



METAFOR

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü
&
Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
Ortak Yayını
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The Department of Western Languages and Literatures and the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Boğaziçi University are pleased to announce the launching of a new journal: *METAFOR: The Boğaziçi University Journal of Literary Studies*.

Our mission is to issue an academic periodical of the highest standards, one that provides a forum for innovative discussions in the field of literary studies and literary criticism. The journal accepts submissions of original essays, book reviews, interviews and short commentaries.

We especially welcome contributions that take an interdisciplinary and comparative approach. *METAFOR* will be a semi-annual journal, accepting submissions in Turkish and English. All submissions will be peer-reviewed by referees assigned by the editorial board.

*We thank Burak Şuşut and FİKA
for our cover design...*

*Kapak tasarımımız için Burak Şuşut ve
FİKA'ya teşekkür ederiz...*

METAFOR

Table of Contents

1. Eda Dedebaş Dünder, “Narratives of Rights and the Travel of Stories in J.M Coetzee’s <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> ” / “J. M. Coetzee’nin <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> Adlı Romanında Hakların Anlatıları ve Öykülerin Seyahati”	1
2. Gülfer Göze, “Is a <i>Bildungswoman</i> Possible? The Making of a West Indian Heroine in Jamaica Kinkaid’s <i>Annie John</i> ” / “Kendine Ait Bir Bildungsroman: <i>Annie John</i> ”	15
3. Burcu Kayışçı Akkoyun, “Autobiography as (E)utopia: <i>Reveries</i> of the Solitary Writer” / “Bir Ütopya olarak Otobiyografi: Yalnız Gezen Yazarın Düşleri”	32
4. Başak Demirhan, ““Are You Real My Ideal?”: Embodiment and Popular Culture in the ‘Nausicaa’ Episode of James Joyce’s <i>Ulysses</i> ” / ““Gerçek Misin İdealim?” James Joyce’un <i>Ulysses</i> Romanının ‘Nausicaa’ Bölümünde Beden ve Popüler Kültür.....	45
5. Azer Banu Kemaloğlu, “Fictional History Writing of Gelibolu Campaign: An Interview with Stephen Daisley on <i>Traitor</i> ” / “Çanakkale Muharebeleri Kurmaca Tarih Yazımı: Stephen Daisley ile <i>Traitor</i> Romanı Üzerine Bir Söyleşi”	63
6. Aişe Handan Konar, “Divan Edebiyatında Etkilenme Endişesi: Tâci-zâde Cafer Çelebi Üzerine Bir Örneklendirme Denemesi” / “Anxiety Influence in Ottoman Literature: An Exemplary Attempt with the Case of Tâci-zâde Cafer Çelebi”	70
7. Çiğdem Kurt Williams & Semiha Şentürk, ““Abdullah Efendi’nin Rüyaları’nda Metinlerarasılık” / “Intertextuality in ‘Abdullah Efendi’nin Rüyaları””	88
8. About the Authors.....	102

**IS A *BILDUNG*SWOMAN POSSIBLE? THE MAKING OF A WEST
INDIAN HEROINE IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S *ANNIE JOHN***

Abstract

Feminist theory has been under critique from within and without with regards to how inclusive it is in its scope and how welcoming it is for those women who either refuse to perform mainstream identities or are disregarded because of their traditional identities. Literature represents the epitome of a space of inclusion in which feminism can transform into feminisms and thrive. I claim that fictional biographies and autobiographies of West Indian women provide us with these new spaces that enable us to expand the conversation about how the feminisms of different women can come together. As one such novel, actually a bildungsroman, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* both provides a fertile ground for questioning the significance of race in addition to gender for the lives of women, and also gives voice and visibility to a genuine character of color who is neither a generic fairy tale heroine, nor an invented representation of an exotic woman. In my title, I refer to the book as a bildungswoman because a brief research on the origin of the genre exposes its unflinching connection to a white middle class hero rather than a black lower class heroine. In this article, I first examine the traditional and feminist versions of autobiography and bildungsroman, and then offer a reading of *Annie John* as a feminist and postcolonial subversion of the traditional bildungsroman. I analyze how Kincaid juxtaposes patriarchal with colonial to highlight the double bind women of color have to fight against and how she makes use of different kinds of interactions among women in writing the destiny of Annie as an alternative to the traditional plot lines allotted for women of color.

Keywords: feminism, interdisciplinarity, West Indian Literature, bildungsroman, Post-colonial autobiography, colonial identity, oppression.

KENDİNE AİT BİR *BILDUNGSROMAN*: ANNIE JOHN

Öz

Son zamanlarda feminist teori, faaliyet alanının kapsayıcılığı ve ana akım feminist yaklaşımları ya kurallara uymayan cinsellikleriyle ya da geleneksel kalıpları birebir takip edişleriyle aşan kadınlara karşı göstermekte zorlandığı kucaklayıcılığı dolayısıyla kadınların eleştirilerine maruz kalmakta. Edebiyat, bu kendini sürekli yenilemesi gereken teorinin yenilenmekle kalmayıp çoğalabilmesi ve ötekileştirilmiş feminizmleri kendine verimli bir şekilde katabilmesi için oldukça uygun bir alan. Antiller’de yazılmış kurmaca kadın biyografi ve otobiyografileri, bize başkarakterlerinin hayatları üzerinden farklı kadınların bu tartışmalara neler katabileceğini örnekliyor. Aynı zamanda *bildungsroman* da olan Jamaica Kincaid’in *Annie John* isimli romanı, bir yandan ırkın bir kadının cinsiyeti üzerinde ne denli büyük bir etkisi olduğunu gösterirken diğer yandan da başkarakter Annie’ye şimdiye kadar geleneksel olarak zorunda bırakıldığı masal prensesi ve batılı erkek yazarların fantezilerinde yaratılmış bir egzotik prenses rollerinin dışında ses ve görünürlük veriyor. Başlığında *bildungskadın* kelimesini kullanıyorum çünkü *bildungsroman*’ın orta sınıf erkek kahramanlarla ilintili olduğunu anlamak için kısacık bir araştırma bile yeterli. Bu makalede, önce otobiyografi ve *bildungsroman* formlarının geleneksel ve feminist versiyonları arasındaki farkları inceliyorum, sonra da *Annie John* romanının neden feminist ve koloni sonrası bir *bildungsroman* uyarlaması olduğu üzerinde duruyorum. Kincaid’in patriarkadan ve kolonyal düzenden kaynaklanan baskıları birbirine karışmış bir biçimde incelemesi renkli kadınların ne derece çapraşık bir düzene karşı mücadele verdiklerini gösteriyor. Kincaid başkahramanını bu düzenin içinde çırpındırmak yerine ona diğer kadınlarla kurduğu ilişkiler üzerinden yepyeni bir kader yaratma şansı vererek feminizm/ere katkıda bulunuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: feminizm, disiplinlerarası araştırma, Antiller edebiyatı, *bildungsroman*, Koloni sonrası otobiyografileri, kolonyal kimlik.

In 2009, Homi Bhabha gave the opening speech of a graduate student conference as the director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University. The conference was on interdisciplinary studies in the humanities, and after a short speech on the subject, Bhabha concluded with a memorable sentence that I remember whenever I am among my engineer, scientist, and medical doctor friends and feel less valuable than they are as a PhD student in the humanities: “Engineers build models, while humanities builds communities.”¹ Aside from the personal significance the quote carries, I visit its vision because the idea of all work done by humanities as an attempt at building communities of unlimited variety and richness brings forth numerous new opportunities and possibilities for the interdisciplinary scholar. Feminist study constitutes one example of how interdisciplinarity among the humanities and the social sciences is urgent and indispensable in building, transforming, and healing individuals and communities. Not only does it make visible the diversified versions of women’s oppression, it also reveals new connections both among the different oppressed groups and between the oppressors and their victims.

There are few feminist scholars who would still argue that women of color have not been victimized more than their white counterparts because they are marked by their race as well. As Uma Narayan notes, they are oppressed even by western feminism because “different cultural contexts and political agendas may cast a very different light on both the ‘idols’ and the ‘enemies’ of knowledge as they have characteristically been typed in western feminist epistemology.”² Religious, historical, cultural, and even traditional issues ranging from the use of hijab to the struggle of national independence have stirred controversies among feminist communities, and approaches disregarding contexts have caused more harm than benefit for the feminist discourse. As a result, Leith Mullings asserts “African-American women, and other women of color find themselves in a narrow historical space, caught between ideal models and real social conditions, between the pressures of racial liberation and gender liberation.”³ Hazel V. Carby in her article “White Woman Listen!” makes the same claim and demands a feminist theory that takes into consideration the racial dynamics controlling the lives of women of color.⁴ As a result, during the last decades, feminists of color have criticized the western feminist

1 Homi Bhabha (opening speech delivered at the conference entitled “Objects of Knowledge/Objects of Exchange: Contours of (Inter)disciplinarity” Mellon Graduate Student Conference Humanities Center. Harvard University. April 3-4, 2009).

2 Uma Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Non-Western Feminist,” eds. McGann and Kim (Routledge, 2010), 309.

3 Leith Mullings, “Images, Ideology and Women of Color,” eds. Hermann and Stewart (Avalon Publishing, 2001), 283.

4 Hazel V. Carby, “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood” eds. Rosemary Hennessey and Chrys Ingraham (New York: Routledge, 1997), 110-128.

standpoint and have proposed new ways of seeing and understanding the women who do not carry the white badge of privilege. In this endeavor, critics, scholars, and writers have been giving voice to the women of color and incorporating discussions of race and class into the feminist theory. This inclusion helps represent women who were silenced for a long time and adds a new interdisciplinarity to the work undertaken by feminist scholars.

Literature represents the epitome of a space of inclusion where “feminisms” can thrive in. Narayan writes that “it is easier and more likely for the oppressed to have critical insights into the conditions of their own oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures.”⁵ She proposes “nonanalytic” and “nonrational” forms of discourse as more “sympathetic” ways of representing these critical insights.”⁶ According to Donna Perry, one such “sympathetic” source is fiction that “offers new myths of female development and new definitions of success”⁷. Similar to these scholars, I claim that fictional biographies and autobiographies of West Indian women provide us with these new spaces that enable us to expand the conversation about how the feminisms of different women can come together. As one such novel, actually a *bildungsroman*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* both provides a fertile ground for questioning the significance of race in addition to gender for the lives of women, and also gives voice and visibility to a genuine character of color who is neither a generic fairy tale heroine, nor an invented representation of an exotic woman. In my title, I refer to the book as a *bildungswoman* because a brief research on the origin of the genre exposes its unflinching connection to a white middle class hero rather than a black lower class heroine. In this article, I first examine the traditional and feminist versions of autobiography and *bildungsroman*, and then offer a reading of the *Annie John* as a feminist and postcolonial subversion of the traditional *bildungsroman*. I analyze how Kincaid juxtaposes patriarchal with colonial to highlight the double bind women of color have to fight against and how she makes use of different kinds of interactions among women in writing the destiny of Annie as an alternative to the traditional plot lines allotted for women of color.

Philippe Lejeune describes autobiography as “A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning *his* own existence, focusing on his *individual* life, in particular on

5 Narayan, *Ibid.*, 314.

6 *Ibid.*, 313

7 Donna Perry, “Initiation in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*” ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 1990), 256.

the *development of his personality* [emphases added].”⁸ According to Georges Gusdorf, autobiography “depends on conscious awareness of the *singularity* of each *individual* life [emphases added].”⁹ Although Lejeune and Gusdorf are two of the most important scholars of autobiography, their definitions are limited by their own word choice to only a small percentage of the world’s population: middle class Western male. Similarly, *Bildungsroman* originated as the novel of the development and social formation of a young man. Louis Caton writes that in a *Bildungsroman* “[a] sensitive child-hero begins his life in a provincial area where he quickly perceives constraints on his ‘natural’ development. He grows frustrated with his family, school, and friends. Finally, at a fairly early age, he leaves the repression of home for the ‘real’ education that occurs in a sophisticated, worldly, and often urban setting.”¹⁰ He concludes that “The *Bildungsroman*, then, has a perceived history of only turning the boy into the man, not the girl into the woman.”¹¹ Examples of traditional *Bildungsroman* disclose how when development, individuality, success, and incorporation into society as an adult are considered, women, as well as the poor and the colored, are irrelevant. However, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a decrease in the works written according to this original structure and brought forth new practices instead. Linda Hutcheon connects this decrease to the modern distrust in a coherent self and the postmodernist emphasis on fragmentation¹². As printing cultures became more inclusive and began to include more heterogeneous stories and characters, life-narrative gradually have lost its rigidity, as well. While providing more opportunities to be heard, this transformation brought new challenges for the subaltern: “The current post-structuralist and postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and postcolonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses.”¹³ Women writers of color, being twice removed from the norm of Western male luxury of authority illustrate the best example to those assertions and affirmations of a denied or alienated subjectivity. They had been invisible in the literary canon because when they wrote, they had used their own cultural traditional forms instead of Western genres. As a result, they

8 Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 4.

9 Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” ed. James Olney, *Autobiography*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, 28.

10 Louis Caton, “Romantic Struggles: The *Bildungsroman* and Mother-Daughter Bonding in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*,” *MELUS* 21, No. 3, (1996): 125.

11 *Ibid.*, 126.

12 Linda Hutcheon, “Circling the Downspout of Empire: Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism,” *Ariel* 20, no. 4, (1989): 151.

13 *Ibid.*

had been represented and objectified by others in travelogues, stories, novels, letters, anthropological accounts, and political treatises. Edward Said talks of the Orient as “almost a European invention;” women of color in traditional literary forms were no exception.¹⁴

During the postcolonial movement women writers managed to reclaim more power as narrators of their own stories, and as Julia Swindells writes, they “began to assert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a ‘personal’ voice, which speaks beyond itself.”¹⁵ One important element in this sudden increase in the number voices was the interest of the non-white literary spheres in using versions of Western forms in their literary works. By adopting Western genres and adapting these to their own subjectivities, they have subverted both the Western literary traditions that control literary markets, and the Western male gaze that oversees the representation of everything and everyone in these markets. Throughout the last decades, life narratives written by non-Western writers demand a new interest in the women of color. The examples such as Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, although not numerous, are successful enough to find their way into the Western syllabi.

Bildungsroman goes back to the eighteenth century German literature and appears many times in English literature. The genre which emerged in line with the emphasis placed on the inevitability of change and progress situates the individual and his life experience at the center. Being a term borrowed from German, it remains untranslated on the grounds that the word *bildung* has significations such as “education,” “creation,” “development,” “establishment,” and “formation.” Of all these definitions, the last one might be the best to convey the essence of the genre. *Bildungsroman* aims to portray the identity formation of a protagonists through his metaphorical or actual journey from youth to maturity. The genre thus proves quite suitable for the postcolonial and/or female subjects celebrating their long strived for subjecthoods. It enables the woman writer of color to create a space to tell either her own story or the story of her culture. However, the examples of *bildungsroman* created by the postcolonial authors do not usually engender a direct replication of the western form. Postcolonial writers lift the form from its context and position it in a completely different historical, cultural, and geographical context. While the traditional *Bildungsroman* is primarily about the acculturation of an adolescent and since the acculturation of the postcolonial subject is marked with a flaw because it is forced, the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* constitutes almost a genre of its own.

14 Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 1.

15 Julia Swindells, *Uses of Autobiography*, (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 7.

In general terms, life writing of women of color differs from the Western male tradition of self-writing in two main aspects: First, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson claim, women's narratives "[culminate] not in integration [into the dominant culture] but in an *awakening* to gender-based limitations."¹⁶ In contrast to a white male who, through the adventures in the novel, realizes that he is the paradigm of power in society, the female writer is faced with the truth of her inferiority because of her gender. Traditional literary forms had barely allowed any visibility for the development of a heroine in works other than fairytales. In many fairy tales the same structure repeats: a girl with a happy life is introduced; her life is suddenly disturbed by a hardship; she has to leave her family, go through adventures, and with the help a knight with a shining armour—reaches a happy end. On the other hand, female protagonists of postcolonial growth stories are not damsels-in-distress. These characters brim with aesthetic appreciation, capacity to love, solidarity, and independence. These protagonists will not be saved by a knight. Instead, the writers position their female characters in a network of other women, thus causing different kinds of female solidarity to help them forge their own identities. Thus these novels, as Donna Perry claims, suggest "a possible paradigm for female development that represents an alternative to the victim models."¹⁷

The second strategy of adapting traditional *bildungsroman* to non-Western women's situations is the type of the final identity formation. These novels focus on a communal rather than an individual tradition of story-telling. This means that these narratives are not haunted by a gradually increasing dose of individualism that allows the protagonists in male narratives to triumph in the end. Instead, they incorporate other women's stories, and interactions among these women prove important in final autonomy of the heroine. She grows up with female involvement in her life, and her success in life is tethered to these influences.

Annie John, which tells the story of a young girl growing up in Antigua, is at once a *bildungswoman* and Caribbean *bildungsroman* since it follows the identity formation of its West Indian female protagonist.¹⁸ Kincaid takes the traditional *Bildungsroman* and subverts it. To do this, she changes the gender of the protagonist, situates her among women, and assigns her a rejection of Western values through the critique of colonial education. This way, as Maria Karafilis claims, Kincaid "[colonizes] this literary form and [reverses] traditional lines of

16 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 189.

17 Donna Perry, "Initiation in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*" ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 1990), 256.

18 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997).

power by controlling representation instead of passively being represented by the dominant culture.”¹⁹ Thus composed, *Annie John* makes us read neither a fairy tale, nor an invented representation of an exotic woman.²⁰

West Indies refers to the numerous islands in the Caribbean Sea. Their population, changed drastically due to the Atlantic slave trade from the 16th until the 19th centuries, includes ethnic groups descended from Europe, Africa, India, and China along with Native American inhabitants who came or were brought to the islands as plantation owners, overseers, or slaves. As the ethnic structure of the West Indies is marked by colonialism, its communal identity cannot be separated from a past of slavery.²¹ Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 in Antigua, one of these West Indian islands reshaped demographically and culturally by British imperialism. She lived on the island until she was sent to the United States to become an au-pair to send money to her family. As numerous interviews and biographical introductions note, after a period of obeying her mother’s expectations, she decided to follow the call for education and terminated connection with her family. She ended up as a staff writer for the *The New Yorker* and in 1983 published her first book, *At the Bottom of the River*. Her second book *Annie John*, whose chapters were first published separately in *The New Yorker*, was compiled in 1985.

The novel is composed of eight chapters, each focusing on a different phase, crisis, or influence on Annie’s development. They are written from Annie John’s point of view and narrative voice and tell the story of her life beginning with her tenth year and ending when she is seventeen and about to leave the island for a new future overseas. The period of Annie’s life that Kincaid narrates is for the most part marked by both colonial and patriarchal oppression and her interactions with her mother. These three sources of interventions which are at times inseparable give rise to Annie’s numerous rebellions to all the authority figures that symbolize these oppressions. Yet, Annie undergoes other interventions by women in her community, and it is these interactions that help shape her identity.

As a character, Annie represents the first variation in non-traditional *Bildungsroman* that I have talked about above. Annie’s identity formation is linked to the colonial education she has to take in her island. Rather than going through adventures that accentuate her

19 Maria Karafilis, “Crossing the Borders of Genre: Revisions of the ‘Bildungsroman’ in Sandra Cisneros’s ‘*The House on Mango Street*’ and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 31, No. 2 (Winter, 1998): 64.

20 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997).

21 Selwyn Cudjoe writes how slavery affected the institution of family on the one hand, and men and women separately on the other hand in her introductory piece to *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (1990).

individuality like *bildungs* boys, she keeps analyzing the nets that keep her imprisoned. Annie has to read the same texts, learn the same history, memorize the same dates, and recite the same poems as the students in England do. She has to celebrate imperialism, respect the British Queen, read children's books written for the blonde and blue eyed children of the center of the empire, and honor Christopher Columbus, the very symbol of colonialism, who sealed the destinies of many of the Atlantic islands during his voyages. Beginning with her first encounter with the education system of the island, Annie consciously criticizes the teachers and their practices. With the loss of her idealism about and trust in the colonial education, she becomes aware especially of the perversity of her people's situation as the former slaves who are forced into respecting imperial culture and history. Contemplating on history during one class at school, she says,

Of course, sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belonged—with the masters or the slaves—for it was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now; all of us celebrated Queen Victoria's birthday, even though she had been dead a long time. But we, the descendants of the slaves, knew quite well what had really happened, and I was sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently; I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans on first seeing them, and said, "How nice," and then gone home to tell their friends about it. (1997, 76)²²

The passage presents us both sides of Annie: the funny dreamer who can imagine how unimpressed her ancestors would have found their white counterparts, and the smart cynic who acknowledges not only the political, financial, and physical oppression that had happened before she was born, but also the cultural and psychological oppression that still continues during her lifetime.

However, dreamer and cynic are not enough to describe everything about Annie because as aware as she is of the catastrophes of imperialism, she is also obsessed with its cultural products: she devours the adventures of the blonde girl in her Enid Blyton books even though she could only be a part of these books as the savage stereotype. She imagines she lived in Belgium just like Charlotte Bronte, "the author of [her] favorite novel, *Jane Eyre*."²³ As a child

22 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997), 76.

23 Ibid., 92.

constantly reading what is made available to her by her school and the public library and daydreaming whenever she finds an opportunity, Annie is more influenced by the colonial education than she is alert to its oppression. She tries to revolt against the rules that the colonial education system inscribes for the West Indian girls, but she subscribes to and appreciates the same rules through her identification with the Western literary figures. While her favorite novel ends with the marriage of the protagonist, she would not consider marriage for her own future. In the chapter entitled “Somewhere, Belgium,” her daydream about Bronte comes to an end abruptly the minute her friend Gwen mentions marriage: “‘I think it would be so nice if you married Rowan. Then you see, that way we could be together always.’ I was brought back to the present, and I stopped and stood still for a moment; then my mouth fell open and my whole self started to tremble. ... I felt so alone; the last person left on earth couldn’t feel more alone than I.”²⁴ Annie leaves Gwen out of her life after this instance and shuts her out the narrative till the very end of the novel. From that point on, we witness Annie’s struggle to completely grasp all the oppressions that make her suffer, and run away from them.

Kincaid emphasizes Annie’s struggle with her conscious revolt to and unconscious acceptance of the enforced value system by contrasting the daughter with her mother Mrs. Annie John. Although she is a strong, understanding, and intellectual woman, who herself revolted against her family and the patriarchal values they represent when she left her home and island in order to live as she wanted, she becomes a perpetrator of a similar oppression towards Annie. She is there as a possible version of Annie lest she cannot internalize and heal her struggle. In the beginning of the novel, the two get along very well. Annie even says that she used to live in a paradise in those early years of her life when she and her mother were so close.²⁵ However, when Annie turns twelve and begins to grow into a young woman, her mother’s attitude towards her changes. Mrs. John’s and her generation’s in-between position plays an important role in the abrupt transformation of their relationship: She is West Indian in her interactions with other women, in her participation in cultural rituals such as funerals, and in her relationships with her husband while she is also an Anglophile who tries to furnish Annie with the manners of a middle class English girl.²⁶ Her own ambiguity towards the two cultures makes her a prisoner of both, and she reproduces them in herself.

24 Ibid., 93.

25 Ibid., 25.

26 Jamaica Kincaid calls her mother an Anglophile in Cudjoe’s interview (1990, 217).

One obvious example of this identification of the patriarchal and colonial oppression in the voice of the mother manifests itself in the chapter entitled “Columbus in Chains.” Right after her critique of the colonial education quoted above, Annie John sees a picture of Christopher Columbus in her history book. He is sitting in the bottom of the ship while his hands and feet are chained to it because of a quarrel he had with a representative of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. “What just deserts, I thought, for I did not like Columbus. How I loved this picture—to see the usually triumphant Columbus, brought so low, seated at the bottom of a boat just watching things go by.”²⁷ Then she remembers how she heard her mother read a letter from her family and responded to the news of her father’s stiff limbs saying ““So the great man can no longer just get up and go. How I would love to see his face now!”” Annie writes her mother’s first sentence under the picture on her book. As Moira Ferguson writes, “Annie John relished defacing the picture of Columbus, whom she detests. Quickly, she mentally shifts images from Christopher Columbus to her grandfather, Pa Chess, from paternalistic colonialism to paternalistic domesticity, and her own mother’s sardonic anger when she discovers that Pa Chess is ill.”²⁸ Annie realizes, though unconsciously, the interconnectedness and almost the interchangeability of patriarchy and colonialism when she is twelve; but Mrs. John remains blind to it. She simplifies her own feud to a personal level and connects it neither to the Caribbean gender norms nor to colonial impositions on identity formation. She represents what Annie should not become in this *Bildungswoman*. Otherwise, she would remain as a product of patriarchy and colonialism.

Under colonialism and patriarchy, the two pressures originating from inside and imported from outside her island, Annie struggles to find her identity throughout different stages she goes through in her childhood and youth. However, in line with the communal aspect of the West Indian *Bildungsroman*, Jamaica Kincaid supplies her protagonist with different forms of female solidarity which, along with turning Annie into a strong, independent, and successful young woman, also contributes to the feminist readings of the novel. In 1974, feminist sociologist and psychologist Nancy Chodorow wrote that since women are responsible for child care and the male and female children go through this experience in diverse ways, they

27 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997), 77-78.

28 Moira Ferguson, *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body*, (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1994), 60.

end up growing up with different personality traits.²⁹ Because of this early diversification, she claimed, “feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to others more than masculine personality does.”³⁰ The significance of relationships with others increases even more for the women of color: Mary Helen Washington writes, “few, if any, women in the literature of the black women succeed in heroic quests without the support of other women or men in their communities. Women talk to other women in this tradition, and their friendships with other women—mothers, sisters, grandmothers, friends, lovers—are vital to their growth and well-being.”³¹ Annie represents an example of this tradition through how she manages to survive after her colonial assimilation and patriarchal enculturation, and to some extent, how she rejects them through these bonds that she develops with other women.

The forms of female interactions in *Annie John* can be classified into three categories: mother-daughter bonding, friendship bonds, and connection with nature and the spiritual world.³² First of these interactions takes place between the child Annie and her mother. This stage furnishes Annie not only with her mother’s limitless love for her but also with the traditional West Indian values about gender and social norms such as family formation and women’s status in society. As Donna Perry states, “in a racist society in which the world beyond the family denies her autonomy, the female hero of color looks to her mother—and the world of women—to find models of strength and survival.”³³ Annie participates in her culture through her mother’s stories the way she would not be able to in the real world. Even though Kincaid presents Mrs. John as the embodiment of patriarchal and colonial oppression, she also gives her two very important roles in Annie’s identity formation. First of all, Annie is initiated into love and bonding through her mother, which allows her, for the rest of her life, to seek connection with other women around her. As the novel proceeds, Annie looks for these intimate bonds in order to nourish her identity formation. Secondly, Mrs. John provides Annie with the story of her own rebellion. In the chapter entitled “The Circling Hand,” Annie tells the reader the story of how her mother left her house on Dominica after a quarrel with her father and came to

29 Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* qtd in Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993), 7.

30 Ibid.

31 Mary Helen Washington, *Invented Lives*, (Anchor, 1988) qtd in Donna Perry, “Initiation in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*” ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 1990), 252.

32 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997).

33 Donna Perry, “Initiation in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*” ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 1990), 252.

Antiqua. She was liberated enough to remain unmarried until she was thirty and choose a husband thirty-five years older than she is. As a result, although she forces Annie to comply with the expectations of society and become a “lady,” she also provides for her a very strong and independent role model. Annie follows this role model even though she is not conscious that it is her mother’s story that inspires her to rebel.

The second stage in Annie’s gender construction comes when she befriends first Gwen and then the Red Girl. These two subsequent chapters in Annie’s life present two female influences on her identity as opposed to the older male figures that influence the protagonists’ lives in the traditional *Bildungsroman*. She tries to replace her mother with these new friends, to the degree of saying “when I was younger I had been afraid of my mother's dying, but that since I met Gwen this didn't matter so much.”³⁴ However, her love for Gwen does not last long. After completing her duty in Annie’s life, Gwen disappears, becomes a random student in the class and an old friend in the street. Instead, Annie aims for a more secret, more rebellious relationship: The Red Girl. The Red Girl represents what Annie’s mother’s “lady-like business” rejects. Her unclean clothes, her unruly hair, her independence from her mother all excite Annie and makes her admire this new friend. Still, this relationship, too, ends as abruptly as the previous one did: “Soon after I started to menstruate, and I stopped playing marbles. I never saw the Red Girl again.”³⁵ Although Annie ends up forgetting both of the girls, one embodying a complete independence to the degree of refusing to participate in society and follow its rules, and the other a complete acceptance, internalization, and reproduction of the same social norms; her experience with them allows her to realize the oppression around her, see her options, and defy them.

The final stage that orients Annie towards a new kind of female identity manifests itself as a connection with nature and spiritual world. In “The Long Rain” chapter, Annie suffers a long period of depression related to her identity crisis. During this time, she remains in bed and her parents cannot find a way to make her well. So, her obeah grandmother Ma Chess decides to come, and in a mysterious fashion, becoming of an obeah woman: “I heard my mother and father wonder to each other how she came to us, for she appeared on a day when the steamer was not due.”³⁶ She “settled in on the floor at the foot of my bed, eating and sleeping there, and soon I grew to count on her smells and the sound her breath made as it went in and out of her

34 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997), 51.

35 Ibid., 70.

36 Ibid., 123.

body.”³⁷ Through the proximity of her grandmother’s body, Annie goes back to where she began: the Eden of oneness with her mother. However, the bonding occurs in a different way this time: the healing rituals of the obeah woman connect Annie to her island’s history and traditions. Kincaid thus makes the spiritual and healing powers of the West Indian women a part of Annie John’s identity before she leaves the island. In other words, Kincaid makes her heroine reclaim her Caribbean history and culture which was attempted to be replaced by imperial values by the in-between generation of Mrs. Annie John.

One day during her nervous breakdown and before Ma Chess arrives, Annie gets up from the bed and picks up some photographs from the table to give “them a good bath.”³⁸ Each of these photographs represent either a gender role or a colonial intervention, and she ends up erasing everyone’s faces except hers in her Aunt’s wedding picture, bodies of her parents below the waist in the cricket picture, and her body except her “rebellious” shoes in her Communion day. By this action, Annie practices erasure—an erasure of all the patriarchal gender roles that are imposed on her and all the signifiers of sexuality that her mother forbids her to know. This erasure is somehow parallel to what Mrs. John had done when she picked up her bag and left her family house years ago. However, Annie could take one more step beyond erasure. By the intervention of her grandmother, Annie learns that the power of negotiation is much bigger than her unfocused anger. Instead of refusing all aspects of both her island’s culture and the colonial heritage, she realizes that both have things to offer for her.

The last chapter of the novel, “A Walk to the Jetty” begins with the words “My name is Annie John.”³⁹ On the one hand, it symbolizes the individualism preached by the colonial education and how Annie has decided to negotiate with it to find her own identity. On the other hand, as Annie John is also her mother’s name, it bolsters the significance of the communal identity of the West Indian culture and the reconnection of the mother and the daughter. Annie will be carrying both cultures’ baggage with her as her mother did, but she will not be reproducing them. She leaves the island knowing, at least unconsciously, what part of her mother and her culture she needs to take with her to west. She is ready to refuse the reproductive role prepared for her by the patriarchal and colonial mechanisms, and instead she will take on the role of the producer, which has been claimed traditionally by male protagonists of *Bildungsroman*. With this truncated ending, Kincaid offers uncertainty and bravery as characteristics of the life of a woman of color. Annie is not waiting for a knight in a shining

37 Ibid., 125.

38 Ibid., 119.

39 Ibid., 131.

armour like a fairy tale damsel, nor is she marrying her oppressor like Jane Eyre. We do not know what happens to Annie, but we know that she is going to do better than her favorite heroine, Jane.

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