

## KİTAP İNCELEMESİ / BOOK REVIEW

### A POSTCOLONIAL REVIEW ON JAMAICA KINCAID'S NOVELLA "LUCY"\*

*JAMAICA KINCAID'IN KISA ROMANI "LUCY" ÜZERİNE BİR POSTKOLONYAL  
İNCELEME*

*Jamaica Kincaid (1990), Lucy, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux*

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**Abstract:** This paper examines Jamaica Kincaid's novel "Lucy" within the context of postcolonial literature, exploring the profound impact of colonial legacies on the main character, Lucy, and her experiences in a postcolonial world. Written by Jamaica Kincaid, a native of Antigua, the novel delves into the complexities of postcolonial identity, juxtaposing the concepts of independence and freedom. Antigua, as one of the last countries to gain independence in 1981, serves as a backdrop, illustrating the stark contrast between the author's newly adopted home in the United States and her memories of Antigua, marked by a history of suppression and oppression. Lucy, the novel's central character, carries the weight of her colonial past, a burden manifested through her constant reflection on her homeland. As a character who has never resided in a white-dominated society, she grapples with navigating a world replete with stereotypes about individuals of black and brown ethnicity. This essay aims to critically analyse Lucy from a postcolonial perspective, providing specific examples from the novel to illuminate the enduring impact of colonialism on the protagonist's identity and her journey towards self-discovery in a complex postcolonial landscape.

**Keywords:** *Lucy, Jamaica Kincaid, Postcolonial Literature, Caribbean*

**Öz:** Bu makale, Jamaica Kincaid'in "Lucy" adlı kısa romanını postkolonyal edebiyat bağlamında inceleyerek, ana karakter Lucy'nin üzerindeki kolonyal mirasın postkolonyal bir dünyada deneyimleri üzerindeki derin etkisini araştırmaktadır. Antigua doğumlu olan yazar Jamaica Kincaid tarafından yazılan roman, postkolonyal kimliğin karmaşıklıklarına derinlemesine iner ve bağımsızlık ve özgürlük kavramlarını karşılaştırır. 1981'de bağımsızlığını kazanan Antigua, yazarın yeni benimsediği Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ile Antigua'nın baskı ve zulmün tarihine işaret eden anıları arasındaki keskin kontrastı ortaya koyar. Romanın merkezi karakteri Lucy, kolonyal geçmişinin ağırlığını taşıyor ve vatanına olan sürekli düşünceleri aracılığıyla bu yükü açığa çıkarır. Beyaz egemen bir toplumda hiç yaşamamış bir karakter olarak, siyah ve kahverengi etnik kökenli bireylerle ilgili kalıplarla dolu bir dünyada gezinmeye çalışırken, kendi kimliği üzerindeki kolonyalizmin etkileriyle mücadele eder. Bu makale, "Lucy"yi postkolonyal bir perspektiften eleştirel bir şekilde analiz etmeyi amaçlayarak, romanın içinden örnekler sunarak protagonistin kimliği üzerindeki kolonyalizmin uzun süreli etkilerini ve karmaşık bir postkolonyal manzara içindeki öz keşif yolunu aydınlatmayı hedeflemektedir. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Lucy, Jamaica Kincaid, Postkolonyal Edebiyat, Karayip

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### **Introduction on Jamaica Kincaid and Her Novella *Lucy***

Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 in Antigua. Her given name was initially Elaine Potter Richardson. When she started writing short stories, she changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid. Her desire for anonymity was motivated in large part by the fact that all of her publications in Antigua dealt with patriarchal, colonial, and gender concerns. She was afraid that if she had used her own name, she would have been discovered. She was also afraid that if her writings failed, her own people, the Antiguan, would mock her. Nobody would be able to make fun of her because Antiguan readers would be unfamiliar with her pen name [which happens to be her passport name at the moment]. She is known as an Antiguan American or Caribbean American writer since she was compelled to immigrate to the United States when she was 16 and has lived there ever since. Her writings typically address mother-daughter relationships, gender roles, women's rights, female identity, queer identity, and colonialism in Antigua. After spending her childhood and adolescence in Antigua with a huge family, she travelled to America to work as an au pair in order to feed and support her relatives there. She claimed in an interview at the 25th Chicago Humanities Festival that she had no choice but to go to America, work as a servant, and support her family because she was the oldest child in her family. In the same interview, she expresses her dissatisfaction with the prospect of being a servant and states unequivocally that she does not want to be one. As a result, she began looking for a new job and began working as a photographer in New York. Kincaid began writing for the New York Times after changing her name in 1973. She later became a full-time journalist for the New York Times in 1976.

Her home nation, Antigua and Barbuda [also known as Antigua], has a lengthy history of colonialism. It was a part of the Spanish colony since Christopher Columbus discovered it in 1493. It became a part of the British Empire in 1632. During the colonial period, however, it was often occupied and ravaged by the French. The island gained independence from the British Empire in 1981 and joined the Commonwealth of Nations. Antigua and Barbuda was one of the last British colonies to gain independence. Even in her interview at the 25th Chicago Humanities Festival, she jokes that people in Antigua were unaware that India had gained independence so that they might claim theirs.

Kincaid wrote *Lucy* in 1990 after her bestseller *Annie John* got popularity. The novel, *Lucy*, has many elements of postmodern literature. While reading, readers might think that they are inside the speaker's mind. This leads us to the technique of stream of consciousness that was started to be used by Joseph Conrad in his *The Heart of Darkness*, the very first modern and postcolonial literary work. Jamaica Kincaid uses first person point of view in the novel. The speaker speaks as if she is talking without any interruptions and does not even care if the readers understand her

properly. Furthermore, Kincaid uses historiographic-metafictions and just metafiction techniques in the novel in order to show the readers that she is the owner of her writing. For example, only at the last chapter of the book, she introduces herself while the book has five different chapters each talking about her experiences as an au pair, her memories, her colonial and postcolonial background, her mother's life, the family that she lives in etc. Another postmodern technique in the novel is the usage of intertextuality. Many times, she refers to her previous book, *Annie John*. This novel brought her a lot of fame. Thus, she wrote *Lucy*, her second novel, as a continuation of *Annie John*, however, as a different story and a different book.

Since the novel was written by a writer from a previously colonized country, Antigua, the novel is considered to be a part of postcolonial literature. The novel's main character's name is same as the title of the book, *Lucy*. She has a colonial past and always she is being haunted by her memories from her colonized country. Her country, Antigua was one of the last countries to get independence in 1981. Thus, while she lives in America, in a previously colonized country, she can see a huge difference between independence and freedom in the USA and suppression and oppression in Antigua. Also, another challenge she faces is that she had never lived in a white dominated society. But now, she has to live in a society that has a lot of stereotypes about black and brown people. At the same time, the novel has a heroine instead of a hero. That is why it is also considered to be a part of postcolonial feminist literature. Yet, this essay's point is to analyse the work from the postcolonial perspective by giving specific examples from the novel.

### **On the Summary of the Novel**

*Lucy* is Jamaica Kincaid's one of the novels that made her popular after she became known for her first short story *Girl*. The novel takes place in New York. The main character and the heroine of the novel, Lucy works as an au pair in a family with four kids and seemingly happy wife, Mariah and husband Lewis. Lucy is the only coloured person in the house considering the fact that the family members all are blonde. Readers see the racial difference between the heroine and the family when Lucy describes the pictures of the family that are hanging on the walls of the entire house. She describes the family to be yellow-haired and all alike. Since she was from Antigua and Barbuda, a country in the Caribbean, she had not seen a lot of blonde people. Also, the family is always happy and always finds everything to be wonderful and nice (Kincaid, 1990: 13). At first, it is difficult for her to adapt and even from time to time, she feels homesick even though she does not want to admit it. (Kincaid, 1990: 9). However, slowly she makes friends and while she makes friends and adapts her life in New York, she starts to hate her life back in home in Antigua. Mostly, she hates her parents, particularly her father, giving the reason that her father is way older than her mother. And she is angry with her mother because she had married an old man who is as old as her father (Lucy's grandfather).

As the time passes, she makes friends and discovers vibrant life of New York. Her first friend is Peggy. Peggy is another au pair in the novel; however, she does not have a central power in the story apart from being Lucy's friend. (Kincaid, 1990: 40). Peggy helps Annie to discover the city and do activities that Lucy could not do alone. Also, she makes Lucy meet several people. One of the people that Peggy makes Lucy meet is Paul. He and Lucy for several time meet, and they make love each time. Thus, one could say that they become friends-in-benefits. After working as an au pair for several months, Lucy understands that she wants to do something different than just taking care of children and household. Thus, she quits. She gets a camera and starts taking photos of interesting things. Later, she starts working in an office for a photographer. At the same time, even though she does not make enough money as an assistant of a photographer, she rents an apartment with Peggy and moves out from Marian and Lewi's house.

During the time that she lives with Marian and Lewis's, she gets a lot of letters from her mother in Antigua. However, Lucy, does not answer any of the letters from her mother. Later, Marion tells Lucy that Lucy's father passed away. And the reason that Marion told it to Lucy was because Lucy herself never wanted to read her mother's emails. At the end, she learns such bad news from her employer. She, desperately, sends all her savings to her mother. However, while sending, she writes a letter to her mother saying that she is angry with her for all the things that happened when she was a child and all the things that happened even before she was born. Thus, she understands that she will never talk her mother again. However, as a response, her mother writes back that she will never forget her, she will always be her mother. And their home will always be Lucy's home.

Time passes, Lucy starts getting used to her new life with her housemate Peggy. From time to time, she meets Paul just for love making. However, unfortunately, at the end of the novel, readers learn that both of her friends, Paul and Peggy disappear at the same hours, which means that Annie's friend Peggy starts meeting Paul. This is where Annie understands that she is alone and lonely, and she is just a brown girl from a colonized country almost nowhere in the Caribbean see that not many people know. She takes a notebook and writes her name. She wants to write more; however, she cannot continue as her eyes starts tearing. Sadly, she only writes down that she wishes she had someone that she would love much and die from her love. And this is where the novel ends. (Kincaid, 1990: 102).

### **Discussion on the Postcolonial Elements in the Novel**

The novel starts as a biography as if the writer tries to talk about her daily life and activities. However, slowly, when reading between the lines, it is not very difficult to see the colonial and postcolonial messages, and memories that she tries to illustrate. Jamaica Kincaid, in codes, perfectly depicts how a female figure from

a colonized country can feel when moving to another country. At first, we can see Lucy's nostalgias regarding her mother and her homeland even though she does not directly love any of them. Then, readers can see how Kincaid reflects on the topics regarding sugarcane plantations, slavery, self-identity, discrimination, stereotypes, generalization, and many more. Let's have a look at them in detailed forms.

Lucy, as a young woman in her adolescence who is around 19 years old, portrays a person that suffers from her colonial background and nostalgias that hunt her. At the very first page, readers understand that her family back in home in Antigua is not rich enough, even to afford a fridge. Later, she describes and adds that even the elevator, the apartment, and everything she is living in is much more different and so much better than back in Antigua. (Kincaid, 1990: 1). Thus, her new life in America is better and easier than her life in Antigua. Here, we can see how a third world country, a country that was formerly colonized could be like. While people in an independent and free country like America can live as they want with all the modern technology, her people who still suffered from colonialism lived in the poorest condition. Furthermore, another important detail is shown itself when Annie talks about seasons and mentions the fact that she likes the weather more when it is sunny since it reminds of her homeland and makes her less homesick (Kincaid, 1990: 2-3). Later, she explains that she wrote letters to her mother and relatives back in home. All those letters contained beautiful and flower words so that people in home could not feel that she was homesick, or she was unhappy. Thus, though she is unhappy, she tries to mask her unhappiness with fake words. (Kincaid, 1990: 5). At the beginning of the novel, Kincaid tries to prepare readers for upcoming colonial images by giving such simple examples. She tries to drag people's attention to the fact that there was no job in Antigua because of the colonial factor, and therefore, our Lucy tries to make money and cope with all the nostalgic homesickness in a far and alien land.

Slowly, the novel deepens and gives more examples of colonialism. Lucy talks about one of the letters that she receives from her mother in which her mother warns her daughter to be careful in the metro. She says that once she heard that someone had cut an immigrant girl's throat [probably black or brawn girl] (Kincaid, 1990: 17). This part of the novel shows readers how racist a society could be even though they themselves are the reason for that immigrant to be live in their country. Perhaps, if colonialism had not existed, that girl, and thousands of people did not have to move to America. They could have stayed in their own countries. However, the reality is different. Many countries got colonized by the British Empire and their last hope after the collapse was finding a new life in New York and London. As a result, they ended up with killings and murders that committed by the colonizer themselves. Again, the colonized suffered in a non-colonized society. Kincaid tries to drag readers attention to the victims of racism and colonialism.

Later, Kincaid talks about the language influence of colonialism. In page 58,

she talks about her mother, using French and English. Her country Antigua was a British colony until 1981. It was one of the last countries to get independence from the British. Just for the note, it is necessary to say that most of the colonized countries got independence after the second world war, however, her country stayed under the British rule almost until the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. And before being under the British, they were controlled by the French. Her island, back and forth, was controlled by either British or French. Therefore, the local language in the island slowly started to turn into French and English. People started to use both languages and forget their own languages. In his part of the novel, Kincaid illustrates language deformation and adaptation of the colonizers' languages.

Apart the linguistic colonization, Kincaid shows how colonization was being controlled through sugarcane fields and how people were being brainwashed with the songs for the so-called British patriotism and heroism. Kincaid's heroine, Lucy talks about a fisherman back in home, Mr Mathew. He was an orphan child and her parents died in the sugarcane fields. (Kincaid, 1990: 65). Possibly, his parents were slaves, and they were brought from Africa like many others who worked in the sugar fields. Later, she continues with an anthem that she was forced to sing as a child at school but did not want to; *Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves; Britons never, never shall be slaves*. She adds that she was not Briton, but she had to sing this song as her island was a part of British Empire. (Kincaid, 1990: 85). This part of the novel shows us a brainwashing technique that is used on children to code them for the possible future colonization. At the same time, it is important to mention the fact that such national and patriot activities create low self-esteem and identity crisis. Growing in such society, people do not understand to which culture and environment they belong. In the song, it says; *Britons will never be slaves*. This part of the song is extremely ironical because British empire colonized almost on third of the world and enslaved millions of people and occupied many countries and territories. Thus, technically enslaved the whole world. While praising their own nation, they disgrace the whole nations that they colonized. Plus, they force people, who are colonized to sing such songs and make them believe that they are part of the British society, while they are not really.

At the last chapter of the novel, closer to the end, Lucy talks about herself and her entire life. There, for the first time, we learn her full name and other details about her parents and her people in Antigua. Ironically, in traditional writings, readers would expect that such introduction about the protagonist would be done in the first pages. However, Kincaid does it in purpose in order to show her artistic licence as a writer. Furthermore, it is one of the examples of postmodern literature. Postmodern writers and poets are free to do anything with their texts since they believe that text belongs to them, and they can write as they please. When we learn her name, we see that she has three names; *Lucy Josephine Potter* (Kincaid, 1990: 95). Later, she continues that she does not like any of these names because all of them are linked to some colonial

past. She says that she was named Josephine after her uncle Joseph who became rich thanks to sugarcane money that he had made in Cuba. Later she talks about her other name, Potter. She says that the reason why she did not like this name is because it a white name, an English name who controlled and enslaved her people. Yet, her parents were so naïve to understand the possible colonial background of the name. On the other hand, she was left only with one name to be called: Lucy. She says that she does not like this name, however, that was the only option she had left. (Kincaid, 1990: 95). However, one can say that not only Josephine, but all three names have colonial backgrounds because none of them are Afro-Caribbean while she is from Antigua which is populated with Afro-Caribbean people. Thus, all her names hunt her with their colonial identity. Now, she has the burden of carrying her colonial past with all these three names. Even though she wants to escape from her colonial past, she cannot because her identity is colonial.

Almost in the middle of the novel, Kincaid introduces the level of education in Antigua through giving examples regarding museums in Antigua. Our protagonist, Lucy, says that she likes to go to museums unlike her friend Peggy. Later she adds that she likes to visit museums because her country had no museums. (Kincaid, 1990: 65) Here, the author, Kincaid, tries to send readers a message that England did not care if its colonies had good education or not. Having a museum shows cultural and historical intelligence of the society. And Antiguans were robbed from their cultural and historical pasts. Besides, if there was a museum, what kind of history would it present? Since still Antigua was still under the British rule, museum could not show the horrible sides of colonialism. Thus, they would show only fake and flowery sides of colonialism (if there was any). Or perhaps they would teach fake patriotism as they did at schools like the song of '*Rule Britannia*.'

The novel also shows discrimination and generalization which came from the concept of 'exotic other' by Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. According to them, the colonizer uses certain images of the colonized to show them less privileged and less important. In the novel, Mariah's friend Dinah asks Lucy saying that she is from the islands. (Kincaid, 1990: 38). Of course, by saying islands, Dinah wanted to mention the colonized states that were still controlled by the British. Yes, there were many islands in the Caribbean Sea and Antigua was one of them. However, no matter the size, it was a land of many people and many people like Lucy called it their homes. However, for people like Dinah, it did not really matter because from her behaviour towards Lucy, we can understand that she is pro colonial. She sees Lucy a subaltern character. She believes that she is just a girl from the Caribbean as she says later in the novel. Thus, readers can see colonial discrimination and generalization. Interestingly, it is the same concept today when people do not know the names of countries in Africa and call them just 'African countries, an African country, or simply, a country in Africa.' On the other hand, it would have mattered so much to Lucy if she just had mentioned her country's name rather than calling it an island. We can see how important it is for Lucy

when she says that she liked Hugh, Dinah's husband, because he simply asked where she was from in the West Indies (another name of the Caribbean) (Kincaid, 1990: 43). As we can see, Hugh does not have pro colonial ideas unlike his wife Dinah.

At the beginning of the novel, Mariah, Lucy's employer tells Lucy a bit of herself. She says that she has an Indian root as she is very good at hunting birds, roasting corn, and catching fish. (Kincaid, 1990: 28). Although, she does not look Indian at all, she claims it as a fact that she has Indian blood. In the previous pages, Lucy describes Mariah to be blonde, not brown like Indian people. Furthermore, even though all the things she mentioned are good and essential things (catching fish, hunting, roasting corn), they are primitive things. People in New York never did such things and if they heard someone doing such an activity, they would underestimate that person because they are simply used to buy everything from the supermarket. Also, the writer does not forget to mention all the struggle and massacres that native Indians in America had faced. She says that all the Indians are not alive today (Kincaid, 1990: 29). Lastly, it is important to mention that Lucy being in America for work is another example of colonialism. If her country had a good condition, and if the colonizer, which is England, had given all the chances and opportunities to Antiguans as they give to their own people in England, she would not have left her country and go far away to work almost as a servant by looking after someone's kids.

## Conclusion

Kincaid's novel *Lucy* was published in 1990, following the success of her previous bestseller *Annie John*. *Lucy* combines several postmodern literary elements. Readers may feel as if they are absorbed in the protagonist's thoughts as they progress through the story. Stream of consciousness is a method that can be traced back to Joseph Conrad's pioneering use of it in his work *The Heart of Darkness*, which is considered one of the earliest instances of modern and postcolonial literature. Jamaica Kincaid uses a first-person point of view in *Lucy*, allowing the speaker to express herself freely and repeatedly, seemingly indifferent about whether or not the readers fully understand her. In addition, Kincaid employs historiographic-metafictions and simple metafiction tactics throughout the novel to demonstrate to readers that she is the sole author of her work. For example, she only introduces herself in the final chapter of the book, despite the fact that the book is divided into five chapters, each of which discusses her experiences as an au pair, her recollections, her colonial and postcolonial background, her mother's life, the family she lives in, and so on. Intertextuality is another postmodern method used in the novel. She frequently references her prior book, *Annie John*. This book catapulted her to popularity. As a result, she wrote *Lucy*, her second novel, as a continuation of *Annie John*, but with a different tale and book.

The novel is regarded as a piece of postcolonial literature because it was



produced by an author from the former colony of Antigua. The title of the book and the name of the main character in the story are both Lucy. She has a colonial past and is constantly being tormented by thoughts of her former colony. One of the last nations to get independence was her own, Antigua (1981). She is able to notice the stark contrast between freedom and independence in the USA and repression and persecution in Antigua since she lives in America, a former colony. She also has to contend with the fact that she has never lived in a culture where white people predominate. She now has to live in a world where there are many negative prejudices about black and physically strong individuals. In spite of the fact that the book includes a heroine rather than a hero, it is nevertheless regarded as postcolonial feminist literature. However, the purpose of this essay was to analyse the piece from a postcolonial standpoint by using examples from the novel.

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