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## A Postcolonial Reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*

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### ABSTRACT

Caribbean literature exposes a history of dispossession, exploitation and oppression which has been neglected and often deliberately misinterpreted. In this article the destructive effects of colonization and slavery in Jamaica Kincaid's 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* are scrutinized thoroughly. The main objective of this research is to examine Kincaid's novel within the framework of postcolonial studies, in the light of Albert Memmi (2013) and Frantz Fanon's (2008) theories on the psychology of colonialism. Frantz Fanon argues that colonialism had brought together two opposing social orders doomed to coexist in everlasting tension; the colonizer's and the colonized's; these tensions cause the moral and spiritual deformity of an ideological system based on racism, oppression, and exploitation. In contrast to Fanon, Kincaid regards resistance and liberation in a quite different perspective. Instead of attempting to build a "new woman", Xuela refuses to accept the colonizer's views of those like her that lead to self-destruction and self-hatred. Instead, in order to survive, she confidently chooses self-love, albeit an almost grotesque and obsessive one. Kincaid uses Xuela's relationships with various characters to categorize the social types that Fanon describes in his writings—from Philip and his wife Moira as examples of the deformation of behavior caused by colonial social hierarchies to using mask as a metaphor for her manipulative father's mimicry of the oppressors. This research finds out that colonization and slavery have negative impact on both the colonizer and the colonized.

**Keywords:** Caribbean Literature, Postcolonial Studies, the Psychology of Colonialism, Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Jamaica Kincaid, Resistance

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## 1. Introduction

Caribbean literature sheds light on a history of dispossession, exploitation and oppression which has been neglected, partially told, or (often intentionally) misinterpreted. In fact, most Western literary productions and historical accounts represent the Caribbean, from Columbus's arrival in 1492 to the neo-imperialist interferences of the West in the present (a process including the annihilation of the native population, the relocation of enslaved Africans, the independence of the islands and their re-conversion from "goldmines" feeding metropolitan markets into exotic sites for the Western tourist industry), as a privileged location for Western economy and civilization.

Caribbean literature generates its own theory by writing against as well as writing over. Its subject is always historically situated. The literature exposes that the history of the region is not only one of economic exploitation, dispossession, and cultural damage, but also one of creativity, self-determination, and most significantly resistance marked by colonialism, imperialism and racism as well as by revolt, reconstruction and hybridization.

Jamaica Kincaid is a Caribbean writer inasmuch as her work is haunted by history and based on personal experience as a primal source of creativity and understanding, insofar as it is grounded on direct experience rather than on intellectual assumption. The worldview expressed in her work is also Caribbean in essence, filled with traditions and beliefs which are the result of creolization and cultural hybridization. Her perception of reality is influenced by *Obeah*, an African-rooted system of belief based on witchcraft, the perspective which gives her work a touch of magic realism evoking the South American tradition. In addition to

clarifying powerlessness and conquest of colonized regions of the new world, she renders the acceptance of feminine self that eases the metamorphosis of girls into women, particularly who long to embrace autonomy and unchained independence of any sort.

*The Autobiography of my Mother* is narrated by the 70-year-old protagonist, Xuela Claudette Richardson who narrates her life story from the beginning; a vulnerable motherless child, abandoned by her father in her early childhood and left in the hands of first, an insensitive laundress Ma Eunice Paul, and then a cruel stepmother who even tries to kill her. Xuela does not yield to male devaluation and coercion of women. Kincaid's texts are filled with depictions of maltreatment of Caribbean colonials which she uses to inform the readers of historical atrocities of half a millennium.

The novel demonstrates the destructive effects of the British patriarchal colonial system in twentieth century Dominica by depicting ways that cause deep and undying physical and psychological pain. This pain is caused by ideologies of gender/sex that are internalized and repeated by teachers, parents, and lovers. The main objective of this article is to explore the destructive effects of colonialism and their outcome on both the colonizer and the colonized in Jamaica Kincaid's *The AMM*, within the framework of postcolonial studies, in the light of mainly Frantz Fanon's theories brought in *Black Skin, White Masks* and Memmi's theories on the psychology of colonialism. The authors examine what Jamaica Kincaid's *The AMM* suggests about the social and psychological effects of colonialism on the colonizers and primarily on the colonized and how Xuela the protagonist, manages to survive psychologically and achieve independence and self-confidence. Furthermore, the problems of class division, corruption and

colonial education as they are revealed in the characterization of main characters are analyzed likewise.

## 2. Literature Review

There are some questions that the authors of this article attempt to answer. 1. What does Jamaica Kincaid's *The AMM* suggest about the social and psychological effects of colonialism on the colonizers and primarily on the colonized? 2. How are the problems of corruption, class division, and colonial education treated in the novel? 3. How does Xuela manage to survive psychologically and achieve independence and self-confidence? 4. What is Xuela's relationship to language - French *patois*, colonial English and how does Xuela enact both language and silence as acts of resistance? 5. What is Xuela's relationship to her father? In "The Autobiography of My Mother" Xuela is an angry child, an angry woman, and is also very bitter in her old age. 6. What are the reasons for Xuela's anger, and is she justified to keep her rage for so long? Does her anger act as a survival mechanism, or, interchangeably, as an obstacle to a better life? Unlike typical protagonists in novels, Xuela is neither likable, nor worthy of hatred. 7. Why does she inspire inconsistency in the readers? How does colonialism have impact on Xuela's changing love objects?

Kincaid's anger seems to reach its peak in *the AMM*. The novel has received varied commentaries from critics, reviewers and readers alike. Merle Rubin (1996), for instance, admired "crystalline prose, precise and serene as a knife drawn through water," through which Kincaid transfers the self-portrait of a totally fragmented and alienated woman who has learned to lead a life bereft of love (p. 5). Some critics regard Xuela's bold tale profoundly disturbing in spite of its lyricism and elegance. Although the novel has been regarded an "inhuman... disturbing... almost unbearable" (Schine,

1996) text, it has the potential to be read as a forceful gendered postcolonial critique, with an elegant and delicate prose.

A critic who has had a postcolonial reading of the novel in this respect is Isabel Hoving. In her book *In Praise of New Travelers* (2001), Hoving argues for a specific postcolonial reading of *The AMM*. Hers acknowledges Kincaid's specific gendered postcoloniality. The main question Hoving asks is how one can theorize the body in the postcolonial. According to Hoving, many postcolonial texts are structured around the rhetorics of body versus text. She asserts, "Within postcolonial practice, the text is made to bear many burdens: to be site of colonialism, of Eurocentric dominance, of passive, elite intellectualism. The body is then mobilized to disturb or shatter or the dominance of writing" (Hoving, p. 225).

The significance and novelty of the present article in line with the rationale behind it is embedded in its analysis of "resistance" to colonialism in Jamaica Kincaid's *The AMM*. When the colonizer is validated at the expense of the colonized, the latter assumes the necessity of the task of building a positive sense of self out of the fragments of colonial destruction. Xuela's "resistance" is different from Fanon's treatment of it. Unlike Fanon's suggestion in this regard taking this as kind of resistance which may be exerting violence "as a means of reconstructing human relations, opening the way for a new society that could give birth to a 'new man'" (Parvasini-Gebert, 1999, p. 162), Kincaid's "new man" is of a distinct type. Kincaid's resistance, depicted in the novel, emerges from individual independence of any sort. Although Xuela's narrative does not attempt to build the "new man" envisioned by Fanon, she nevertheless offers her obsessive grotesque self-love as a means of surpassing the categorical opposition between the colonizer and the



colonized. This particular view is what has made the authors of this article cling to a new perspective of analyzing the novel unlike the present scholarship of the fiction.

### 3. Methodology

This article significantly aims to apply postcolonial theories to Jamaica Kincaid's *The AMM* in order to provide answers to the questions posed by the researchers earlier. Frantz Fanon's works are without doubt, the most well-known of psychological attempts to theorize the effects of colonialism. Although the present study draws mainly upon his *Black Skin, White Masks (Peau noire, masques blancs, 1952)* as its central theoretical framework, it also benefits from related theories by Albert Memmi. Examples, notions and points might be taken from Kincaid's other works where necessary.

*Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon was the first book to explore the psychology of colonialism. In the words of Ziauddin Sardar, the book "examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors" (Fanon, p. x). Fanon emphasizes heavily on the root of what he calls an inferiority complex, which he declares is a massive psycho-existential complex derived from the juxtaposition of the black and white races (Fanon, p. xvi).

The emphasis on examining the relationship between colonizer and colonized is also taken up by the Tunisian critic Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957) in which Memmi describes his purpose as having been to "reproduce, completely and authentically, the portraits of the two protagonists of the colonial drama and the relationship which binds them" (As cited in Ward, p. 193). He assumes that it is not sufficient to simply focus on the

colonized; instead, we need to observe the psychological problems experienced by the colonized particularly *in the context* of their relationship with the colonizers.

### 4. Discussion

#### *4.1 Psychological Background:*

#### **The Absence of Mother's Love: The Main Source of Loss**

The reader of this novel finds out from the very beginning what constitutes Xuela's main loss: "My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 3). Xuela regards 'defeat' her destination as well as her Carib mother's destiny and the fate of all West Indians who suffered from colonialism and were vanquished consequently:

Who are the Carib people? or, more accurately, who were the Carib people? For they were no more, they were extinct, a few hundred of them still living, my mother had been one of them, they were the last survivors. (Kincaid, 2012, p. 71)

The absence or withdrawal of a mother's love is a prominent theme in Jamaica Kincaid's oeuvre. In spite of its important role in identity formation of the protagonists, the mother represents other significant concepts too. In *The AMM*, Xuela spends her entire life mourning the loss of her mother, who died in giving birth to her -- a woman whose face she has never seen, whose voice she has never heard. "My life was beyond empty. I had never had a mother" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 35). Writing for New York Times, Michiko Kakutani (1996) asserts:

For these narrators, the figure of the mother represents more than the woman who gave them life; she also represents the vanished and enduring past, a connection to earlier generations of women and blacks who endured the indignities of colonial and post-colonial oppression. For these young women,

the struggle to come to terms with their progenitors is at once a Freudian search for love and independence and a historical search to understand a public world of race and class that continues to intrude upon their private lives. The result, in the case of 'Autobiography,' is an indelible portrait of an angry woman, a portrait that weds the hallucinatory magic of Toni Morrison's "Beloved" to the bitter disillusionment of V. S. Naipaul's middle novels. (1996, p. 17)

Damaged by the loss of her mother due to childbirth, Xuela is determined to reject motherhood to avoid death; the only possible resort for the defeated. As said by Snodgrass (2008), Xuela's "sole weapon against an unstable, unlovable world is will, her control of self and her abortion of her own children, reminders of the danger of parturition, which deals death to the unlucky" (Snodgrass, p. 49). Leigh Gilmore (2001), states that the deceased birth mother is "the love of her [Xuela's] life". The mother is an emblem of the island's enduring history (Gilmore, p. 132). In the words of reviewer Cathleen Schine (1996), women like the motherless Xuela suffer from "a Freudian search for love and independence and a historical search to understand a public world of race and class, that continues to intrude upon their private lives" (Schine, 1996, n.d.).

There is something harsh about the series of bad experiences that happen to Xuela: in addition to the losses she has already suffered, she also undergoes the death of her brother and father and the injury of her sister. In fact, Xuela soon comes to define herself almost completely through negative feelings. She will not become a submissive, defeated woman like Madame LaBatte. She will not fall in love. She will not speak unless she wants to.

Everyone Xuela meets is vulnerable to her anger or her pity. She describes her schoolmates as "the eventually defeated, the eventually bitter," (Kincaid, 2012, p. 29)

while she depicts her European husband as a man who was obsessed with the idea of decay and ruin, which "made sense, for he came from people who had caused so much of it they might have eventually come to feel that they could not live without it" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 52).

If we are repelled by Xuela's bitterness, anger, and hard-heartedness, we are made to understand it in the context of her own history and her perception of the history of her island. On the word of analyst Diane Simmons (1998), the repulsive personality of Xuela is one of the consequences of colonialism: "there is nowhere to turn but to revenge, nothing to nurture but a heart that is cold and closed" (p. 107). Her insensitivity and self-absorption conceals a life-long emotional need. Deprived of positive channel for passion, Xuela strives "to entice, to ensnare, to dominate, to enhance [her] own sense of power by taking advantage of those who are innocent or weak" (Simmons, 1998, p. 114) Thus she conquers without invasion. Left defenseless at birth in a patriarchal family, she imprisons herself in disillusion and rejects intimacy with others. Kincaid, likewise, justifies Xuela's coldness as a natural outcome of colonialism: "I am completely unapologetic about it. How can you ask a person like that to be different than she is?" (qtd. in Snodgrass, p. 53).

#### 4.2 Political Background:

#### Colonialism in *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Colonialism interweaves *The AMM*. Human relations in the island are fragmented. It is a milieu divided by contrasting wealth, bigotry, class barriers, exploitation of any sort and subjugation. According to Snodgrass (2008), Xuela is "a relic of the Carib, a silenced, deracinated people who survive in isolated families" (p. 67). Xuela regards the island of Dominica as a "false paradise", based in a great lie-- The superiority of the



British over the inferior Carib or black West Indian. In an extract from her essay, "In History," (1997) which could well be spoken by Xuela, Kincaid writes:

What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?

Should I call it history?

If so, what should history mean to someone like me? (p.2)

Albert Memmi (2013) believes that the colonizer's rewriting of history to his glorification removes the colonized from history. The colonized child is not taught his/her own history, but the unknown settings of the colonizer's history. The colonized become "divorced from reality" (p. 106). The colonized are conditioned that their inadequacy is what makes them unable to "assume a role in history" (Memmi, 2013, p. 94).

Let us bring Memmi's definition of colonialism here. He describes colonialism as "one variety of fascism":

Every colonial nation carries the seeds of fascist temptation in its bosom. What is fascism, if not a regime of oppression for the benefit of a few? The entire administrative and political machinery of a colony has no other goal. The human relationships have arisen from the severest exploitation, founded on inequality and contempt, guaranteed by police authoritarianism. (2013, p. 45)

According to Memmi (2013) colonialism is based on economic privilege, despite colonizer's ideology of more noble objectives of religious conversion or civilization. He assumes that colonialism's key apparatuses are racism and terror. "It is significant that racism is part of colonialism throughout the world; and it is no coincidence. Racism sums up and symbolizes the fundamental relation which unites colonialist and colonized" (2013, p. 48) Memmi says. Racism is deep-rooted in the spirit of every colonial action and institution. "Colonialism denies human

rights to human beings whom it has subdued by violence, and keeps them by force in a state of misery and ignorance that Marx would rightly call a subhuman condition" (Memmi, 2013, p.11). Colonialism promotes poor self-concepts in the defeated colonized. Thus, since the colonized native is looked down as subhuman, he/she is left without protection to cruel forces.

By using terror to suppress any reactionary rebellion, the colonizers strengthen fear and submission. In order to keep the incomes of the colonizers high and their cost of living low, there must be high competition among the native laborers, so the colonial system favors population growth. The bitter fact is that all resources go to the colonizer in spite of the growing colonized population's need for those increased resources. Thus, the standard of living of the colonized certainly gets worse.

Slavery of the past and colonialism has a tremendous negative effect on colonized and former colonized people in Antigua and the Anglophone African Caribbean as a whole. By colonialism or its negative impact, the structural imposition directly or indirectly of political, economic, and cultural control of the people of Antigua and the Anglophone African Caribbean is meant. By Anglophone African Caribbean the English-speaking nations of the Caribbean with majority populations of people of African descent is meant. Before gaining its independence in 1981, Antigua, the focus of much of Kincaid's writing suffered approximately 350 years of colonialism and slavery.

*The AMM* asserts that colonial discourse excludes the formerly colonized in the Caribbean from knowledge and insight. Xuela states, "Everything about us [the colonized] is held in doubt and we the defeated define all that is unreal, all that is not human, all that is without love, all that is

without mercy. Our experience cannot be interpreted by us; we do not know the truth of it" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 14). In contrast, the novel argues that the colonized highly seeks knowledge and insight. Xuela asserts that "those [the colonized] who have lost are never hardened—they feel it deeply, always" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 70).

One of the aspects of this study deals with the fact that in many ways those colonizers, the British in particular, in conjunction with First World imperialistic powers like the United States, even today, still have not completely relinquished what amounts to control of former colonized countries like Antigua and Jamaica. In his *Black Skins, White Masks* (2012) Fanon deals with his perception of how the sexuality of former enslaved and colonized blacks is influenced by their relationships with whites:

The sexuality of the colonized person is shown as fraught with racial tension concerning dominance and submissiveness. It is argued that male sexuality is shaped by the ambivalent desire for conquest over, or violation of the white woman, and female sexuality is characterized by the black woman's desire for acceptance by, or submission to, the white man. The sexuality of the colonized person is thus rendered as depraved in itself and threatening to whiteness. The effect is to alienate men and women from their own bodies and their skin color. (As cited in Stennis, p. 3)

The physical and psychological pain suffered by Xuela the protagonist in *The AMM*, is complicated because ideology is complex involving a system based on economic or political policy.

Xuela, the young African Caribbean woman who is the protagonist in *The AMM*, is confronting and dealing with a multiplicity of ideologies related to economics, politics, gender, and race in the novel. Despite the fact that Terry Eagleton says, "Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of

ideology" (1991, p. 1), he has listed "some definitions of ideology currently in circulation" (1991, p. 1). The discussion of Kincaid's critique of the negative impact of colonialism on characters in this article will employ some of those definitions. Those definitions of ideology listed by Eagleton include:

...the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life; a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class; ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; false ideas which help to legitimate a dominate political power; a systematically distorted communication; that which offers a position for a subject; forms of thought motivated by social interests; identity thinking; socially necessary illusion; the conjuncture of discourse and power; the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world; action-oriented sets of beliefs. (1991, p. 2)

Although Eagleton's definition of ideology is broader than the one found in most dictionaries, it can serve as a kind of a "working" definition for analyzing the torment that Xuela is enduring during her coming of age years under British patriarchal colonial rule in Dominica in the Anglophone African Caribbean during the mid and early twentieth century.

Let us discuss the "pain of colonialism" experienced by Xuela. This "pain" can be categorized as bodily injuries and negative emotions like physical pain, unhealthy attachments, fear, anguish, confusion, alienation, lack of empathy, loss of identity, etc. African Caribbean women, and Xuela among them, are affected by a complicated and complex history; from a slave and colonial existence, to a colonial existence, and finally to an existence under independence that is influenced by the ideological legacies of slavery and colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchal rule. That kind of pain is reflected in A. Lynn



Bolles' (2003) essay "Women and Development":

Women of the region (the West Indies, specifically the English-speaking women of the Caribbean, like Dominica where Xuela reside), whether poor or from the working or the upper classes, have been subject to inequalities based on their gender. These gender inequalities have a historical precedent so pronounced that the resultant sociological structures continue to impact every contemporary Caribbean country. Enslavement and its impact on the majority of African-descended women fostered the development of Creole cultures. This slave system constructed social hierarchies of color and class and, in some areas, the indenture of immigrant workers. (p. 259)

Creolization, mentioned by Bolles, is "the process of intermixing and cultural change that produces a Creole society"(Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin, p. 51). While it is argued that the creolization processes go on throughout the world, the term has usually been applied to 'new world' societies (particularly the Caribbean and South America) and more loosely to those post-colonial societies whose present ethnically or racially mixed populations are a product of European colonization.

Bolles' statement that women from the region "have been subject to inequalities based on their race" (As cited in Stennis, 2012, p. 32) means that these women who are of African descent, faced these inequities not only because of their gender generally, but also because of the fact that they are African Caribbean women, which causes a sort of double subjugation. The necessity of redefining the word "pain," associated with African Caribbean women is due to this multiplicity of pain and the many complexities associated with it. This pain is something that many people today still think of as either psychological or physical, but probably not both for many people. In the

novel *The AMM*, the main female character, Xuela, faces and suffers dual pain, physical and psychological, that stems from ideologies related to race under colonialism, as well as gender/sex ideologies.

#### 4.3 Social Background:

##### Twentieth Century Dominica

*The AMM* presents evidence early on that Xuela will have multiple struggles with her deep hatred and rebellion against gender and sexual disparity under British patriarchal colonial rule. Part of her rejection of British colonial rule seems like to be motivated by her perception that the British regard themselves as superior, and, thus they (the British) have inherited authority over African Caribbeans, whom they (the British) consider as inferior. The life of this African Caribbean young woman is shackled by sexuality and gender inequalities in Dominica, which is populated primarily by the descendants of former black slaves from Africa. The restraints of Xuela's life are tied to patriarchal British colonial rule at the time. And patriarchal colonial rule of African Caribbeans is tangled directly to British importation of black slaves from Africa to Antigua and Dominica and its colonization of those countries, in which the African Caribbeans worked Britain's highly profitable sugarcane crops.

This colonization took place in Antigua between 1632 and 1981, when colonization ended with the country winning its independence, and between 1635 and 1978, when Dominica gained its independence, after periods of colonization by both England and France. This history of African Caribbeans in Antigua and Dominica and the imposed rules of patriarchal colonialism that they are forced to live by in the early and mid-twentieth century gradually penetrates the ideology of everyday life or to quote Eagleton's definition, "the process whereby

social life is converted to a natural reality," especially for African Caribbean women. So the pain that Xuela is feeling is not tied or related only to her current circumstances in life, but to her country with a history of gender and racial inequality under colonialism, as well as slavery.

In *The AMM* we observe the British patriarchal colonial system at work under a capitalist economic system in which women in general are treated as being unequal to men not only because of gender/sex ideologies, but also due to the center/margin aspect of global capitalism, which also devalues their work. For Xuela, the unfairness is even greater because of the black/white binary opposition as well.

At the center of this unequal development of gender and sexuality role for Xuela, is the fact that she confronts grave restrictions, from her family female caretaker, Eunice Paul, also called Ma Eunice. She also faces heavy constraints from the system of patriarchal colonialism and economic oppression under British capitalism, all of which causes her to feel so to speak, pinned down on her island. Xuela is so severely affected by gender and racial ideologies that she ultimately ends up leaving Dominica.

In the Caribbean, particularly in Antigua, colonial ideologies developed into a system of race/gender subordination in which skin color marked one's status and power in a hierarchy of race and class. Gender ideologies were developed to reinforce patriarchal colonial rule in a system that developed a portrayal of black women.

*The AMM* is filled with examples of how the legacy of British slavery and colonial rule has a negative impact on the lives of the novel's characters. From early on Xuela suffers from resentment and rebellion against British colonial rule. She says, "That the first words I said were in the language of a people I would never like or love is not now a

mystery to me; everything in my life, good or bad, to which I am inextricably bound is a source of pain" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 2). An image implying Xuela's angst and persistence in revenge is when she sees crawling insects that bear venom in their stingers and saliva, a symbol of innate hatred in a conquered nation. On the word of Snodgrass (2008), the menace and gloom stems from islanders' legacy of mistrust after the British colonized it and from Dominica's post-Columbian history. "Reared by a British-worshipping laundress, Ma Eunice Paul, and a vicious step-mother, Xuela grows into a cynical unlovable 70-year-old misanthrope" (Snodgrass, p. 62).

So, there are very clear indications that Xuela's problem in accepting British colonial rule and resentment toward her family female caretaker, Ma Eunice will add complexity to any other problems that she might have later in life. In one scene in *The AMM* Xuela faces disappointment when she breaks a piece of china in the home of Ma Eunice. Here is the way that Xuela expresses her disappointment and resentment for Ma Eunice's punishment for her breaking the china and its lack of effectiveness or impact on her (Xuela). "Why should this punishment have made a lasting impression on me, redolent as it was in every way of the relationship between captor and captive, master and slave, with its motif of the big and the small the powerful and powerless, the strong and the weak..." (Kincaid, 2012, p. 3)? Xuela regards Ma Eunice's irritation, caused by Xuela's breaking of the china, as an obsession with the mimicking of British values and culture. "She meant to keep me in this position until I said the word 'I am sorry,' but I would not say them, I could not say them," Xuela says (Kincaid, 2012, p. 3). "It was beyond my will; these words could not past my lips. I stayed like that until she exhausted herself cursing me and all whom I came from," she adds (Kincaid, 2012, p. 3).



This detached, cold, rebellious attitude of Xuela is part of the pain and oppression that she confronts.

Xuela has an early awareness of the inequities and absurdities of British colonial rule, but ironically from an African Caribbean woman. She says, "My teacher was a woman who had been trained by Methodist missionaries; she was of the African people, that I could see, and she found in this a source of humiliation and self-loathing, and she wore despair like an article of clothing, like a mantle, or a staff on which she leaned constantly..." (Kincaid, 2012, p. 7). Xuela's teacher's "humiliation and self-loathing" probably stems from Fanon's so-called "two dimensions" term. For Fanon one of the greatest dangers facing the black person is psychologically internalizing racism and oppression. According to Fanon, it would seem that it is impossible to ignore the roots of this Manichean contradiction; he suggests that the unequal, and difficult, relationship between black and white people was caused by slavery. He describes the process of "two dimensions" as follows:

The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question. . . . No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man. Here is objective evidence that expresses reality. (Fanon, 2008, p. 8)

In "Colonialization and Housewifization.." Mies (1986) calls this a "double-faced" practice:

In order to be able to freely exploit the slaves, they had for centuries defined them outside humanity and Christianity. In this they were supported by the ethnologists who said that the Negroes did not belong to the same

'species' as the Europeans. Hence, slaves could not become Christians because according to the Christian Church England no Christian could be a slave". (p. 177)

This is an example of pain produced by colonial racism. Early on Xuela recognizes that British colonialism, and earlier slavery, has left African Caribbeans, or at least some of them, with an identity crisis, which has caused them to not be able to appreciate or not relate to their native and/or indigenous culture and values. This is most palpable in the fact that Xuela challenges the imposition of the language and religion of the British. Her Methodist-taught African Caribbean teacher personifies both through her action, which are approved by Xuella's caretaker, Ma Eunice as well.

The fact that Xuella's caretaker expects adoration of the British Empire and England, and loyalty and allegiance to, its center, disturbs Xuela throughout the text. Xuela has to internalize this rage, because she does not feel that she can talk about it with Ma Eunice.

Early on Xuela learns about the vastness of the former British Empire and how it influenced the rest of the world, especially her homeland Dominica, negatively. For instance Xuela is pained by the legacies of colonial rule and racism and their limitations, specifically the double standards for development of male and female gender and sexuality roles. Xuela's sexual development is troubling, due to the restrictions or perhaps ineffectiveness of the key female figures in her life, who conventionally are expected to be nurturers for the protagonist. In the mostly absence of the father, Ma Eunice's devotion to British traditions, values, and customs is so much that she forgets how essential her role is as encourager, educator, and nurturer in Xuela's life.

There are examples in the text where Xuela feels that she is victim because she detests having to admire African Caribbeans'

adoption of or mimicry of British culture, traditions, and values, instead of practicing their own, as was the case with her and the breaking of Ma Eunice's china plate for instance. After Xuela accidentally breaks the precious plate (painted with a pretty scene depicting heaven as an idealized English countryside), Ma Eunice punishes her by forcing her to kneel out in the hot sun, with her arms raised above her head holding stones. "Why should this punishment have made a lasting impression on me, redolent as it was in every way of the relationship between captor and captive, master and slave, with its motif of the big and the small, the powerful and the powerless, the strong and the weak, and against a background of earth, sea, and sky..." (Kincaid, 2012, p. 3), Xuela says. We can consider the broken plate as a symbol of fractured colonial motherland and the devastating colonial values. This is a constant pose reminding us of the island's slave's vulnerability to a bigger master. "Ma Eunice was not unkind," Xuela recalls. "She treated me just the way she treated her own children -- but this is not to say she was kind to her own children. In a place like this, brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given." (Kincaid, 2012, p. 3)

Xuela's detestation of mimicry of British culture is also apparent when his brother dies. Xuela states that after Alfred's death they bury him in the churchyard of the Methodist church, singing hymns and offering prayers:

Such is the lot of the defeated: in the end what is meant to be, in the end the other outcome, the outcome of triumph, would have been a tragedy, a consequence far more devastating than the defeat being experienced now. Such is the consolation of the defeated". (Kincaid, 2012, p. 40)

As said by Albert Memmi (2013) in his *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, the culture of the colonizer spreads through the colony; the dress code, the holidays, the flag raised

above national monuments are all the colonizer's and social communication is in the colonizer's language. Xuela finds some words at the top of a map in her classroom disturbing: "There was a large wooden table and a chair facing the three long desks; on the wall behind the wooden table and chair was a map; at the top of the map were the words 'THE BRITISH EMPIRE.'" These were the first words I learned to read," Xuela says (Kincaid, 2012, p. 6). Eagleton's definition of ideology reminds us the "body of ideas" embraced in the establishment of and maintenance of the British Empire.

Xuela considers her school uniform a mimicry of the British style likewise. As said by her, Antigua surrenders to the conqueror by its subservience through mimicking everything English and white, which the triumphant accept as a world norm. This leaves the islander alienated and fragmented. Here, let us bring Memmi's notion of "social salvation" which he believes to be a mere illusion made by colonialism. Memmi states that the colonized could not rise above their social status and be allowed to blend in and join the colonizer: "all efforts of the colonialist are directed towards maintaining the social immobility, and racism is the surest weapon for this aim" (2013, p. 50). Another example for proving Memmi's point is Xuela's father who had inherited his father's gray eyes and pale skin, but his mother:

was a woman from Africa, where in Africa no one knew, and what good would it do to find out, she was simply from somewhere in Africa, that place on the map which was a configuration of shapes and shades of yellow". (Kincaid, 2012, p. 18)

Xuela believes that her father's skin color was the color of corruption: copper and gold which made him look more like the victor (the Scots-man) than the vanquished (the African people). She says that her father



rejected the complications of the vanquished to choose the ease and comfort of the victor.

What Xuela observes and hears among the congregants of her church as they say goodbye to each other and head to their homes after worship, is very distressing to her:

They bade each other goodbye and returned to their homes, where they would drink a cup of English tea, even though they were quite aware that no such thing as a tea tree grew in England, and later that night, before they went to bed, they would drink a cup of English cocoa, even though they were quite aware that no such thing as a cocoa tree grew in England. (Kincaid, 2012, p. 51)

Xuela regards the activity of church going by the people of Roseau as a decree signifying defeat yet again, because she states that if they had not believed in the gods of the conqueror, they would not have gone to church. Xuela tells us that the church was built by enslaved people and many of whom died while building the church. The masters had buried them in a way so as to make their enslaved faces turn toward the eternal darkness of hell on the Day of Judgment (Kincaid, 2012, p. 48).

Memmi states that unlike the common belief, the colonizers "never seriously promoted religious conversion of the colonized" (2013, p. 49) because it would have been a step towards integration (a threat to the colonizers' profits) and therefore "the disappearance of the colonial relationships" (2013, p. 72-73). He continues, "To be sure, the church has greatly assisted the colonialist; backing his ventures, helping his conscience, contributing to the acceptance of colonization — even by the colonized" (Memmi, 2013, p. 49).

## 5. Conclusion

### *Resistance*

Pattern of continuous rebellion or resistance becomes characteristic of Xuela

throughout *The AMM*. The rebellion is against a lot of things, from British education to culture, historical figures to literary figures, language to values, etc. And in her rebellion, Xuela finds out that her rebellion is having a negative impact on her character and attitude on life. For instance she rejects the idea of reading a book on John Wesley, one of England's earliest and most prominent Protestant religious leaders. Xuela's feelings about the obligation of reading a book about John Wesley reflect on more than just the British and colonization. It also reveals her feelings of ambiguity about the British's teaching and actual practice of their religious values as well as their adoption of and contradictory teaching-practice of these values by African Caribbeans, including her father. Her suggestion that her father is corrupt is very important here because corruption, which often is out of control in former colonized countries like Antigua and Dominica, is one of the negative legacies left by British colonization. For the most part, the empire being obsessed with capitalism, patriarchy, and slavery, and a desire to preach the Christian religion, can explain the long persistence of British colonization and its many negative effects. This knowledge is a part of what drives Xuela's hatred.

There are also other resentments that Xuela has for the British. She objected at the fact that she (Xuela) "knew the history of an array of people I would never meet". "That in itself should not have kept me from knowing of them; it was that this history of people that I would never meet - Romans, Gauls, Saxons, Britons, the British people - had behind it a malicious intent: to make me feel humiliated, humbled, small," she adds (Kincaid, 2012, p. 22).

### *Class Issues*

Finally, there is the pain and confusion over class issues that are so conspicuous in

the hatred, pain, and bitterness that Xuela feels because of British colonial rule in her country. "Lack of or loss of identity by one when they feel that they do not fit in with a certain social or economic class and the struggle to gain or regain it are some of the major problems that are common to the people of all colonized or former colonized countries, whether they are in the Caribbean, Asia, Africa or some other part of the world," says Stennis (2012, p. 67). This can be the case with Xuela when she does not feel contented in saluting the British flag due to her lower social status. According to Snodgrass one of the effects of imperialism on non-white children is that they "see themselves as innately substandard in a milieu hopelessly dominated by European Caucasians" (Snodgrass, 2008, p. 65).

That is also evident when Xuela becomes agitated with her father, a wealthy and corrupt policeman, who is ironically supposed to distribute extra materials to the poor, but refuses to give nails to a poor man named Lazarus. "I loved to look at him (her father) when he wore his dress uniform of navy-blue serge pants and white cotton twill jacket with gold buttons, the uniform he wore to a parade celebrating the English king's birthday," Xuela says (Kincaid, 2012, p. 68). "But at that moment when he denied Lazarus the nails, he started to become real, not just my father, but who he might really be," she adds (Kincaid, 2012, p. 68). It is bitter irony that her father's lack of empathy for his own people, African Caribbeans, is produced by colonial racism. This is not a big deal for him because his job and economic position with the colonial administration blinds him to his plight, but it is very upsetting, troubling and unpleasant to Xuela because she is not blind to it, she knows that her cruel father had a large barrel of nails. "My father did dispose of some of the things in the proper way, giving them to people in need, but just

enough not to cause a scandal; the rest he sold, and the more a person was unable to pay, the more they were in need, the more he charged them," she says (Kincaid, 2012, p. 68). Her wealthy father does not show empathy for the poor, a status that describes most African Caribbeans, his own people, in both Antigua and Dominica. Additional evidence of Xuela's father's lack of empathy is clear when she says, "And what could my father have been thinking as he sat in that room, as he sat on a chair which was a copy of a chair seen in a painting of some dreadful Englishman's drawing room, a chair copied by the hands of someone of whom he had no doubt taken advantage" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 69)? The father has lost his empathy for his own people; his mimicry of the British is very much embarrassing to Xuela.

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) which was the first book to explore the psychology of colonialism "examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors" (Fanon, 2008, p. x). Fanon's emphasis is on the root of this inferiority complex, which he declares is a massive psycho-existential complex derived from the juxtaposition of the black and white races (Fanon, 2008, p. xvi). Fanon believes this complex originates from numerous aspects of colonialism and mixing of the races and, most notably, language or literary propaganda. Fanon mentions that for many years certain laboratories have been trying to produce a serum for "denegrification"; the process of "making it possible for the miserable Negro to whiten himself and thus to throw off the burden of that corporeal malediction (Fanon, 2008, p. 84). Fanon's rage is aimed not towards the "black man" but the hypothesis that he is required not only to be black but he must be black *in relation to* the white man. It



is the internalization, or rather as Fanon calls it "epidermalization" (Fanon, 2008, p. 4) of this inferiority that agitates him. Sardar describes the process as this:

When the black man comes into contact with the white world he goes through an experience of sensitization. His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behavior is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man. (in Fanon, 2008, p. xiii)

It is this dynamic of inferiority that concerns Fanon; and which ultimately he wishes to abolish. "So the purpose of our study becomes more precise: to enable the man of color to understand, through specific examples, the psychological elements that can alienate his fellow Negroes" (Fanon, 2008, p. 58).

#### The Intricacies of Xuela's Gender and Sexuality Development

Pain is felt in multiple ways and lived by women dealing with colonial ideologies of gender/sex. Girls and boys have very little contact with each other in school under British colonial rule so there is very little opportunity for Xuela to explore or develop friendships with the opposite sex during her coming of age years. So her knowledge or lack of knowledge about how to develop friendships is left completely to the decision of the family female caretaker, who conforms totally to restrictions imposed by British patriarchal rule under colonialism.

Generally speaking, women in Jamaica Kincaid's novels are certainly taught to regard their sexuality as dangerous, dirty and threatening. Later in this novel we find that Xuela's gender and sexuality roles are acutely complicated by her marriage to a European man named Philip, who she does not love at all and her sexual relations with a married man named Roland, a stevedore whom she loves, but whose wife detests her. The

complications that she confronts are depicted in this passage: "And Roland's wife called me ... a pig, a snake, a viper, a rat, a lowlife, a parasite, and an evil woman (Kincaid, 2012, p. 61)".

The first complexity Xuela confronts is the fact that she is married to Philip and she does not love him. She marries Philip only because it brings her social status, wealth, privilege and cultural comforts, and since she is certain that she will not find someone she loves with a prestigious background and social status similar to her lower social and economic status. In contrast, she finds comfort and delight in an intimate relationship with Roland because of the resemblances in their social status, despite the fact that he is married. This is part of the second segment of the complication, which includes the fact that Roland wants to have a child with Xuela but she refuses.

Xuela's acceptance of and satisfaction with her problematic affair with Roland, and the fact that she has apparently followed Madame LaBatte's model in marrying for economic security instead of true love leaves Xuela with a complicated and disturbing understanding of her gender and sexuality roles. Like Madam LaBatte, Xuela's desire to be without economic worries puts her into a situation where she will become victimized by the differences in gender and sexual equality. She is a victim of both sexual and capitalist oppression, which are among the dangerous consequences of colonial ideologies for African Caribbean women. Thus the destructive effects of colonialism and their outcome on both the colonizer and the colonized have been scrutinized thoroughly.

#### *Results of the Study*

Despite Xuela's enduring rebellion and resistance to the negative impact of British patriarchy and colonial rule, she suffers a lot.

Her social behavior and general development as a young woman are affected by it. The restrictions this impact imposes on women either directly or indirectly also affect Xuela's gender and sexuality development in negative ways early in her life. Since the system of patriarchy is so entrenched with the remnants of British colonial rule and its impact has lasted so long on Anglophone African Caribbean women they are not optimistic it will end anytime soon, even under African Caribbean rule.

If one is familiar with the literature of decolonization, it will be almost out of question to read *The AMM* and not feel the presence of Fanon's oeuvre as an implication to Xuela's story. One knows that Fanon strove to depict the destructive ways in which colonialism affected both the colonizer and the colonized. Fanon argued that colonialism had brought together two opposing social orders that were doomed to coexist in everlasting tension; the colonizer's and the colonized's. Fanon believes that these tensions cause the moral and spiritual deformity of an ideological system based on racism, oppression, and exploitation.

Fanon's focus was on the division of the colonial world into native and settler. According to him, the settler's view of the native as racially and culturally inferior has damaging effects on the native. As a solution to this crisis Fanon proposes the use of rebellion and violence to put an end to colonization. He believes that violence can reconstruct human relations to make a new society with the birth of a "new man" (Fanon, 2008, p. 10) who struggles hard for liberation.

Reviewing the social, political, and psychological data analyzed, the authors of the article came up to a new idea that in contrast to Fanon, Jamaica Kincaid regards resistance and liberation in a quite different perspective, or as Paravisini states "Xuela's

narrative establishes a dialogue with Fanon" (1999, p. 162). As a substitute to Fanon's method of transcending the opposition between colonizer and colonized, Xuela chooses and prefers self-love. The similarity between Fanon and Xuela is that they both mention the division between oppressor and victim and they both resent the bridge of mimicry that links the two together but their great difference is their method of resistance. As an example one can consider Xuela's parents. Xuela's mother was a Carib, the aboriginal presence from whom the colonial subject has been wrenched; Xuela's father, the "mimic," was the native who had totally lost his own *self* in a tragic imitation of the oppressor, and had adopted a series of "white masks" through which he himself becomes a cruel oppressor.

Instead of attempting to build a "new woman", Xuela refuses to accept the colonizer's views of those like her that lead to self-destruction and self-hatred. Instead, in order to survive, she confidently chooses self-love, albeit an almost grotesque and obsessive one. She herself acknowledges that it is not the best type of love; however it is better than mimicry and *self*-hatred. She even marries a white man but only to achieve social and financial status, and of course it is not a marriage of love. Despite the fact that Xuela experiences loss, resentment and contempt throughout her life, she still manages to survive. She states:

I am of the vanquished, I am of the defeated. The past is a fixed point, the future is open-ended; for me the future must remain capable of casting a light on the past such that in my defeat lies the seed of my great victory, in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge...My good is to serve myself. (Kincaid, 2012, p. 78)

Another difference between Xuela's story and Fanon's theories is Xuela's rejection of political action as a way to liberation. Fanon's theories are adjusted in accordance with the



development of psychological defenses with which to resist the negative effects of colonization. The key question in his writings is how to abolish the colonial conditions that brought subjugation and suffering to the colonized.

Xuela, on the other hand, is not interested in political activity; she even rejects the very idea of identification with a nation in such respect. In a very significant part of *The AMM* Xuela asks this question: "What makes the world turn?" (Kincaid, 2012, p. 48) She does not care to find an answer to such a question. She believes that this question is reserved for those who do not look like her at all—men, British colonizers, those who mimic their ways, and those who are privileged in the hierarchy of things.

Instead, what Xuela longs to be part of is "some force of the universe that is outside history" (Paravisini-Gebert, 1999, p. 163). Thus, the choice Xuela makes for facing colonization is survival. Xuela remains to the end obsessed by the past, reluctant and unable to rely on a future of supremacy through violent revolution. Instead, she provokes the question of whether the societies of the Caribbean, like Xuela, are damaged beyond repair.

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