

Subverting Patriarchy in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of my Mother*: Orderly Disorder

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Abstract

Concern with questions of order and disorder has risen in a variety of fields and disciplines, resulting in a great deal of controversy in relation to these two apparently 'dichotomous' concepts. In literature, for instance, writers, not only of different nationalities and ethnicities, but also of various intellectual affiliations, have displayed a particular focus on this area of interest. A female postcolonial and a feminist writer, who also writes within the framework of post-modernism, Jamaica Kincaid is among those who have tackled the issue of (dis)order in a multiplicity of ways in their fiction. In her *The Autobiography of my Mother*, the Caribbean author seems to overthrow traditional modals of order that adhere to the superiority of the figure of the "patriarch" through the female narrator, who is at the same time the protagonist. The current paper will explore how Kincaid attempts to reshape the conventional order of established social conventions through her fiction. By empowering her female protagonist both sexually and intellectually, Kincaid seems to refuse to reduce women to any forms of submissiveness or victimization. The current paper will also investigate how Kincaid's act of endowing the protagonist with a mind and a will of her own mirrors the writer's rebelliousness against the conventional assumption that male power is given and monolithic. Through her endeavor to subvert traditional modes of patriarchy, Kincaid lays down the pillars of a new order –as opposed to an old order which cherishes male supremacy –thus, an orderly disorder.

Keywords: Order, disorder, orderly, subversion, patriarchy.

Introduction:

There has been controversy with respect to the definition of the relation between order and disorder. While classical views emphasize their opposition, recent approaches reiterate their dialectical aspect (Hayles 306). In terms of public reception, order is what man seeks due to the debatably relative stability it offers, as opposed to the potential jeopardy its absence imposes. Indeed, while “chaos is the law of nature,” Henry Adams avers, “order is the dream of man” (qtd. in Peters 131) and as such seems to be the way of man in the Dominica of Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, *The Autobiography of my Mother*. Regulated by the rules of the Patriarch, the place exhibits a certain degree of order that Kincaid appears to antagonize, instead adhering to a more complex conception of order, resultant from the introduction of disorder into the system.

This paper studies not only the manifestations, but also the implications of patriarchal order in the Dominican society while highlighting the mechanisms facilitating its actualization. With the primary intention of revealing Kincaid’s dissention with such conventional understanding of order, it will examine Xuela’s life narrative insofar as it is one of resistance to its archetypal modals and its residual effects.

1) Order of the Father: The Dominican Society and Laws of Patriarchy:

The perception that a dialectical and dialogic relationship exists between the individual and society is central to the works of Jamaica Kincaid and consequently, myriad aspects characteristic of the Caribbean society disseminate her fiction, *The Autobiography of my Mother* included. The novel unfolds Xuela’s retrospective account of her life growing up in Dominica, an island country in the Caribbean Sea, whose long history of subjugation to the British colonial rule shapes its present identity. From her current position as a seventy-year old woman, Xuela ponders on significant instances of her experience of growing up in such a place, emphasizing the fundamental role the institution of “family” plays in an individual’s identity construction process.

Within the socio-historical context of the narrative, the Dominican society is chiefly defined by that “form of the family whose essential features are the incorporation of bondsmen and power vested in the paternal head of the family,” namely patriarchy (Marx & Engels 488). Traditional societies entertain a sense of order advocated by the presence of the father figure, exercising autocratic authority as the pater familias. In other words, the administration of the family is exclusively the father’s prerogative which positions him as the sole sovereign.

As the narrative of *The Autobiography of my Mother* initiates with the actual and symbolic death of the mother, Kincaid strategically attempts to introduce a rather convoluted conception of patriarchy. Indeed, “the figure of the father casts a shadow over this text, for in the West Indies that Kincaid presents here, the mother is physically absent,” which further consolidates the overwhelming dominance of patriarchal laws, since they are “left untempered by her tenderness” (Adams 4). Orphaned, Xuela’s deprivation from motherly affection impels her to struggle in a multitude of ways in order to survive the overwhelming dominance of a

patriarchal society, especially with the father's deliberate imposition of disconnectedness through his refusal to mediate between his daughter and her deceased mother.

In the novel, the mother's physical absence is juxtaposed with the father's strategic omnipresence. Alfred Richardson appears to be the epitomized version of the traditional patriarch as he often prioritizes reason over emotions. His abandonment of his *love* child in order to pursue career goals after the death of his wife evidences pragmatism to stand among his salient personality traits. Indeed, it is this pragmatic thinking that destined him with his second wife with whom the union would benefit him financially. Often unwilling to "eat food in the presence of strangers, or in the presence of people who were afraid of him," Alfred Richardson endeavors to shield his humanity from his acquaintances, solidifying the godlike nature he often conveys (Kincaid 39). He is the kind of person whose help characters, like Lazarus, solicit and as if a god, he is selective when it comes to those on whom he bestows his grace. Alfred's thirst for personal empowerment is countered with his constant attempt to dominate and disempower the Other and his "conceit [is] perhaps the way of all men" (Snodgrass 89). He draws legitimacy for his trespasses from his profession –for he is a jailor – which further establishes his status as a legalized source of authority.

It is his uniform that Xuela first noticed when he came to take her home at the age of seven. "My father came to fetch me wearing the uniform of a jailor," she narrates explaining that while "to him this had no meaning, it was without significance," to her it had fathomless implications (Kincaid 24). This arises from the female's instinctive gaze, a gaze colored by the ability to recognize the potential jeopardy the figure of 'the all-powerful patriarch' may inflict on female subjectivity. Xuela's suspicion is confirmed when Alfred, threateningly perhaps, invites her to "remember that he was [her] father," finalizing an argument once (Kincaid 49). Although she, along with her schoolmates, witnessed a schoolboy drowning in the river in the wake of his attempt to swim towards a jablesse, she *had* to concede to her father's assertion that the entire incident is a figment of her imagination. The implied accusation and the subsequent obliteration are typical of patriarchal societies since they both conveniently serve the Father's interest as they facilitate the patriarch's imposition of order.

The father's verbalization and actualization of his authority as head of the family resonates conspicuously throughout the narrative through different suggestive occurrences, analyzed and critiqued by Xuela. As if the all-seeing eye, Xuela monitors with scrutiny her own family. Considering the change in her environment –for she spent the first seven years of her childhood in the exclusive company of Ma Eunice and her children, a family whose pedestal is a male figure was foreign to her. Her savvy is remarkable, for she displays a level of awareness about impending or pervasive phenomena. At an early age, she becomes cognizant of the collective belief in male superiority, reflected in the preference of an heir over an heiress. It is noticeable how Xuela's stepmother favored her son "because he was not like her. He was not female, he was male" (Kincaid 53). Such a belief emanates from the instilled conviction that a son is the father's vehicle to assure the survival of his dynasty and legacy. It is for this reason that children who are born out of wedlock are not offered legitimacy unless they are boys. Indeed, in the Dominica of the novel, men, such as Jack LaBatte, are entitled to sexual ventures, the reason why they tend to have children outside the institution of marriage. However, only male newborns are willingly given the father's name.

The absence of concessions on the part of women who subserviently uphold the law of the Father facilitates the prevalence of male supremacy and thus, while males conveniently endorse such a doctrine, females inherently internalize images configured by the patriarch who, as Harris Mirkin suggests in his “The Passive Female: The Theory of Patriarchy” monopolizes external structures and institutions.

The novel exposes patriarchal societies’ stereotypical reduction of women to the traditional conception that implies not only hyper-emotionalism, but also passivity, self-abnegation, and unnaturalness of violence. In her account of her mother’s life, Xuela remarks that, whoever contributed to her nurturing, “brought her up ... and demanded that she be a quiet, shy, long-suffering, unquestioning, modest, wishing-to-die-soon person” (199). “This wearying demand [to be quiet] was one of many demands made on [her] simply because [she] was female” (Kincaid 42). However, such favorable degree of subservience, docility, submissiveness and meekness are demanded when addressing men but not fellow women.

A woman in the process of becoming, Xuela was subjected to otherness by her stepmother and her sister, Elizabeth, through the strategic discriminatory use of Patois and outspoken rejection, respectively. In her account of the use of language, Xuela observes how French Patois is considered an inferior language in comparison to English due to questions of purity of linguistic origins. A pidgin language, the former is used by the stepmother when the father is absent, in accordance with her agenda of denigrating Xuela. The discursive disempowerment of the female as a spurned Other is further complicated by the inimical and adversarial attitude of Elizabeth Richardson towards her half-sister, Xuela, despite the latter’s attempted friendliness. Such hostility gains credence within the order of the father since it encroaches upon womanhood and sisterhood, thus negating women any sense of communion as it echoes the divide-to-conquer principle.

Women in *The Autobiography of my Mother* appear to be divided by what unites men: interest. Whereas men like Alfred Richardson and Monsieur Jacques LaBatte entertain an air of bondsmen fostered by –but not necessarily limited to –mutual financial interest, women –with the exception of Xuela –are separated by their desire to please and satisfy their male counterparts. In the novel, men’s success at perceiving the potential partner in a fellow man is juxtaposed with women’s failure to understand and identify with each other. Often unjustifiably alarmed by Xuela, the women in *The Autobiography of my Mother* –with Lise LaBatte excepted –establish a relationship of enmity with her. While her stepmother antagonized her for the mere assumption that she represents a vehicle that bridges the father’s present with his past, Roland’s wife targeted her for jeopardizing her marital life. Their veneration of men is, however, deemed inauthentic since it is the byproduct of an entire system or what Juliet Mitchell succinctly labels “the ideological domination” of women by men.

However, as Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison point out in “Racism and the Patriarchy in the Meaning of Motherhood,” ideology is not the sole mechanism through which the order of the father is both executed and maintained, since the gendered role divisions and the resultant economic subordination of women play an equally influential role. In Kincaid’s novel, the decision of Xuela’s father to allow her to continue her schooling at the age of

thirteen is non-normative, for “girls did not attend school” and Xuela “can only imagine that he desired such a thing for [her] without giving it much thought because in the end, what could an education do for someone like [her],” a woman (Kincaid 12)? Her stepmother, a woman herself, postulates Xuela’s education “a great sacrifice” as she “would have been more useful at home” (Kincaid 40). Gendered roles division guarantees the Dominican society a sense of equilibrium and order by which each subject carries out a definite set of tasks as defined by the norm. Indeed, primarily the prerogative of men, Dominican women are disallowed the public sphere which limits them to the domestic life in the roles of mothers and housewives. Thus, suppressed by the dominant male, women’s ultimate victimization is their lack of prospects and aspiration for independency and the consequent reduction of their identity to motherhood.

Stay-at-home wives and mothers, women in the Dominican society find refuge in marriage which Mary Daly, along with other critics, denounces for being an enslaving institution. Yet, “I want to desperately marry men, I have come to see, is not a mistake women make.... what else is left for them to do” (Kincaid 64)? Lise LaBatte, for instance, desperately yearned to be possessed by Jacques whereas, unlike her, during the time they met, “he would not be had, he would not be contained” (Kincaid 76). This pathological drive to be a man’s possession is the natural outcome of a passive female’s upbringing in a patriarchal society. Born and raised in an environment where satiation with the beliefs in female subordination and ‘legitimate’ inactivity in the public sphere is the custom, young girls mature embracing those ‘values’ to be replicas of their submissive mothers.

However, as Friedrich Engels accentuates, patriarchs partake in marriage not out of desire to settle down, but out of egocentric thirst for the legitimacy of heirs and the effortless consolidation of estates. The word “estates,” here, does not exclusively refer to real estate, but also to a non-legalized form of chattel marriage where, at the end of the day, every single member of the family is the father’s property. Discerning such fact, when Alfred writes Xuela updating her about family occurrences, she angrily writes back: “your son, your daughter, your wife. They were his...he wanted to tell me we were all his” (Kincaid 104). The Father often claims lawfulness of proprietorship due to his social, economic and political empowerment and following these terms, even motherhood, supposedly untainted by laws of patriarchy, transforms into another mechanism by which men exert women’s subservience (Roberts 3).

In a patriarchal society, Martha Fineman avers that motherhood figures “as a colonized concept, an event that is physically experienced but occupied and defined, given content and value by men” (qtd. in Roberts 5). Fineman’s statement holds true, for in the Dominican society as portrayed in *The Autobiography of my Mother*, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood are celebrated when the newborn is a boy. Such a patriarchal conception is advocated by the society’s superstitious belief that having a girl born in plain daylight is an omen of bad luck, while “the time of the day when [a] son was born did not matter. Any time of day a son was born is the right time” (Kincaid 107). The demeaning gaze by which the entire society perceives female newborns echoes the Father’s discriminatory and objectifying discourse.

Women in this society reduce their self-worth not to motherhood as a selfless act of giving life, but as a means to satisfy men. Consequently, “women who fail the ideal of motherhood (unwed mothers, unfit mothers, and women who do not become mothers) are stigmatized for violating the dominant norm and considered deviant and criminals” (Roberts 5). In *The Autobiography of my Mother*, Elizabeth Richardson and Lise LaBatte exemplify the figure of the deviant female within the Father’s order as they both unintentionally violated the profile of ideal ‘womanhood’ which is, according to the patriarch’s definition, about the *ability* to bear *legitimate* children. As such are the laws of the Father, Elizabeth’s attempt to truncate her *illegitimate pregnancy* is her only way to escape marginalization and disinheritance. Similarly, *barren* Lise conceives her definite salvation in Xuela’s fertility.

With the validation and maintenance of the order of Father as its primary objective, a patriarchal society seeks to confine women via a definite set of mechanisms. The patriarch’s monopoly of institutions facilitates the ideological infiltration of his supremacy as opposed to women’s subordination and compliance. The gendered roles division establishes an unambiguous sense of order in which participants display awareness about their functions and responsibilities, always under the male’s surveillance. It is this kind of order that the traditional Dominican society as delineated in *The Autobiography of my Mother* reflects, the kind of order that would guarantee the continuity of the phallogocentric offspring.

2) The ‘Anomalous’ Subject and Self-fashioning in Narratives of Resistance:

In the Dominica of the novel, the entrenched sense of order generates some sort of disorder that is embodied in the character of Xuela. The ultimate non-conformist, Xuela adamantly resists approbation of patriarchal discourses as she is unwilling to make concessions to community discourses unless they make *sense* to her. In an environment that staunchly adheres to a traditional model of family, Xuela’s burgeoning subjectivity epitomizes her as ‘the anomaly’ in a community of uniformity. “Through the marginalized space inhabited by actual mothers and daughters, she pursues the source of patriarchy’s reproduction of women as a means to discovering some new truth” about herself, as a woman (Smith 57). Indeed, she is a representation of the existential protagonist who overlooks societal norms often imposed on the individual, instead constructing her own universe where the ultimate law is that which foregrounds her own ethos, which originate in her own self-perceived and self-validated circle of reference.

Her quest for identity, further complicated by rigid social paradigms, is embarked upon as early as childhood. Accustomed to copying other people’s letters in class, Xuela heartily confesses that “it only made [her] want to write [her] own letters, letters in which [she] would express [her] feelings about [her] own life as it appeared to [her] at the age of seven” (Kincaid 19). The educational system’s failure to transform the act of copying into a welcome habit in Xuela’s case is due to her difference as, unlike her peers, she disapproves of taking things for granted, opting for reasoning instead and thus, she “felt [her] convictions powerfully” despite being “young, so young” (Kincaid 65). It is both her employment of reason and prioritization of *will* which allowed her to oppose the system by writing her *own* letters. In a way recognizing the paramount importance of self-writing at an early age, Xuela voices her inner refusal to make of her existence a replica of someone else’s. Her recurrent

use of the word “my own” throughout the novel reverberates her desire for self-possession. Unlike other females in the novel who willfully yearned to be men’s possessions, she “chose to possess” herself (Kincaid 174). Her choice resonates with contestation, for it unravels her dissent with the patriarch’s unchallenged proprietorship of women not only intellectually, but also physically and it is this “availability of choice [which] lifts the compromised woman from victimhood to a stronger bargaining position” (Snodgrass 31).

The source of disruption of the order of the Father, Xuela’s salient asset, which is fearlessness and gallantry, is “a stance of defiance and a requisite for survival” (Paravisini-Gebert 149). Retrospectively, Xuela ruminates over how, during her school days, “there were only boys” in the classroom and yet, she “was not afraid of the new situation” (Kincaid 14). Invulnerable, she challenges the patriarch in his own territory and twice proves to be his equal not only academically but also professionally. On the wake of her escape from LaBatte’s house, she started a job that is traditionally perceived as unsuitable for women due to lack of physical stamina. The task of shifting the sand needed to construct a road between Loubière and Giraudel granted her financial and economic independence, positioning her as the sole woman in the novel who holds means of production. As having an education and a profession is an indivisible element of the public sphere that is exclusively reserved for men in patriarchal societies, Xuela’s ‘intrusion’ is a conspicuous threat to the phallogocentric community, for “it was clothes of a dead man that [she] wore to work each day” (Kincaid 98). The act of wearing a dead man’s clothes is symbolic of undermining and disempowering patriarchal discourses that promote gendered roles division, which endangers the sense of stability offered by the validation of Fatherly control. Xuela’s prerogative is her unswerving audacity which permits her not only to pursue her battle against traditional discourses, but also to often react against objectification instead of acquiescing to it.

Unlike the other subservient female characters in the novel, Xuela opts for agency rather than passivity and subordination. As Alexandra Schultheis explains in “From Longing to Loss: Mother-Daughter Relationships in the Novels of Jamaica Kincaid,” Xuela negotiates her position in a continuum of female experience by overthrowing sexual subjugation and archetypal models of motherhood.

Xuela’s exploration of her sexuality commenced during her teenage years, at fifteen of age, to be accurate. It is with Jacques LaBatte that she first had intercourse once offered to him by his wife, Lise. The evident allusion to concubinage is inasmuch as it serves the male interest, for “LaBatte sees himself as the patriarch (and king) of this place, and his penetration of Xuela is an exertion of his power as well as a manifestation of his desire to conceive an heir who will inherit his estate,” considering his own wife’s infertility (Edwards 126). However, in her reminiscence about the sexual occurrence, Xuela discloses her awareness about her power as a woman as she believes that she was through with him as much as he was through with her (Kincaid 71). An autodidact, she displays a remarkable ability to turn advantageous what might seem at first glance disadvantageous as she is “an example of the neophyte learning from sexual exploitation her value as a woman” (Snodgrass 191). In fact, it is thanks to the early sexual subjugation she experienced that she came to master the art of subjecting men to the service of her own pleasure. She reflects an unparalleled innate pathological drive for self-liberation and sexual agency. “Her sexuality is powerful and

frightening. She therefore acts against the social standards regarding women's sexuality" (Linder 11).

In a way returning the desiring gaze that is usually ascribed to male sexuality, her fascination with men merely translates into self-interest. Xuela's blatant conviction in sexual pleasure is discernible, since she believes that "the body of a man is not what makes him desirable, it is what his body might make you feel when it touches you that is the thrill" (70). By reducing the male to a source of female sexual pleasure, she overturns traditional conceptions that promote female sexual objectification.

Noticeably, Xuela entertains a sense of self-worth which licenses her robust belief in her status as equal to men. Her convictions are an outright defiance of the male-centered stereotypical credence in female inferiority. As a matter of fact, Xuela 'anomalously' goes as far as celebrating her supremacy which is echoed in the conspicuous reversal of roles, as her account of her sexual encounter with her husband Philip unravels. She orders him to get on his knees and he subserviently complies by staying there until she was satisfied. By denying him penetration and the subsequent emasculation, she strategically empowers herself. The reductionist perception with which she also approaches the existence of Roland, one of her many lovers, as being limited "to a list of names that were not countries, and to the number of times he brought the monthly flow of blood to a halt," (Kincaid 176) suggests ridicule because, unlike her, he fails to entertain a sense of self-referentiality.

Xuela's attitude acquires legitimacy in her adherence to self-definition whose basis is independence. She opposes an understanding of the self as dependent on an Other whose subjectivity is conditioned by the contaminating patriarchal laws. For this reason, her "rejection of motherhood as enforced identity and as political institution" dubs her with self-determinism (Roberts 4). She refuses to endanger her inner desire and personhood which shape her individuality by rejecting women's reduction to mere surrogate wombs.

Her rebelliousness is not simply verbalized, but rather actualized. At the realization that she is impregnated with LaBatte's child, she finds salvation in abortion, as she is unable to embrace "this ghost of [her] with a child inside" (77). Since "the motif of unplanned pregnancy recurs ... as an element of female powerlessness and vulnerability enforced by an androcentric society," it encroaches upon the self and suggests its erasure (Snodgrass 31). The inseparability of death and pregnancy is further accentuated, for she "had vomited up everything [she] had ever eaten [her] entire life and felt [she] would die" (Kincaid 81). The figurative implication of the act of vomiting is suggestive of identity loss, for her acceptance of an unwanted pregnancy is a sign of compliance which compromises her revolutionariness.

For Xuela, resistance to patriarchal motherhood is facilitated by abortion and menstruation. A matter of will, her countless abortions guarantee her autonomy and distinguish her from the remaining subordinate female characters as they offer her "a rebirth through self-knowledge and the development of individuality" (Edwards 126). With detachment, she discloses that if there was a child in her, she could expel it through the sheer force of her *will* (Kincaid 81). Driven by an analogous impassivity, Xuela *wills* her sister's fetus out, sparing her potential marginalization. Indeed, "the folkloric admiration of the

female abortionist” that permeates the novel “derives from a sisterhood that protects its underground community from male oppression and sexual mastery” (Snodgrass 145). Similarly, menstruation is another stratagem employed to resist subjugation. Often welcomed by Xuela, the monthly occurrence “strikes (Roland’s) manhood and weakens the very foundation of his sense of self as he can only define himself by the power he exerts over women” through bringing menstruation to a halt, a sign of pregnancy (Edwards 129).

Xuela’s resilience further manifests itself in her celebration of womanhood as differentiated from ladyhood, after a period of time she spent living “not a man, not a woman, not anything” (Kincaid 102). In her account of what constitutes a woman, Xuela provides a succinct definition: “two breasts, a small opening between my legs, one womb; it never varies and they are always in the same place” and accentuates how it has at “its core the act of self-possession” (Kincaid 159). The concept, then, implies self-referentiality which distinguishes it from its counterpart that is pre-conditioned by dynamic societal norms. Her ability to differentiate between the two concepts evidences her critical and analytical skills and it is indeed this inclination of hers to employ logic rather than give in to emotionalism and sentimentalism which further distinguishes her from the other female characters.

The female protagonist then reflects a level of consciousness that self-knowledge is the foundation of an independent individuality that does not abide by “the sense of order that confuses and betrays the world” (Snodgrass 171). A source of all that is new to the Dominica of the novel, Xuela is the disruptive force that is strategically introduced by Jamaica Kincaid.

Kincaid attributes to Xuela the profile of the ultimate rebel who inflicts disorder into the fallacious patriarchal order, echoing N. Katherine Hayles who affirms that “chaos [is] not an absence or lack, but as the source of all that is new in the world” (306). In her “Chaos as Orderly Disorder: Shifting Ground in Contemporary Literature and Science,” Hayles thoroughly examines the correlations of order and disorder, emphasizing their dialogic aspect. Negating their oppositional nature, she unequivocally foregrounds the conception that the two are rather dialectically configured. Her view on the matter echoes the chain reaction principle as she believes that from order comes disorder, which allows room for “a more complex kind of order” to emerge (320).

Through *The Autobiography of my Mother*, Kincaid accounts for the ability of women to rise like the phoenix from the ashes of a dwindling order. By writing this matrifocal piece of fiction, the author aims at subverting the traditional conception of the Caribbean society as patrifocal, instead adhering to a view that foregrounds women as potential compeers. Her feminist stance is evident insofar as she promotes women’s rights to be active participants in the public sphere whether academically or professionally, thus deconstructing the conventional public versus private spheres dichotomy.

Her intentional portrayal of Xuela as the powerful female, who entertains not only a mind of her own which often assists her in critiquing and analyzing phenomena in her surrounding environment, but also an adamant will of her own that permits her to venture on the unknown, echoes the implied invitation for West Indian women to follow Xuela’s lead in breaking the imposed manacles.

With a society comprised of more women who share Xuela's breath, a new order would surface, an order that introduces a novel community which voices the long marginalized, victimized and obliterated minority. According to Kincaid, it is on the remnants of the *old* order which strictly permeates the will of the Father that the *new* order would emerge.

Conclusion:

By writing *The Autobiography of my Mother*, Jamaica Kincaid lashes out at irrational allegiance to a suppressive society that propagates perpetual series of discriminatory acts, deemed harmful to subjectivity. Through Xuela, who displays awareness about the paramount importance of political action and a subsequent ability to redefine her roles in the community, Kincaid "begins to write the history of the Caribbean women as one of resistance to the patriarchal trend of Caribbean motherhood" and womanhood (Seanor 7). Instead of subscribing to patriarchal conception of gender hierarchies that is solidified by a definite set of mechanisms and forces whose agenda is the marginalization of West Indian female voices, Kincaid talks back. She not only subverts "the patriarchal forces that have shaped the West Indies and subjugated West Indian women" (Seanor 7), but also questions the legitimacy of a traditional sense of order that is based on modals of exclusion and inclusion, permeating the will of the Father. With her unpredictability, Xuela is then the embodiment of that desired disorder which Kincaid aspires for in a limited and limiting paternal society, culminating in the emergence of a more complex type of order, namely *orderly disorder*.

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