

## **A Study on Dominant Force of Trauma in Social and Political Category: Jamaica Kincaid’s “Lucy”**

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### **Abstract**

*Trauma is the psychological symptom that appears on the people who had suffered from serious oppression of society, political scheme, or fearful disaster of nature. It never easily disappears and isn't healed by any diligent effort. Once the trauma is formed in someone's mind, it unexpectedly appears and bothers them in an intermittent and repetitive pattern. This phenomenon aims to turn up frequently on black people or third-world people, especially women. This study focuses on looking into the fundamental ground of trauma mostly dominating this social structure. Herman Judith Lewis insists that an unstable and unequal social scheme causes chaotic factors to surrounded people in the society, and it is directly connected to trauma. The trauma gradually dominates their life and their identity. This paper will examine the dominant force of trauma in the context of social and political norms based on the analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's novel, Lucy. For that purpose, it will examine the symbolic objects bursting out trauma to the social members. It will analyze the recalled memory of 'daffodil' and 'Lucy Josephine Potter'. Next, this paper will look into what changes the symbol of water and tears can bring to Lucy, who has a trauma grounded on Sigmund Freud's theory.*

**Keywords:** *Trauma, Suppression, Daffodil, Tears, Overcoming*

### **1. Introduction**

Historically and politically being examined, trauma is deeply related to social and cultural circumstances. When suppressive war, colonization, the unexpected disaster of nature happens to people, they are prone to show some abrupt reaction to it or they get unimaginable fear [1]. These factors can be potential symptoms, and they get manifested later on. This phenomenon explicitly appears in black women or third-world women. Researching on the footsteps of historical and political trace, this study will look into how that trauma is formed into those targets, and how they can get it over.

When we examine world history, people having diaspora life have been unstable, and they have not been treated well as human beings. Black people's life in American society was very similar to theirs. National or international political suppression produced a lot of drifted immigrants who wanted to escape from the inhumane atrocity of reality. Colonized people were also included in that group. They have never been respected as a person. It was an absolute disaster and chaos. Scattered immigrants and wanderers' life was chaotic as it was. They could not set up their identity properly in that circumstance. People who could not have

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a natural relationship with their mother got lost in the direction of their life. It was natural that they had difficulty extending relationships in society. It becomes a deficiency factor as they grow up, and such deficiency forms trauma in the relationship. It leads them to have deprivation in relations, and it affects their identity.

The unexpected environment where they were stuck - incomplete identity yet, chaotic ego, no brothers and sisters around them, absolute absurdity, mental and physical persecution, inhumane insult, – lets the third world people or black people be exposed to the frame of mental instability. This circumstance was the factor causing mental trauma. This trauma dominates their life step by step, and the domination invades their right as a human.

This study will explore the structural basis of trauma, and will embody the example of such analysis through the examination of Jamaica Kincaid's novel, "Lucy". The study on the formation and development of trauma will be studied by applying Herman Judith Lewis's theory. In terms of the analysis of Lucy's traumatic pathology and mental symbols in this novel, this paper will examine Freud's theory in parallel.

## **2. Dominant force of trauma in the social and political background**

Trauma which is already engraved in some person never goes away even with constant and indomitable effort. It is not a matter of it is a personal or national issue in the category of human history. This is a matter of mental mechanism. That is to say, once trauma gets in someone's mind, it does not completely disappear. It unceasingly works on their mental representation. It appears again whenever they are exposed to any oppressive or unexpected situation similar to their experience [2]. It can not be solved out easily and recovered as time goes by. For that reason, plenty of writers ranged from Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, Nora Zeal Hurston through Jamaica Kincaid tried to embrace their nations' instability and mental shock into their novels. They also advocate supplying appropriate social and political schemes where their psychological scar can be healed [3].

Like it is already pointed out above, trauma is not a simple symptom that is resisted easily. It is really hard to get over it with their free will. Trauma unexpectedly and intermittently shows up in different patterns in normal life. It has a pathological symptom and is transformed into an unexpected phenomenon. Its abrupt invasion into life seriously disturbs normal life. Lots of psycho-pathologists defined this mental disorder as 'post-traumatic stress disorder(PTSD). Psychopathologists suggested a few possible potential treatments for them, and it is using drugs of psychosomatic medicine and having regular psychological treatment. They say that it is not a perfect cure for them, but it will help them be healed inch by inch. Many scholars insist that people have to find out the truth of conflicts or persecutions from the social structure they belonged to exactly diagnose symptoms of trauma revealed in individuals or groups of people [4]. They should try to find out the foundational cause of trauma and stick to its cure. A lot of psychosomatic doctors or professional psychologists who have studied post-traumatic stress order tend to conclude that each patient's research has to be processed first and then treatment has to be accompanied by it.

When researching the originality of the word, 'trauma', it has the etymology of Greek culture. Based on Greek etymological background, it meant 'the scar' on someone's body. It does not mean simply the scar or hurt on someone's body, but it includes double meaning on it for medical scientists. Looking into the meaning of the wound from the viewpoint of medical scientists or writers, it embraces the meaning of scar on their mind. According to Judith Lewis Herman, that scar which can be called 'trauma' is not the simple abrupt symptom appearing at the designated time. It is a kind of obsessive symptom that shows up

that person's mental crack from the frame of stability. It gradually gets bigger and bigger and has a serious influence on that person's identity. It harms his mind and destroys his normal life by showing up the phenomenon of a nightmare or paroxysm. It sometimes causes paroxysmal dyspnea.

Judith Lewis Herman points out in his book "Trauma and Recovery" that trauma is an invisible obstacle that hinders someone's normal life [5]. They tend to keep their exhausted life without realizing the entity, what bothers their mind. It is so natural that they become to get exhausted and inert step by step. They cannot have a stable relationship with others in society. Because they show up paroxysmal symptoms in front of them, and they do not know the reason why they have those symptoms. Until trauma gets to show some repetitive patterns, they are exposed to social bias and pain.

As John N. Briere also explains, traumatic people show up a similar tendency the way of controlling their mind when they have to face the fearful situation in society. Especially when it is about their experience of trauma, they tend to be helpless. It "reminds them of terror, anger, and devastation they experienced in repetitive form" [6]. It hinders them from keeping the social relationship as a human individual, and it finally leads them to lose self-esteem as a grown-up person. The lack of self-esteem and self-identity produces various types of side effects on people, and it becomes a trigger that causes trauma [7]. These people hesitate to make their own decision to start something in society. This can be connected with the unstable relationship with their mother. But this tendency often stems from an unstable relationship with motherhood.

People having a problem of mental shock or trauma tends to show the wrong relationship with their mother at the starting of their life. The establishment of an unstable relationship with a mother derives negative aspects of a person's growth in many respects. This propensity is based on the circumstance of diaspora and war, and it takes a long time to restore themselves. This research targets examining these tendencies on trauma in the context of social and political background. When it comes to this research, this paper will analyze one of Jamaica Kincaid's representative novels, "Lucy". It will look into Lucy's escape from her mother, diaspora life in an unfamiliar land, the meaning of traumatic symbols in Lucy's life, and her gradual change as a mature person.

### **3. Symbol recurring trauma: Daffodil**

Jamaica Kincaid is a very powerful and influential writer in the field of diaspora literature all over the world. She represents third-world literature. She tried to embrace people's stories living diaspora life. Naturally, Jamaica Kincaid's novel includes female wanderers' life ranged from third-world people to black people isolated from cultural protection. Her story mostly delineates third-world women's unstable and fearful life as immigrants. These women's adventure in the new territory was horrible. Everything surrounding them was smooth. They had to go through a kind of pilgrimage whatever they do in this new land.

In "Lucy", Jamaica Kincaid suggests Lucy as her mirror. Kincaid conveys her philosophy as a third-world person to readers through her mirror, Lucy [8]. In this new territory, Lucy makes a new relationship with people, and its process tends to show a repetitive pattern that she had with her mother. Lucy sometimes retrieved contempt adversely to break the fortress of her mother and move on. Her way of discontent against her mother turns up in the aspect of sexual activity. Her mother excessively oppressed her attitude in terms of sexuality. This form of her mother's oppression lets Lucy have an obsession with it. This propensity affects

Lucy to have trauma in the state of unconsciousness. Ever since this experience, Lucy shows up some traumatic symptoms when she is exposed to a similar confined situation.

Jamaica Kincaid implicatively suggests colonizer's power through Lucy's landlady, Mariah. Mariah is seemingly generous and understanding to Lucy, and she is compared to Lucy's mother later on in this novel. At the same time, she becomes an object who irritates Lucy's potential traumatic symptom. Lucy's experience staying in Mariah's house leads Lucy to have an unconstrained worldview. It also makes Lucy re-set up her memory in the colonized country and lets her discover herself. In the early part of this novel, Lucy is very impressed with Mariah the way she acts to her and her caring. Mariah does not look narrow-minded, and she seems to be generous to all people regardless of race and class. Mariah's way of attitude is very unfamiliar to Lucy, but it is touching enough to move her mind. Lucy even thinks of Virgin Mary's unconditional love and generosity through Mariah's caring for her. Moira Ferguson points out that Kincaid is using very intentional comparison by adapting the colonizer's symbol, Mariah to Virgin Mary in "Lucy" [9]. Therefore, readers need to read between the lines in terms of Lucy's constant proclaim to Mariah who is delineated to have the image of an innocent mother.

As Moira mentioned, Kincaid suggests on purpose this symbolic image of goodness through Mariah in the early part of this novel. This flow of the story can give a more dramatic effect on readers, and the writer's message can be conveyed to them more strikingly. Mariah's pure and innocent image symbolizes the colonizer's fancy illusion. Colonizers have a clear goal to incapacitate colonized ones to keep perpetual suppression and wield their power. Colonizers never acknowledge that they abuse their power to colonized nations. They only see the world from their point of view. This study implicitly digs up most of this dominant structure in the category of social, historical, and cultural interrelations between colonizer and colonized one.

Lucy realizes the truth in a time that she already has a mother she loves, but she feels terrified the moment Lucy had a heavy burden on her mother's love. Lucy once feels that Mariah's love for her looks stronger than her mother's love for her. This way of attitude is very typical in the view of the medical pathologist's diagnosis of the traumatic patient. About Lucy's compatible behavior, J. Brooks Bouson indicates as follows.

This invisible but potential factor that might turn up again at any time in life is the worst enemy to maintain common life. This fear constantly suppresses diaspora people to deviate from the stable routine of their life. It never perishes, and it only looks perishable. This possible risky factor interrupts traumatic person to hesitate to make some relationship in society and lets them ask questions to themselves if it is possible for them to co-exist with other people [10].

This realistic phenomenon hinders third world women or black women from being sustaining normal human relations including family and even loved ones.

In "Lucy", the episode of daffodils plays the role of awakening colonized people's buried souls [11]. Kincaid has an intention to stimulate colonized ones' memory and let them evoke their potential trauma through the episode of daffodils. In this novel, daffodils are the symbol of joy and beauty to Mariah. It is a very superficial object to colonizers. In general, daffodils sprout in Spring, and it lets Mariah remember the bright side of the world. However, daffodils are the object which reminds Lucy of the helpless and inert world in her past. It guides Lucy to think of her poor and vulnerable childhood and her colonized homeland. Due to Mariah's tenacious pressure to go to the garden of daffodils, Lucy gradually memorizes her traumatic incident in school when she was young. She had to make a speech on reciting a pome, 'Daffodil' in public.

Lucy was extremely nervous and her memory did not work properly. She was very shameful of other students' responses and her teacher's insult. The pressure to memorize and recite it lets Lucy dream of being chased and fallen by yellow daffodils. She was finally buried in a pile of daffodils in that nightmare. By that experience, daffodils become a sort of symbol of traumatic symptoms. To surmount the traumatic memory, Lucy has to erase each phrase of that poem, word by word from her memory.

Lucy's shame and anger about daffodils exemplify how cultural form in some society induces culturally impaired psychology of it. Nancy Chodorow says, "the psychological and cultural experience of childhood is accidental, filtered, personalized in some certain psychological activity. Those activities are individually structured and revived in both each individual and culture" [12]. Lucy's remembrance of her life in her homeland which was dominated by English colony culture reminds her of the insult and shame she experienced there. She always had the feeling of revenge in her mind to their contempt. Daffodils which look weak and beautiful superficially are the symbolic object of violence wielding its power to Lucy.

Lucy expresses daffodil's violence on her to Mariah how terrible that memory was, and it had bothered her for a long time since that incident. She had to memorize the poem about daffodils and recite it in public, which she had never seen before that moment in life. Conquerors and the conquered have explicitly different historical consciousness on the culture and circumstance they coexisted together. The image of Lucy and Mariah symbolizing those two classes reveal their different viewpoints on daffodils. Anything cannot change Lucy's sadness and agony that she had by remembering this flower, which Mariah thinks beautiful. Colonization, violence, and fear of oppression dominate people's consciousness, and it divided the world into two groups of oppressors and the oppressed, conquerors and the conquered. It eventually deviated fatal trauma to some nations. Through Lucy's inner conflicts, Kincaid claims to remind people of the historical record that third world people's hurt and trauma must not mystify and delete in world history.

#### **4. Symbol overcoming trauma: the meaning of Lucy's full name and water**

At the end of this novel, Lucy leaves Mariah's house and secures her room to live with Peggy in the apartment. A new job provides her economic independence, but it puts her in solitude. This novel starts in a season, winter, and ends in winter, and it shows a circular structure. Lucy, for the first time, reveals her full name, Lucy Josephine Potter. As Kincaid insists that names, naming, renaming are necessary to Lucy for the definition of the self, change of the self, possession of the self, and creation of the self [13]. "Josephine" was named after her uncle, "Joseph", who made a fortune from a sugarcane farm but died of poverty. "Potter" was named after the owner of her slave ancestors. When Lucy asked her mother the reason how she could get that name, her mother explained the background of the birth of her name, Lucy. She says that it is quoted from the bible, Satan Lucifer. What Lucy's mother explained about her name conjures up her illegitimate identity, and she accepts herself as she is now.

However, at this point, Lucy defiantly accepts the insulting name of Lucifer. She confesses that she has emotionally changed into a new and determined person getting out of old and exhausted feeling ever since she accepted the real meaning of her name. Lucy links Lucifer's bad identity and power who was made to challenge the existing order and rules like Satan to herself. Lucy, in reverse, derives victory from failure. She becomes actively involved in her

name now. As Lucifer settled down in the new land, Lucy becomes to accept her life and settle down in the new land. She starts to get stable and move on to her life positively.

To completely get over the trauma, traumatic people need to restore their identity and reconciliation with themselves [14]. And then they can make another positive relationship in society. Therefore, Lucy also needs to regain true reconciliation with herself first. Selwyn Cudjoe says, "If traumatic people desperately restore normal human relationship with others, they have to open their false ego painfully stricken to past scar and memory which were caused by trauma, then they have to restore the basic relationship in life. It means to restore the relationship with mother" [15].

Lucy's anger against her mother and her devastation in her homeland has conquered most of her life, but she needs to reconcile with her inner self-ego to be reborn in this new world. Kincaid puts out Lucy as a different human being having her stable self-ego by being reborn. Lucy can be broken away from the confinement of the colonizer's dominance. Kincaid uses the device of water and tears to let Lucy see the light in the world. Freud insists that the period of mourning for traumatic people is necessarily required to get over its symptom and to be out of it [16][17]. Those people need to be indulged into absolute sadness and mournfulness for the time being to completely heal themselves. The definition of mourning should be distinguished from the concept of retaliation. The repetitive apparition of traumatic people's retaliation is prone to be magnified, and the apparition of forgiveness constantly bothers their scar [18][19].

After all, Lucy becomes to collapse with emotional tears yearning for true love. As tears and water symbolize the pilgrimage of self-purification, Lucy washes off her trauma from the little box of the world which had suffocated her whole life. These movements of Lucy mean that she is developing herself to another level of reconciliation and self-healing. Lucy finally re-discovers her buried identity by mourning her mother sincerely, and her lost love gets into the stage of healing. This novel looks like it ends before readers witness Lucy's complete change, but they realize Jamaica Kincaid will keep writing in the direction of advocating women's equal rights and self-identity. In the long run, Kincaid implicitly shows hope for women's future through Lucy's tears having the message of change.

## 5. Conclusion

As it is examined through the whole process of this research, Lucy is a representative figure of third-world people who have had serious mental scars cause of political and social absurdity oppressing them in reality. The reality full of absurdity, recklessness, inhumanity unceasingly suppressed third world people, especially women who had double oppression in family and society, and this social and cultural atmosphere made them wanderers. They had deep hurt in their soul. They were political and social victims, and this circumstance became the seed of their trauma. Third-world women's diaspora life drifting away here and there was very similar to that of black women in American society. The social and political scheme they belonged to was overwhelmed with insult and inhumanity, and it naturally gave birth to trauma.

This study looked into trauma appearing in third-world people or black people through the examination of Lucy's growth in the context of social and cultural background. The symptoms of trauma were being expressed in the form of individual portent or collective portent. With the movement of time and space, the trauma that had been trapped in traumatic people's subconsciousness tends to reveal its entity and comes to the surface. By analyzing trigger factors that stimulate the suppressed trauma, this study suggests an opportunity to lay

the groundwork for a quantum leap. It also encourages to the establishment of cultural and social mechanisms for diaspora people suffering from trauma in the category having the limit of a social and political movement.

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