white couple.

When she flies to the United States, she is full of expectations as she desires to find her own self and create her own future, free from any kind of family constraints.

Unfortunately, the cold and gloomy atmosphere that welcomes her once she arrives in the American city makes her miss her land where the warm weather is always present, and the sun caresses her skin. She soon finds herself in a situation in which her desire to forge her own path and to distance herself from a mother who had paid less and less attention to her since the birth of her brothers are no longer as strong as they had been when she decided to leave everything behind and start a new life. Moreover, she discovers that she is not completely able to free herself from her upbringing, but she often feels alienated and somehow resentful while living in the seemingly perfect world created by Mariah and her family. Despite the difficult start, with Lewis addressing her as “Poor Visitor” because of her detached and shy demeanor, she manages to establish a good relationship with Mariah, who treats her with love and affection, as if she were her own daughter and not just a mere employee. However, Lucy sometimes associates her with her mother Annie because they both act in a controlling way with her and she cannot stand it.

After some months, when spring comes, Mariah brings her to see some daffodils blooming, since they are her favorite flowers, but Lucy is completely repulsed by them, as they remind her of her school days when she was required to learn a poem by Wordsworth. In particular, the sight of the daffodils reminds her of the British colonial education she received and consequently her status as an inferior person. Lucy is also invited to go for a trip near the Great Lakes with Mariah and her daughters, because her foster mother wants to show them her childhood home and share the memories she had created in that place. In this passage, when Mariah seems to almost force her to see things with the same joy she feels, Lucy reacts negatively, as her behavior reminds her of her mother’s efforts to manipulate her. In fact, she reveals “I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (Kincaid 2002, 36) because she does not want to become like her mother who always behaved according to the laws imposed by the British government to control West Indian women and wanted Lucy to do the same to avoid derogatory appellations. Furthermore, another thing that makes her more and more isolated from the rest of her family is the fact that her parents have decided to use all their savings to send their sons to university in England, while they expect her to take up the job of a nurse without considering her dreams.

She feels so disappointed with her mother’s behavior that once she is in the United States, she refuses to open the letters Annie sends her and she befriends Peggy, a rather

transgressive girl who likes to smoke and have casual sex. Even after Mariah shows her disdain for Peggy, Lucy continues to keep her in her life as Peggy had enjoyed her company from the moment they met and she had not labeled her for her skin color. Throughout the story, even though sometimes they seem to grow apart because of their different personalities, Peggy stays as her companion and introduces Lucy to the pleasures of life.

Gradually, the façade of a close and loving family begins to crumble and Lucy realizes that Mariah and Lewis are in reality hiding their troubled relationship from their children. In fact, Lucy takes them as an example to focus on her past relationships and she realizes that they were not based on love, but they were just sexual intercourses.

In summer the family decides to go back to the house on the Great Lakes, together with Lewis and Mariah's friend, Dinah. Here Lucy meets Dinah's brother, Hugh, and she decides to enter a passionate but non-binding relationship with him, since they are both infatuated with each other. However, during the holiday Lucy witnesses Dinah and Lewis having an intimate moment and after a while, she decides to speak the truth with Mariah who files a divorce.

When they go back to the city, Lucy returns to her libertine life and continues to rebel against her mother: in fact, she roams around with Peggy and they end up in a party where everyone is smoking marijuana and where she meets Peggy's co-worker, Paul. Despite the warnings of her friend, she finds herself in another sexual but loveless relationship with the guy, who actually declares his love for her after a while.

Meanwhile, her relationship with Mariah strengthens, after the woman encourages her to take up photography and listens to her talking about her love for her mother and the sense of betrayal she feels every time Annie does not take her side but prefers to embrace ideologies that suppress women. That is why when she receives a letter marked "Urgent" from her mother she does not want to open it, but later she replies to her unleashing her rage and her complains after getting to know that her father died and her mother needs financial help from her. In conclusion, when she thinks she is finally ready to live independently, she decides to leave Mariah behind and rent an apartment with her friend Peggy, even though she soon starts to feel a bit lonely.

As it is possible to understand from the plot of the novel, Kincaid prefers to portray strong characters, especially young black women who can overcome difficulties

and create a space for themselves in the society. In fact, she argues that it is quite common to find fierce and straightforward women in the writings of African and Caribbean authors, because their characters have to use their strength against injustices in order to survive (Ferguson 1994, 177). On the other hand, she says that American women “lack that sense of self-invention or renewal, self-discovery. They don’t have that, unless of course they are a repressed group like the black women in America” (Ferguson 1994, 177) because they are used to belong to the privileged and ‘central’ group, therefore they do not need to stand up for themselves, as they already occupy a good position in the social hierarchy.

2. Lucy

2.1 *Au pair: visitor or member of the family?*

The role of the au pair has always been quite difficult to define, as the person who decides to apply to become an au pair is aware of their status of employee, but at the same time they are unsure about the level of affection they are supposed to show to the family they are working for. According to Cox, au pairs “are migrant domestic workers who are constructed by official discourses as neither workers nor migrants but as participants in a ‘cultural exchange’ programme” (2007, 282) and they “are meant to live as members of their employers’ families and should be treated as equals [...] rather than as paid servants” (282), therefore they are considered as “guests of ‘host families’ on a temporary sojourn”(282). While in the 20th century au pairs were selected according to their race, with ‘white European’ as a synonym of eligible, nowadays the focus is more on physical appearance. This is one of the features that are taken into consideration when selecting women for the role, as foster families seem to prefer people who are healthy and attractive, even if some au pairs find this practice a bit offensive because their skills are not always valued (Cox 2007, 290).

One thing that unifies all au pairs and many other people who migrate to work is the fact that they feel they become cosmopolitan, because they learn how to deal with various nationalities and traditions, so they slowly become more comfortable in social ways that were unfamiliar to them. Conforming to what Robbins writes in his article, a person like Lucy, who moves from the periphery of a town in the Third World to a developed metropolis in the First World becomes cosmopolitan by undertaking an “upward mobility” (1994, 136). Specifically, she is included in a literary genre that sees this movement towards the metropolis as a “passage from primitive unselfconscious barbarism to universal civilization, thus relegating those who remain behind to a familiar sort of colonial stasis and inferiority” (Robbins 1994, 137).

At the beginning of the novel, this sense of ‘inferiority’ is seen in the words Lewis addresses to Lucy, starting from the fact that he calls her “poor visitor” (Kincaid 2002, 14):

It was at dinner one night not long after I began to live with them that they began to call me the 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, just saying one long Hallo!, and soon would be saying a quick Goodbye! So long! It was very nice! For look at the way I stared at them as they ate, Lewis said. Had I never seen anyone put a forkful of French-cut green beans in his mouth before? This made Mariah laugh, but almost everything Lewis said made Mariah happy and so she would laugh. I didn't laugh, though, and Lewis looked at me, concern on his face. He said, "Poor Visitor, poor Visitor," over and over, a sympathetic tone to his voice (Kincaid 2002, 13-14).

According to Nichols, this fragment of the text shows the perspective of Lewis, who wants to maintain his distance from Lucy and clearly misinterprets her behavior: in fact, he believes she is not participating in the conversation, and she is looking at them with a curious expression because of her amazement for "the banal everyday facts of the superior culture's existence" (2009, 192). Therefore, she is initially treated as a visitor, who knows how things are managed inside her employers' home, since she is a domestic worker living there, but is only allowed to passively observe what is happening around her (Nichols 2009, 193).

However, Mariah tries to change Lucy's condition by showing her various places and taking her around from the start of the novel, because she wants Lucy to feel as a part of the family and trust them. Specifically, there is a passage in which Lucy seems to understand how Mariah feels towards her, because she states:

Mariah said to me, "I love you." And again she said it clearly and sincerely, without confidence or doubt. I believed her, for if anyone could love a young woman who had come from halfway around the world to help her take care of her children, it was Mariah (Kincaid 2002, 26-27).

Even though she accepts the fact that Mariah cares for her, she rarely reciprocates the feelings, as she thinks her employer will never be able to understand her point of view, because she belongs to the white civilized society, therefore she cannot relate to the struggles Lucy experiences in her life. This is because Mariah is seen as a "gender ally" (Robbins cit. in Majerol 2007, 18) because of her being a woman, but at the same time she is ideologically different from Lucy, as she is a 'privileged person' who has "too much of everything, and so she longed to have less" (Kincaid 2002, 87). Through her characters, Kincaid seems interested in shattering the Western feminist view that all women belong to the same group "on a basis of a shared oppression" (Mohanty cit. in Majerol 2007, 19): this tendency to homogenize various kinds of women into the category 'Woman' is considered to be a result of "assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality" (Mohanty cit. in Majerol 2007, 18). This condition of privilege Mariah finds

herself in is one of the reasons why Lucy does not completely open up to her, because she is reminded of her upbringing which had nothing to do with wealth and comforts.

Although Lucy seems quite cold towards the two hosts, both of them try to establish a relationship with her. Indeed, Lewis' behavior changes over the course of Lucy's stay in the house and the girl acknowledges his attempt to get close to her, even though the two will never be able to move beyond the simple relationship of host and foreign visitor:

I think he felt sorry for me, because I was so far away from home and all alone. Whenever he heard me speak of my family with bitterness, he said that I spoke about them in that way because I really missed them. [...] Sometimes he treated me as if I were another one of his daughters, and he would tell me fantastic stories just to see my face as it formed in belief and then fell apart in disbelief (Kincaid 2002, 47-48).

On the other hand, Mariah and Lucy share a different kind of connection, even though they also have their ups and downs because the attitude of her host mother is sometimes similar to that of her real mother Annie, from whom she has drifted away. Specifically, as Nichols states, "Mariah uses feminism as a way to connect to Lucy" (2009, 199), but she does not always take into account Lucy's feelings when proposing to do some activity together or starting to talk about something that can be misunderstood. In fact, there is a passage where Mariah says, "Let's go feed the minions" (Kincaid 2002, 37) but she does not realize that the word 'minions' reminds Lucy of her past and the dominion she was subjected to.

In these cases, her attempts to make Lucy feel like a member of the family are internalized by the girl as methods to force her to behave accordingly to what her foster mother wants. Indeed, Kincaid shows it clearly when Lucy seems not to appreciate how Mariah acts, like for example when she says, "Mariah wanted all of us, the children and me, to see things the way she did" (2002, 35-36) and Lucy finds herself "sitting on the edge of a Great Lake with a woman who wanted to show me her world and hoped that I would like it, too" (36). Majerol argues that, even though this experience at the Great Lakes seems to encourage Lucy's sense of disidentification, it can be understood as an attempt "deliberately aimed at transforming Lucy into the type of person whose consciousness transcends the bounds of a domestic worker" (2007, 20) as Mariah is trying to provide the girl with the same opportunities she gives to her daughters. However, these

attempts to assimilate Lucy into the narrative of a wealthy and lovely white family bring out “feelings of exclusion” (Majerol 2007, 20) in the young black woman.

Roszak argues that the bond Lucy and Mariah share reproduces a sort of “emotional subordination” (2017, 279) because Lucy starts to feel guilty about going against Mariah’s expectations and as a result, she slowly becomes compliant with everything the woman says for her sake. For this reason, Lucy takes on both the role of the caretaker, who looks after the children and tends the house, and the role of the daughter, who obeys her foster mother and takes care of her needs. However, scholars have identified Mariah’s motherly approach with a desire to control and eliminate Lucy’s racial difference: indeed, she seems to act as a ‘colonizer’, because she wants the girl to assimilate the American culture and act accordingly, to become a true member of the family. Mariah tends to “universalize the conditions of her own experience to Lucy” (Majerol 2007, 21) by exposing ‘her foster daughter’ to the experiences she enjoys the most, such as the trip to the Great Lakes or the visit to the daffodils’ garden, but her efforts to include the immigrant girl in American culture only bring back painful memories which were long repressed.

According to Roszak (2017), Lucy tells Mariah and Lewis the dream she had about them⁹ because she wants the couple to understand that she truly cares for them, as “only people who were very important to me had ever shown up in my dreams” (Kincaid 2002, 15). Nonetheless, she is met with silence because apparently the two Americans only show interest for things related to their national identity and their cultural norms, while they do not really listen to Lucy when she shares her stories, even though it should be a part of the ‘cultural exchange’ she is experiencing as an au pair. Actually, the silence that surrounds her is moved by the embarrassment that turns into mockery, because the two hosts believe that her dream had a sexual nature, therefore they are surprised as it is not in their culture to share this kind of dreams while being together in a family context.

⁹ In the novel *Lucy* (1990) there is a passage in which Lucy describes her dream of being chased around the house by Lewis, while she was naked. Here the excerpt for a better understanding:

Lewis was chasing me around the house. I wasn’t wearing any clothes. The ground on which I was running was yellow, as if it had been paved with cornmeal. Lewis was chasing me around and around the house, an though he came close he could never catch up with me. Mariah stood at the open windows saying, Catch her, Lewis, catch her. Eventually I fell down a hole, at the bottom of which were some silver and blue snakes (Kincaid 2002, 14-15)

2.2 A comparison between Annie Potter and Mariah

The mother-daughter relationship is one of the main themes in Jamaica Kincaid's works, together with colonialism and identity. Some psychoanalysts have argued that sometimes the mother-daughter bond clashes with the ability of daughters to create their own identities, that is why their relationship can become conflictual, because daughters try to separate from their mothers while remaining close to them (Rajani 2021, 35).

In the 1950s some British psychologists developed the 'Object Relations Theory'¹⁰, which "sees the developing child as creating and being created by its relations with mother, father, siblings, and playmates" (Rajani 2021, 35). This study focused on the idea that children who did not have good relationships with their parents found it difficult to engage with other people in their life.

In specific, in the novel *Lucy* (1990) the author creates a sort of comparison between Lucy's mother Annie, who was born and lives in the Caribbean, and her foster mother Mariah, who was raised in the United States. As Ty (1993, 120) reflects on her article, Annie is physically absent from her daughter's life while she lives in the United States, but Lucy keeps on recalling her because she is nostalgic, even though she claims she hates her mother. For example, when her friend from the Caribbean visits her, she is reminded of a nice habit her mother had when she was a child:

She left behind her the smell of clove, lime, and rose oil, and this scent almost made me die of homesickness. My mother used to bathe me in water in which the leaves and flowers of these plants had been boiled (Kincaid 2002, 124).

The reason why she rebels from her mother driven by an adolescent need to escape, but at the same time she feels connected to her is explained by Edith Clarke, who suggests that mothers are the ones taking responsibility for their kids in West-Indian societies (Ty 1993, 123). On the other hand, fathers are not asked to take care of their children, so they do not have the same kind of relationship with them, as Kincaid reveals in an interview:

¹⁰ 'Object Relations Theory' refers to the idea that the psyche of a person is developed through the relationship with others during infancy. Children are often shaped by the experiences they live with parents and other adults around them (Rajani 2021).

I know a sort of person who is my father. We see each other, but I can't get myself to call him "father". He's sort of typical of West Indian men: I mean, they have children, but they never seem to connect themselves with these children" (Cudjoe 1989, 399).

If readers were to consider the mother-daughter relationship in Kincaid's books, they would find some similarities and differences between *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990). Both girls encounter problems when bonding with their mothers, but Annie's behavior is moved from her inability to understand that she needs to separate from her mother when she grows, while Lucy's detachment is driven from her necessity to find her own identity without being influenced by her mother.

After trying hard to separate themselves from their maternal figures they come to understand that they will never be able to completely "reject their mother's influence" (Rajani 2021, 38) so they keep on acting rebellious to show their independence, even though they still have feelings of love and affection towards their mothers. In *Annie John* (1985), the inability to break this bond with the family can be seen in the sentence her mother says, "It doesn't matter what you do or where you go, I'll always be your mother and this will always be your home" (Kincaid 1985, 147). On the other hand, Lucy admits she finds it difficult to distinguish herself from her mother, because she feels linked to her parent through their femaleness, therefore she says, "I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother – I was my mother" (Kincaid 2002, 90).

When Lucy starts her new life in the United States, she establishes a relationship with another maternal figure, Mariah. Some scholars have argued that Annie and Mariah can be seen as the two faces of the world Lucy lives in: her mother represents the past, the landscapes, and the traditions of her homeland, as well as the patriarchal society which Lucy resents for giving more opportunities to male individuals; on the contrary, Mariah represents the 'other', she symbolizes freedom and emancipation, but also novelty and future (Ty 1993, 124-126).

In the novel, there are some passages in which Kincaid describes Mariah through Lucy's eyes. When she talks about her, Lucy demonstrates her affection and care towards her foster mother, even though their relationship is complicated, because "the unequal power dynamics between employer and employee always loom beneath the surface" (Rajani 2021, 38). In the following excerpt, Mariah is seen as a tired and sad woman, a

woman who hides her desires and emotions for the sake of her daughters, who still look at her with their innocent eyes and do not see her struggles:

What Miriam might have seen was her beautiful golden mother pouring love over growing things, a most familiar sight to her five-year-old eyes; but what I saw was a hollow old woman, all the blood drained out of her face, her bony nose bonier than ever, her mouth collapsed as if all the muscles had been removed, as if it would never break out in a smile again. Mariah was forty years old. She kept saying it – “I am forty years old” – alternating between surprise and foreboding. I did not understand why she felt that way about her age, old and unloved; a sadness for her overcame me, and I almost started to cry – I had grown to love her so (Kincaid 2002, 46).

Kincaid offers the image of a woman whose life has had a negative impact on her physical appearance, and she uses words like ‘hollow’, ‘old’, ‘bony’ to remark it. Instead, for what concerns Mariah’s personality, Lucy describes her as “the kindest person I had even known” (Kincaid 2002, 72). The ‘happy family’ Lucy had in mind when she entered her foster home changes radically as months pass by, because

All of them, mother and father and four children, looked healthy, robust – everything about them solid, authentic; but I was looking at ruins, and I knew it right then. The actual fall of this Rome I hoped not to be around to see, but just in case I could not make my own quick exit I planned to avert my eyes (Kincaid 2002, 88).

In fact, Lucy soon discovers that Lewis is not the caring man she thought, because he treats Mariah badly and he also cheats on her with her friend Dinah. After witnessing an intimate moment between Lewis and Dinah, Lucy starts siding with Mariah. Even if Lucy says she will not tell her foster mother, Kincaid makes her unveil the hidden side of her employers’ relationship through a photo Lucy takes of them in an inappropriate moment:

When I saw them, apart yet closely together, Mariah’s eyes red from tears, a crooked smile on her face as if she were a child trying to put up a brave front, I knew that the end was here, the ruin was in front of me. For a reason that will never be known to me, I said, “Say ‘cheese’” and took a picture. Lewis said, “Jesus Christ,” and he left our company in anger. Mariah held out her arms and hugged all four of her children together in a big embrace and said to me, “I’m sorry.” (Kincaid 2002, 118)

As Majerol argues, the picture of the ‘broken’ couple Lucy takes “serves to expose some of the gaps or fissures that exist within grand narratives but seem to be repressed or consistently unrepresented” (2007, 25).

From the beginning, Lucy seems to notice the difference between Mariah and her own mother, but she is always a little hesitant to show her feelings. In fact, when the woman decides to take Lucy and the children with her to the house on the Great Lake

where she grew up and she treats her as her own daughter, Lucy is not completely able to accept Mariah's behavior and she states:

But I already had a mother who loved me, and I had come to see her love as a burden and had come to view with horror the sense of self-satisfaction it gave my mother to hear other people comment on her great love for me. I had come to feel that my mother's love for me was designed solely to make me into 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. That was not a figure of speech. Those thoughts would have come as a complete surprise to my mother, for in her life she had found that her ways were the best ways to have, and she would have been mystified as to how someone who came from inside her would want to be anyone different from her (Kincaid 2002, 36).

Again, it is possible to see the love-hate relationship she has with her mother, who influences her thoughts and actions even without being there with her. Lucy confirms her necessity to grow and mold her own personality when she says, "I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone" (Kincaid 2002, 36).

Moreover, she reflects on the fact that her mother was too focused on herself to understand that she could not instill in her daughter her beliefs and her way of living. This is something that differentiates her from her surrogate mother, because Mariah tries to get to know Lucy's likes and dislikes and she considers her necessities, like for example having her friend Peggy in her life:

I told Mariah about Peggy's missing her train, and Mariah said, "I guess you like Peggy a lot, and, you know, you really should have a friend." This is a way in which Mariah was superior to my mother, for my mother would never come to see that perhaps my needs were more important than her wishes (Kincaid 2002, 63-64).

Peggy and Lucy met for the first time in a park where Lucy was spending time with Miriam and after that, they started hanging out together, even though they were not alike: after a while, this causes some conflicts between the two girls as "the small differences between us were beginning to loom, sometimes becoming the only thing that mattered – like a grain of sand in the eye" (Kincaid 2002, 94), but it never makes them drift apart completely. From the description Kincaid gives of Peggy, it is obvious that the girl represents everything Annie had told Lucy to avoid, because she is carefree, and she has a rebellious appearance. Even though Mariah also thinks she is a "bad influence" (Kincaid 2002, 63) for Lucy, the girl seems to keep Peggy close both because Peggy helps her in discovering herself and because she enjoys the time spent with her:

She started to tell me about a long trip she had just taken, and then in the middle of it she stopped and said, "You're not from Ireland, are you? You talk funny." And I laughed and laughed, because in a long time that was the funniest thing anyone had said to me. People from Ireland, after all, did

not look like me. We exchanged telephone numbers, and after that we spoke to each other at least once a day, sometimes more. We saw each other every weekend and sometimes during the week. We told each other everything, even when we knew that the other didn't quite understand what was really meant. (Kincaid 2002, 62-63)

From this extract it is possible to see the funny side of Peggy, who asks Lucy if she is Irish, not acknowledging the difference in skin tone, as everyone else does when they see the Caribbean girl. The initial shock for such a question turns into laughter and happiness for not being defined by her complexion and this is probably one of the reasons why Lucy becomes friends with her at first. Throughout the story, Mariah starts to understand the role Peggy has in Lucy's life, therefore she lets her have fun with her friend, although "this new friendship of mine drove Mariah crazy" (Kincaid 2002, 63).

Every time Lucy looks at Mariah, she is reminded of her loss and of the absence of a happy relationship with her mother Annie. In fact, Mariah's consideration and care both fascinate and repulse her so much that she says,

The times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. (Kincaid 2002, 58).

As the story unfolds, it is understood that Lucy's hatred towards her mother is due to a sense of betrayal the girl experiences while living with her family and she is reminded of it by the words Mariah tells her when she asks her why she cannot forgive her mother:

Her words made me remember how it was that I came to hate my mother, and with the memory came a flood of tears that tasted as if they were juice squeezed from an aloe plant. I was not an only child, but it was almost as if I were ashamed of this, because I had never told anyone, not even Mariah. I was an only child until I was nine years old, and then in the space of five years my mother had three male children; each time a new child was born, my mother and father announced to each other with great seriousness that the new child would go to university in England and study to become a doctor or lawyer or someone who would occupy an important and influential position in society. I did not mind my father saying these things about his sons, his own kind, and leaving me out. My father did not know me at all; I did not expect him to imagine a life for me filled with excitement and triumph. But my mother knew me well, as well as she knew herself: I, at the time, even thought of us as identical; and whenever I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought of how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation (Kincaid 2002, 129-130).

This extract of the novel shows that the resentment Lucy feels toward her family is driven by the fact that her parents do not hold the same expectations they have for their sons, and they do not encourage her to have some dreams for her future, but they expect her to adopt the same customs and behaviors of her mother and become exactly like her (Rajani 2021, 39). For this reason, Rajani (2021) also suggests that Lucy decides to

distance herself from her family because she is afraid she might have to take the same 'wrong' decisions her mother took in her life because of the lack of opportunities in her homeland.

2.3 Gender-related stereotypes in the postcolonial era

After British domination, Caribbean societies remained patriarchal and male chauvinist, in which women had no chance of emancipating themselves from their position of mothers and housekeepers.

The idea of the woman who is expected to "live and perform her gender" (Bailey 2010, 107) is portrayed with special intensity in *Girl* (1978), a short story written by Jamaica Kincaid. The text is constructed as a list of instructions for girls to learn what is considered appropriate for a woman to do and how to behave in the society. In particular, the short story focuses on domestic chores, but also on the moral conduct of women: Bailey suggests that "the emphasis on domestic performance alludes to race and class" (2010, 109) because black working-class women were normally the ones to have these roles in colonial societies.

According to Bailey (2010), the speaker in the text is a woman who partially accepts the standards of respectability given by a patriarchal society and she tries to explain to young females that they should adhere to that set of behaviors established by the dominant culture in order to survive and have a decent life. However, Bailey (2010) also suggest that there is another perspective that needs to be considered when reading *Girl*: in fact the speaker, who at first sight seems to understand and support the gender-based norms which Caribbean societies are based on, is actually teaching girls to maintain an impeccable public figure, so that they can avoid any kind of "social stigma" (Bailey 2010, 110) while living their life as they want when they are in their private sphere.

The emphasis of the story seems to be more on protecting the woman from having a bad reputation, that is why the speaker says for example "on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming" (Kincaid 1978), because she wants young ladies to cover up the inappropriate behaviors which can make people understand they are not as pure and respectable as they appear.

The idea that a girl can be seen as a 'promiscuous woman' is discussed also in the novel *Lucy* (1990), especially in the following passage when Lucy writes back to her

mother and reveals she had started exploring her sexuality after she reached the United States, going against everything her mother taught her when she was young:

I wrote my mother a letter; it was a cold letter. It matched my heart. It amazed even me, but I sent it all the same. In the letter I asked my mother how she could have married a man who would die and leave her in debt even for his own burial. I pointed out the ways she had betrayed herself. I said I believed she had betrayed me also, and that I knew it to be true even if I couldn't find a concrete example right then. I said that she had acted like a saint, but that since I was living in this real world I had really wanted just a mother. I reminded her that my whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut; I then gave a brief description of my personal life, offering each detail as evidence that my upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable, thank you very much. I would not come home now, I said. I would not come home ever (Kincaid 2002, 127-128).

As Holcomb (2003, 300) argues, Lucy decides to rebel from her mother through her sexuality, because she knows that Annie has always made sure to abide by the rules imposed by the gendered hierarchy of their island. In the novel, there is only a passage where Annie seems to oppose herself to the “oppression of patriarchy” (Holcomb 2003, 300), which is when she maintains her friendship with Sylvie, a woman whose reputation is damaged because she had a fight with another woman, and she spent some time in jail for misconduct. However, this act of resistance is quite weak, since Annie hides Sylvie's presence to her husband, because she is scared of being discovered while spending time with a “social outcast” (Holcomb 2003, 301).

While experimenting her sexuality with various men, Lucy always tries to avoid having romantic feelings towards them because she wants to be the one in control of the relationship, to symbolically go against the tradition that expects the superiority of men (Holcomb 2003, 304). Indeed, the ideal woman is traditionally the one who submits to the male will and performs “the ‘natural’ function of womanhood; carrying life” (Holcomb 2003, 306).

Furthermore, motherhood is often linked to domestic servitude: a good mother is supposed to be responsible for domestic chores, she has to take care of the house and her family since her husband and sons are expected to be the ones who study and reach success at work. This gender-related stereotype can be seen for example when Paul, one of her lovers, shows Lucy a picture he took of her while “standing over a boiling pot of food” (Kincaid 2002, 155): looking at the image, Lucy comes to understand that “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 2002, 155). Indeed, she does not want to feel controlled because she is reminded of the “colonial-patriarchal demand for superiority”

(Holcomb 2003, 310) which she wants to fight with any means, in order to reach emancipation and savor the freedom. For this reason, while she lives in the United States, she starts cultivating her passion for photography, because she feels the need to escape from the “traditional women’s work” (Roszak 2017, 275) and follow the ‘American Dream’¹¹ and find something she truly likes. Photography helps her approaching situations in a different way, as she begins to look more carefully at those details that are normally forgotten to leave room for a bigger picture. Through her photographs, “Lucy can expose the artificiality of “official” narratives of progress” (Majerol 2007, 24) because she disrupts images of a family and a society which were otherwise considered ‘perfect’. She does not take pictures just for aesthetics, but she wishes to capture moments which reveal the true story, the one that is not for public disposition.

According to Roszak, “Kincaid’s Lucy swiftly becomes an example of what second-wave white feminists might miss in their assumptions about the aspirations of working-class women of color” (2017, 276) as she decides to leave her Caribbean island mostly because of her mother’s betrayal, which is also linked with gender and employment. Annie has different expectations for her daughter and her sons, because she wants Lucy to follow her steps and choose a caretaking profession, such as nursing, which is an acceptable kind of employment to maintain a decent female behavior. In fact, before Lucy leaves the Caribbean, Annie states “Oh, I can just see you in your nurse’s uniform. I shall be very proud of you” (Kincaid 2002, 93). However, Lucy does not want to study nursing, because

A nurse, as far as I could see, was a badly paid person, a person who was forced to be in awe of someone above her (a doctor), a person with cold and rough hands, a person who lived alone and ate badly boiled food because she could not afford a cook, a person who, in the process of easing suffering, caused more suffering (the badly administered injection) (Kincaid 2002, 92).

Her refusal for this type of profession can be seen more during her stay in the United States, as she progressively moves away from everything she was used to and begins to lay the foundations for her future.

It is possible to say that Mariah plays an important role in helping Lucy shape her new life, especially in the creation of her artistic persona. She is the one who introduces

¹¹ The expression ‘American Dream’ was first used by James Truslow Adams in 1931, because he believed everyone had to have the possibility to live a better life with more opportunities regardless of their class, race and birth. See Lawrence 2012 for more information.

Lucy to museums, because she “is interested in drawing Lucy into a narrative of inclusion” (Majerol 2007, 22) and she hopes the girl will be able to appreciate art as she does. When Mariah takes her to see the works of a French painter, Lucy says

I don't know if Mariah meant me to, but immediately I identified with the yearnings of this man; I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven. I wondered about the details of his despair, for I felt it would comfort me to know. (Kincaid 2002, 95)

At first, she identifies with the artist because they both decide to escape from their homeland to find better places to live and develop their own interests, but as Majerol notices, “this immediate identification is followed by a subsequent moment of disidentification” (2007, 23) because Lucy realizes

I was not a man; 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 2002, 95)

Again, gender affects how people have to act, as it was possible for a man to leave his family and embark on a journey of no return, but it was not something a woman could do so freely: in fact, Lucy must accept the status of a servant to be able to leave her country and seek fortune abroad.

3. Identity

3.1 *The impact of Blackness*

From a historical point of view, the discourse on race and Blackness has always played an important role in defining the power relations within societies that have traditionally been organized on the systemic enslavement and exploitation of Black people, and have normalized their submission to white supremacy.

According to Nunnally (2018, 3), in the 15th century western colonizers started exploiting Africans and the Indigenous people of America through the economy of slavery to gain high profits for their homelands and later they started addressing slaves as ‘black bodies’ to distinguishing them from white people, who had access to freedom and were protected by the rights of the U.S. Constitution. This distinction based on color led to a brutal denigration and discrimination of black people, which is still visible nowadays: as a matter of fact, there have been many episodes of violence and verbal offence against the black community, which has decided to create the Black Lives Matter movement¹² to fight racism and social inequality.

Blackness is an important topic for Jamaica Kincaid too, since she comes from the Caribbean, an area that suffered colonization and slavery for a long period of time. It is particularly interesting to observe how she discusses this theme in the short story *Blackness* (1983) which is included in the collection *At the Bottom of the River* (1983). In the story, Kincaid gives Blackness two different meanings, because she links it to darkness and to the color of a racial identity, focusing on the feelings of the person speaking.

Indeed, the main character is depicted as a woman and mother who associates Blackness with annihilation and erasure, and she seems to live in a space which constrains and silences her, since “in the blackness, my voice is silent” (Kincaid 1983, 25). The woman has conflicting ideas about Blackness, because she feels oppressed by it and she considers it both as a part of herself and as something from which she wants to distance

¹² A movement founded in 2013 after Trayvon Martin’s murderer was acquitted. Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation is an organization which aims to eliminate white supremacy and help in the fight against violence towards black communities. See more information at <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

herself. At the beginning of the text, she presents a series of examples which give the readers some hints about her relationship with being black:

The blackness cannot bring me joy but often I am made glad in it. The blackness cannot be separated from me but often I can stand outside it. The blackness is not the air, though I breathe it. The blackness is not the earth, though I walk on it. The blackness is not water or food, though I drink and eat it. The blackness is not my blood, though it flows through my veins. The blackness enters my many-tiered spaces and soon the significant word and event recede and eventually vanish: in this way I am annihilated and my form becomes formless and I am absorbed into a vastness of free-flowing matter. (Kincaid 1983, 25).

As Duarte de Gouvêa (2016, 3379) argues in her paper, the narrator does not seem to find a way out of the isolation she encounters herself in due to her skin color and she says, “In the blackness, then, I have been erased. I can no longer say my own name. I can no longer point to myself and say ‘I.’” (Kincaid 1983, 25).

From the start, readers can notice the character’s awareness of her condition, and they can also understand this need for isolation as a way to distance herself from a society which increases the differences between people by putting black people at the margins, but at the same time as a way to reflect on her interiority and initiate a positive change in her own identity (Duarte de Gouvêa 2016, 3379). Moreover, she appears passive and lost in some passages, because of the confinement she is subjected to as a woman within a society which bases its foundation on power and patriarchy.

The second section of the story explores the behavior of the daughter, who is a “hybrid being” (Duarte de Gouvêa 2016, 3380), because she is able to deal with her fragmented identity without isolating herself and therefore “she stands boldly now, one foot in the dark, the other in the light” (Kincaid 1983, 27). While observing the demeanor of her child, the mother realizes that the Blackness she had always seen as an enemy is what can push her to become stronger and empowered. Indeed, she starts accepting the Blackness that surrounds her and she embraces the silence, as it is possible to read in the following passage:

Within the silent voice, no mysterious depths separate me; no vision is so distant that longing is stirred up in me. I hear the silent voice—how softly now it falls, and all of existence is caught up in it. Living in the silent voice, I am no longer “I.” Living in the silent voice, I am at last at peace. Living in the silent voice, I am at last erased. (Kincaid 1983, 27)

In the last lines of the story, the woman has completely changed her attitude towards Blackness, and she is finally at peace because through silence she has found a way to develop her character and break the chains that kept her linked to ideas of

inferiority and marginalization. According to Duarte de Gouvêa (2016, 3381), the woman can reconstruct her identity because she has given a new meaning to the ideas of erasure and Blackness and has challenged the “colonially determined gender roles” (3381).

Kincaid explores the impact of Blackness also in her novel *Lucy* (1990) and she creates a sort of contrast between the Caribbean character and her new white family. From the beginning of the novel, Lucy seems to be highly conscious of her different background and she sometimes sees things from a different perspective, thus finding herself misunderstood by others. Kincaid highlights this diversity between the young black worker and her white employers by associating different colors to the two countries which represent meaningful parts of Lucy’s life. As Nichols (2009, 196) suggest, pale-yellow is the color associated to Mariah and Lewis and consequently to American culture, while bright colors such as “the redness of the red ants” (Kincaid 2002, 131), “the navy blue of the sailor suit” (131), the “red lipstick on my mother’s mouth” (131) are linked to her homeland and her family.

Therefore, pale-yellow becomes “a symbol of western oppression” (Nichols 2009, 196) and Lucy uses it to describe various things and people she encounters while in the United States, like for example the “pale-yellow sun” (Kincaid 2002, 5) that welcomes her on her first day or the “six yellow-haired heads of various sizes” (12) who appear to be the members of her new family. The same color ‘yellow’ appears repetitively through the whole text, as it is possible to see in this passage:

The yellow light from the sun came in through a window and fell on the pale-yellow linoleum tiles of the floor, and on the walls of the kitchen, which were painted yet another shade of pale yellow, and Mariah, with her pale-yellow skin and yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light, and she looked blessed (Kincaid 2002, 27).

Kincaid uses this specific color to symbolically emphasize this “homogenizing force that threatens Lucy’s identity” (Nichols 2009, 195). Lucy feels overwhelmed by the color ‘yellow’ and she is reminded of her past of struggles and sufferance because of western colonization, especially when she is brought by Mariah to a garden to see the ‘yellow flowers’ she has come to hate so much:

I did not know what these flowers were, and so it was a mystery to me why I wanted to kill them. Just like that. I wanted to kill them. I wished that I had an enormous scythe; I would just walk down the path, dragging it alongside me, and I would cut these flowers down at the place where they emerged from the ground. [...] Mariah, mistaking what was happening to me for joy at seeing daffodils for the first time, reached out to hug me, but I moved away, and in doing that I seemed to get my voice back. I said, “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 had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes. (Kincaid 2002, 29-30)

In fact, when Mariah talks about the daffodils, Lucy is reminded of her past in the Caribbean island, where she was asked to memorize Wordsworth's poem *Daffodils*¹³ as a part of her education "centered on training her to be a good subject of the British Crown" (Nichols 2009, 198):

I remembered an old poem I had been made to memorize when I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girls' School. [...] The night after I had recited the poem, I dreamt, continuously it seemed, that I was being chased down a narrow cobbled street by bunches and bunches of those same daffodils that I had vowed to forget, and when finally I fell down from exhaustion they all piled on top of me, until I was buried deep underneath them and was never seen again. I had forgotten all of this until Mariah mentioned daffodils, and now I told it to her with such an amount of anger I surprised both of us. (Kincaid 2002, 17-18)

Therefore, the daffodils become a visual representation of that western imperialism that had forcibly deprived Caribbean citizens of the possibility of having their own history and culture, proposing European culture as the one to follow. However, as readers can see in the aforementioned extract, Mariah is not able to understand the emotions that the sight of daffodils has triggered in Lucy, as she had not lived the experience of colonialism on her own skin, and she had never linked the flowers to something so cruel as slavery and oppression. In fact, when Lucy becomes speechless in front of the daffodils because she is overwhelmed, Mariah misunderstands her behavior for joy, because that is what she was feeling at the sight of the flowers.

Being a white woman in a developed country gives Mariah the 'privilege' of looking at things without considering the impact they can have on people with a different historical and cultural background: when they reach the garden, Mariah stands still amazed by the beauty of the daffodils which seem to dance pushed by the wind, while Lucy looks at them with hatred and her mind wanders back to the colonial past. As Gregg (1999, 42) discusses in her article, the distance between Mariah and Lucy is emphasized by the fact that Mariah feels entitled to be exempt from the burden colonized people live with, because she believes the history of imperialism and slavery is something that only black and colonized people have to deal with, and this is shown in the following excerpt:

¹³ Poem by William Wordsworth also known as *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud>)

Mariah reached out to me and, rubbing her hand against my cheek, said, "What a history you have." I thought there was a little bit of envy in her voice, and so I said, "You are welcome to it if you like." (Kincaid 2002, 19).

When saying "what a history you have" (Kincaid 2002, 19), it seems like Mariah wants to detach herself from the terrible past Lucy and other black people had, because she feels like she does not belong to that past and she is not responsible for it too. However, she ends up being mocked by Lucy who replies by inviting Mariah into 'her' history, which is something black and white people share, despite being in opposite positions, as colonizers and colonized (Gregg 1999, 42).

In the novel there are various passages in which Lucy's Blackness and history come to the surface and in each of these it is possible to see the inability of Mariah to grasp the real meaning of the girl's words. For example, when she is on a train with her foster mother, Lucy starts to look at the people in the carriage:

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 2002,32).

She realizes that the colonizer-colonized contrast is also repeated inside the train, where the waiters are black workers attending to the needs of white passengers, probably Mariah's compatriots. Furthermore, Lucy's past influences once again her emotions as she angrily says, "Well, thank God I didn't have to do that" (Kincaid 2002, 33) when the train passes near some plowed fields which Mariah adores. This clearly takes readers back to the past, when black slaves were forced to work on plantations because of Western colonization of their territories, but Mariah seems neither to receive the message nor to understand it.

Gregg (1999, 45) argues that these misunderstandings happen also because of how the two women use language when they are conversing. There is a passage when Mariah says, "Let's go feed the minions" (Kincaid 2002, 37) while talking about her children, but Lucy is again impacted by the choice of words because of her Blackness:

It's possible that what she really said was "millions," not "minions." Certainly she said it in jest. But as we were cooking the fish, I was thinking about it. "Minions." A word like that would haunt someone like me; the place where I came from was a dominion of someplace else. (Kincaid 2002, 37)

As it is explained in the excerpt, the word 'minions' upsets Lucy, because it reminds her of the oppression and the control her country had to suffer and the condition

of inferiority black people were still in, even after slavery was abolished and many areas gained independence from Europeans.

All things considered, Blackness certainly has a great impact on Lucy and it keeps on meddling with her project to reinvent herself and make room for her own interests, that is why this thesis wishes to analyze the steps Lucy has to take in order to create her own person while balancing the negative feelings coming from the past and the excitement about what the future holds for her.

3.2 Nostalgia and detachment from the homeland

When dealing with migrations, it is necessary to take into consideration the idea that people decide to move to another country for various reasons, like for example to seek political asylum, to escape a war or, simply, to look for a decent job.

According to Akhtar (1999, 124), there is a significant difference between those people who call themselves ‘immigrants’ and those who are actually ‘exiles’ and he gives a brief explanation of the reasons why he made this distinction in his article:

Based upon external parameters, the immigrant and the exile differ in five important ways. First, the immigrant has left his country voluntarily while the exile has been forced out of his land. Second, the immigrant has usually had more time available for preparing to leave, while the exile has had little or no notice for his departure. Third, less traumatic events are generally associated with the immigrant's leaving his home; the exile has often fled a catastrophic sociopolitical situation in his country. Fourth, the immigrant retains the possibility of revisiting his home country while the exile, having broken the tether of belonging, lacks this important source of emotional refueling. Finally, the manner in which the two groups are received by the host population might also vary (Akhtar 1999, 124).

If we were to look at these parameters, it would be difficult to determine whether Kincaid's character Lucy can be understood as an immigrant or an exile. In fact, Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) is a novel that deals with the topic of exile and nostalgia from the homeland, but it certainly discusses it in a peculiar way. As Sugg (2002, 156) suggests in her article, many postcolonial and Caribbean narratives considered displacement and exile as the first step for immigrants to realize they missed their homeland and that became the reason why they wanted to return home later on, but for Lucy the situation is different, as she does not wish to go back to the Caribbean, even though she encounters many challenges and she is sometimes melancholic about her past.

Kincaid offers excerpts of Lucy's past throughout the novel, but she does so in an almost anti nostalgic sense, as most of Lucy's memories are filled with anger and

resentment towards a society and a family that had never attempted to free her from the condition of oppression and suffocation in which she found herself. Sugg refers to the experience of exile as “an anguished experience of loss” (2002, 157), because Lucy is still a young woman who lost her maternal figure in the process of rebelling, even though she had started to resent her because she embodied “the voice of a colonizing authority and the surveillance of the daughter’s female body” (Sugg 2002, 158).

Through the character of Lucy, Kincaid wants to go against those narrative forms that followed stereotypes and linked the woman to her family nest and to her origins, while seeing the man as the only figure who could exercise his freedom and flee towards mysterious places in search of adventures (Sugg 2002, 157). To put it in another way, women were expected to stay “within the nation” (Sugg 2002, 159) and the migration towards another country was supposed to be “the privileged terrain of the errant male” (Nair 185, cited in Sugg 2002, 160), but Kincaid opposes herself to this concept and makes her female protagonist leave the country to embrace a different culture and boost her selfhood.

As a matter of fact, the metropolis is often considered a place where everyone can have great aspirations and can reach independence: this is probably why Lucy decided to escape from her Caribbean town, because she imagined she could emancipate herself and be happy in the United States. However, in the first pages of the book it is already possible to see the difference between what she imagined and the reality waiting for her:

In a daydream I used to have, all these places were points of happiness to me; all these places were lifeboats to my small drowning soul, for I would imagine myself entering and leaving them, and just that – entering and leaving over and over again – would see me through a bad feeling I did not have a name for I only knew it felt a little like sadness but heavier than that.. Now that I saw these places, they only looked ordinary, dirty, worn down by so many people entering and leaving them in real life, and it occurred to me that I could not be the only person in the world for whom they were a fixture of fantasy. It was not my first bout with the disappointment of reality and it would not be my last (Kincaid 2002, 3-4).

She hints at the way she felt on her first day in the United States when she says, “I was reminded of how uncomfortable the new can make you feel” (Kincaid 2002, 4). Particularly, she seems disoriented and not at ease in the new city, because she has stepped out of her comfort zone, and she is not able to recognize anything familiar to her life back home. However, the discomfort she feels and the ability to separate ideas and reality while looking at the new city are understood by Oczkiewicz as necessary for Lucy’s process of “personal liberation and consequent self-invention” (1996, 145).

Kincaid also portrays the moment in which Lucy is struck by the realization of being in another country far from her home: it was the day after she arrived and she decided to wear a dress because it was sunny outside, even though it was January, but she soon realized "I was no longer in a tropical zone and I felt cold inside and out, the first time such a sensation had come over me" (Kincaid 2002, 6). She instantly makes a comparison between her past "so familiar and predictable that even my unhappiness then made me happy now just to think of it" (Kincaid 2002, 5-6) and her future, which is "a gray blank, an overcast seascape on which rain was falling and no boats were in sight" (Kincaid 2002, 6).

She then continues by reflecting on the feeling of 'homesickness' many people in books are said to experience while being abroad and she unexpectedly realizes she is also one of them, even though she was the one who made the decision to leave her homeland:

But now I, too, felt that I wanted to be back where I came from. [...] What a surprise this was to me, that I longed to be back in the place that I came from, that I longed to sleep in a bed I had outgrown, that I longed to be with people whose smallest, most natural gesture would call up in me such a rage that I longed to see them all dead at my feet. Oh, I had imagined that with my one swift act – leaving home and coming to this new place – I could leave behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings, and my discontent with life in general as it presented itself to me (Kincaid 2002, 6-7).

She realizes that running away from home is not enough to be able to completely break all ties with the past, because that still remains even after you have settled in the new city. In fact, the past is made up of emotions, experiences, and memories which, however negative they may be, are destined to be part of her forever, as the human being is not able to forget all of a sudden what has happened in their life.

At that moment she notices that she is a bit dejected because all the excitement of the first moments in such a different country is slowly waning and what she has left is nothing but the emptiness and nostalgia of the Caribbean landscapes:

I was unhappy. I looked at a map. 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 2002, 9-10).

Looking at the map makes her understand that it did not matter whether there was 'an ocean or a teacup of water' between her and her homeland, because in any case she had decided she did not want to go back, so she had to be strong and keep going. Nostalgia strikes her especially when she gets in contact with anything that reminds her of her

homeland, like for example water in all its shapes and states. In the Caribbean Lucy was used to see and enjoy pristine beaches, so she mostly feels happy when she sees water, as it is possible to read here:

The day we arrived at the lake was a very hot day – unusual, everyone said, for that time of year; but for the first time since I had left home I felt happy” (Kincaid 2002, 51).

This happiness she feels whenever she thinks about the Caribbean climate or the natural landscapes turns into resentment “when she contemplates a mother and a land that are seemingly lost to her” (Sugg 2002, 162) because they remind her of colonial discourses. As Sugg (2002, 162) states, Lucy’s mother evokes the colonial regime, based on racism and on the predominance of patriarchy, so Lucy escapes because she does not want to become her mother’s puppet and she wants to avoid being maneuvered by her beliefs:

I had come to see her love as a burden and had come to view with horror the sense of self-satisfaction it gave my mother to hear other people comment on her great love for me. I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her (Kincaid 2002, 36).

Dasi (2014, 2) reflects on the idea that Lucy’s mother is fixed on the traditional roles of women, therefore she is inclined to focus more on her sons, rather than bonding with “her only identical offspring” (Kincaid 2002, 130) and this becomes a source of disappointment which influences her decision of leaving the country. However, she is destined to fight against her position as a colonial subject throughout the novel, as glimpses of her past continue to psychologically dent her willingness to leave everything behind (Dasi 2014, 3). Kincaid continues to insert details that push the protagonist to look back and she does so by using flashbacks that mix with the story itself, thus recreating the kind of confusion Lucy has in her mind while she thinks of her homeland.

As a matter of fact, Lucy’s reluctance to let go of her past collides with an obsessive need to separate from her mother and from the trauma of submission: this obviously leads to psychological repercussions in Lucy’s ability to create a new identity which had for long remained superimposed on that of her mother, as she says, “I was not like my mother – I was my mother” (Kincaid 2002, 90).

3.3 *Defining one's identity: an inner conflict*

Given the rapid increase in people who decide to migrate abroad for work or personal reasons, many scholars have started to question the notion of 'identity', which seems to be "one of the slipperiest concepts in the social scientist's lexicon" (Vertovec 2001, 573). Researchers argue that the migratory phenomenon has changed over the years, since new technologies and means of transportation have given migrants the opportunity to maintain their connections with their homeland, while being in a different national environment (Vertovec 2001, 574-575). This idea of being emotionally and culturally tied to another country seems to both strengthen and weaken the migrant's position in the host society, because it is said to impede the complete integration in a different culture, but at the same time it is seen as an asset for the host country, as the migrant forms a dual identity and has double perspectives (Vertovec 2001, 575-576).

The concept of dual identity has widely been studied especially by psychologists, who are interested in seeing how immigrants are psychologically affected when they try to adapt to a new environment. According to Zhang, Verkuyten and Weesie (2018, 4-5), dual identity can be considered the identification with both the national community, which refers to the place the person lives, and the ethnic group, which refers to the cultural and ethnic background of the immigrant. In particular, it is said that "something about the experience of simultaneously belonging to two (or more) distinct groups has beneficial impact on creativity" (Gocłowska and Crisp 2014, 217), but at the same time "trying to develop and maintain a dual identity can involve the difficult task of reconciling loyalties, cultural worldviews and normative expectations which induces stress and psychological conflicts" (Hirsh & Kang; Rudmin cit. in Zhang, Verkuyten and Weesie 2018, 4).

For what concerns the novel *Lucy* (1990), the protagonist goes through various changes in her identity during her first year in the United States. Indeed, she is seen as a foreigner and a Caribbean woman, but at the same time she is forced "into a realm of global Blackness in which Lucy is identified by her Black racial identity instead of her ethnicity" (Martin and Raynor 2013, 35). This thesis focuses on showing how Lucy's identity develops throughout the novel and how the idea of 'dual' or 'double' identity becomes applicable to this character's life.

As it was previously said, Lucy is a young woman who decides to escape from a life "in mental and physical bondage" (Martin and Raynor 2013, 36), because she wants

to shape her own life and live independently while focusing on her interests. However, as Martin and Raynor argue, she is “an inexperienced nineteen year old girl” (2013, 36) who always lived in a postcolonial society which did not allow her to express herself, because she was a woman and therefore she had to follow the cultural norms given to her gender.

From the beginning, Lucy finds herself being often linked to the Black race, the one which was normally associated to US African Americans, even though she comes from the Caribbean. As Martin suggests, this happens because “the concerns of black people in America and the Caribbean prove to be the same, that of oppression by a ruling power” (2015, 6). Thus, racial identity becomes dominant at the expense of ethnic and national identity, as does her association with the legacy of slavery.

In fact, when she starts working as an au pair for Mariah and Lewis, she becomes ‘the helper’ of the family and she is sent to sleep in a room that gives the reader a hint of how she is perceived by her employers, that means not only as a domestic helper, but also as a sort of slave staying in a place that resembles a “cargo” (Martin and Raynor 2013, 37):

The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box – a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid’s room, and I was not even the maid (Kincaid 2002, 7).

By saying “But I was not cargo” (Kincaid 2002, 7), Lucy wants people to understand that “she has no connection to the identities of slaves in America who after certain historical movements became African-Americans” (Martin 2015, 7), but she has to bear the imposition of this black identity, because for the white community there are no striking differences between African-Americans and her.

While trying to understand who she is and what is her role in the society, Lucy unwantedly finds herself being labelled by others: at first, she is associated to African American women and more specifically to the figure of the black ‘mammy’,¹⁴ because of her motherly behavior towards Mariah’s children.

¹⁴ The term ‘mammy’, meaning a slave woman who takes care of white children, was used for the first time in a narrative regarding the American South in 1810. Some researchers argue that ‘mammy’ was used as a synonym of the word ‘mother’ and it was linked to African women who took on the role of caretakers or nurses for the white families. See Wallace-Sanders 2008 for a more detailed description of the role of the ‘mammy’ in the American society.

According to Wallace-Sanders, the image of the ‘mammy’ has various meanings in American culture, but it is mostly known as “the ultimate symbol of maternal devotion” (2008, 2) because of her being able to nurture and care for both white children and her own black ones. However, it is also a symbol of ruthless exploitation because most of the times African American women were expected to raise white children at the expense of their own children who were left in the care of someone else.

Lucy grows fond of Miriam, and she becomes a sort of maternal figure for her, as she says, “When I heard her cry out at night, I didn’t mind at all getting up to comfort her” (Kincaid 2002, 53) or “Whenever I was away from them, she was the person I missed and thought of all the time. I couldn’t explain it. I loved this little girl” (Kincaid 2002, 53). Therefore, she is linked to African Americans because of her status of domestic laborer, but also because of this particular stereotype which sees her as a loving mother for children that were not her own flesh.

However, when Lucy reminisces about the past, her Caribbean identity resurfaces and she must deal with the controversial emotions coming from it, as it is possible to read in this passage:

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. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. (Kincaid 2002, 18)

This “two-facedness” she is talking about refers to her experience of “having two identities in her own country” (Martin and Raynor 2013, 40), because of the British influence in all areas of daily life, starting from the educational environment. In fact, Lucy reacts in a hostile way when Mariah takes her to see the daffodils, because for her they are nothing more than a symbol of a traumatic past, which reminds her of the feeling of alienation towards a culture that did not belong to her and that reminded her of her submissive position as a colonized woman (Martin and Raynor 2013, 40). Lucy becomes an example of the idea that people whose identities were created by their conquerors may have some difficulty shaping their own personality, but at the same time she can be considered an exception as she was able to split her Caribbean nature from her being a woman of color (Martin and Raynor 2013, 41).

As a Caribbean girl, she has always been controlled by the patriarchal society, which requires women to have good manners and respect their families, while avoiding

promiscuity and libertine attitudes, and she was often reprimanded by her mother when she deviated from certain moral standards. Tired of her mother's behavior and crushed by the weight of social expectations, Lucy decides to reverse her behavior in America, becoming what Gary Holcomb calls a "transnational slut" (Holcomb 2003, 295) and going against the idea of "sexual purity" (King 2008, 368) that her mother seemed to care so much about. As King (2008, 370) argues, Lucy started rebelling while she was still in the Caribbean, because she realized her mother was not interested in giving her the same opportunities as her brothers, but the rejection of sexual morals became even more extreme when she arrived in the United States, because she did not feel restricted anymore from exploring her sexuality and engaging with various men.

Through sexual intercourses Lucy begins to discover her body and she is surprised of the pleasure of it because "I had not known that such pleasure could exist and, what was more, be available to me" (Kincaid 2002, 113): she decides to focus on the physical side of her relationships, while she keeps emotional distance from her partners as a way to rebel from what her mother expects and also to concentrate on her personal development (King 2008, 371). According to Martin, "to her, engaging in love would require giving up pieces of her identity" (2015, 24) but she does not want to establish a bond with the other person "because she is only interested in committing herself to one person, and that person is, without any doubt, herself" (2015, 24).

Sex becomes "a part of the journey to adulthood, an overtly rebellious act which defies the conservative and gendered expectations of their community, whether in the Caribbean or in its diaspora" (King 2008, 375), but it is not what sets Lucy free from her past, as she realizes at the end of the story. Indeed, it is possible to say that she develops a new identity through her sexual activities, but the fact that she still feels the need to send a letter to her mother to give her the details of her promiscuous life shows her desire to have a reaction from a person she claims to despise, especially due to the betrayal she felt because of "the mother's preferential treatment of her sons" (King 2008, 372). According to Holcomb, Lucy "is a sexually emancipated traveller who willingly accepts the identity of the slut" (2003, 297) because it is what allows her to create her own path and to break those stereotypes which only permitted men to engage in sexual adventures without experiencing the judgements of the society.

Starting from her sexuality, Lucy keeps on enjoying life in the United States and learning new things about herself and by the end of the novel she comes to understand that her personality and her attitude towards things have changed, even if she cannot establish exactly what is different from before:

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. But in one year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence. The person I had become I did not know very well. Oh, on the outside everything was familiar. My hair was the same, though now I wore it cut close to my head, and this made my face seem almost perfectly round, and so for the first time ever I entertained the idea that I might actually be beautiful. I knew that if I ever decided I was beautiful I would not make too big a thing of it. My eyes were the same. My ears were the same. The other important things about me were the same. But the things I could not see about myself, the things I could not put my hands on – those things had changed, and I did not yet know them well” (Kincaid 2002, 133-134).

From this passage it is quite evident that Lucy has matured a lot since she arrived in the metropolis, but she has not been able to embrace a single identity, as the circumstances have prompted her to adopt various “sub-identities”, as Martin and Raynor (2013, 43) call them.

In conclusion, during her year abroad Lucy holds many roles within the society and for this reason she has to change her behavior accordingly: first, she identifies with the character of the servant, who must obey passively to the requests of her employers; secondly, she is seen for her status of immigrant, which classifies her as a Caribbean woman and puts her in a bigger ethnic group, the American black community; thirdly, she becomes a daughter, a friend, or a sexual partner to those people she gets acquainted to; lastly, she assumes the role of an independent woman who is finally able to provide for herself and embarks in a new journey far from her Caribbean past and from her foster mother Mariah.

Lucy spends every single moment of her life in the United States desperately trying to mold a new existence that could separate her from her mother and she realizes that the only way to do it was by reinventing herself: that is why, at the end of the novel, Lucy decides to move from Mariah’s house and rent an apartment with her friend Peggy, while becoming financially and socially independent (Oczkowicz 1996, 154). According to Oczkowicz (1996, 155), Lucy understands that she cannot completely forget her past, but she has to embrace it in order to liberate herself, so she decides to go back to her birth name, Lucy Josephine Potter, because it reminds her of her mother who used to say, “I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer” (Kincaid 2002, 152). In that

moment of her life, she feels exactly like Lucifer, because she shares some of his traits, such as “his total alienation and loneliness after rebellion against God, the result of his uncontrollable search for knowledge” (Oczkiewicz 1996, 155): it is true that Lucy reaches independence and freedom, but she has to pay with her loneliness and her unhappiness, as she states in the last pages, “I was alone in the world. It was not a small accomplishment. I thought I would die doing it. I was not happy, but that seemed too much to ask for” (Kincaid 2002, 161). Lucy has indeed become “an artist figure of disidentification” (Majero 2007, 18) and to do so, she has distanced herself from both the American and the Antiguan identity, but what she has not realized is that “she consumes a multicultural identity that feeds her permanent homelessness because she creates herself out of the very cultural identities she rejects” (Martin 2015, 30).

Conclusion

As it has already been specified in the chapters, this thesis was written to analyze one of Jamaica Kincaid's novels, with the aim of bringing out its main themes, such as the mother-daughter relationship and the issue of race and identity.

Specifically, I decided to focus on the novel *Lucy* (1990) because I was interested in studying in more detail the role of the au pair, since it is a figure who often has to divide herself between the status of an 'adopted daughter' and that of a domestic worker. In fact, it has been particularly fascinating to observe how Lucy interacts with her foster family, especially with Mariah, because Kincaid highlights the different cultural and historical background through the conversations and the behaviors of her characters.

Moreover, I found thought-provoking the idea that Lucy has to deal with various identities, which are not only limited to her Blackness in a white-centered world, but further branch out, creating a multifaceted individual, who struggles to find her place in the world. Kincaid offers various food for thought to her readers and sometimes she even causes them some difficulties, because, like Mariah, they find themselves not understanding what Lucy is going through, as they do not share the same past, made up of submission, paternalism, and gender roles, but they are in a position of privilege since they are white people.

Indeed, the author makes it clear to her readers that creating a new identity is not easy, because human beings are unable to completely leave their past behind and consequently the desire to start from scratch often collides with nostalgia and with the need to rediscover that comfort that only some people and spaces brought out. This nostalgia that sometimes does not allow you to fully immerse yourself in a new culture is something that also happened to me during my year as an exchange student in the Philippines, hence the image of Lucy reminiscing the emotions she felt when her mother treated her with love or simply when the sun's rays warmed her skin is an image in which I recognized myself a lot. On the other hand, all the references linked to slavery and segregation were sometimes hard to understand because, as Lucy suggests in the story, my knowledge about what black people had to suffer because of colonization is limited to some narratives; besides, it has also been challenging to change my point of view to match the position of inferiority Lucy often experiences in her life.

To sum up, we could say that *Lucy* (1990) is a novel that deals with intellectually burdensome issues using a language that is not too complex, therefore it offers many details to reflect on, especially on current issues such as migration and self-discovery.

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Summary in Italian

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare il romanzo *Lucy* (1990) di Jamaica Kincaid, un'autrice nata ad Antigua, un'isola caraibica, e trasferitasi negli Stati Uniti, per scappare da una società che non le permetteva di esprimersi e da una famiglia che non la sosteneva. L'elaborato approfondisce alcuni macro-temi, come ad esempio la migrazione, il rapporto madre-figlia, gli effetti di segregazione e schiavitù nella popolazione afroamericana e caraibica, il problema della razza e, infine, la ricerca di sé stessi e la creazione di nuove identità.

Il primo capitolo presenta, nella prima parte, una descrizione della storia che ha portato Antigua all'indipendenza e mette in evidenza alcuni degli avvenimenti più significativi che permettono di capire l'impatto che la colonizzazione forzata ha avuto sulla popolazione antiguo-barbudana e, in particolare, sulla scrittrice. Partendo dalle origini, ossia dall'arrivo delle prime popolazioni indigene quali gli Arawak, noti per aver introdotto l'agricoltura nel territorio, e i Caribe, conosciuti soprattutto per le loro abilità marinare e per la violenza con cui sottomettevano altri popoli, la tesi si occupa di vedere quali sono gli effetti che la presenza europea ha avuto sugli abitanti e sul territorio. In particolare, dopo il passaggio di Cristoforo Colombo nel 1493, che decise di indentificare l'isola come Antigua in riferimento alla Chiesa di Santa Maria de la Antigua a Siviglia, i primi ad interessarsi all'isola intorno al 1600 furono gli inglesi, che riuscirono ad annettere Antigua all'impero britannico e trasformarono il territorio, creando le prime piantagioni di zucchero dove furono messi a lavorare gli schiavi africani. Gran parte delle informazioni riguardanti le condizioni disumane, nelle quali gli schiavi si trovavano, si basa sui racconti di Olaudah Equiano, uno schiavo africano di cui vengono riportate anche alcune citazioni nel testo. Lo spostamento continuo di masse di africani nei paesi caraibici andò a modificare anche la composizione della popolazione, determinando un abbassamento sempre più evidente degli occidentali, e questo portò alla formazione delle prime rivolte violente degli schiavi, che miravano ad ottenere la libertà. Nello specifico, viene menzionata la rivolta del 1858, successiva all'emancipazione degli schiavi, per il fatto che esistevano ancora molte discriminazioni nei confronti dei lavoratori di colore, discriminazioni che verranno ad essere limitate in parte soltanto dopo l'indipendenza di Antigua dalla corona britannica nel 1981. Sempre nel primo sotto capitolo, viene riportata la visione che Kincaid ha del colonialismo, presente sia nel libro *A small place* (1988) sia

nel saggio *In history* (1997): l'autrice ritiene che l'arrivo degli europei nel territorio abbia privato le popolazioni autoctone della loro storia e delle loro tradizioni, per dare spazio invece ai bisogni e ai desideri delle popolazioni bianche, le quali aspiravano soltanto a ricavare profitti dalle piantagioni e a trasformare la zona in un luogo turistico, non curandosi del benessere degli abitanti.

In seguito, il capitolo presenta una breve introduzione dell'autrice, focalizzandosi sul percorso che l'ha portata a cambiare il nome Elaine Potter Richardson, datole dai genitori, nel nome Jamaica Kincaid, con cui oggi è conosciuta dai suoi lettori e dai critici. Alcune interviste fatte all'autrice riferiscono che abbia iniziato a lavorare come ragazza alla pari a New York all'età di 17 anni per aiutare la propria famiglia, che versava in condizioni economiche difficili, e che poi abbia deciso di rimanere in America per continuare gli studi e lavorare per alcuni giornali, tra cui il periodico *The New Yorker*. Nelle interviste, Kincaid rivela di aver cambiato nome soprattutto per il fatto che la sua famiglia e i suoi amici la criticavano per il suo desiderio di essere una scrittrice e, di conseguenza, cambiare il proprio nome le sembrava il modo migliore per rompere con il passato. Nel capitolo viene, infine, introdotta la trama del romanzo *Lucy* (1990), un racconto semi-autobiografico che narra le vicende dell'omonima protagonista, la quale decide di scappare dal proprio paese per liberarsi dal controllo della madre e inizia a lavorare come ragazza alla pari presso la famiglia di Mariah e Lewis, mentre si barcamena tra la nostalgia della sua terra e la necessità di costruirsi una nuova identità e una nuova vita.

Il secondo capitolo, in primis, si occupa di definire il concetto di *au pair*, per il fatto che si tratta di una figura che spesso viene vista sia come lavoratore, sia come parte integrante della famiglia ospitante. Viene, quindi, indagato il ruolo che Lucy assume nei confronti di Mariah e la sua famiglia, per capire anche quale sia il comportamento della ragazza di fronte ai tentativi di relazionarsi da parte dei membri della famiglia americana.

Le considerazioni fatte da molti studiosi permettono di capire che, nonostante la relazione tra Lucy, Mariah e Lewis vada oltre il semplice rapporto professionale, Lucy non riesce mai ad aprirsi completamente alla sua 'seconda famiglia' e molti sono i motivi che la portano a guardare con diffidenza gli sforzi che Mariah compie per accoglierla nel suo mondo. È possibile dire che Lucy si rende conto dell'affetto che la donna prova nei suoi confronti; tuttavia, l'interesse di Mariah nell'includerla nella storia di una 'ricca

famiglia bianca' viene percepito in parte come un desiderio di controllarla e di eliminare la sua diversità culturale, omologandola alla società in cui si trova. Viene, inoltre, menzionato il fatto che Lucy vede Mariah come una persona 'privilegiata' per il suo status di donna bianca e, di conseguenza, si sente spesso in una condizione di inferiorità, che la porta ad allontanarsi per non ricordare il suo passato doloroso, fatto di oppressione e sottomissione.

Nel secondo sotto capitolo, viene realizzato un confronto tra la figura di Annie Potter, la madre biologica di Lucy, e di Mariah, la madre adottiva e anche suo 'datore di lavoro'. Secondo alcuni studiosi, le due donne simboleggiano anche i due luoghi in cui Lucy si trova a vivere: Annie le ricorda i meravigliosi panorami di Antigua, ma anche il risentimento per una società che non le permetteva di esprimersi, mentre Mariah rappresenta l'America, territorio in cui è possibile emanciparsi e imbattersi in continue novità. In questa sezione della tesi, viene messa in luce la figura di Mariah, come donna che Lucy sembra apprezzare di più rispetto alla propria madre, soprattutto per il fatto che non mette sempre in primo piano le proprie necessità, ma si impegna a capire i desideri della ragazza, tanto da permetterle di continuare la sua amicizia con Peggy, nonostante il suo stile di vita fosse ben lontano da ciò che la donna riteneva adatto. Mariah è descritta, attraverso gli occhi di Lucy, come una persona dall'animo gentile, ma dall'aspetto segnato dalle sofferenze provate negli anni, anche a causa di una relazione coniugale che era felice solo all'apparenza. Attraverso alcune citazioni tratte direttamente dal testo è possibile vedere come questo amore che Lucy prova nei confronti della donna sia, però, anche fonte di avversione, dovuta al ricordo della relazione quasi inesistente con la propria madre, principalmente per il fatto che Annie non la incoraggiava ad avere dei sogni, ma si aspettava che Lucy seguisse le sue orme e vivesse in accordo a quanto determinato dalla società.

Questo particolare viene maggiormente spiegato nel terzo sotto capitolo, che è incentrato sul tema degli stereotipi di genere nell'età postcoloniale. In questo, viene inserita una breve digressione riguardante il racconto *Girl* (1978), che spiega quali sono i comportamenti che una donna dovrebbe seguire per non essere giudicata dalla società e non essere vista come una 'donna promiscua'. Nonostante gli insegnamenti della madre, quando Lucy raggiunge gli Stati Uniti inizia ad esplorare la propria sessualità e il piacere fisico, senza però lasciare spazio ai sentimenti, perché voleva andare contro la tradizione

che prevedeva che la donna fosse sottomessa al proprio uomo e si occupasse soltanto di crearsi una famiglia. Inoltre, viene spiegato come Lucy decida di allontanarsi dai desideri della madre, che desiderava per lei una carriera da infermiera, e scelga di seguire le proprie passioni, quali la fotografia e l'arte, per poter pian piano raggiungere quella libertà promossa dal sogno americano.

Nel terzo e ultimo capitolo il tema principale è quello della ricerca e della creazione di una nuova identità. Il primo sotto capitolo utilizza il racconto *Blackness* (1983) per spiegare la condizione in cui si trovano le persone di colore, che molto spesso sono relegate ai margini della società e si sentono oppresse dal colore della loro pelle. Allo stesso modo, però, il racconto mostra come alla fine il personaggio principale sia in grado di andare oltre il proprio colore della pelle e di accettare sé stesso, sviluppando quindi una nuova identità. In seguito, viene evidenziato come anche Lucy si senta molto spesso incompresa dalla propria famiglia ospitante proprio a causa del diverso retroterra culturale.

Alcuni studiosi hanno, inoltre, notato l'importanza del colore giallo pallido nel testo, tanto da poterlo intendere come simbolo dell'oppressione occidentale: sono, infatti, biondo pallido i capelli della famiglia di Mariah, è di un giallo spento il sole che la accoglie il primo giorno in America e, soprattutto, sono gialli i narcisi che Lucy odia, perché le ricordano una poesia inglese che era stata obbligata a imparare a causa dell'influenza britannica di cui risentiva l'isola caraibica in cui viveva. Come è spiegato all'interno della tesi, i narcisi rappresentano per Lucy una memoria dolorosa del passato imperialistico, che aveva privato i cittadini caraibici della propria cultura e delle proprie tradizioni, ma questo purtroppo non viene percepito da Mariah, la quale è orgogliosa di mostrare a Lucy le bellezze della sua terra. Il passato di Lucy sembra riaffiorare molto spesso nel corso delle vicende, com'è possibile vedere anche nel momento in cui Mariah la porta con sé a fare un viaggio verso i Grandi Laghi in treno, dove emerge il binomio colonizzato-colonizzatore, dato dalla presenza di camerieri di colore e passeggeri bianchi.

Questa visione negativa del passato viene ripresa poi nel secondo sotto capitolo, dove Lucy si trova a bilanciare la nostalgia per la propria terra e il risentimento nei confronti di una società e una famiglia che non l'hanno mai valorizzata. Infatti, Lucy decide di scappare in America con la speranza di raggiungere l'indipendenza, ma ben presto si ritrova ad essere a disagio in un paese in cui le mancano dei punti di riferimento

e delle persone a cui appoggiarsi in caso di necessità. La felicità e l'entusiasmo provati inizialmente lasciano quindi spazio alla nostalgia per un posto che, nonostante i brutti ricordi, era stato anche luogo di esperienze ed avvenimenti gioiosi. Ad ogni modo, questa malinconia si trasforma in rancore non appena Lucy ricorda la madre, che continua ad influenzare le sue scelte e i suoi comportamenti anche non essendo fisicamente in America con lei. Questa incapacità di staccarsi completamente dal proprio passato ha delle ripercussioni anche a livello psicologico sulla sua volontà di crearsi una nuova identità, che le permetta di non essere più soltanto una copia della madre.

Partendo da questo, il terzo sotto capitolo esplora il concetto di 'identità doppia', un concetto che può essere utilizzato per spiegare il rapporto che si viene a creare tra le varie identità che Lucy fa proprie nel corso della sua vita. Questa pluralità risulta più evidente con l'arrivo negli Stati Uniti, ma in realtà era già insita nel suo passato: questo accade per il fatto che, come è già stato menzionato in precedenza, la sua terra natale era stata a lungo assoggettata all'impero britannico e, quindi, a Lucy erano state imposte delle conoscenze e delle tradizioni che non le appartenevano, ma le ricordavano la sua posizione di donna sottomessa. Con l'arrivo in America, la sua identità si frammenta maggiormente, perché Lucy viene contemporaneamente associata alla comunità caraibica, per via della sua provenienza, e alla comunità afroamericana, per via del suo colore della pelle e per la sua posizione di bambinaia nella famiglia di Mariah. Inoltre, il suo percorso di creazione di una nuova identità si scontra anche con il suo passato e, in particolare, con l'oppressione della madre e, per questo motivo, Lucy decide di ribellarsi vivendo liberamente la sua sessualità, senza curarsi del giudizio della società.

La tesi si conclude con l'analisi delle ultime pagine del romanzo, dove la protagonista decide di allontanarsi anche da Mariah, per andare a vivere con l'amica Peggy e diventare economicamente e socialmente indipendente. Kincaid quindi ci offre l'immagine finale di una persona che ha raggiunto la libertà tanto desiderata, ritrovandosi però ad essere infelice e sola, e soprattutto che è riuscita a crearsi una nuova personalità soltanto grazie a quella pluralità di identità che spesso ha tentato di sopprimere.