



REJECTION OF WOMEN'S SUBMISSION IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S LUCY

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Abstract

This study examines the rejection of women's submission as portrayed in *Lucy* (1990) by Jamaica Kincaid using feminist literary theory. It aims to identify the forms of female submission rooted in culture and analyze how the main character rejects traditional roles that marginalize and oppress women. Employing a qualitative approach, the novel serves as the primary data source, supported by secondary sources such as scholarly books, journal articles, and library research. Data are collected through close reading and note-taking, then categorized and analyzed from a feminist perspective. The findings reveal that women's submission is manifested through traditional gender roles that confine women to the domestic sphere and restrict their autonomy. The main character's rejection of these roles represents both a form of self-defense and an act of transcending social expectations imposed on women. This rejection demonstrates a conscious effort to gain independence, assert personal freedom, and challenge patriarchal norms. The study concludes that rejecting women's submission is essential for achieving self-determination and equality, emphasizing the importance of encouraging women to step beyond their comfort zones, claim authority over their lives, and actively participate in both domestic and public spheres.

Keywords: rejection, women's submission, traditional rules, feminism

1. Introduction

The discussion about women remains an important and ongoing topic to this day. Women have now taken on significant roles in various sectors such as politics, education, economy, and social life, no longer limited to the domestic sphere as mothers and wives (Ghatri, 2023). With the resilience and strength they possess, women not only keep up with the changes of the times but also create change by boldly challenging the limitations that previously restricted their space. This struggle demonstrates that women are capable of thinking, working, and leading, and making a significant impact in life.

However, in patriarchal culture, women's roles in the past were very limited. Patriarchy positioned men as the dominant party in the family and society, while women were considered second-class citizens who had to obey norms and rules passed down through generations. Women were expected to be obedient daughters, compliant wives, and self-sacrificing

mothers, so their freedom to determine their own life paths was often constrained by deeply rooted social values (Harahap & Jailani, 2024).

Opportunities for women to develop their potential outside the domestic sphere are minimal, either due to social pressure, cultural norms, or the patriarchal system that is deeply rooted in society. Women are often not given enough space to explore their abilities in education, work, or other public spheres. As a result, they are often forced to spend most of their lives at home, fulfilling traditional roles such as caring for the household, serving their husbands, and raising children. Women who choose to pursue careers, become leaders, or pursue higher education are often seen as deviating from their "natural destiny," as if their success and self-worth are measured solely by their ability to manage a household.

This inequality causes many women to experience oppression, especially through the division of traditional roles that confine women to the domestic sphere while giving



men broader access to the public sphere. This creates a subtle yet systematic cycle of oppression, where women feel secure within these limitations even though their freedom is reduced. Although today women have greater access to education and public spaces, traditional stigma and norms have not completely disappeared. According to Rimdani (2024), many women still choose to remain in domestic roles due to a social construct that regards these roles as the most ideal choice. This choice should be respected as long as it is not driven by coercion or fear of social judgment. Therefore, it is important to continue fostering awareness that women's independence is not a form of deviation, but rather an effort to freely and humanely actualize themselves.

Although women currently have much greater freedom to play roles outside the domestic sphere, thanks to advances in education, technology, and awareness of gender equality, the social stigma attached in the past has not completely disappeared. Traditional norms still influence the way some people view women, so that conservative social expectations often limit women's life choices. Not a few women in Indonesia choose to remain in the comfort zone of domestic roles, not because they are unable, but because they have been internalized by a social construction that assumes that the best place for women is at home. This choice is certainly worthy of appreciation as long as it is not born of coercion or fear of social judgment. However, it is also important to continue to encourage awareness that being an independent woman is not a form of rejection of nature, but rather an effort to use potential fully and freely in various areas of life.

Rejection of women's submission is also reflected in literature, one of which is *Lucy* (1990) by Jamaica Kincaid. Through the character of Lucy, this novel portrays the struggle of a young woman who rejects patriarchal norms and tries to step out of the comfort zone shaped by culture and social expectations, including her mother's

demands. Unlike previous studies that focused more on trauma, colonialism, or migration, this study concentrates on the rejection of subjugation and women's efforts to redefine their roles and identities. This study remains relevant because many women still face similar dilemmas in striving for freedom and independence amid social and cultural pressures.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rejection

Rejection is a way or process to convey feelings of disagreement towards an expression, request, invitation, or offer from the interlocutor in everyday interactions. This rejection can be expressed directly or indirectly so that the interlocutor understands the disagreement (Busri & Massaguni, 2023).

In a feminist context, the concept of rejection is multifaceted and plays a critical role both as a political act and a theoretical stance. Rejection in feminist thought often involves refusing to accept unjust, oppressive, or limiting social, political, and cultural norms that subordinate women and other marginalized groups. Feminist theory frequently rejects traditional philosophical frameworks that exclude or marginalize gender and sexuality as critical categories. It embraces transdisciplinary concepts like gender, sexuality, and sexual difference, which challenge the insularity of traditional philosophy and push for social change. This rejection of disciplinary boundaries is a productive contradiction that fuels feminist critique and activism (Sandford, 2015).

2.2 Women's Submission

Submission comes from the Latin word *submissionem*, which means to lower oneself, to give up, or to submit. In general, submission is understood as the act of giving up something for judgment or as an attitude of submission to authority and power. According to Sjoberg (2008), in the traditional view, submission is considered a noble moral value because it is seen as helping to maintain order, harmony, and social stability, especially in societies that



uphold hierarchy and customs. This value is often instilled from an early age through religious and cultural teachings. However, submission has a strong gender dimension in patriarchal societies. Women are often expected to submit to men—whether as fathers, husbands, or leaders—and this obedience is considered a natural and ideal role for women. Women who refuse to submit are often labeled as impolite or rebellious, so this attitude of submission serves to reinforce unequal power relations and male dominance in both the domestic and public spheres.

2.3 Women's Oppression

Women's oppression is a longstanding and complex issue rooted in gender inequality that places women in inferior positions through socially constructed, gender-biased cultures. This subordination limits women's roles and mobility in both domestic and public spheres, preventing them from achieving equality. As a result, women experience various forms of oppression, including the loss of rights, control over their bodies and fertility, unequal wages, domestic violence, sexual harassment, restricted access to decent work, and discriminatory practices (Putri et al, 2003). Historically, women's oppression can be traced back to the hunter-gatherer or barbarism era, when the concept of ownership emerged and men controlled the means of production. Women were confined to reproductive and domestic roles, reducing their bodily and social capacity. This domestication of women's bodies continues across private and public spheres in different forms and degrees. Consequently, women face discrimination, marginalization, stereotyping, violence, commodification, sexual objectification, double burdens, and feminization of poverty. These persistent injustices ultimately gave rise to the feminist movement, which seeks to liberate women from systemic oppression.

3. Research Method

Research is a primary tool in advancing knowledge in the fields of humanities and literary studies, as it aims to uncover the truth through systematic, methodological, and consistent investigation. Through this process, data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted to build meaningful insights and arguments. This study uses a qualitative narrative research design, which emphasizes deep understanding, interpretation, and contextual analysis of literary texts.

Qualitative research in literary studies is an approach that focuses on the analysis of themes, characters, symbolic meanings, and the socio-cultural context within a narrative. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to social or humanitarian problems. The main purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people think, feel, and give meaning to an event or situation in their lives.

The primary data source in this study is the novel being analyzed, supported by secondary sources such as scientific journals, books, and academic articles relevant to the study of feminism and the concept of the other. Data collection techniques were carried out through systematic in-depth reading, noting and marking significant parts of the text, and grouping textual data according to the research problem formulation. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. This structured analytical approach allows for a comprehensive and consistent understanding of how Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory explains the forms of Lucy's rejections to the women submission.

4. Result and Discussion

The rejection of women submission in *Lucy* (1990) by Jamaica Kincaid arises from



the complex interaction between personal experiences, family relations, and patriarchal social structures that shape the main character's consciousness. This rejection is not merely an act of rebellion, but a profound existential conflict, as explained in Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, particularly the concept of The Other.

4.1 Women's Submission

In patriarchal societies, women are constructed as The Other, that is, a secondary subject whose existence is defined through their relationship with others. Simone de Beauvoir asserts that "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 2009). This position demands that women submit, obey, and accept predefined roles. Lucy rejects this construction from the beginning of the narrative. Her conflict with her mother reflects the clash between internalized patriarchal values and Lucy's awareness as an individual seeking freedom. Lucy expresses her alienation from her mother by saying, "I had come to feel that my mother's love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn't know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone" (Kincaid, 1990). This quote shows that Lucy no longer views her mother as a figure of affection, but rather as a symbol of a system that demands women submission. According to Beauvoir, women who accept traditional roles without resistance are trapped in a static and repetitive condition. Lucy's rejection of her mother is thus an early attempt to break free from that condition.

Lucy's rejection of submission does not only occur within the family sphere but also in her social relations, particularly with Mariah. Mariah, despite being a woman, represents dominant values that attempt to shape Lucy according to her own perspective and interests. Lucy is aware of this objectification effort and states, "this woman who hardly knew I loved me, and she wanted me to love this thing—a grove

brimming over with daffodils in bloom—that she loved too" (Kincaid, 1990). This quote demonstrates Lucy's awareness of her position, constantly being directed to become The Other, even by another woman. Beauvoir asserts that women can become agents of oppression when they internalize patriarchal values and apply them to other women. In this context, Lucy's rejection of Mariah represents a form of resistance against the reproduction of submission in relations between women.

Lucy's rejection of submission ultimately represents an existential awareness of being an autonomous subject. Simone de Beauvoir states that women's liberation is only possible when women reject external definitions and act as free subjects. She emphasizes that women must move out of the passivity imposed upon them to achieve freedom (Beauvoir, 2009). Lucy's decision to leave home, work, and live independently demonstrates her effort toward transcendence, a state in which individuals actively determine the meaning and direction of their own lives. Although this choice brings alienation and emotional conflict, Lucy still chooses freedom as a form of her existence. The rejection of submission is not portrayed as an easy process but as a struggle that demands courage and self-awareness.

4.2 Women's Oppression

Oppression is a consequence of subservience and the normalization of patriarchal culture, passed down from generation to generation. Women's oppression refers to systematic acts or systems of injustice perpetrated against women, aimed at limiting their freedom, rights, and equality. This oppression is characterized by an unequal power relationship that exposes women to discrimination, marginalization, and even violence. One form of women's oppression in the novel shows by the author through the relationship between Lucy and her mother. When Lucy experiences the same headache that her mother experienced before, she feels afraid, not because of the headache but



because it makes her imagine and remember her mother. We can see this from the following narrative:

“I had begun to suffer from violent headaches, exactly like the ones that used to afflict my mother. ... They frightened me because I did not know when one would come on, and they frightened me because they reminded me of my mother. ... Her desire not to please me was greater than my desire to erase her, but it so took her by surprise – my wish for such a thing – that she got a headache, a bad one, and it caused her to take her bed” (93-94).

When Lucy expresses her desire to live independently without her mother’s interference, it leads to conflict rather than understanding. The argument culminates in Lucy’s harsh statement, “I wish you were dead,” which deeply shocks her mother and causes a severe headache that leaves Lucy traumatized. This moment represents a form of symbolic oppression, as Lucy’s pursuit of independence results in guilt and fear, reinforcing the emotional control her mother holds over her.

Despite this trauma, Lucy continues to struggle for her freedom and autonomy. She rejects her mother’s values to establish her own identity, seeking to become a subject rather than an object. This struggle reflects Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of transcendence, which emphasizes the freedom to create meaning and exist as a full subject. Lucy refuses to be defined solely as a “woman” according to societal and maternal expectations, choosing instead to live as an independent individual capable of making her own choices.

4.3 The Rejection of Liyan or The Other

In *Lucy*, the narrator clearly portrays Lucy’s persistent rejection of being positioned as “The Other,” a role imposed on her by various figures and systems of power, including her mother, Mariah, and the colonial structure that shaped her

upbringing. Lucy’s mother expects her to embody traditional feminine values such as obedience, self-sacrifice, and devotion to family, positioning Lucy as a continuation or reflection of herself rather than as an independent individual. Lucy refuses to become an “echo” of her mother, recognizing that accepting this role would require her to suppress her desires, individuality, and freedom. Her resistance toward her mother is not merely personal but ideological, as it represents a rejection of inherited patriarchal values that confine women to roles of submission and self-denial.

In addition to rejecting her mother’s expectations, Lucy also rejects the colonial education system that attempted to shape her identity from an early age. This system forced her to admire and internalize European culture, which was foreign and disconnected from her lived reality. Her intense hostility toward daffodils symbolizes her refusal to accept colonial objectification and cultural domination, as these flowers represent the imposed values of a colonial power that sought to define her sense of beauty, knowledge, and selfhood. Furthermore, Lucy resists Mariah’s attempts to mold her according to Western ideals and lifestyle. Although Mariah appears affectionate and well-intentioned, Lucy recognizes that this affection is accompanied by an effort to assimilate her into a dominant cultural framework, reinforcing unequal racial and cultural power relations. Through these multiple acts of rejection, Lucy asserts herself as a subject rather than an object. She consciously chooses autonomy over comfort and freedom over submission, actively constructing her own identity despite the uncertainty, emotional pain, and struggle that accompany this process. Ultimately, Lucy’s journey represents her firm refusal of patriarchal and colonial definitions of womanhood and affirms her determination to become a woman on her own terms and by her own free will.



5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis results, it can be concluded that *Lucy* (1990) by Jamaica Kincaid represents the rejection of women's submission through the character Lucy. This rejection is expressed through her resistance to the patriarchal values inherited from her mother and social environment. Using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of The Other, Lucy is depicted as a woman striving to move from a position of immanence to transcendence. Lucy's refusal to be submissive indicates that women have the capacity to become free and autonomous subjects. This novel emphasizes the importance of women's existential awareness in resisting patriarchal oppression. Thus, Lucy is not only a narrative about identity but also about women's struggle to refuse to be The Other.

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