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The Tension in Mother-Daughter Relationship in Jamaica Kincaid’s Works

Master’s Diploma Thesis
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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** 7

2. **Jamaica Kincaid** 12
   - 2.1. Her Early Life in Antigua 12
   - 2.2. A New Life in a New Country 14
   - 2.3. Reinventing Herself in Exile 14
   - 2.4. Literary Work and Writing Style 15
   - 2.5. Themes in Her Work 18

3. **The Historical Cultural and Social Context** 20
   - 3.1. Colonial Education 20
   - 3.2. Woman/Mother’s role in the Caribbean Society 23

4. **Annie John**: My Mother, My Self, My Enemy 29

5. **Lucy**: A Stranger in a New Land 40

6. **The Autobiography of My Mother**: Reflecting her Own Mother’s life 48

7. **My Brother**: Being A Stranger In Your Own Home, To Your Own Family 60

8. **Conclusion** 70

9. **Bibliography** 72

10. **Summary** 76

11. **Shrnutí** 77
1 Introduction

A mother daughter relationship can be regarded as the most powerful and influential relationship in a woman's life. However, this relationship contains tension, conflicts and misunderstanding; mother and daughter may oppress each other, may silence each other, and may contend with each other. This is clearly visible in Jamaica Kincaid’s works, where the mother-daughter relationship is fundamental to the main females’ character development; their view of the world, and their life style but at the same time the relationship turns out to be heated and detrimental.

The tension in mother-daughter relationship is found at the core of Kincaid's writing. Aspects of these forms of representation are shaped by memories that Kincaid carries within her from her days as an Antiguan girl growing up under her abusive 1 mother which subsequently converge with the narration of the female characters she articulates in her works:

I write about my mother and her influence on her children and on me all the time. She's dead now and I found that even that was a source of inspiration or something.(BBC) 2

Jamaica Kincaid’s works indicate strong autobiographical content, her work has been described by Justin D. Edwards as “a cycle of autobiographical and putatively fictional writing that explore her complicated relations with her family in an attempt to work through the problematics of a personal, literary and historical identity“ (Edwards

1 Kincaid says:“ my mother didn't like me. When I became a woman, I seemed to repel her. I had to learn to fend for myself. I found a way to rescue myself.“(Snell)

2 http://www.bbc.co.uk
In an interview with Garner she admitted that all what she writes is a further development of something. That is to say all protagonists’ lives are interwoven but with differences, producing women's lives as a tune created of chord of different notes.

Writing about the mother daughter relationship enables Kincaid to define her values and her character. She uses her narrators and dramatic personae to vent her feelings on her mother and colonial rulers, as Kincaid highlights in the following quotation extracted from an interview with Ferguson:

My writing has been very autobiographical. The events are true to me. They may not be true to other people. I think it is fair for my mother to say, 'This is not me.' It is only the mother in the books I've written. It is only the mother as the person I used to be perceived her.... For me it was really an act of saving my life, so it had to be autobiographical. (Ferguson 4)

In The Voice of the Mother, Jo Malin argues that every woman autobiographer is a daughter who writes and establishes her identity through her autobiographical narrative. Similarly, Susan Koppelman claims that often, a woman writer's first published story is about the relationship between a mother and a daughter. Nor do women writers abandon this subject as they grow in their craft and their lives.

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3 Kincaid related to Dwight Garner of Salon, "I am not troubled … to be seen to be of one whole cloth—that all that I write is a further development of something. Perhaps it is musical in that way. My work is a chord that develops in many different ways. I couldn't help but write these books." (Garner)

4 Kincaid emphasizes the autobiographical and psychological origins of her writing. “[F]or me, writing is like going to a psychiatrist. I just discover things about myself,” (Perry 498).
Literary production is a means of survival for Kincaid. She writes to survive and to understand how, Kincaids says, “I got to be the person I am“.(Vorda). When commenting on the ongoing construction of Kincaid's autobiographical identity and her relation to her mother, scholars such as J. Brook Bouson has aptly articulated how writing to Kincaid has become an action of self-rescue from traumatic memories..

In giving an account of her experiences to the readers, Kincaid is making sense of herself. Authors Cahill and Halpern argue: “we live in a time when great numbers of people are beginning to tell their truths. Some of the these truths are hard to hear, some involve temble childhood abuse and betrayal, yet they must be told and heard“ (Cahill and Halpern 75).

This thesis examines the tension in mother-daughter realtionship in Jamaica Kincaid’s works and shows how the struggle for personal development not only of her protagonists but of the writer herself lead them to find a personal identity and a voice to express themselves to their mothers and the society that do not understand them.

In this thesis I argue that Annie John, Lucy and Xuela are representatives through whom Kincaid works out her own strained relationship with her mother. The protagonists’ joys, pains and despair echo Kincaid's. Understanding the tension in mother-daughter relationship in her works, depends on understanding the way Kincaid's upbringing and emotional life are embodied in the text.

I will examine four major works: Annie John (1985), Lucy (1990), The Autobiography of My Mother (1996) and My Brother (1997), one by one, following their chronological order so as to bring to light the causes and outcomes of the tension in mother-daughter realtionship that take place in Kincaid’s works.
In my next two chapters, I will provide a biography of Jamaica Kincaid and a depiction of the socio-historical context that surrounds Kincaid’s life, which emerges in most of her works. I believe this is essential in order to understand her motivation for writing as well as the topics and forms employed in her narratives. Also it is crucial to have an understanding of Caribbean values concerning family life. The mother-daughter relationship can be better understood with the knowledge of traditional values and role expectations that are included in the Anglophone Caribbean family system.

In the following part of this thesis, I will explore Kincaid’s works in their own chapters. In the third, *Annie John: My Mother, My Self, My Enemy*, I describe the novel’s portrayal of the protagonist childhood emotional experiences and the conflicts she face with her mother while growing up in Antigua.

The fifth chapter *Lucy: A Stranger in a New Land* turns to Kincaid’s second novel and portrays the protagonist who emigrates to America in order to escape the dominance of her suffocating mother, but even in exile she cannot free herself from the haunting memory of her mother.

I explore Kincaid’s third novel in a chapter called *The Autobiography of My Mother: Reflecting Her Own Mother’s Life*, the motherless protagonist, Xuela finds herself living a solitary life without love or protection. I will show that even if Xuela’s mother is dead, her very absence assumes significance in the narrator’s life.

The seventh chapter, *My Brother: Being A Stranger In Your Own Home, To Your Own Family* centers on Kincaid’s nonfictional work which primarily deals with the relationship of the author and her biological family. The conclusion evaluates and
compares the tension in mother-daughter relationship between the protagonists and their mothers and highlights the consequences of this strained relationship.
2 Jamaica Kincaid

Jamaica Kincaid's biography becomes crucial in the understanding of the mother-daughter relationship in her novels. Also, we can find parallels that show the connection between the author's life and her works.

2.1 Her Early Life in Antigua

A novelist, short-story writer, gardener, and author of numerous reviews and critical essays, Jamaica Kincaid has become one of Caribbean's major women writers in recent decades. Born on Antigua, a small island in the West Indies, in 1949, Kincaid spent her childhood and adolescence on the island during the British colonial rule. This might account for the deep dislike for colonialism which pervades Kincaid's work.

Jamaica Kincaid was originally named Elaine Potter Richardson. She was the first of four children and enjoyed the sole attention of her mother until she was nine. Kincaid's mother, Annie Richardson Drew, was originally from Dominica. She was the daughter of a Carib woman and a half-Scots, half-African policeman. With the arrival of her brothers, Kincaid's relationship with her mother changed dramatically. She expressed her feelings publicly about the issue:

I don't know if having other children was the cause for our relationship changing—it might have changed as I entered adolescence, but her attention went elsewhere. And also our family money remained the same but there were more people to feed and to clothe and so everything got sort of shortened not only material things but emotional things, the good emotional things I got a short end of that. But then I got more of things I didn't have, like a certain kind of cruelty and neglect. (BBC)
Growing up in colonial Antigua, Kincaid developed into a voracious reader who enjoyed everything from Shakespeare to Charlotte Brontë. Her mother told her stories enriched with personal "gossips" which she transferred to her writings later on "My mother used to tell me a lot of things about herself. It’s perhaps one of the ways in which I became a writer" (Bonetti)

Kincaid’s educational world came crashing down as well when her stepfather, who was the only father Kincaid knew, became ill. At the young age of thirteen, Kincaid's mother pulled her out of school to help take care of the family. As a girl from a poor family there were few options available for Kincaid. She wanted to attend university in Antigua and remain there after becoming a teacher, but she was denied access to education.

My family, my mother and step-father planned distinctive lives. My brothers were going to be gentlemen of achievement, one was going to be Prime Minister, one a doctor, one a Minister, things like that. I never heard anybody say that I was going to be anything except maybe a nurse. There was no huge future for me, nothing planned. In fact my education was so casually interrupted, my life might very well have been destroyed by that casual act, that might have been what removing me from school might have been like if I hadn't intervened in my own life and pulled myself out of the water. (BBC)

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5 Kincaid adds: "I did not have any African type of storytelling traditions. I had gossip, essentially. I had my mother telling me about her life, and about my life before I knew myself, and about her mother, and her father, and her sisters". (Bouson).

6 "I am from a poor family, and most of the girls who went off to university were from privileged families. Only boys could go off to university if they were from my background. If I had been a boy, there’s no question that I would have been singled out". (Bonetti)
2.2 A New Life in a New Country

Soon after her seventeenth birthday, Kincaid was sent by her parents to New York to work as an au pair (although "servant" is the word she prefers) in order to support her family in Antigua. While working in New York, Kincaid continued her education at a community college, earned a high school equivalency diploma, and began taking photography courses at the New School for Social Research. She later studied photography at Franconia College in New Hampshire on a scholarship, though she never earned a degree.

Feeling depressed and all alone in the world, she refused to respond to her mother's letters or send money home. It was in this state of self-exile that Kincaid would shape her new life away from the unhappiness she had felt in Antigua. Kincaid cut off from her family until her return to Antigua nineteen years later.

2.3 Reinventing Herself in Exile

Elaine Potter Richardson reinvented herself in New York. She cut her hair short and dyed it blond, wore odd clothes and vivid red lipstick, shaved her eyebrows and changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid. (Taylor)

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7 "I came here to be an au pair in New York — although servant is the word I prefer. I came to work as a servant, in somebody’s house, as one of those many ladies you see with little blonde children." (Garner)

8 “I was in despair that my mother could have sent me out into the world all alone. I thought: How could she do that? How can I survive? I had no family, no friend.” (Graner)

9 "The crucial thing was that I would not communicate with my family. Somehow I knew that was the key to anything I wanted to make of myself. I could not be with people who knew me so well that they knew just what I was capable of". (Bonetti)
In an interview Kincaid told Cudjoe that she changed her name because she "had always hated [it] 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." As to the name 'Jamaica', the author admitted: "It wasn't really anything meaningful. 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...[Kincaid] just seemed to go with it." After this she began to write.

Through a series of lucky chances, she befriended George W.S. Trow, a writer for The New Yorker, who began writing “Talk of the Town” pieces about her. As a result, Kincaid met the editor of the magazine, William Shawn, and eventually becoming a staff writer for The New Yorker. Kincaid met the editor of the magazine’s son, Allen Shawn whom she married and converted to his faith, Judaism. The marriage ended in a divorce in 2002 producing two children, Annie and Harold.

2.4 Literary Work and Writing Style

[In another interview with Taylor she says: “I didn’t want my parents to know I was writing. I didn’t know if I would succeed at it, but I wanted to be a writer. In fact, I thought I would fail at it, and if I failed under another name they wouldn’t laugh at me. [...] I picked a name that was a combination of an island name and a very English name. Havana was one choice and Dominico was another, but I liked the combination of Jamaica Kincaid (Taylor)

11 Jamaica Kincaid is surprised that many people still wonder at the fact that she converted to Judaism. It seems natural to her to be Jewish – and even to have served as president of her synagogue in Vermont. (Taylor)
From her early short stories and novels, Kincaid’s career rapidly evolved towards international recognition in the last three decades. Her work has become the subject of numerous academic publications and she has won several outstanding awards.

Her first collection of stories, *At the Bottom of the River* was published in 1983. Her breakthrough collection earned Kincaid the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and it was also nominated for a PEN/Faulkner Award. Another well admired and criticised work by Kincaid is *A Small Place* (1989) this work is about the exploitation of the Caribbean islands by colonialism and the neocolonialist abuses of the tourism industry. Kincaid’s first novel novel, *Annie John* (1985) was selected as one of three finalists for the 1985 international Ritz Paris Hemingway Award. The first of her books set completely outside the Caribbean, *Lucy* (1990), like most of Kincaid’s writing, has a strong autobiographical basis. Her 1996 book, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, won The Lannan Literary Award. The memoir, *My Brother* (1997) which chronicles her brother's battle with AIDS, won the Prix Femina Etranger and gained a nomination for a National Book Award for nonfiction. In 2002 Kincaid returned to writing about her family in the novel *Mr. Potter* (2002), a fictionalized account of her father's life. After a decade without any new fiction work, Kincaid is back with a new book, *See Now Then* (2013), a novel about a marriage that is poisoned by both love and hate.

Having taught at various educational institutes including Harvard University, Jamaica Kincaid is a living expert literary figure of the United States. Now 64,

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12 In an interview with Julia Schen, Kincaid says: “I’m an American and an African-American. I’m an American.” (Schen)
Kincaid moved to California from Vermont in 2009 to teach creative writing and literature at Claremont McKenna College.

Her writing style has been described for Tahree Lane as having dreamlike repetition, emotional truth, and autobiographical underpinnings. “Thoughts, meandering somewhere between conversation and stream of consciousness, pile poetically onto each other, stitched with conjunctions, prepositions, punctuation. Sentences often number in the hundreds of words." (Lane)

Almost all her short stories and novels are first person narrative. She doesn’t use much dialogue (“I’m not able to do it”), and the narrative voice hardly changes (“that has its limitations, no doubt”). Her books are short (“I wish I could write longer, but I can’t”) which is just as well, since hers are not the sort of books you skim (Taylor)

Kincaid is regarded as an author who situates herself at the crossroad between various traditions: the feminist, the postmodern, and the postcolonial. Kincaid refuses to be classified as a member of a particular tradition

I don’t really see myself in any school. I mean, there has turned out to be rise in West Indian literature, but I wouldn’t know how to fit in it, I am very glad that there is such a thing, but on the other hand, belonging to a group of anything, an “army” of anything, is deeply disturbing to me. (Cudjoe)

This refusal might well be attributed to the fact that she actually draws elements from each of them. Indeed, whereas early works such as Annie John, and most of her short stories collections, display colonial overtones, in Lucy and The Autobiography of My Mother, Kincaid’s Portrayal of sex as a tool of independence for women, adds the feminist aspect of her writing. Diane Simmons has offered postmodern readings of
Kincaid, focusing on her protagonists’ inner contradictions. Also scholars such as Moira Ferguson and Justin Edwards have devoted their attention to the postcolonial implications of Kincaid’s writings: preoccupied by the situation of cultural and political domination and resistance in colonial and postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean. Kincaid often thematically associates these themes.

For Derek Walcott, famous Caribbean writer, Kincaid’s writing is universal: "As she writes a sentence, the temperature of it psychologically is that it heads toward it own contradiction. It's as if the sentence is discovering itself, discovering how it feels. And that is astonishing, because it's one thing to be able to write a good declarative sentence; it's another thing to catch the temperature of the narrator, the narrator's feeling. And that's universal, and not provincial in any way" (Garis).

2.6 Themes in her Works

As an Anglophone Caribbean female writer, Kincaid addresses the question of the female condition under the British Empire. Other postcolonial themes often mentioned in relation to Kincaid’s work comprise exile, search for identity, and alienation. Her production strikes the reader with a balanced mixture of anger and loss. According to Simmons Jamaica Kincaid's work "is not about the charm of a Caribbean childhood, nor is it about colonialism. Nor, finally, is it about black and white in America. At heart, her work is about loss" (466). She tackles difficult themes, such as colonialism, often present in her protagonists’ childhood memories, or the powerful-powerless relationship between mother and daughter.

Kincaid’s great variety of issues draws so many readers to her writings Henry Louis Gates Jr., a distinguished critic and black studies scholar said: “She deals with
issues of colonialism, racism, gender — she also deals with problems of identity and psychological development," he added. “I think that is why she gets a lot of attention — she deals with these issues and she deals with them very well.”(Garis 81)

Kincaid has also faced heavy criticism for her writing style. Jane King in her essay “A Small Place Writes Back.” claims:

Kincaid refuses to allow us to pin her down. She is an autobiographical writer who calls many of her books fiction…An Antiguan who lives in the US but claims to remain Antiguan while vilifying Antigua and sympathizing with the US’s values. A person who reviles her mother in book after book but claims to think that her mother is “a great person.” Whose emotions are all her own personal ones but finds that her descriptions of them happen to be useful to feminists, and to postcolonial theorists. And, above all, it is all postmodern. This shape-shifting, protean, slippery unwillingness to be pinned down—a consequence, I suggest of the very relaxed writing style of a very talented writer—is easily embraced by this recent tradition which enjoys refusing to search for definitions of such categories even as “woman.” (King 905)

In a interview with Felicia Lee for The New York Times, Kincaid responded: “I’m so used to being misunderstood,” she said. “They say, ‘She’s angry.’ ‘Her sentences are too long.’ One reviewer accused me of not dealing with race and class. I think in my next novel I should say, ‘They’re black and they’ve been beaten,’ something like that.”(Lee)
3. The Historical Cultural and Social Context

The island of Antigua\textsuperscript{13} is a small territory of 280 square kilometers, with a population of 80,161 inhabitants, most of whom are of African descent. In 1632, England colonized Antigua. After overcoming significant resistance from the native Caribbeans, the English settlers soon began to grow cash crops such as tobacco, indigo, and sugar. The success of the sugar plantation brought an influx of cheap slave labor. Antiguan ancestors were transported to the island mainly during the slave-trade days to work on sugar cane plantations. After the abolition of slavery in 1834, Antigua remained under British rule, and life under colonial rule was similar to that of many of Britain's West Indian colonies. Antigua became a self-governing territory in 1967 and gained its political independence from the British Empire in 1981.

3.1 Colonial Education

The British education system, for instance, was a major disseminator of British cultural values and ideals\textsuperscript{14} in the Anglophone Caribbean. Colonial education in Antigua was therefore not transmitting the values and knowledge of Caribbean society from one generation to the next; it was a deliberate attempt to change those values and to replace traditional knowledge by the knowledge from a different society. On this, Kincaid comments: "I really knew not much about the Caribbean and the place I grew up in so much as I knew about England" (Gottlieb). This antagonism between the official traditions and the native elements; and the subordination of their people which

\textsuperscript{13} This is the main island of the country of Antigua and Barbuda

\textsuperscript{14} Jamaica Kincaid's early literary influences under this system were mostly British. These influences included, for instance, Milton, Dickens, Shakespeare, and the Bronte sisters, as well as the Bible.
put this system to work made Kincaid resent and rebel against the colonial system. She used to refused only to stand at the refrain “God Save Our King,” and also hated “Rule, Britannia“ with its refrains, “Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves, Britons never ever shall be slaves. “I thought that we weren’t Britons and that we were slaves“ (Cudjoe)

Young Kincaid suffered from the imposition of alien culture and education. The British curriculum, which was forced on her, created the inevitable cultural dualism.

I was brought up to understand that English traditions were right and mine were wrong. Within the life of an English person, there is always charity, within an English culture there was always clarity, but within my life and culture was ambiguity. A person who is dead in England is dead. A person where I come from who is dead might not be dead"(Bonetti)

She also admits that she is someone with something ,which Franz Fanon called the double consciousness.15 The school as an entity contributed to an increased level of double consciousness, as it imposed the white ideals of education upon West Indies students by using a format of school common to Britain.

15 In an interview with Maya Sela Kincaid claims: "My relationship to it is not an easy one, but it's what I got. What I got was English. My consciousness is influenced by Shakespeare, Milton, the Brontes - you name it. Franz Fanon writes about this thing called the double consciousness. Yes, I'm someone with it, and now I have a triple consciousness. But actually it turns out that that's a truly modern existence - you have more than one consciousness. It started out [as something that] was imposed, the colonialism and so on, but the more [people] meet each other, the more conscious we are of each other.(Sela)
In A Small Place Kincaid notes, “So that was England to us – Queen Victoria and the glorious day of her coming into the world, a beautiful place, a blessed place, a living and blessed thing, not the ugly, piggish individuals we met” (Small Place31).

Although Jamaica Kincaid was a gifted student, she was considered a bright troublemaker. "I was sullen," she recalled for Garis in an interview. "I was always being accused of being rude, because I gave some back chat. I moved very slowly. I was never where I should be. I wasn't really angry yet. I was just incredibly unhappy." (Garis). The colonial school system demanded punishment for transgression of rules, attempting to force children into conforming with the empire way of thinking. Kincaid was forced to learn by heart long passages of canonical English literature. When enforcement failed, the school system took on an aggressive stance of control and punished her. She had to copy books one and two of Milton’s Paradise Lost when she was seven as a punishment.(Gottlieb). There was no room for disobedience in that colonial educational system, and the rebellious girl, Kincaid, had to be punished since she could not conform. In her essay, The Daffodil Gap, Irline François comments: “Indeed, an implicit aspect of the official education system was devoted to remolding West Indian black girls into “ladies” elevated to middle-class society“(François 92)

Annie John, Lucy and Xuela have the same experience as Kincaid. Annie serves as a constant troublemaker for her fellow classmates and it is punished by her teachers, yet she is a brilliant student, exactly as Kincaid had been. After Annie defaces one of her schoolbooks by writing beneath the picture of Christopher Columbus in chains “The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go,”(78) Annie receives her teacher's livid scolding; Annie had “gone too far this time, defaming one of the great men in history, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was my home” (82).
To Lucy, the sight of daffodils brings her back a memory of a poem by William Wordsworth. Lucy reflects on her days as a student at Queen Victoria Girls’ School:

I had been made to memorize it [a poem], verse after verse, and then had recited the whole poem to an auditorium full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils. I was 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 by modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. (Lucy18)

The poem is a reminder of the colonial oppression experienced as a child.

3.2 Woman-Mother Role in Caribbean Society

An examination of the social and historical background of gender relations in the Caribbean is crucial in understanding Kincaid’s protagonists’ “psychic landscape” regarding issues of male–female relations and female sexuality. (François 92)

The Caribbean woman is brought up to be passive, to avoid conflict with societal norms and to carry on despite abandonment by men. Her main task is to take care of the children and be the primary nurturer in the household. They are also the primary caretakers of the home. Kids are required to show obedience, respect, and servility to their parents. Female children are expected to help her mother with the housekeeping […] (Evans and Davies 1996). The mother wants her daughter to grow up conforming to the traditional roles of women within the Caribbean culture: “this is how you sweep a whole house… this is how you set a table for tea… this is how you behave in the presence of men” (The River 3). Women’s roles of being household assistant start
from an early age. When they are young girls many times are forced to put their own education and aspirations for the future on the back burner to accommodate the present needs of their mother and siblings. "The first-born are frequently sacrificed," Kincaid has said in one of her many interviews. (Nnamdi)

Kincaid depicts this situation in the first story of At the Bottom of the River, "Girl" in which the mother tries to show her daughter, there are limitations of being a woman. That being a girl is much different than being a boy. The story tells of a mother giving her daughter advice on how to be a lady, how to cook and clean, get and keep a man. She tells her daughter everything she needs to do to succeed as a woman without becoming a slut. In this short story, Kincaid recalls from her mother the many lists of chores and warnings a girl should and should not do as a woman and what would be expected of her. Interestingly, as the maternal voice alternates between warning and directive, she makes it clear that the proper navigation of black female gender dynamics are all about corporeal control: a good woman either knows how to mend the hem on a skirt and walk like a lady in public, or she looks like a whore and is relegated to the status of a nonentity by everyone, even the local baker. Thus, through a very nuanced narrative of matrilineal inscription, the mother reproduces the violence of extrinsic inscription even though her struggle for corporeal control is attempted out of a desire to teach her daughter how to survive in her local community. Even worse, because this violence happens within the supposedly-safe spaces of the mother-daughter relationship, it is even more traumatic for the daughters caught within the struggle for independence.(Mardberg 8)

In traditional Caribbean society, not only is there a marked gender bias in favor of the man in matters like education, housework, expected behavior and sexuality but
even in a more abstract concept like love, too, we see that parents tend to be partial towards the male child. (Roopnarine 22) This gender bigotry can have one of two outcomes for the daughter: She may imbue her mother’s values and attitudes and resign herself as a housewife, or, if she is the more questioning type, may retaliate against such discrimination and escape from home just like Annie, Lucy, Xuela and Kincaid herself did it.

In *Mr. Potter*, Kincaid portrays this situation when the narrator ponders about her biological father:

He feels no love for his many daughters – beginning with Marigold, daughter of Yvette, and continuing with Charlotte, Emily, Heather, Irish, Jane, Lily, Reseda, Rose, and Elaine. They pose a constant financial burden that he chooses to ignore,” However, “Potter loved his son, and the father of his son was someone who administered to the dead and Mr. Potter loved his son best of all his children and all his real children were girls and he was the father of all these many girls but he did not love them, he only loved his son whose real father was a fashionable and well-regarded undertaker (Mr. Potter 147, 156).

Similarly, in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela’s stepmother gives preference to her son, the girl is neglected and the boy is given all his mother love and affection. Xuela’s stepmother also disapproves her education. Kincaid conveys her stepmother’s attitudes towards women furthering their education: “No one told me what I should do with myself after I was finished with school. It was a great sacrifice that I should go to school, because as his wife often pointed out, I would have been more useful at home” (Autobiography 40).
The same happens with all Jack La Batte’s illegitimate daughters; they cannot have his father’s last name just because of their female condition: “He would not marry any woman. They would bear him children, and if the children were boys, these boys were given his full name, but he never married the mothers” (Autobiography 65). In Lucy, feeling neglected by her mother, is one of the reasons why the girl decides to leave home.

Olive Senior argues that Caribbean man perceives women as existing for his sexual pleasure. The tendency to be simultaneously involved with more than one partner is perceived as natural to a man, but not to a woman. For their sexual performance men are complimented as ”hard seeds”, while women become ”whores” and are “dragged to the gutter”(Senior 58). The mother has also been taught to believe that a woman’s body belongs to the respectable male who, one day, will marry her daughter and insure her class and social standing. “She is thus convinced that it is her responsibility to keep her daughter sexually untouched so she can better her chances on the marriage market” (de Abruna 281).

Women see marriage as the ultimate goal of their life since, in part; it provides the privileges of social mobility, status, and financial security.(François 94). Lucy and Xuela consider marriage as an arrangement in which there is an exchange of service between two parties: “When my mother married my father, he was an old man and she a young woman. This suited them both. She had someone who would leave her alone yet not cause her to lose face in front of other women; he had someone who would take care of him in his dotage” (Lucy 81). Referring to LaBatte’s marriage Xuela asks, “[t]o want desperately to marry men, I have come to see, is not a mistake women make, it is
only, well, what else is left for them to do? I was never told why she (Madam LaBatte) wanted to marry him (Monsieur LaBatte)” (64).

For most African Caribbean men there are three essential components to manhood: rampant heterosexual activity, provisioning for the family economically, and being the head of the family. Early and frequent heterosexual activity with several partners serially or concurrently in several relationships is seen as a strong reflection of manhood and a sign of maturity. The number of offspring that result from the sexual relationships, both within and external to the union or family is tangible proof of the man’s virility (Roopnarine 74). Kincaid agrees with that statement, men in the Caribbean “have children, but they never seem to connect themselves with these children” (Cudjoe). Thus, their emotional availability and their social ties to children are unclear.

According to Helen Pyne Timothy, the Caribbean mother who is bent on seeing her daughter rise from the lower classes to the middle ranks must not only teach her useful housekeeping tasks, cleanliness, good manners, and practical knowledge of her environment but also European norms and the need to desist in the practice of African ones…Thus, in the mother’s perception, Christianity, Sunday school, good manners (the ability to curtsy) and piano lessons are all essential to her daughter’s acceptability and respectability. (Pyne-Timothy 240). François agrees with this statement and also points out that in Kincaid’s novel the mothers figure internalized those aspirations and strove to inculcate those values attributed to the Cult of True Womanhood, for they held the

16 A study conducted with students from the University of the West Indies suggested that Caribbean men have poor emotional relationships with their children. As a result, young boys may view family patterns such as matriarchal households, male absenteeism, and extramarital relationships as norms and continue them as adults (Roopnarine).
belief that it was the only acceptable way for their daughters to secure social mobility.

(François 92)

Even though the households where Annie, Lucy and Xuela and Jamaica Kincaid spend their childhood and adolescence are not single-parent households, it is evident that the mother is the dominant parent and the father is mostly absent. All the protagonists including Kincaid, become alienated from the mother and stepmothers in Xuela’s case, and eventually leave home at a relatively young age. This along with the negative impact of restrictions and British colonial rule, which are reinforced by the mothers and stepmothers, “have a negative impact on Kincaid’s protagonists development as women, especially their gender and sexuality roles. These are the situations and circumstances of British colonial rule in the West Indies, which contributes to the bitterness, distrust, and frustration of the protagonists in Kincaid’s novels“ (Stennis 150).
4. Annie John: My Mother, My Self, My Enemy

In this chapter I begin with my discussion of Kincaid’s first novel, Annie John, examining the ways in which Annie’s mother ambitions for her daughter drives her to try to inscribe the young girl’s personal identity. In Annie, Mrs John sees a rebellious girl that she has to dominate, but one that is, in many ways, a mirror image of her former self. But when Mrs John tries to repress Annie’s individuation by destroying their own idyllic mother-daughter relationship and imposing colonial values, traditions, and customs Annie thwarts her mother’s attempts through acts of rebellion, which include: Lying, stealing money, behaving badly at school, playing marbles, and finally exile, which removes her from the mother’s sphere of influence altogether. But, in spite of all this, Annie also emerges as another version of her mother’s former self, possessing many of the same traits that have driven Mrs John’s immigration from Dominica to Antigua.

When Annie is a little girl, her mother is like a goddess. Anything she does — starting her baths, taking her shopping, telling her stories — seems like the best thing anyone could ever do.

My mother and I often took a bath together. Sometimes it was just a plain bath, which did not take very long. Other times it was a special bath in which the barks and flowers of many different trees, together with all sorts of oils, were boiled in the same large cauldron.(14)

Annie adores and idolizes her mother to the extent that she will do things to imitate her in every aspect. “I spent the day following my mother around and observing the way she did everything”(15) Edith Clarke in her study of family structures and
relationships points out that in the West Indian family “mother and children co-operate in the small daily duties in the home...They are continually together. There is constant companionship, and a constant interdependence. The girl child identifies herself with the mother” (Clarke 158).

Annie's admiration for her mother is captured as she remembers her favorite pastime, which involves looking through her mother's trunk:

as she [her mother] held each thing in her hand she would tell me a story about myself. Sometimes I knew the story first hand, for I could remember the incident quite well; sometimes what she told me had happened when I was too young to know anything and sometimes it happened before I was even born (21).

That wooden trunk contains Annie’s memories: handmade clothing and baby blankets, her christening outfit, baby bottles, photographs, birthday dresses, report cards, and certificates of merit from Sunday school. (Paravisini-Gebert 90)

Mrs. Johns has the respect and admiration of her daughter for her exceptional loving care of Annie and her beauty. Annie’s mom is known to be very skilled both at housework and storytelling. She is also accorded some respect for the Antiguan’s inhabitants because she does special favors for her neighbours, but she is nevertheless a common colonized Caribbean woman, and as such has the rules and expectations of the colonial society enforced upon her.

When Annie believes that the paradise she lives in (25) cannot fade, the onset of puberty takes front stage. As the summer of her twelfth year progresses, Annie begins to notice physical changes within her own body. As Annie’s body develops, her hair becomes more unruly, the smell of her body more unfamiliar, “as if I had turned into a
strange animal” (25), Mrs. John pushes her away from her image and forces the separation. Kincaid illustrates this separation when Mrs. John refuses to have a dress made from the same fabric as Annie. "I [Annie] immediately said how much I loved this piece of cloth, and how nice it would look on us both, but my mother replied, "Oh, no. You are getting too old for that. It's time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like little me" (27)

Mrs. John has not bothered to forewarn Annie of the more important aspects of the process of “becoming a young lady,”(26) Thus, the first sight of separation comes as a shock to the girl. "To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far."(27) Annie’s mother failing in her duty to say exactly what it was that made her daughter on the verge of becoming a young lady (26) and how this will alter their relationship, instills hope in Annie so she asks her mother to engage in the trunk ritual again and “a person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize, ‘Absolutely not! You and I don’t have time for that anymore’” (27).

The moment Annie hears her mother’s response, she realises that the relationship with her mother will never be the same again. Annie feels uncertain, betrayed and angry at the prospect of splitting up with her beloved mother. At this point Kincaid is presenting to the reader the genesis of the tension of mother-daughter relationship in Annie John.

Annie feels a certain betrayal because nobody has told her what would happen
On the morning of the first day I started to menstruate\textsuperscript{17}, I felt strange in a new way- hot and cold at the same time, with horrible pains running up and down my legs. My mother, knowing what was the matter, brushed aside my complaints and said that it was all to be expected and I would soon get used to everything. Seeing my gloomy face, she told me in a half-joking way all about her own experience with the first step in coming of age, as she called it, which had happened when she was as old as I was. I pretended that this information made us close- as close as in the old days- but to myself I said "What a serpent!"

Annie’s coming of age is a turning point in the plot as much as in the girl’s biological development, as well as in the relationship between mother and daughter. In Annie’s transition and struggles she feels as if the passion and love with her mother have diminished. Their relationship becomes strained, and uncomfortable as each become involved in battle within their home. “My mother and I each soon grew two faces: one for my father and the rest of the world, and one for us when we found ourselves alone with each other. Hence, Annie has to disguise the tension between her mother and herself infront of people and even her class\textsuperscript{18}. But no sooner were we alone, behind the fence, behind the closed door, than everything darkened” (87-88) This tension eventually leads to her permanent separation from her mother after she recovers from her illness.

\textsuperscript{17} Kincaid refers to same event in her life: “I went to take a bath and noticed this brown rust thing in my underwear and was terrified of it and I told my mother and, I think she thought it was the best way to act, she said 'oh yes that happens'. And I felt kind of betrayed and nobody had told me that would happen to me so young. I remember I had a lot of pain during it and fainted and had to be sent home.”(BBC)

\textsuperscript{18} I placed the old days’ version before my classmates because, I thought, I couldn’t bear to show my mother in a bad light before people who hardly knew her. But the real truth was that I couldn’t bear to have anyone see how deep in disfavor I was with my mother. (Annie John 45)
After coming back from Sunday school and witnessing her parents making love in bed, Annie begins to look at her mother differently. Her subsequent feelings of betrayal and neglect (30), is a result of the knowledge that her mother’s love is shared with her father. Annie sees in Mr. John a competitor for her mother’s affection (Collins 68).

Annie openly expresses her anger about seeing her mother engaged in the sexual scene with her father. We read her defiant words: "I was sure I could never let those hands touch me again; I was sure I could never let her kiss me again. All that was finished"(31-32) Parental sexuality bothers Annie; her entry into adolescence and the foreign feelings this generates transform the stirrers of these feelings into “alien parents.”(Ferguson 6)

Karen L. Fingerman has suggested that In this respect, “mother-daughter relationships appear to share the dyadic feature of marital relationships. Spousal tension also often revolves around the marital relationship itself. In fact, difficulties in such relationships may stem from the demands of maintaining a dyadic relationship” (Fingerman 593)

When Annie John begins a new school she befriends Gwen, a girl of her age whom satisfies Annie into a new and more exciting relationship.

At the end of the day, Gwen and I were in love, and so we walked home arm in arm together. When I got home, my mother greeted me with the customary kiss and inquiries. I told her about my day, going out of my way to provide pleasing details, leaving out, of course, any mention at all of Gwen and my overpowering feelings for her (p. 33).
Annie’s seeks intimacy with other girls, toward whom she turns passionate longings. Greg Thomas claims that “Gwen and other schoolgirls appear as objects of Annie John’s affection only when her mother distances herself from her newly maturing daughter, after deciding it is time to make a “young lady” out of her” (26–27). (Thomas)

The narrator has ceased to become the good girl portrayed at the beginning of the story - to all intents and purposes - and has changed beyond her mother’s recognition. She has begun to think for herself, to do more things for herself and tries hard to separate herself from the girl who wanted to be a little version of her own mother. She says:

We both noticed that now if she said that something I did reminded her of her own self at my age, I would try to do it in a different way, or, failing that, do it in a way that she could not stomach. She returned the blow by admiring and praising everything that she suspected had special meaning for me. (87)

Annie starts to disagree with her mothers' rules; she fights her values and resent her teaching remarks. Much of it may be feelings of anxiety. However Seanor argues that Annie’s behaviour seems beyond normal teenage angst (Seanor 14)

Instead of the days spent in perfect harmony with my mother, I trailing in her footsteps, she showering down on me her kisses and affection and attention, I was now sent off to learn one thing and another. I was sent to someone who knew all about manners and how to meet and greet important people in the world" (27-28).

The protagonist tells us with a touch of sarcasm that she could “not resist making farting-like noises each time [she] had to practice a curtsy . . . [or] seemed
unable to resist eating from the bowl of plums which . . .” the piano teacher, a shriveled up old spinster from Lancashire, England “. . . had placed on the piano purely for decoration” (28).

Niesen de Abruna suggests that “Annie constantly rebels against those aspects of her society that have been imposed by the British. Some of these norms have been absorbed by Annie's neighbours, her school and, especially and unfortunately, by her beautiful, loving, and well-intentioned mother.” (de Abruna 279)

This arguing and mockery creates a very heavy tension in the mother-daughter relationship, one that leads to Annie's exile at the end of the story. Annie and Mrs. John battle against each other for supremacy. Mrs. John trying to hold onto her role of an authoritarian mother, while Annie develops a dark side weaving a web of lies, deceit, theft19 and blatant disobedience which is very repulsive to her mother.

Perhaps it had stuck in my mind that once my mother said to me, "I am glad you are not one of the girls who like to play marbles, "and perhaps because I had to do exactly the opposite of whatever she desired of me, I now played and played at marbles in a way that I had never done anything (61).

Annie’s tomboy tendencies are the result of an inevitable attempt to create distance from her mother. Thus, we see Annie isolated from Mrs. John “her former beloved mother no longer provides a constant flow of advice, gives no positive

19 People who knew me when I was a child said I have always written. I remember always reading. I just loved books. It got me in a lot of trouble. I would steal them, because once I read a book, I couldn’t bare to part with it. So I would steal books from the library. (Jamaica Kincaid in an interview with Julia S Chen)
reinforcement, and switches from compliments to complaints“ (Berian 9) The narrator can find no real connection with her mother even less with her friend Gwen.

Feelin very lonely, Annie creates the ideal companion figure in her mind that can satisfy her emotional need to be loved and understood. Having the Red Girl as her alter ego, to some degree, is a response to Annie’s lonelines and rebellion. However, the Red Girl abandons Annie after her first menstruation comes. Annie “admires the Red Girl’s nonconformity and her apparent ability to act as she pleases; she constitutes an alter ego of sorts, certainly a projection of who Annie John would like to be if only to anger her mother“. (Ferguson 5). Annie damires this girl because:

She (took) a bath only once a week, and that was only so that she is permitted to her grandmother's presence. She didn't like to bathe, and her mother didn't force her. She changed her dress once a week for the very same reason...She didn't like to go to the Sunday school, and her mother didn't force her...A what an angel she was and what heaven she lived in(57-58).

As the story continues, the reader begins to gain a deeper understanding of how the Red Girl as a character in the novel functions as a symbol rather than a mere ordinary girl for the purpose of rebelling against the mother expectations of Annie.

At this point of the story it becomes clear that Annie does not fit her mother’s image of a true Antiguan girl: obedient, self-effacing, hard-working, and loyal; She is a marble-playing liar girl who neither looks nor behaves as a “little miss” should (Berrian, 7)

As if the physical changes Annie has to deal with were not enough, she is burdened with the negative aspects of womanhood, conveyed in crude language, where
her mother’s main concern is preventing her of becoming a “slut”. In this scene Mrs. John accuses Annie of making a “spectacle” of herself while talking to Minue, a childhood friend:

She went on to say that, after all the years she had spent drumming into me the proper way to conduct myself when speaking to young men, it had pained her to see me behave in the manner of a slut (only she used the French-patois word for it) in the street and that just to see me had caused her to feel shame. The word “slut” (in patois) was repeated over and over, until I suddenly felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the word “slut,” and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth.(102)

The violence of the mother’s verbal attack suggests the importance of understanding those limits for an acceptable woman within Antiguan society (Berrian 7)

Mrs. John does not give Annie a chance to explain the situation so she turned to her and said, "Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter" (102). Annie’s back talk to her mother in a moment of anger symbolizes her railing attempts at developing her individuality, but the results is a rift between mother and daughter.

All this in addition to the trick that Mrs. John plays on her by making her eat breadfruit, something Annie detests, by making it look like rice contribute to damage the mother- daughter relationship:

My mother brought me my lunch. I took one smell of it, and I could tell that it was the much hated breadfruit. My mother said not at all, it was a new kind of rice imported from Belgium, and not breadfruit, mashed and forced through a
ricer, as I thought…I ate my meal. The more I ate of it, the more I was sure that it was breadfruit. When I finished, my mother got up to remove my plate…My mother said, “You just ate some breadfruit. I made it look like rice so that you would eat it. It’s very good for you, filled with lots of vitamins”…When she laughed, her mouth opened to show off big, shiny, sharp white teeth. It was as if my mother had suddenly turned into a crocodile. (84)

Annie’s eating the breadfruit that she hates represents violence to the body and the core of her feelings. She disbelives her own certainty that she is eating breadfruit in order to accommodate her mother. “She eats it anyway, only for her mother to laugh off Annie’s feelings of betrayal. Even though Mrs. John seems to want Annie to grow up, she has rejected her bodily integrity, as well as her ability to act on her own knowledge“.( Collins)

The anger morphs into a deep depression where Annie is bedridden for months. Annie’s three month illness accompanied by torrential rains, represents a trial that she has to pass before she can welcome the adolescence. Only after having survived thanks to the strength and care of her grandmother, Annie is ready to leave Antigua. This scene also represents the symbolic transition of Annie from a girl to a young lady. “Annie emerges from her breakdown with the clear sense that she must leave the world as she knows it to save her sanity and her soul” (Simmons 103).

As the book closes, Annie has come to realize that she has changed and will never be the same:

Everything I would do that morning until I got on the ship that would take me to England I would be doing for the last time, for I had made up my mind that,
come what may, the road for me now went only in one direction: away from my home, away from my mother, away from my father, away from the everlasting blue sky, away from the everlasting hot sun.(128)

Annie is reflecting a very mixed emotion about the long wait that is finally over and the daunting challenge that has suddenly arrived. So the curse of getting what the Annie has devoutly feared has come true: she is separating from her mother.
The tension occurring between mother and daughter is captured in a similar way in Jamaica’s second novel, *Lucy*. The main character Lucy Potter, a nineteen year old girl from the West Indies, emigrates to America to escape the dominance of a suffocating mother. Lucy, is plagued by the memories of her mother and her colonial upbringing. The protagonist is alienated from the Antiguan community and feels ambivalent toward her mother who embodies its values.

Kincaid opens the novel with Lucy’s disillusionment with the first day of her new life in New York. This exposure to foreign environment creates in the girl a feeling of homesickness: "What a surprise this was to me, that I longed to be back in the place, that I longed to sleep in a bed I have 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" (6).

According to Diane Simmons, on arriving in the wintry American city, Lucy does indeed feel herself to be in a cold and alien land, a place that surely is not her home. (Simmons120). The strained relationship with her mother and isolation in Antigua made Lucy rebellious, miserable and gloomy. It intensifies her hunger for independence, and for the pleasures of city life and these are the main factors why she emigrated.

Lucy likes the family she works for. The mother, Mariah, is a willing guide and source of support for Lucy throughout her adjustment. Lucy finds in Mariah a sort of substitute for her mother: "Mariah reminded me more and more of the parts of my mother that I loved. Her hands were just like my mothers-large, with long fingernails." (59). The emphasis on the large hands of Lucy’s mother and Mariah symbolizes control.
for Mariah, control that Lucy rejects, control that she sees as the equivalent of the patriarchy and gender and sexual inequality that she experienced in Antigua. (Stennis 140)

Mariah treats Lucy like her oldest child: she takes Lucy to museums, gives her gifts, and has intimate conversation with her, making easier Lucy’s adaptation to her new environment. Mariah does all the kind of things Lucy’s mother never did for her. But as time progresses, their relationship, as Lucy and her mother’s, does not retain its initial passion.

Lucy is grateful for the protection Mariah offers, and makes straightforward references to the maternal feeling that accompanies their friendship. She comes to see Mariah as superior to her mother, for her mother would never come to see that perhaps Lucy’s needs were more important than her wishes (64). Stennis comments that Lucy’s thoughts are influenced by the difference in Mariah’s and Lucy’s mother’s acceptance of Lucy’s sexual explorations. Lucy’s temporary belief in Mariah’s superiority has more to do with her (Mariah) living in a society or culture that accepts women’s exploring their sexuality more freely. Lucy, on the other hand, has spent her early life in Antigua and the Caribbean, in a society or culture that approves of such freedom for men, but not for women. (Stennis 52)

The relationship with Mariah is comforting for her. Mariah gives Lucy the acceptance and appreciation she did not receive from her mother. To Lucy, “Mariah, in her ethereal beauty and generosity, assumes the guise of a goddess“, and thus, Lucy risks being consumed by an all-subsuming consecrated mother, like her own beloved/hated, god-like mother who, hitherto, assumed total authority over her life. (François 81)
While Lucy cannot change the fact that she does not fit into her mother’s image of an Antiguan woman, she can escape the frustration of her mother’s disappointment by distancing from her. “I had begun to see the past like this: there is a line; you can draw it yourself, or sometimes it gets drawn for you; either way, there it is, your past, a collection of people you used to be and things you used to do. Your past is the person you no longer are, the situations you are no longer in” (137). In Lucy's case, the past she has left behind is Antigua, the girl who was supposed to grow up and become a nurse, the girl who was "so beyond reproach in every way that if you asked her a question she would reply in her mother's 40-year-old voice."(89)

During her first ten years of her life Lucy and her mother shared a secure bond and connection, and their relationship was the best part of the girl's life. Her sibling's birth and her mom's expectations eventually isolated Lucy in Antigua. Lucy becomes enmeshed in a futile love for her mother from which she can never extricate herself. "For ten out of my twenty years I have been mourning the end of a love affair, perhaps the only true love affair in my whole life I would ever know" (132).

According to Laura Niesen Lucy’s anger comes from her mother’s lack of faith in her abilities and talents. (Niesen de Abruna 57) Lucy says of her parents’ expectations for her that “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” (130) Unlike the encouragement offered to her three brothers to grow up and become anything they wanted to be, Lucy was encouraged, indeed assumed to lead a life like her mother, a housewife:
I am not like my mother. She and I are not alike. She should not have married my father. She should not have had children. She should not have thrown away her intelligence. She should not have paid so little attention to mine. [...]. I am not like her at all.(122)

Chodorow draws our attention to the fact that matrophobia might stem from a pent up anger a daughter might feel when she sees her mother victimised and oppressed, passively accepting whatever comes her way.(23). Lucy also recognises that, in a way, her mother fails her by being so submissive: “I asked my mother how she could have married a man who would die and leave her in debt even for his own burial“.(110)

She seems not to respect her father, an old man who had fathered thirty children and left their mothers. But she could not accept the betrayal by her mother “I felt a sword go through my heart“(130) This feeling of treachery as a daughter but also as a woman haunts Lucy and fuells her struggle for a separate individuality in America.

The mother's failure to distribute her love and attention evenly between the children reflects the colonial patriarchal hierarchy imitated in the Caribbean households. The woman's position within the household did not allow for self-realization and contentment. Paradoxically, the mother herself plays an instrumental role in furthering of the gender oppression by depriving her daughter Lucy of the emotional support and confidence in her bright future. (Stennis 140) From that point Lucy felt betrayed by her mother - it seemed to her that her needs were considered less important than those of her brothers.

The birth of Lucy’s brothers makes Mrs John neglect Lucy’s emotional needs. Lucy’s feelings of rejection, which seem to pervade her growing years, are the result of
her mother’s cruel denial of her needs in life. A girl usually holds the frustration caused by the privileges given and superiority attributed to her brothers, against the mother, and rarely against the father (de Beauvoir, 305). In this instance, there is cause for the angst, for it is the mother who is directly responsible for this sex discrimination.

Away from home, Lucy receives numerous letters from her mother, however in those letters Lucy’s mother tries to instill in her fear of her new world:

The letter was filled with detail of horrible and vicious things she had read or heard about that had taken place on those very same underground trains on which I travelled. Only the other day, she wrote, she had read of an immigrants girl, someone my age exactly, who had had her throat cut while she was a passenger on perhaps the very same train I was riding. (21)

Lucy blocks out memories of her own mother, and refuses to read letters from her. The tension of the protagonist’s relationship with her mother profoundly affects her and is reflected in her life in America. Lucy struggles to find her own identity in her mother’s absence, to avoid her mother’s mistakes.

Lucy retaliates against convention (as symbolized by her mother), by engaging in many sexual relationships. She uncovers herself, without inhibition, for men she encounters in her life, defying her mother’s conventions, and proving her mother’s conceptions that lucy should remain “clean, virginal and beyond reproach,” an image that Lucy rejects for herself as a young woman (97).

As I kissed Hugh, my tongue reaching to caress the root of his mouth, I thought of all the other tongues I had held in my mouth in this way. I was only nineteen, so it was not a long list yet. There was Tanner, and he was the first boy with
whom I did everything possible you can do with a boy. The very first time we did everything we wanted to do, he spread a towel on the floor of his room for me to lie down on, because the old springs in his bed made too much noise; it was a white towel, and when I got up it was stained with blood. When he saw it, he first froze with fear and then smiled and said, “O,” a note too triumphant in his voice, and I don’t know how but I found the presence of mind to say, ‘It’s just my period coming on.’ I did not care about being a virgin and had long been looking forward to the day when I could rid myself of that status, but when I saw how much it mattered to him to be the first boy, I had been with, I could not give him such a hold over me (82-83).

Lucy’s not wanting to give a boy “a hold over me” probably stems from her fear that if she becomes too emotionally attached to any of her lovers she could become what she perceives as a victimized woman who tolerates the sexual arrogance and neglect of a man as her mother does. Kincaid shows Lucy as striking a balance, as much as a balance can be struck, between sexual attraction and sexual detachment. She is creating a barrier that will not allow men to dominate her with the kind of arrogance and neglect that her mother has accepted in her father. Thus, Lucy’s aim in life is to be everything her mother is not, and never what her mother is. The mother–daughter bond is so tenacious that it withstands anger, hatred, scorn, thousands of miles of distance, separation and emigration. Although Lucy’s mother is physically absent from the narrative, she is powerfully evoked. (Irlne François 81)

As Lucy longs for her mother, she start to pull away. She tries hard to put a sizable gap between her mother and herself so she won't inherit the negative aspects she have judged her mothers so harshly for. “I thought of opening the letters, not to read
them but to burn them at the four corners and send them back unread. It was an act, I had read somewhere, of one lover rejecting another, but I could not trust myself to go near them. I knew that if I read only one, I would die from longing for her” (91)

When Lucy learns of her father's death. It has been over a month, but Lucy is unaware of it, she never opens any of her mother's letters. Lucy immediately sends all of her savings home. Yet this sorrow has not overcome Lucy's resentment to her mother. She remains angry. Along with the money, she sends a bitter letter reproaching her mother for the miserable life she has choosen to live. This letter clearly fuels more tension on the already strained mother- daughter relationship.

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 (110-111)

Though Lucy had seemed to be enjoying her new life in New York, some of the things that Lucy has taken up or encountered are more out of her rebellion to the difficult and repressive relationship she had with her mother under British colonial rule in Antigua. This plays a large role in her leaving the island. However, in America she
still feels alone and alienated. This time Lucy's alienation is self imposed. Despite her friendship to Peggy and her seemingly cordial relationship to Mariah, Lucy believes Americans to be hypocritical. Her assessment of the society seems to come from her internal unrest. She is dissatisfied with the relationships in her life and she is unfulfilled at her job as a nanny. Lucy sets out to remedy the situation by leaving Mariah and her children.

Lucy goes out to secure herself a job and a chance to prove herself. She is given an opportunity to work as a secretary for a photographer. Lucy decides that she will rent an apartment in New York and start a new life. She feels empowered by her decision and feels as if she has been freed of her mother powerful memory. For Lucy, making decisions for herself empowers her. She has a need to be in control of her own destiny and to feel like she is in control of the situations she finds herself in. In New York, Lucy has a place to live and a job. She is free and independent, however, all this does not bring her the love she longs for. The ending of the novel confirms it: “I wish that I could love someone so much that I would die from it.” (164)
6 The Autobiography of My Mother: Reflecting her Own Mother’s Life

“This account is an account of the person who was never allowed to be and an account of the person I did not allow myself to become” (228).

The Autobiography of My Mother differs from the previous two texts in that Xuela has grown up without her biological mother. In an interview with Dwight Garner, Kincaid speaks about her own personal experience and why she called the novel The Autobiography of My Mother. Using real experience as the basis for her narrative, Xuela’s character is based on Kincaid’s mother.

It was a deliberate choice. It is somewhat explained in the book — that the main character is a fertile woman who decides not to be. And that is drawn from an observation I’ve made about my own mother: That all her children are quite happy to have been born, but all of us are quite sure she should never have been a mother. I feel comfortable saying that publicly, I think. I try not to corner my mother anymore. Because I have at my disposal a way of articulating things about her that she can’t respond to. But I feel comfortable saying that the core of the book — and the book is not autobiographical except in this one way — derives from the observation that my own mother should not have had children.

(Garner)

The Autobiography of My Mother is a story liberally sprinkled with real life. J. Brooks Bouson claims that Kincaid’s novel “is driven by the daughterly imperative to assert herself and assume power by talking back—or more accurately, writing back—to her powerful and powerfully destructive mother” (Bouson 116).
Kincaid immediately begins the novel with the protagonist mourning the loss of her mother, suggesting that this will remain an important motif throughout the story. In fact, this is the very first sign of the complexity and importance of the relationship between Xuela and her deceased mother in the tale.

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 […] And this realization of loss and gain made me look backward and forward: at my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world. (3)

Already on the first page, we are essentially given a window into Xuela’s consciousness, and her suffering is unveiled to us through the opening lines. As the story progresses, the loss of Xuela’s mother has an enormous emotional impact on her. There seems to be something missing in Xuela’s life that she is longing for; love and affection.

The loss of the mother shapes the protagonist’s life and exposes her to betrayal and exploitation during her lifetime. Jana Braziel argues that “[i]n this novel, the mother is too absent, evasive, remote, this absence engulfing Xuela in an abyss of solitude she must endure and survive.” (Braziel 113). Xuela is motherless and, for all intents and purposes, fatherless. Her father practically abandoned her to “the care of the same woman he paid to wash his clothes”, Ma-Eunice (3). Xuela struggles to transcend the fate she has inherited from her mother. Xuela is left without a sense of identity. “Who was I? My Mother died at the moment I was born. You are not yet anything at the moment you are born” (225). Xuela’s task is to find her own identity and a place in her community.
Xuela’s decision not to love others and not to become a mother is fueled by her earlier experience of being deprived of maternal love as well as having lived in a world without love and attention. Not merely is she determined not to love others, she also comes to the defiant decision to love no one else but herself. Xuela, refers to the events that led up to her current situation and provides a detailed description of her life. Readers learn much about her experiences and about her community.

During the first seven years of her life Xuela lives with his father’s laundress. Ma Eunice is already a mother of six when she agrees to care of Xuela, but basic food, shelter and maltreatment is all Xuela receives from this woman: “Ma Eunice was not unkind: 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 thing freely given. I did not like her, and I missed the face I had never seen (5).”

The girl does not accept Eunice’s milk, which tastes sour in her mouth, and once she grows teeth, she bites Eunice’s hand as she feeds her as an "act of ingratitude" (6). According to Alexandra Schulteis, Xuela rejects to be breastfeed by Ma Eunice because she identifies it with the maternal role (Schulteis 4). Xuela’s recognizes that this woman can never replace her mother, thus she is unable to feel maternal affection for Ma Eunice. She says that: "I never grew to like this woman...I did not know how” (5). Seanor, finds this statement interesting because it suggests that love is something that you “learn”, as if it is taught by someone else, in Xuela case, by her mother. The fact that Xuela grew up without her mother or parental love means that she had no role model to follow.(Seanor 21)

The young Xuela lives a miserable life. She is painfully aware that she will never find happiness at Eunice’s house. She vents her agony through some letters:
My dear Papa, you are the only person I have left in the world, no one loves me, only you can, I am beaten with words, I am beaten with sticks, I am beaten with stones, I love you more than anything, only you can save me.(19).

Those letters are sent to her father by her teacher, and shortly afterwards, Xuela’s father decides to take her from Ma Eunice’s into the home where he lives with his new wife. However, Xuela’s situation does not improve; she is denied a caring relationship in this new place as well. The father’s new wife deeply resents Xuela just because the girl is an unwelcome reminder of his husband’s former wife. “She did not like me. She did not love me. I could see it in her face,” Xuela explains, “My spirit rose to meet this challenge. No love: I could live in a place like this. I knew this atmosphere all too well. Love would have defeated me. Love would always defeat me” (29).

Xuela’s stepmother emotionally abuses her. In her father's presence, Xuela’s stepmother speaks to her in English, “the language of the conqueror”; but when they are alone she speaks French patois in order, thinks Xuela, “to make an illegitimate of me, to associate me with the made-up language of people regarded as not real—the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low.”(31)

Her father's wife gives the child moldy food “as if she had saved it specially for me in order to make me sick.” She also gives her an ornament to try to kill Xuela. “I placed the necklace around the dog's neck. […]Within twenty-four hours he went mad and died.”(34) Xuela is not loved by her mother-figures, nor does she long to find a substitute for her biological mother.

Xuela is depicted as a lonely and solitary child, her childhood is a period of powerlessness, emotional and physical pain, “[n]o one observed and beheld me, I
observed and beheld myself; the invisible current went out and it came back to me. “As a result of this “[she] came to love [her]self in defiance, out of despair, because there was nothing else. Such a love will do, but it will only do…it is not to be recommended. “ (57). This words lead us to infer that her self-love develops due to the absence of her mother. As Maria Mardberg claims: “[m]othering in Xuela’s world is all detrementing as the most important experience for a child and crucial in any life.” (Mardberg 8).

The protagonist is never fully accepted by any of the female characters in the novel, she never experiences contentment, and her life is fraught with abrasive relationships. She is a woman with an extraordinary nature who just does not seem to fit into the community where she lives.

The girl is sent to live with a friend of her father, Jack LaBatte and his wife Lise, in order to attend school. Lise tries earnestly to connect with the young woman. Xuela respectfully appreciates Lisa’s efforts and even likes her. Still, Xuela is sceptical about her kindness “of course I did not believe her I did not fool myself“ (66). Soon Xuela realizes that Madame LaBatte “had wanted a child, had wanted children; I could hear her say that. I was not a child, I could no longer be a child; she could hear me say that. She wanted something again from me, she wanted a child I might have“ (Kincaid 77).

Xuela receives affection under Lise LaBatte but at a cost. She is made the sexual toy of Jack while receiving the benefits of living under the family care. She is not simply receiving the loving aid of a surrogate mother, willing to teach and to guide unconditionally. She receives conditional aid that forces her to occupy a mistress role. Seanor comments that “[b]ecause, or perhaps despite, Lise clearly has no physical connection with her husband any more, Xuela’s “burgeoning fertility” is an attractive commodity to Lise, one she feels she might parlay into a child for herself.” (Seanor 56)
Lise has not been a “productive” partner in her marriage, and is bound to stay in a relationship where her love is not reciprocated. Madame LaBatte stands as an example of the unnecessary sterile women in Jack’s life. Her husband interacts with her as little as possible; her condition shows how devalued women might become. Lise’s condition fuels Xuela’s dislike for marriage, "I[Xuela] thought, this must never happen to me, and I meant that I would not allow the passage of time or the full weight of desire to make a pawn of me" (65).

Madam LaBatte is a manipulative woman who only “wants to make a gift of [Xuela] to her husband“(68). Eventually, Xuela becomes Monsieur LaBatte’s mistress and is impregnated by him. But, once Xuela finds out that she is pregnant, she feels stifled, and chooses to terminate her pregnancy because She does not want a child whom she cannot love. By aborting her child, Xuela refuses to allow her body to be used, but she does make use of it for herself.( Harris 19)

The abortion of her child causes her enormous physical pain and leaves her with an even greater measure of detached insight. Elizabeth West says, “her first abortion awakened her to the power she possessed to will out unwanted life.“ (West 148)

I was a new person then, I knew things I had not known before, I knew things that you can know only if you have been through what I had just been through. I had carried my own life in my own hands (82).

After numerous love affairs, Xuela becomes pregnant many times. Each time, however, she wills out her children through abortions. Xuela, at any rate, sees that the pain inflicted on her by lack of love would passed along to her children and, in turn, make them the outcasts that she feels herself to be.
I had never had a mother, I had just recently refused to become one, and I knew then that this refusal would be complete. I would never become a mother, but that would not be the same as never bearing children. I would bear children, but I would never be a mother to them...I would destroy them with the carelessness of a god\textsuperscript{20}. (96-97)

Kincaid portrays the situation in a way that demonstrates that Xuela's actions, although in no way acceptable are understandable. Kincaid calls the reader to ponder what makes a person become who they are. Beyond the question of nature versus nurture, she wants us to consider society's influence on individuals.

Xuela's personal life is the aspect of her character that is most obviously affected by the loss of her mother. She takes her motherless status as a lifelong sentence of loneliness and suffering. She refuses to bear any children; to allow no one to come from her (199, 213, 228) on the grounds that her children will never be loved and have to live in abandonment, just as her mother and Xuela herself were forced to do. Collins comments that “Xuela’s children would feel all the pain of a distant mother, except Xuela would be alive to actively create the distance and betray her children to a world determined by the cycle of violence” (Collins 45)

Throughout the novel, Xuela’s mother is the only person she really loves: “I had never known my mother and yet my love for her followed her into eternity. My mother had died when I was born, unable to protect herself in a world cruel beyond ordinary imagining, unable to protect me” (210). Furthermore, Xuela has never been loved by

\textsuperscript{20} In an interview with Leigh Haber, Kincaid said that her “was an extraordinary person but a terrible candidate for mother. She was like the god Cronus, who gave birth to his children in the morning and then ate them at night”. (Haber)
anyone, since she regards her mother as the only one that could have loved her, and she died at the moment Xuela was born. Therefore her loss does not include love: “in my loss column was my mother; love was not yet in my loss column. I had not yet been loved. . . . I had not had love yet, it was not in my column of gain, so it could not be in my column of loss” (76). As a consequence of a lack of mother love from the beginning of her life, her feelings are numbed and thus her ability to love anyone or anything.

Xuela’s mother was a Carib woman, of “a vanishing people” who “had been defeated and then exterminated, thrown away like the weeds in a garden.” (15) As she is convinced that her mother belongs to “the defeated,” she rejects motherhood. Thus, she embraces her childless condition as a means of survival. Shu-li Chung claims that by refusing to bear any children, Xuela “only ends up translating herself into a feminine version of her father” (Chung 109). Xuela has some of her father’s attributes — she is stubborn and strong. This makes her an outsider without a place in her community. The novel’s world belongs to men, and women’s place in it is as mothers and housewives. But the mothers in The Autobiography of My Mother behave badly; they are selfish and cruel.

According to Nancy Chodorow, the child who is separated from the mother and who has to identify with the father forms his gender negatively, (Chodorow220) Xuela recognizes that she “was like him,” for both of them “could be described as reasonable” in stubbornly following and practicing their own personal belief (108). “My father had invented himself, had made himself up as he went along; when he wanted something, he made himself meet the situation, he made his cut fit the jib” (53). Xuela’s father, Kincaid seems to be saying, inspires in his daughter an understanding of the ability of
desire to win power, but Xuela's desire is different to her father’s, hers is a desire for justice. (Collins 39)

Xuela’s father, Alfred Richardson, is a manipulating, selfish, narcissistic and corrupt policeman. He is “conniving and heartless towards those in need” (Collins36). Xuela’s hate and resentment for her father is clear when she says:

He believed he loved me, but I could tell him how untrue that was, I could list for him the number of times he had placed me squarely within the jaws of death; I could list for him the number of times he had failed to be a father to me, his motherless child, while on his way to becoming a man of this world. (118)

However, what she does not realise is that her violent attitude is exactly the replica of her father’s bitter and cynical outlook. Xuela’s self love and determination to survive are evident either because of, or in spite of, the lack of a loving parental relationship

Xuela's relationships with women are not much better than her relationships with her teachers and classmates at school. She is isolated and those around her behave arrogantly. The Carib21 aspect that Xuela has inherited from her mother is used as the basis for attributions of any of her unusual behavior as mysterious or devilish by her teacher.

I learned to read and write very quickly. My memory, my ability to retain information, to retrieve the tiniest detail, to recall who said what and when, was regarded as unusual and my teacher... said I was evil, I was possessed—and to

21 “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.” (197)
establish that there could be no doubt of this, she pointed to the fact that my mother was of the Carib people (16-17).

Xuela learns that her mother, like Xuela herself, grew up without her own mother. She was given away at birth, thus, she was brought up by nuns from France who named her Xuela. Claudette Desvarieux and “demanded that she be a quiet, shy, long-suffering, unquestioning, modest, wishing-to-die-soon person. She became such a person” (199).

Xuela’s motherline story represents a legacy of loss:"The attachment, spiritual and physical, that confusion of who as who, flesh and flesh, which was absent between my mother and her own mother was also absent between my mother and myself, for she died at moment I was born"(199). she realises that the only way to end that legacy of loss is to stop bearing children, in this way the effects of loveless and abandonment that have been inherited through generations would be terminated.

Naomi Lowinsky refers to what she calls "rnotherline" in her book of the same name. When a woman comes to understand her life story as a story from Motherline, she gains femal authonty and a sense of self. She proposes that when “a woman finds her motherline, she finds her own story. “(Lowinsky 5) Following Lowinsky, when Xuela identifies with her mother, the mother's life turns into the narrator's autobiography. In other words, Xuela finds her story in her mother's story, that makes The Autobiography of My Mother the autobiography of its narrator: “[t]his account of my life has been an account of my mother’s life as much as it has been an account of mine, and even so, again it is an account of the life of the children I did not have, as it is their account of me” (227). Xuela creates the autobiography and imagines her mother’s life as it might have been, and therefore her own life.(Seanor 30).
Even though Xuela identifies with her mother she also assumes at times the mantle of the victor.

I am of the vanquished, I am of the defeated . . . for me the future must remain capable of casting a light on the past such that in my defeat lies the beginning of my great revenge. My impulse is to the good, my good is to serve myself. I am not a people, I am not a nation. I only wish from time to time to make my actions of a people, to make my actions be the actions of a nation(96)

Xuela’s acknowledgement of her past echoes what Kincaid has said in an interview, “I am interested in the defeated and identify even though I don’t feel defeated myself...Actually, the great thing about being the victim is that you identify with the victim, and that may save you from victimizing. If you can keep in mind who suffers, it might prevent you from suffering”...

Ferguson

Xuela becomes increasingly disinterested in the prudish life that the typical upstanding Dominican woman is expected to lead, which includes marriage and children. Xuela, connects marriage with servitude. When Lise is telling her how to make the prefect cup of coffee for Jack, Xuela says: “I do not want to make him coffee, I shall never make him coffee, I do not need to know how to make this man coffee, no man will ever drink coffee from my hands made in that way!” (74).

Even though Xuela manages to break the circle of mothering by not having children, eventually her relationship with Phillip lead her to marriage. preceding her first sexual encounter with Phillip she says: “He did not look like anyone I could love, and he did not look like anyone I should love, and so I determined then that I could not
love him and I determined that I should not love him” (Kincaid 152). She also refuses the requests of Roland, her one genuine lover because he wants to have children with her. Thus she chooses to terminate their relationship.

Forging her own identity and freedom in a loveless world, Xuela loves only herself. She finds pleasure in sensuality and learns to make use of her considerable sex appeal, but she has no use for love and no desire to bear children.
My Brother: Being A Stranger In Your Own Home, To Your Own Family

Kincaid's memoir is not about Kincaid's youngest brother or his sickness and death, instead it turns to be about Kincaid herself; Devon's sickness and eventually his death have brought forth the strained relationship between Kincaid and her mother. Adrian Blevins Argues that “Kincaid uses her brother Devon's illness with AIDS and his eventual death as the axis for meditations on a whole series of complex themes about the self in relation to itself, others, and the world." (Blevins 1)

Kincaid’s memoir eloquently engages with themes of love, motherhood and death while simultaneously using personal experience and the act of remembering to challenge both her mother’s role and the sexual repression in a society ruled by social convention.

My Brother provides the reader with stories from Kincaid’s childhood and early adolescence. According to Kezia Page, “reading My Brother as nonfiction allows us to examine some of the fundamental themes and concerns crucial to understanding the politics of the text. Since Kincaid tells a true story using real names and real experiences it seems fair that we would add the expectation of truth." (Page 195)

My Brother, like so much of Kincaid’s work, is about the bitterness, resentment, and contempt she feels toward her family in Antigua, and in particular, toward her mother. The story deals explicitly with memory, sexuality and the complexities of mother-child relationship. Kincaid’s piece of nonfiction mirrors her previous novels in that it uses rebellion to subvert her mother and gender expectations, asserting her own independence as well as the independence of Annie, Lucy and Xuela.
Kincaid once again returns to Antigua, allowing herself to be affected by the tragedy of her youngest brother, Devon. Antiguans' attitude towards people affected with AIDS, along with poverty and a neglectful government, prevents Kincaid’s brother from being treated properly and effectively. After all the years she has been absent from her brother’s life she feels the need to do something to redeem herself for the absence. She provides the medicine that prolongs his brother’s life.

There was no AZT on the island, it was too expensive to be stocked, most people suffering from the disease could not afford to buy this medicine; most people suffering from the disease are poor or young, not too far away from being children; in a society like the one I am from, being a child is one of the definitions of vulnerability and powerlessness (32).

At Holberton Hospital, the furniture is dirty, the dusty ceiling fans present a danger to patients who have trouble breathing, and even something as ordinary as aspirin is sometimes impossible to get. Seeing Devon in the isolated bedroom where he is being treated, unlocks a side of Kincaid that is rarely revealed in her interviews: love instead of scorn. Kincaid finds she loves his brother. However this discovery is confused with pity. Page suggests that Devon’s hospital room can be read as a metonym for what Kincaid sees as a crumbling Antigua. (Page 200)

Kincaid’s visit to Antigua brings he back unpleasant memories of why she had to leave Antigua years earlier for the United States. Leaving the Caribbean island, Kincaid believes, was necessary in order to fulfill herself. She writes:
I could not have become a writer while living among the people I knew best, I could not have become myself while living among the people I knew best – and I only knew them best because I was from them, of them, and so often felt I was them – and they were – are – the people who ought to have loved me best in the world, the people who should have made me feel that the love of people other than them was suspect (162).

Kincaid never got to know her brother. Devon is portrayed as a empty man living a carefree lifestyle that involves Rastafarian music, drugs, sexual promiscuity, and criminal behaviour. The result of his lifestyle is AIDS.

Who is he? I kept asking myself. Who is he? […] no one depends on him, he is not a father to anyone. […] his father was the father of many children. This compulsion to express himself through his penis, his imagination passing between his legs, not through his hands, is something I am not qualified to understand. (69-70)

Devon had wanted to be a singer. Kincaid views Devon's decision to become a singer as a distancing attempt, one she praises."The impulse was a good one, if only he could have seen his way to simply moving away from [our mother] to another planet, though perhaps even that might not have been far enough away."(98). Like Kincaid, Devon had some artistic talent, but unlike her brother she invented a life for herself far from home and thus escaped the danger of death. She become a famous writer. Her brother’s voice, on the other hand, would never be heard.

Devon regards Kincaid as a lady who "no readily speaks the kind of English he did" In a similar way, Devon’s fast-paced Antiguan Creole is unintelligible to Kincaid,
as her “funny talk” is unintelligible to him. For all intents and purposes they are strangers to each other, though still blood. (Page 195)

I had lived away from my home for so long that I no longer understood readily the kind of English he spoke and always had to have him repeat himself to me; and I no longer spoke the kind of English he spoke, and when I said anything to him, he would look at me and sometimes just laugh at me outright. You talk funny, he said.” (6)

Kincaid's mother excels at caring for her adult son22, each morning she gets up very early and make for her sick son a bowl of porridge and a drink of a fortified liquid food supplement and pack them in a little bag and and climb up a long steep hill to get the hospital, she even shares the same bed with him; however Kincaid seems to be saying that this only beacause his brother is ill, “her love, if we are dying, or if we are in jail, is so wonderful, a great fortune, and we are lucky to have it. My brother was dying; he needed her just then.“(11)

Kincaid feels good she has bought the AZT for him, which has led to an improvement in his condition. Her mother is so thankful for all the support they have received from her daughter. Kincaid remarks to herself that “my brother would have been dead by now had this act of my mother’s been all that remained of my life. Had

22 Taking about her mother in an interview she says that “ I think we kindly call it strict but actually she was very tyrannical. And was most interested in us when we were -- when we needed -- when we failed, was most able to be there. For instance, I remember when one of my brothers was dying of AIDS and the other one had done something and was in jail. And in both institutions they didn't like the food that was served. And at the same time they didn't like the same kinds of food so she would make two separate dishes of food and take one to the hospital and one to the jail, which happened to be not too far from each other. And that was -- that seemed -- when you say it it seemed, oh what a wonderful thing. But of course most wonderful of a mother would've been if we had not been in jail or be dying of AIDS. That would've been the most extraordinary kind of mother”. (Nnamdi)
my life stayed on the path where my mother had set it, the path of no university education, my brother would have been dead by now“(74-75) However, her irresponsible brother returns to his previous careless, promiscuous lifestyle, incurring the disapproval of Kincaid.

Being afraid of stigmatization from his friends and his family led Devon into hiding his homosexuality23. The English-speaking Caribbean, Luliano asserts, “seems to be unable to shake off the influence of Victorian morality, and not only maintains laws that criminalise gays and lesbians, but also argues the case for homophobia, for instance in Jamaica”(Luliano 113). Thus, Kincaid’s brother:

[D]ied without ever understanding or knowing, or being able to let the world in which he lived know, who he was; that who he really was--not a single sense of identity but all the complexities of who he was--he could not express fully. (162).

Kincaid has some nice memories of her childhood. She remembers when her mother would feed her by chewing the food to soften it before placing it in her mouth, or when she would remove the mucus of a cold by drawing the mucus from the nose into her own mouth and then spitting it out.(Kincaid17). Mrs. Drew‘s love for her children when they are small is spectacular, however when her children are growing up this love morphs into a threat.

23 Two years before My Brother was published, Antiguan parliament passed a law against sex-related crimes, “The Sexual Offences Act”. This law, which never mentions homosexuality, states in article 12: “A person who commits buggery is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment. […] In this section ‘buggery’ means sexual intercourse per anum by a male person with a male person or by a male person with a female person.”(Luliano 113)
Edwards suggests that Kincaid’s mother is someone who is nurturing and compassionate but also as someone who seeks to rob her adult children of life undermining their confidence, taking away their independence and destroying their ambitions (Edwards 108). Kincaid says that “It never has occurred to her[mother] that her way of loving us might not be the best thing for us. It has never occurred to her that her way of loving us might have served her better than it served us“. (16)

Kincaid relates the defining story of her relationship to her mother. At fifteen Kincaid was asked to take care of Devon. Instead of watching the two year old boy, she spends the day reading, allowing Devon's dirty diaper to go unchanged. This put her mother in such a rage that she sets fire to Kincaid's most loved possessions: her books.

It was because I had neglected my brother when he was two years old and instead read a book that my mother gathered all my the books I owned and put them on a pile on her stone heap, sprinkling them with kerosene and then set them alight (197).

Refering to this incident in a interview with Vorda, Kincaid remembers this unpleasant experience with great sadness, “because books were the only things I knew and loved, and I didn’t know what else to love.“(Vorda). Kincaid felt she hated her mother, and even worse, she felt that her feeling was reciprocated, too. she even says that "when my mother saw [Devon's] unchanged diaper ... she wanted me dead."(198)

The tension between mother and daughter revolves around the birth of Kincaid’s siblings, which is seen as the most important event determining a change in Mrs. Drew's attitude and affecting their relationship. The loving and nurturing mother gradually transforms into a bitter and quarrelsome one, especially after the birth of her youngest
son, Devon, an undesired child whom she had tried to abort because he represented a burden on the family’s income. (Barcanto 288). It was after the birth of Devon that Kincaid’s mother removed her from school, something that Kincaid resents: “I was always being asked to forgo something or other that had previously occupied my leisure time, and then something or other that was essential (my schooling), to take care of these small children, who were not even mine” (128). Kincaid adds, "There was no real reason for me to be removed from school, she just did it, removed me from school. My father was sick, she said, she needed me at home to help with the small children, she said" (74)

Kincaid’s memories are filled with cruelty and emotional detachment; her mother’s idea of denying her education was a cynical removal of all Kincaid’s opportunities of improvement. Obviously, she is filled with hatred and rage towards her mother, which is reflected in her literary work.

Remembering a conversation held with her mother in the garden, she writes: “I noticed that the lemon tree my sick brother had planted was no longer there and I asked about it, and she said casually, Oh, we cut it down to make room for the addition”; and, later on, she remarks: “That lemon tree would have been one of the things left of his life. Nothing came from him; not work, not children, not love for someone else.” (13) She is pained when reflecting on ruthlessness of her mother at destroying the lemon tree that Devon had planted. Destroying the one thing that came from him was almost as if she had killed Devon himself. (Baracanto 284)

Kincaid is aware of the fact that had she not caused her own life to take a different turn, she could now be as helpless as her brother; had she not left home when she did, she would have probably died at his age; she insists that had she ruthlessly
rejected family and nation as a young woman, she might have known a man just like her mother’s son.

Kincaid’s hostility toward her mother is shared by her siblings. (Edwards 103). She explains that her brothers, Devon and Dalma address their mother "Mrs. Drew," and at many times in the memoir, Kincaid is equally unwilling to claim relation with her. She writes, "He[Devon] stole from his mother (our mother, she was my own mother, too, but I was only in the process of placing another distance between us, I was not in the process of saying I know nothing of her, as I am doing now)” . Her brothers also refuse to eat the food their mother cooks, and only speak to her when is needed. Kincaid starts refusing her mother’s meals, too: "not eating food my mother cooked for me as a sign of distancing myself from her was a form of behavior I had used a long time ago, when I felt most close to and dependent on her."(116)

Kincaid’s family causes her distress that is why she distances herself both, physically and emotionally as an act of self-protection. “I am so vulnerable to my family’s needs and influence that from time to time I remove myself from them. I do not write to them. I do not pay visits to them. I do not lie, I do not deny, I only remove myself.” (120). When Kincaid learns about his brother’s illness she and her mother "were in a period of not speaking to each other”(6)

Thus, like Kincaid’s mother, although the maternal paradigm is convinced that she alone knows what is best for her children, her determination to control them creates both hostile conflict as well as emotional estrangement. She does not recognize that she has done them any damage and refuses to apologize for the pain she has caused the author, saying that she always has good reason for anything she does. The author's
mother believes Kincaid does not like her, because she has brought her up very strictly, to prevent her from having ten children by ten different fathers. (28)

Kincaid reveals the reasons she feels she must remove herself from her family (in an alternative act of self-preservation) when she tells us what happened after her mother came for a visit to Vermont:

... after my mother left, I was sick for three months. I had something near to a nervous breakdown, I suffered from anxiety and had to take medicine to treat it; I got the chicken pox, which is a disease of childhood and a disease I had already when I was a child. Not long after she left, I had to see a psychiatrist. (27-28)

Devon was a powerless victim of circumstances to whom things just occur. Devon never stopped to imagine the possibilities of what his life might have been far from his mother. He was not essentially able to break away from Antigua and cultivate his own beliefs and principles by which to live. He resigned his entire life to a state of mediocrity by accepting but the plan the oppressive Antiguan environment which eventually, led him to death.

Jamaica Kincaid very clearly expresses her need to leave her birth place and experience the world on her own. She separated herself from her mother and embraced the individual freedom she came to find in America. Kincaid will never forget Devon "because his life is the one I did not have, the life that for, for reasons I hope shall never be too clear to me, I avoided or escaped" (176).

For Kincaid, however, My Brother is an attempt to escape that turbulent part of herself:
I became a writer out of desperation, so when I first heard my brother was dying I was familiar with the act of saving myself: I would write about him. I would write about his dying. When I was young, younger than I am now, I started to write about my own life and I came to see that this act saved my life. When I heard about my brother’s illness and his dying, I knew, instinctively, that to understand it or to make an attempt at understanding his dying, and not to die with him, I would write about it. (195-196)

*My Brother* is a story about Kincaid’s struggles of childhood, her struggles of adolescence, her struggles of womanhood---the struggles to define herself against, the restrictions of her mother.
8. Conclusion

Knowing something of the genuine complexity of the Caribbean socio-historical context and its legacy on Kincaid's writing deepened the interpretation of the mother daughter-relationship.

In each of the stories, Kincaid provides an intimate portrait of her characters, their joys, their pains, their hopes, and their despair. The theme of mother daughter is not solved. The void by the mother's loss is never filled and this shape the individual identity of Kincaid’s protagonists. Annie, Lucy, Xuela and Jamaica must overcome memories, anger, and despair to recognize that the one thing they cannot change about their life is the past or their heritage.

The tension in mother-daughter relationship in Kincaid’s works is evidently shaped by memories that the author carries within her from her childhood and youth growing up with an authoritarian and tyrannical mother which subsequently converge with the narration of the female characters she articulates in her works.

The lack of mother love, in Xuela’s case a love she never experienced, while in Annie and Lucy’s case it is the result of their mothers’ expectations harm the protagonists with an inability to deeply love anyone or anything ever again. This betrayal, this lack of familial attachment, causes each female character to decide against allowing herself to feel love for anyone else. Unlike Annie and Lucy, Xuela did not grow up surrounded by her mother's love. However, like the other two heroines, Xuela also lacks the ability to truly love without reservation.

Cultural values and expectations are at the root of the tensions between mothers and daughters in Kincaid’s work, among which are the preference for the male child,
the stress on housework as opposed to education, and the sexual repression put on women.

All the heroines manifest a strong desire of escaping. Escaping from their homeland; escaping from the adherence to British values, traditions, and customs; escaping from the fixed role prescribed to them by society. Searching continuously other ways of being, other places, other names. Jamaica Kincaid presents Annie’s, Lucy’s and her own immigration as both, as an opportunity for a better life and as an escape from her past. As the protagonists in her first two novels, Kincaid left home on angry terms when she was still quite young, moving from her Caribbean island to a foreign country to get a better future. In exile she cut off the communication with her mother. This act of rebellion, followed by years of a distant family relationship, was her way of shaking loose from a strong, controlling mother and home life.

Kincaid’s works successfully integrates her own lived experience as an girl, the reality of women in the Caribbean, and the effects of colonialism throughout the narratives. We understand both Kincaid’s lived experience as well as Annie, Lucy and Xuela’s bitterness, distrust and frustration, grounded in the restrictions and expectations imposed on them by the authority of their mothers and, in Xuela’s case, surrogate mothers and the British colonial rule.

Jamaica’s strained relationship with her mother did not only brand her life forever, but also strongly influenced the way of expressing herself through writing. Without an understanding of her life, her narratives will never be fully comprehended.
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9 Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the tension in mother-daughter relationship in Jamaica Kincaid’s works and shows how the struggle for personal development not only of her protagonists but of the writer herself lead them to search for a personal identity.

The primary works examined here are: *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), *My Brother* (1997), one by one, following their chronological order so as to bring to light the causes and outcomes of the tension in mother-daughter relationship that takes place in Kincaid’s works.

In this thesis I argue that Annie John, Lucy and Xuela are representatives through whom Kincaid works out her own strained relationship with her mother. The protagonists’ joys, pains and despair echo Kincaid's. Understanding the tension in mother-daughter relationship in her works, depends on understanding the way Kincaid's upbringing and emotional life are embodied in the text.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first part contains the author’s biography followed by a brief depiction of the social context and analyses of the chosen works. These analyses are founded on references to secondary sources. The conclusion evaluates and compares the tension in mother-daughter relationship between the protagonists and their mothers and highlights the consequences of this strained relation.
10 Shrnutí

Cílem této diplomové práce je prozkoumat napětí ve vztahu matka-dcera v dílech Jamaica Kincaid. Ukazuje nejen boj o osobní rozvoj protagonistů, ale i autorky samotné vedoucí k hledání osobní identity.


V této práci argumentuji, že Annie John, Lucy a Xuela jsou zástupci, jehož prostřednictvím Kincaid pracuje na jejím vlastním vypjatém vztahu s její matkou. Radosti protagonistů, bolesti a zoufalství jsou odezvou Kincaid. Pochopení napětí ve vztahu matka-dcera v její dílech závisí na pochopení způsobu, jakým Kincaid byla vychována a její emocionální život obsažený v textu.

Práce je rozdělena do šesti kapitol. První část obsahuje autorovu biografii následovaný krátkým zobrazením společenského kontextu a analýzy vybraných děl. Tyto analýzy jsou založeny na odkazech z druhotných zdrojů. Závěr vyhodnocuje a porovnává napětí ve vztahu matka-dcera mezi protagonisty a jejich matkami a poukazuje na důsledky tohoto napjatého vztahu