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Unhomely Lives:

Double Consciousness in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*

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Abstract

This essay argues that Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* depicts how the indigenous colonized in Dominica are living 'unhomely lives' and that their experience is one of the double consciousness. i.e. when a person see the world through different "lenses." The person does not only have a dual personality but also feels the notion of having different roles in society, such as having a black identity and at the same time conforming to the stereotypical norms of the white society for a black person. Therefore, the person sees the world, and oneself, through one's own "black" lens and the "white" lens at the same time. Subsequently, with a setting full of diversities, the novel depicts a colonial background where the characters have been ascribed certain features to their persona. Furthermore, the novel uses metaphors to show a futile endeavor of finding identity of the main characters in an ineluctable power structure. By utilizing the postcolonial theoretical framework; mainly Du Bois's notion on 'double consciousness' and Bhabha's term 'unhomely lives' which means to grow up between two cultures, to live on borders and in margins and not feel at ease in either sides, expands the readers understanding of the text. A central aspect of the novel is the alienation of an individual's personal identity in the context of a postcolonial society. Therefore, the psychology of the novel's characters will be a major theme of this essay. Nevertheless, the novel shows that it is hard for the characters Alfred and Xuela to break free from the bonds of society.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, colonial discourse, double consciousness, unhomed, hybridity,

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1. Introduction

I am talking about millions of men whom they have knowingly instilled with fear and a complex of inferiority, whom they have infused with despair and trained to tremble, to kneel and behave like flunkey (Aime Césaire 7).

The quotation above is from an article depicting how the colonial system takes advantage of indigenous people and transforms them into tools in the apparatus of the colonial power. In a relationship where there is a polarity of master and servant, or indeed slave, that relationship is automatically based on inequality. In such relationship, it is inevitable that the servant or slave must yield to the master's system of rules and values. According to Dr. Ania Loomba:

“colonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world, but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history” (2).

Jamaica Kincaid's novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1995) depicts how the colonized mind is stuck in a certain state. Set in the Island of Dominica, the novel is narrated by the protagonist Xuela Claudette Richardson; the reader follows her struggles through life, from infancy to old age. Xuela's greatest struggle in life is to find out the identity of her mother; Xuela has no idea who her mother is since she died giving birth to her. Throughout the novel, Xuela repeats the same sentence as if it were her mantra: “My mother died at the moment I was born” (3). Living without her mother has traumatized Xuela and with a strained relationship to her father, a police officer, Xuela overcomes obstacles in her life by conducting herself in a particular manner. Another factor that is repeated in her life is the dreams she has about her mother. Xuela's mother reveals herself to Xuela in dreams, but every time she dreams about her mother it is only a part of her mother that is revealed.

In every colonial situation there is an encounter between two parties/sides, the colonizers and the colonized. But, as mentioned previously, this is an encounter that takes place on unequal grounds since the colonizers have the upper hand due to their superiority in technological terms. This allows them to amass raw materials such as gold and gemstones from Latin America and rubber and a labor force from Africa. When the British colonizers physically vacated the Island of Dominica what they left behind was a cultural colonization that replaced their presence; there occurred a change in the indigenous people's minds during the period of colonization. According to the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, the change was that: "all colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language; i.e., the metropolitan culture" (2). Nevertheless, this essay will have a postcolonial theoretical framework and focus on themes of instability and dynamic, hybrid forms of cultural identity. As Lois Tyson argues: "postcolonial criticism seeks to understand the operations—politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically—of colonialist and anticolonialist ideologies" (418). Also, Tyson concedes: "that the colonized can have a double consciousness or double vision, which is a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures; that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community" (421). In the analysis of the novel in this essay the term unhomely will be used, this is a term coined by the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha, which exemplifies a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition (9).

Since the main characters of the novel, Xuela and Alfred, are subjugated and live in a former British colony. This essay will argue that Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* depicts how the indigenous colonized are living 'unhomely lives' and that their experience is one of a double consciousness.

1.2 Aims and Method

Previous analyses of the novel have had different theories in their approach to the novel, mostly from feminist perspective. This essay claims that Kincaid's novel manages to depict how the oppressive invisible power structure or to use Antonio Gramsci's term hegemonic colonialist discourse; instills a sense of an uncomfortable everyday life in the colonized people.

Methodologically, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that the concept of double consciousness and the term 'unhomely' are relevant to furthering our understanding of the novel and its main characters. This essay will elucidate how the colonialist hegemony is at work in shaping the experiences of the characters. Since this essay has a postcolonial theoretical framework as its approach to the novel, it will be essential to look at whether the colonialist hegemony i.e. the invisible power structure that is maintained by a patriarchal status quo, restraints or privileges the characters psychologically and on a socio-economic level. The psychological feature will be highlighted through demonstrating how the colonial power has made the characters internalize the colonizer's values and limit their daily lives in the process; this notion is mainly present in the character of Xuela. Additionally, this essay will also look into how the socio-economic society illustrated in the novel is restricting the characters; a culture that symbolizes an unjust and corrupt colonial hierarchy.

2. Previous research

This section contains some analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*.

Not only does it deal with previous research on her novel but an attempt will also be made to convey some of the most common features in the criticism on the novel. Furthermore, some of these critical criticisms are to be included under the section analysis in this essay.

One article written by Giselle, Liza Anatol, contributes to the large quantity of analyses by focusing on the power of language. In her article "Speaking in (M)Other Tongues: The Role of

Language in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*” Anatol assumes that a language is not only a part of the identity process, but language can also be of pragmatic use. Hence, Anatol argues that a language can be analyzed for its nationalist messages and for how women fit the nationalist project and society as a whole (939). Anatol suggests that Xuela’s use of language serve to chart her developing anti-colonial attitudes, which will help her to formulate a postcolonial subjectivity (939).

Anatol concedes that a person’s first language is often spoken of in terms of maternal connection; moreover, the bondage between mother and child is discussed in the article where she also problematizes Benedict Anderson’s notion of the importance of mothers’ roles in society. Anatol claims: “that the narrator's embrace of the "motherland," particularly her emphasis on its power as the land of origin of her maternal ancestors, coheres with her preoccupation with her biological mother” (950). Nonetheless, the bond between mother and daughter is not such a unique theme in the novel *Autobiography*.

The bond between mother-child and the role of language is an empowering factor for establishing a Caribbean-based sense of identity, not only for the Islanders, but also for the myriad of immigrants who reside outside of the region and suffer feelings of alienation and homesickness (950). This feeling is further corroborated because Xuela’s lack of maternal love resulted in her persona being riddled with complexes and an obsession with finding out the identity of her mother. This element becomes crucial, when analyzing the novel within a postcolonial theoretical framework.

Subsequently, in another article entitled “In the Beginning There Was Death: Spiritual Desolation and the Search for Self in Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother*," written by Dr. Elizabeth J West, who claims that the author focuses on spirituality and the search for self. In opposition to Anatol, West makes a comparative analysis with Kincaid’s previous works and their protagonists. West notes: “in Kincaid's fictional female trilogy Annie, Lucy and Xuela’s, alienation from the mother becomes a metaphor for alienation from an island culture that has been completely

dominated by the imperialist power of England” (2). West’s ideas strengthen the thesis of this essay, since the novel depicts a context, a culture where the minds of the characters is a central aspect in the narrative

Moreover, West draws the connection not only to the lack of Xuela’s relationship with her parents but also to the process of subjugation and how the colonial power affected Xuela’s state of mind. Nevertheless, West states: “the protagonist in the novel does not have a prevailing struggle with racial issues even though a critique of racism is present in the novel, issues of personal and subjective desire emerges instead” (4). Notwithstanding, the argument in the article in looking into the psyche of Xuela suggests that her urge for wanting to know who she is might stem from Xuela’s parent’s complicated background:

“As the narrative unfolds the reader learns that this loss represents a legacy of loss: in infancy her mother was abandoned and left at the gates of a convent, and her father was abandoned in his youth by his father. Her father will not physically abandon her; however, he becomes himself a symbol of unfulfilled desire (6)”.

With the support of West’s statement above, this essay can make a strong argument that the novel depicts a futile search for self and a spiritual un-fulfillment. Furthermore, in her conclusion West states that the protagonist’s rejection of religion, both of the indigenous religion and Christianity, is a sign of her unfulfilled desire; in the process of the rejection of religion Xuela is setting herself into being an outsider in her community and, therefore, becoming alienated to her surroundings.

The quest Xuela undertakes to find out who her mother is a struggle for her own cultural identity; that she is in constant isolation shows how Xuela is living an unhomey life. In conclusion, other than the unhomey live and the quest for an identity West’s article discusses the basic elements of

postcolonial theory; the consequences of colonial power for a person. Her main argument regarding the mental imbalance of the protagonist will be included in the discussion under the rubric analysis.

Furthermore, the third article, Dr. Kathryn E Morris's "Jamaica Kincaid's Voracious Bodies: Engendering a Carib(bean) Woman," mainly concentrates on how the colonial power has created a sexualized Caribbean woman. Morris supports her arguments by using the concept of exoticism; e.g. the Europeans came to the island and saw the indigenous people like something different than themselves and ascribed not only some physical features to them but also inner qualities such as an enormous appetite for sex. In this process of othering, the Europeans became fixated with the idea of an exotic Caribbean woman. In addition, Morris examines Kincaid's portrayal of Xuela's self-creation as a re-fashioning of that 'bleak, black' space where Xuela is referring to what is standing between her and eternity (Kincaid 3). Also, Morris focuses on how Kincaid constructs a metaphor of sexual 'devouring' as a response to colonial history's objectifying representation of the Carib people as ravenously sexual and cannibalistic (954).

The similarities between this article and with the previous articles' are the identity process; in the previous articles the main ideas were that it was Xuela as an individual who searched for her own identity by looking for answers about her mother. Morris argues it is a colonial power that ascribes to the indigenous people their identity. She also discusses Kincaid's writing and concludes that, the Caribbean literary romance with death might speak to a performance execution of the trope of cannibalism that metaphorize the physical ingestion of flesh into flesh as a nostalgic incorporation of the lost body into the present body (956). Morris also refers to Dr. Eugenio Matibag, who argues: "cannibalism is a Caribbean trope which provides a focus on the manner in which recent Caribbean texts have undertaken a search for identity in the traces left by Antillean 'forerunners,' while at the same time ironizing the implicit search for origins" (956).

Morris illustrates that Xuela represents the fate of her people, she is a historically voiceless subject, an object of desire both within her culture and within the European colonial culture;

furthermore, Kincaid's work on female subjectivity may be read allegorically as commentary on the socio-political development of the Caribbean (960). In conclusion, the results found in Morris's article are of interest to the overall thesis for this essay; therefore, it will be a part of the analysis.

Subsequently, in Nicole Matos's article "The Difference between the Two Bundles": Body and Cloth in the Works of Jamaica Kincaid; the author looks into Kincaid's works and problematizes cloth and the naked body. Matos argues that Kincaid uses juxtapositions which set up an elastic and evolving dichotomy between body and cloth, naked and clothed, which continues evocatively throughout many of Kincaid's works (844). Matos discusses further the importance of the body in Caribbean literature by referring to Michael Dash who claims: "the theme 'body' and the description of the naked human body can be seen as a revolt against the colonial power" (845). Moreover, the body as a signifier is present in Kincaid's works, and it appears not only as means of liberation from the colonial discourse image of the colonized body. Also, as Matos argues that in Kincaid's writings; this theme is counterbalanced by the use of clothing as a primary image of suppression, a means by which oppressors can disguise, inhibit, and appropriate subjects' treacherous bodies (846).

Further, Matos assumes that cloth in Kincaid's works is loaded with negative connotations, emotions and bad memories. She also discusses how cloth can carry several meanings; an example she gives of how clothing can preserve within itself a sort of memory and transmit that memory to successive wearers; was when the fifteen-year-old Xuela is brought by her father into the home of his business associate Monsieur LaBatte (847):

One day, without any preparation, she gave me a beautiful dress that she no longer wore; it still fit her, but she no longer wore it. As I was trying on the dress I could hear her thoughts.... She wants to make a gift of me to her husband; she wants to give me to him, she hopes I do not mind. I was standing in this room before her, my clothes coming off,

my clothes going on, naked, clothed, but the vulnerability I felt was not of the body, it was of the spirit, the soul. (Kincaid 68-69)

This scene takes place when Madame LaBatte's gives Xuela a dress to try on. According to Matos the above quotation is proof of her argument about the power cloth bears, in this case cloth is transmitting the thoughts of Madame LaBatte's to Xuela (848).

This article differs from the previous articles because Mato's research looks into all of Kincaid's works and also the theme this article carries is unique because it is connecting cloth to the overall subject of the article, subjugation. In order for this essay to meet its aims it is of utmost necessity to include Matos's findings in the analysis. Additionally this article helps to strengthen the thesis of this essay that is to depict how the characters are 'living unhomely' lives, and cloth is a factor where it can cause a feeling of unconformity.

The final article is "Re- Conceptualization of Race and Agency in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*," written by Dr. Izabella Penier. As the title of the article portrays, Penier discusses topics such as sexuality and race where she argues that the color of one's skin is not an essential issue when defining an individual's identity. Subsequently, her central theme lies in the identity process, where she presumes that the novel presents a whole range of perspectives on the problem of identity formation by dramatizing the cultural construction of Xuela's and her father's subjectivity (61).

Penier bases her reading of Kincaid's text by adapting the postcolonial thinkers Paul Gilroy's and Louis Gates's observations about the correlation between race, literacy and power (60), they mean that identity is a sociopolitical construction and not based wholly or partially on skin color. Penier also refers to an influential thinker and poet in Caribbean thought and cultural commentary, Édouard Glissant, who worked with the idea of rhizome identity. The latter idea he defined as multiple spreading of filaments of simultaneous being, according to both Glissant and Penier it better accounts

for the cultural and geopolitical intricacies of the Caribbean region than the Negritude's model of racial identity (57).

The significant difference between this article and the previous is that Penier includes Alfred, Xuela's father in more of an in-depth manner than the other articles have done, where Alfred is analyzed only in the periphery. Further to the identification process, is not only a question of who is a better fit identify someone, but also includes models of identification that are discussed and analyzed more in this article more than the others. In the previous articles, the defining of an identity was in the hands of the colonizers and the indigenous people had no choice, but to accept and internalize the ideas and values of that power. Whilst in this article Penier is suggesting that Kincaid portray the protagonist as the one who is in control of her sexuality and identity.

The ideas presented in this article are of interest to this essay, because to feel unhomey is foregrounded in a person's confidence about their own identity. This article will therefore be a part of the tools used in analyzing the novel to prove the statement of this essay.

3. Theoretical Framework: Postcolonialism

Before explaining postcolonialism, it is imperative to start by looking into the history of colonialism without the prefix 'post.' Because, in order to fully comprehend the postcolonial theoretical framework; the foundation must be set and put into a context where the theory of this essay will be easier to understand. Loomba explains colonialism by consulting the Oxford English Dictionary. According to the OED, the word colonialism comes from the roman colonia which meant "farm" or "settlement". Subsequently, Loomba argues that according to OED the term colonia referred to Romans who settled in other lands but still retained Roman citizenship. Loomba states that colonialism has been practiced by different imperial societies throughout history; e.g. the Ottoman Empire, the Inca Empire, the Mongols and Western European empires. The major difference between the former colonialist projects and the latter is that the European restructured the economies of the

colonized countries and drew them into a complex relationship with their own; hence there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries (Loomba 3).

According to John McLeod, imperialism, capitalism and colonialism are intertwined. MacLeod refers to Dennis Judd, who argues that the colonial project was first and foremost a fundamental part of the commercial venture of Western nations such as Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Portugal, that developed from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (8). Consequently the seizing of foreign lands for governing and settlement was motivated in part by a desire to generate wealth and control international markets. Frequently this was done by securing the natural resources and labor power of different lands and peoples at the lowest possible cost to Europeans (8).

To clarify, imperialism and colonialism have similar basic structures in which these two projects exploit other country's natural resources. The significant difference between the two terminologies lies in the fact that imperialism is an ideological project which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military control of one nation by another. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams define imperialism as the extension and expression of trade and commerce under the protection of political, legal and military control, while colonialism prioritizes the act of settlement and constitutes a particular historical manifestation of imperialism, specific to certain places and times (MacLeod 10).

In conclusion, it is in the aftermath of this context that the novel is set. Also from this process came the notions of alienation from a comfortable everyday life to a life of unease due to a separation from a known geographical place and culture for the indigenous people. In this situation it is inevitable that those suffering from a separation become the victims of a system that makes them socially handicapped as can be found in the novel in the case of Xuela.

Additionally, the consensus about the term 'postcolonialism,' is that it is an academic discipline which aims at studying and explaining the consequences of imperialism and colonialism. Moreover, the dismantling of the former colonial structures during the 1950s and 1960s is a major factor which forwarded the usage of the term postcolonial (Childs and Williams 1). Another factor for using the

term postcolonialism is the emergence of 'Commonwealth literature,' a term that was used for the first time by literary critics in the 1950s to describe global literatures in English written by authors from former colonial countries (MacLeod 12). More important, for postcolonial of literary theory, however was the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2) the postcolonial concept can be explained as follows:

“We use the term ‘post-colonial’, however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.”

(2)

Even though the work is somewhat dated (25 years old or more), the essence of the usage of the term postcolonial is current even in this new millennium. For example, the narrator of the novel is in a context where it is important to remember as a reader that the process of postcolonialism is, in fact, affecting the everyday life of an individual. Hence, the notions of double consciousness and uncomfortable life are experienced portrayed in the novel.

As previously mentioned, the term includes not only the study of the cultural psyche and process of subjugation of the colonized people, but also the process of 'othering' which aims to devalue the colonized and in the process, viewing them as 'the other', a peoples 'less then' and 'different from' that of the norm: i.e. the European colonizers. A form of 'othering' can be found in the study of orientalism which is a process that Edward Said has explained as follows: “[T]he relationship between occident and orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). Even more, Orientalism can be understood as a European concept invented to help the Occident to relate to the Orient, an invention the very process of which allows the Occident to be able to control and manipulate the Orient by various means, whether these are cultural, economic, or

political. This idea corroborates with Morris's article where she discusses othering and claim that Xuela has taken control of her subjugation and how she will be perceived from her surroundings. Also Alfred is taking control as will be discussed closely in the upcoming analysis.

In short, postcolonialism concerns the study of the cultural heritage which the colonial power has left behind. It is not only the colonized that can be studied and analyzed, but the colonizer's mind of state too can be studied: their attitude towards the colonized and their view of the world where they have place themselves on the pinnacle, viewing the other societies as juvenile and undeveloped. Tyson discusses this sense of European superiority in terms of Eurocentrism. An example of this are the categories used to signify the order of the nations of the world, where the term 'First World' includes Britain, Europe and the United States; the *Second World* includes the white populations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and southern Africa; the 'Third World' includes the technologically developing nations, such as India, those of Africa; Central and South America, 'Fourth World' referring to the indigenous populations subjugated by white settlers (420).

In addition, the term postcolonialism also includes the idea of the subjugated feeling a double-consciousness. According to William Edward Burghardt, W. E. B. Du Bois who was an American sociologist, historian, activist and author explained the term as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois. Web.)

Long before Du Bois used the term double-consciousness the term was used in the realm of psychology. The term was applied to cases of split personality, where the personalities worked in the

subconscious of the patients. The stimulus was different for every case, and the symptoms were that the dual personalities had different aspects in their life that made them happy and sad. Also, they did not know of each other.

By the late nineteenth century, it had come into quite general use not only in professional publications but also in discussions of psychological research published for general audiences (Du Bois 237). Du Bois's usage of the term referred to three different issues: first, the real power of white stereotypes in black life and thought; second, the double consciousness created by the practical racism that excluded every black American from mainstream society; and thirdly and most important, Du Bois referred to an internal conflict in the African American individual, between what was "African" and what was "American" (238). Even though the term stems from the discipline of psychology, Du Bois used it in sociology to highlight the problematic of the duality that the African American felt in the United States of America. According to Professor Dickson D. Bruce Jr, Du Bois was trying to "develop and offer in the 'African' a kind of alternative to American materialism with which many in an educated readership could sympathize" (240). In the classic cases of double consciousness too, the dual personalities were not only different from each other but they were inevitably in opposition to each other (242). Furthermore all the people in these cases suffered from great anguish. They became unhappy upon becoming aware of their condition and realizing their desire to possess a single individual self (243). 'A single individual self' is what Du Bois proposes to be the cure for those people suffering from double consciousness; he urges the African American "...to merge his double self into a better and truer self...", losing neither of the older selves" (243).

Another term that is important to take into account before pursuing the analyses is a term coined by the postcolonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha: 'unhomely lives'. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha presents his definition of the term: The subaltern is nostalgic about his or her own background and in this process the subaltern cannot fully feel the sense of fitting in. As Bhabha explains: "the negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary, a bridge,

where the ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” (9). This concept of ‘presencing’ is derived from the German existential philosopher Martin Heidegger. The term seeks to describe the phenomenon whereby people try to make both themselves and their surroundings a part of themselves by engaging themselves in matters that are important to them: being embedded in their surroundings. Furthermore Bhabha defines unhomely lives as follows: “to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomed’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres” (9).

In conclusion, because they are useful tools to use when answering the major questions in this essay these terms will be used in the upcoming analysis. For example, Bhabha talks about unhomely where the subaltern is nostalgic and in the case of the context in the novel the characters are nostalgic of their history. Also, the novel presents this sense of nostalgia that has made them uncomfortable in their everyday life and must therefore conform to the norm in the society they are in and find a way of coping and conduct themselves accordingly.

4. Analyses

4.1 Xuela Claudette Richardson

In the beginning of this essay the discussion was, how Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother* depicts a postcolonial society, and how the protagonist Xuela Claudette Richardson lives in a society that inspires neither hope nor faith in a brighter future. This is a society where the colonized person is drained of patience, dignity and is left with deep wounds to the subconscious mind. Kincaid is, as illustrated in the previous research, a writer who criticizes the colonial hegemony and the postcolonial structures in her society. Her criticism includes the effects of the devastating system which the individual is forced to live in and endure. She manages to perform this criticism by depicting her characters’ endeavors in a context where multilayered systems exist, systems that entangle the indigenous people into a web of psychological anomalies. Hence this essay argues that *The Autobiography of My Mother* can be best analyzed through postcolonial criticism since it conveys

structural problems that still persist in the lives of former colonial subjects. Analyses of this novel using postcolonial theory however has not been entirely exhausted: by adding and integrating Homi Bhabha's term 'unhomely lives' and Du Bois's idea of 'double consciousness' into the analyses, a new point of view is introduced.

4.1.1 Anomalies of the subconscious

When sickness strikes a person the entire symptoms are not always revealed at once; the individual goes through various phases before the disease reaches its final stage. The novel depicts Xuela throughout her entire life, struggling to uncover the identity of her mother, and the endeavor functions as 'the forwarding' momentum of the plot of the novel. Tyson discusses and explains this 'forwarding' according to Dr. Algirdas Julien Greimas's actantial model. Tyson asserts: "the forwarding of the plot—the movement from conflict to resolution, struggle to reconciliation, separation to union, and so forth— involves the transfer of some entity (a quality or an object) from one actant to another" (225). Also Tyson concedes that this forwarding can be a search for a person on a quest to find one's inner self.

In the devastating separation from her mother, Xuela develops a strategy in order to be able to cope with being alone early on in her life; she learns how to enjoy her own company: "I spoke to myself because I grew to like the sound of my own voice" (Kincaid 16). Not only is she in a solitary state caused by the loss of her mother, she is also abandoned by her only living parent and consequently lives in an emotional vacuum—a state lacking in intimacy. This void has played a great role in shaping Xuela's state of mind. As discussed earlier in this essay, a separation from the known to the unknown makes a person feel more and more ill at ease. The novel depicts that Xuela has lost her mother in infancy years and thus forcing her develop a personality that can make her cope and get by in society.

As an aftermath of the devastating separation from her mother the novel show Xuela in a vulnerable mode, describes her loneliness: “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 “(3). This realization of being alone has set psychological neuroses in motion in her mind. When the text shows a lacking of a functioning family life, then Xuela is in a problematic state, and the result of this is that an anomaly emerges in her behavior. The novel shows that symptoms of her disorder begin to be manifest at a young age, e.g. emotions of indifference and antipathy begins to develop in her psyche:

“– I took all three turtles and placed them in an enclosed area where they could not come and go as they pleased and so were completely dependent on me for their existence... But they would withdraw into their shells when I did not want them to, and when I called them, they would not come out. To teach them a lesson, I took some mud from the riverbed and covered up the small hole from which each neck would emerge and I allowed it to dry up.” (11-12)

The turtles died as a consequence of this action because she had forgotten them. Evidently in the above quotation, the text illustrates her indifference to life and death due to the fact she happens to mention the destiny of the turtles in a certain mode. This incident is depicted in the novel before her adolescent years. Prior to this event she is in disagreement with Ma Eunice because of having broken her special china plate. In this situation too she is not sorry about what grief might have befallen Ma Eunice. After she broke the china plate Xuela notes: “When I broke the china plate on which this picture was painted and caused Ma Eunice to cry so, I did not immediately feel sorry (9)”. Here the text shows the result of Xuela’s lost a developed antipathy.

Subsequently, Fanon might say we would need psychology to understand Xuela’s behavior:

“It can never be sufficiently emphasized that psychoanalysis sets as its task the understanding of given behavioral patterns—within the specific group represented by the

family. When the problem is a neurosis experienced by an adult, the analyst's task is to uncover in the new psychic structure an analogy with certain infantile elements, a repetition, and a duplication of conflicts that owe their origin to the essence of the family constellation." (109)

According to psychological research, babies who are held and comforted develop healthier modes of behavior (Fox, Leavitt and Warhol). Their psyche being sounder and their physical behavior more healthy, societies they belong to will be less aggressive and violent in nature. The text shows how Xuela bereft of the possibility of being near her mother has clearly made her develop a disorder where she cannot help being in a state of antipathy. Also it is depicted that she is alienated due to the process and she does not feel at home anywhere. This lack of intimacy and closeness has caused Xuela to develop a sense of being unwanted. Psychological research demonstrates too that a person cannot control the kinds of thoughts which enter the mind, but a person is definitely able to make the choice of what kinds of thoughts they desire to live with. In the novel, Xuela is in full control when she chooses to conduct herself in a way that is unfamiliar to the consensus and context of the norms of the society in which she lives in. Her thoughts lead her into being the opposite of the norm:

I responded in a fashion by now characteristic of me: whatever I was told to hate I loved and loved the most. I loved the smell of the thin dirt behind my ears, the smell of my unwashed mouth, the smell that came between my legs, the smell in the pit of my arm, the smell of my unwashed feet. (Kincaid 32)

The text shows how Xuela is protesting to the status quo by trying to liberate herself from the bondage of the structure of power. Stuart Hall, in his article entitled "The Spectacle of the Other", discusses the practice of stereotyping in the popular media. In that context he looks into the underlying need for

stereotyping and poses the questions: “*Why is 'difference' so compelling a theme, so contested an area of representation? What is the secret fascination of 'otherness' ...? (225)*”. Even though his article concerns the popular media it can help the reader to understand the trap Xuela finds herself in the novel. When Hall depicts and discusses his images, taken from modern media coverage, he implies that individuals depicted in this media are trapped since they are required by necessity to work hard at getting rid of their stigmata. What the narrative technique is doing is to show how Xuela is trying to rid herself of the chains that the colonial society has shackled her with, but at the same time she is reinforcing the image of herself as ‘the other’ who is dirty and strange.

The entrapment in a postcolonial society is at most times diffuse and not cut clear, e.g. in the text it can be found how Xuela bondage came about. Furthermore, Xuela’s first experience of reading can explain some of the neuroses she has gotten herself into: “on the wall behind the wooden table and chair was a map; at the top of the map were the words “THE BRITISH EMPIRE.” These were the first words I learned to read (Kincaid 14).” According to postcolonial theory it is in the subconscious of their subjects that the colonizers can instill a sense of inferiority and insecurity. Instead of rejoicing in the fact that she has learned to read, this act of reading results in her becoming entangled in a relationship with the invisible power structures of the colonial hegemony. According to Said it is not within the physical institutions that a person is taught to raise the colonial culture to a height and degrade the local culture; it is within the invisible system instead that the out-poring of the subliminal messages and images pollute the mind. Hence the novel shows how Xuela is psychologically disadvantaged and everything that she encounters hinders in her everyday life. Such is the nature of her alienation from her surroundings.

4.1.2. The uncanny situation

The term unhomey includes the notion that a person is caught between two opposite worlds and does not feel at piece in either one. In the case of Xuela from the novel, her situation is one where she has

internalized the values of the power structure that she lives in. According to West though, the narrative: “is not controlled by a master discourse of race (5)”, even though this idea is correct in the first meeting with the novel; her argument fails when performing an in-depth analysis of the novel. Because the novel illustrates that Xuela is in actual fact a subjugated being, and according to Morris the ascribing of the other is present in the novel. Morris also declares that, the colonial discourse in the novel has made the protagonist internalize the notion that Xuela is a victim of exoticism; that Xuela is viewed as a sex symbol. An interesting fact in the novel is how Xuela is depicted as not wanting to be a part of the general notion of the sexualized individual; Morris declares Xuela to have taken the matter into her own hands; that she is living a life of promiscuity enjoying sexual liberation.

Additionally, Fanon too talks about self-loathing among the indigenous black population, he discusses lack of self-esteem, such as when a person is abandoned in some manner, and then that person becomes damaged psychologically and is not able to love again out of fear of losing that love, fear of abandonment. The result of this sorry affair according to Fanon is that: “the individual is in a state of profound inner insecurity and it keeps the individual in a state of profound inner insecurity of which it inhibits or falsifies every relation with others (55)”. The novel also depicts this notion, in the case of Xuela’s sexuality she experiences the unhomely life by not wanting to be boxed in and categorized, she is not comfortable with the notion of being someone’s love, nor is she at ease with the notion of loving in itself. Even though she was married to her husband she states that: “I married a man I did not love, but would not have married a man I loved at all (Kincaid 205)”. Xuela is depicted as always trying to create a third alternative, a ‘third room’ to use Bhabha’s term. This includes the idea of creating a new room for meeting and merging of multiple cultures. E.g. from the text she is living in a site of ‘in-between’ emotions and feelings were she is trying to figure out what is the best for her. This idea of always creating a third room can be a way for Xuela of getting rid of her chains which society has locked her up with. By taking control of the uncanny situation she is in, the text is trying to convey that she is free in her solitude and bondage.

Another episode where Xuela is depicted as not at peace with herself is when she is using language; Xuela does not like to speak in a language which she feels is loaded with negative features and stigmata for her. Thinking thus, Xuela declares: “When we were alone we spoke to each other in French patois, the language of the captive, the illegitimate; (Kincaid 74)”. This feeling comes up to her when talking to Madame LaBatte, a feeling that reemerges when someone talks to her in French patois.

In another scene in the text where she is ill at ease is when she utters her first words, Xuela notes: “That the first words I said were in the language of a people I would never like or love is not now a mystery to me; everything in my life, good or bad, to which I am inextricably bound is a source of pain” (7). Two conflicting languages are used in her surroundings and she does not like them both at all. Another aspect to reflect upon in the previous quotation is that she reads her first words in the language of the power. This power structure corroborates with the notion of Said that it is within the invisible system that we can see in the process of indoctrination at work.

Other places where we see Xuela ill at ease are in the physical homes that she lives in during different periods of her life. In her infancy years, up till she attends school, she lives with Ma Eunice, Xuela notes: “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 (Kincaid 5)”. Fanon declares that: “There is no disproportion between the life of the family and the life of the nation (110)”. Applying his discussion to the description of Xuela where she feels that in the physical condition she is in ‘a place of brutality’, then the text is showing how she is internalizing this hard climate into her own being, and her behavior subsequently becomes irrational and indifferent.

As the narrative goes forward in time and the reader meets an older Xuela, where she lived by herself and got employment, in the beginning she liked it but one day, when she received mail from her father, asking her to come home because her brother had died, she declares:

“I suddenly grew tired of the life I had been leading; it had served its purpose. I suddenly felt that I did not want to wear the clothes of a dead man anymore.... I wanted to set fire to the house I had lived in all this time before I left it, but I did not want to bring attention to my absence; I did not want anyone to notice that I had been there and that now I was not” (Kincaid104).

In this scene we can see how the interaction between life and death is connected via cloth as Matos has discussed in her article, where she also emphasizes the power of cloth in its transmitting ability. Xuela is not only uncomfortable about wearing a dead man’s clothes, she is becoming impatient with leading the life of a worker and she is eager to work her way up in society. Now and then she is also living ‘in-between’, when she states, for instance, that she does not want anyone to notice her absence. According to Bhabha, who suggests that Xuela’s thoughts of being between here and there, past and present, depicts binary oppositions linked through an ‘in-between’ (Bhabha 13). The novel shows that her feeling of unhomeliness is clearly depicted here.

4.2 Alfred Richardson

In addition to Xuela’s life we may also consider the character Alfred Richardson when trying to break new grounds in the analysis of the novel; this is important since their lives are intertwined. Even though he too is a victim of the invisible power structure, his symptoms are different to that of Xuela’s. In his sense he is depicted as a binary victim caught ‘in-between’ two contrasting worlds – caught in one black body. His Father hailing from Scotland and his mother an African woman; being a mulatto in a context of colonial society he takes advantages of that fact that he is in-between and merges with each side much more easily than his daughter does. Also, Fanon might suggest that in the case of a mulatto that such a person wished to be white rather than black; the mulatto will try by any means necessary to be accepted by the norm in the colonial society (41). The novel shows Alfred in

his line of profession where he is caught in-between two cultures. Alfred is trying to lead the life of an untouchable – away from the clutches of the law and the indigenous people as well. This essay will try to depict how Alfred is shaped by the experience and discourse of colonialism and it will also enquire into how/ or whether he is in a position of privilege or restraint on the psychologically and socio-economic level.

4.2.1 The Curse of the Mulatto

We are first introduced to this character as a bearer of two bundles and a description is given by the narrator that he is a vain man. Soon after Xuelas birth and her mother's death; Alfred the father of the newborn baby Xuela, leaves her to the care of a foster family. While they are on their way to Ma Eunice, he is carrying two bundles, Xuela recollects:

He would have handled one more gently than the other, he would have given more careful instructions for the care of one over the other, he would have expected better care for one than the other, but which one I do not know, because he was a very vain man, his appearance was very important to him. (Kincaid 4)

This scene shows the essence of the father and daughter relationship in the novel, he is concerned about his daughter but at the same time it is suggested that he is more concerned with his appearance so that he can be abroad in society, doing his work. This excerpt also depicts how important Alfred's appearance is to his line of work. Dealing with people, it is essential that one be dressed for the part so a person can perform the duty this his job entails. Penier discusses in her article the importance of identity: "Kincaid argues against treating 'race' as a separate category of analysis just as she refuses to recognize her sex as a major coordinate in the process of her identity formation (Penier 54)". This claim of Penier's is corroborated in the context of Alfred due to the fact that, as subaltern, he is trying

to be rid of the stigmata given to him by the white colonizer. In the text it is shown that during his lifetime he does not see his skin color as a major part of his identity but identity is to be found in his police uniform and actions. Xuela describes him as follows: “My father’s skin was the color of corruption (Kincaid 181)”. This view is the best description of Alfred because it is reminiscent of the idea of hybridity that Loomba takes up in her book. Hybridity, she explains, is a mixing of ‘species’; the term originates from the discipline of biology. Lending from this idea of Hybridity it becomes possible to see Alfred as trying to use his in-betweenness to act in a situation where normally a person in a society may be locked into separate or different roles. Loomba asserts: Colonial ‘hybridity’ in this particular sense, is a strategy premised on cultural purity, and aimed at stabilizing the status quo (Loomba 173)”.

Restricted by the fact that he is depicted as not being a high-ranking officer in the police force, and by the fact that he is not white, he does attempt however to play a role in the opposing cultures of in his everyday life—law and order and the criminal world—he is certainly the one that gains from various crimes committed in his community. As a police officer in the novel Alfred is more aware of the invisible power structure behind the colonial system he finds himself part of, more aware than the majority of black indigenous people on the Island of Dominica. Still the world of the ‘untouchable’ is the elitist world to which he wishes to belong. Like Xuela he too enters into the ‘the third room’ discussed by Bhabha, and amasses his fortune with criminal activity. Fanon discusses the dilemma of the mulatto where he implies that the mulatto is tipping more to the side of white than black, due to the idea that to be white comes with certain perks. The narrator observes that her father hates black people: “My father rejected the complications of the vanquished; he chose the ease of the victor (Kincaid 186)”. This excerpt can be discussed in the realm of Fanon’s work, where he declares:

The educated mulatto woman, especially if she is a student, engages in doubly equivocal behavior. She says, “I do not like the Negro because he is savage. Not savage in a cannibal way,

but lacking refinement.” An abstract point of view. And when one points out to her that in this respect some black people may be her superiors, she falls back on their “ugliness.” (Fanon 41)

Even though Fanon mentions the mulatto women specifically here, this is still applicable to the character and life of Alfred in the novel. He is depicted as hating the black people, the people darker than himself, and he desires to live a life of ease, a life a white might be able to live.

Just like Xuela, Alfred is also living an unhomey life: being so ill at ease forces him to find a way of living which is in-between worlds and cultures that are embodied within him. He is reluctant to lead a life that does not grant him immediate inner happiness, he is on a futile quest for an easy life, in search of a state of being that he will not attain.

4.2.2 Through the Eyes of Others

The novel is full of underlying mysteries and interrelation problems that emerge. E.g. the novel raises Alfred’s subjugation Alfred and shows how he has internalized the views of the colonizer into his own being; as a result he conducts himself according to that world view. As Xuela has observed of her father, when being around people she notes:

He seemed to regard his life, himself, all of his surroundings, with humor; he wore a smile on his lips at all times when he was in public, but it was directed inward, not outward, this smile also served another purpose and he had not intended it to: it made people less powerful than he hesitate to approach him and it made people more powerful than he comfortable approaching him. (Kincaid 185)

According to the notion of living ‘in-between’ two cultures, Alfred is clearly a victim of the notion that he has to act according to the eyes of the ‘other’. Du Bois discusses this and says; that living

through other people's expectation one cannot clearly be free to be oneself. In the life Alfred leads it seems that he does not smile because he is happy from inside out but that he is expected to smile so he can be able to perform according to what is expected of him. This corroborates with what Du Bois discusses in his definition of double consciousness; the person experiencing this is a person who is not happy but filled with anguish within.

Du Bois discusses how dual personalities work in dynamics of opposition; we can see it in the depiction of Alfred through his interactions with people he meets, and those who surround him. People who act like African's he despises, while he is nostalgic and dreams of being settled in a an easy life, which whites lead and being quit his stigmata, Xuela notes: "and he came to despise all who behaved like the African people: not all who looked like them, only all who behaved like them, all who were defeated, doomed, conquered, poor, diseased, head bowed down, mind numbed from cruelty (Kincaid 187)". According to Du Bois a person suffering from double consciousness is in anguish about having a 'oneself', one personality where the dual personalities merge into one. The problem depicted in the quote is that Alfred is worried because as he has told himself that he does not want to be one of the colonized. At the same time he knows that he can never be accepted as a white person and live the life that comes along with it: a life of ease. In realizing this lack this he is trying to create, as mentioned earlier, a third alternative where he sets up his own little paradise. A life of easy living 'in-between', since he is aware of the futile search for the one-self.

5. Conclusion

The statement made in the beginning of this essay which was, that the novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother* depicts how the indigenous colonized are living 'unhomely lives' and that their experience is one of a double consciousness. The statement is corroborated by utilizing postcolonial theory as tool for peeling off the multilayered aspect of colonial societies. This was to have been done by means of analyzing the two characters that bear the symptoms of colonialism clearly; Alfred Richardson and his

daughter Xuela Claudette Richardson from a political discourse to the discipline of psychological analyses I have examined the novel through different lenses in the previous research of this essay. Most of the research however has been focused on Xuela as the protagonist in the novel, but by shedding some light on Alfred this has helped us to better our overall understanding of colonial context of the society depicted in the novel. Also analyzing the novel from a postcolonial theoretical framework; our understanding of the complex situation in the modern world increases.

In the first part of the analysis I have focused on the protagonist Xuela Claudette Richardson and looked into of how or whether she was a victim of the uncanny situation Homi Bhabha refers to in the ‘unhomely lives’. The conclusion I have drawn is that she is living an unhomely life due to the fact that she is living in-between parallel cultures. The text shows by not feeling at ease in various situations due to her very subjugation, and internalizing values that are devastating to her very being she is amassing feelings of antipathy and indifference. This affects her behavior incredibly. She is clearly restrained from moving upward in society because she has internalized and embodied values not her own. She has developed a personality where she cannot feel at ease with herself.

In the second part of the analysis I have looked into a character who is in the periphery of most of critics who perform a critique of the novel—the character of Alfred. In my in-depth analyses of his life in the novel I have focused on the idea of Du Bois’ double consciousness and looked at how he lives an ‘unhomely life’, and the result is a persona that is in pursuit of a futile search for the live where everything is ‘normal’ and ‘good’ according to the standards of what he believes to be the standards of a white man. In his case I have also focused on whether he is restrained or privileged in the socio-economic sense. The result founds is that he is depicted as having an ability to live ‘in-between’ cultures and being able to find a way of operating in that space, he is both restrained and privileged at the same time. Restrained due to the fact that he will never be able to conduct a life in wealth and dignity in an official sense; he is privileged

economically instead since he is gaining ground from the indigenous people by stealing from them and amassing fortune in the process.

In my postcolonial theoretical framework I have mentioned the use of the framework as the best tool of looking into the lives of colonized people. As Loomba puts it: “One of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it both needs to ‘civilise’ its ‘others’, and to fix them into perpetual ‘otherness’ (Loomba 173)”. Also by adding the notion of ‘unhomely lives’ and the concept of ‘double consciousness’ a new point is introduced to the quantity of criticism of the novel; in addition by using these concepts we can analyze the novel at different levels simultaneously.

As a result, my conclusion is that both Xuela and Alfred are depicted as both victims of the colonized society in which they live and operate in the novel. They become locked into different systems in the process. Systems where they cannot be quit the chains and bonds of the colonizer. This notion furthers the understanding of the reader in the way that a colonial society is presented and depicts how individuals in such society live.

The narrative technique of the text makes the reader not only understand the process of a colonial society that oppresses but also it suggests and shows the reader different ways of getting rid the chains. The characters have not only internalized the values of the colonizer, they have also made choices in their own lives. Choices that entangle them even further a result of the invisible power structure within which they operate. They are living unhomely lives and experiencing double consciousness.

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