

# Mother to Daughter, Wounds to Words: An Analysis of Intergenerational Trauma in Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl*

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## Abstract

Jamaica Kincaid's short story, *Girl* examines the mother-daughter relationship from the perspective of intergenerational trauma and cultural transmission. Written in the form of a one-sentence monologue, the mother describes in great detail how the girl in question, who is her daughter, should behave within the framework of domesticity, sociability, and sexuality. The mother can be seen attempting to protect her daughter from the society that objectifies and undermines women; however, reading the list of warnings that she gives her daughter evokes a poignant discomfort within the reader as well. This paper attempts to interpret *Girl* from the perspective of intergenerational trauma, an idea described by authors such as Bessel van der Kolk and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart as the transmission of historical traumas through personal history. The mother's behavior as a controlling figure and the silence around her own experiences in life cause confusion and result in submission from the daughter, thus creating a cycle of trauma. Ultimately, *Girl* might be interpreted as a commentary on the consequences of cultural trauma on personal experience and familial relationships. In this case, healing might be facilitated by open communication lines, trust, and respect, as it provides a way to terminate the cycle of silence. The story calls for empathy and understanding of the painful nature of intergenerational trauma, as the very act of being acknowledged and validated which in turn serves as a powerful means for healing and adaptation.

**Keywords:** Jamaica Kincaid, *Girl*, intergenerational trauma, mother-daughter relationship, cultural legacy, colonialism, slavery, family dynamics, healing, resilience.

## 1. Introduction

Jamaica Kincaid's story, *Girl* (1978), explores the relationship between a mother and her daughter and the transmission of cultural values in a patriarchal society. The entire piece is written in a single sentence, preserving the text as the mother's instructions and warnings to her child: "wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk bare-head in the hot sun...". The mother covers a range of topics such as housekeeping, cooking, social conduct, and sexual behavior. The mother insists on traditional female roles and maintaining one's image in the community. The daughter occasionally responds in attempts to defend herself as seen in the instance when her mother admonishes her against singing benna on Sundays, "but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school", but she miserably fails. Kincaid's short work reflects themes around gender identity, peer pressure, and individuality within a world dominated by rigid gender norms. The unique structure and poetic format highlights issues in the mother-daughter relationship, allowing the reader to reflect on the difficulty of intergenerational transmission of trauma and the impact of cultural norms.

Intergenerational trauma refers to traumatic experiences and their sequelae being transmitted across generations. It is passed on to the next generation not only genetically but primarily as a socio-psychological phenomenon, mediated by family relationships, parenting, and environmental conditions. Studies, including those conducted by R. Yehuda (2001) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014), demonstrate that a history of trauma can alter parenting and induce insecure attachment styles, affective dysregulation, and problems with intimate relationships. This becomes a part of the trauma cycle—one generation unconsciously transmits unprocessed trauma to the next, leading to the reappearance of similar patterns in history. The idea of intergenerational trauma, rooted in trauma theory, suggests that traumatic events have long-term effects and that recognizing the transfer of trauma across generations is crucial to understanding individual and family psychopathology.

Furthermore, studies suggest that enslaved mothers must have known at some level of the hardship that awaited their unborn daughters, signaling an all too tragic cycle of trauma being passed on intergenerationally (Eddins, 2020). In addition, the rich cultural and social contexts in which mother-daughter relationships are embedded have an influential role throughout a woman's adult life (Cwikel, 2016). Previous research points to current mother-daughter relationships as being impacted by historical and intergenerational socialization experiences (Bojczyk et al., 2010), honing in on the manner past life events exert their influence.

## 2. Literature Review

Jamaica Kincaid's literary piece *Girl* has been extensively explored in academic circles, particularly through various lenses such as Black feminist readings, postcolonial perspectives, feminist stylistics, and feminist close readings. Butler (2018) emphasizes the importance of integrating Black girl texts like Kincaid's *Girl* into educational settings to offer a more inclusive and diverse curriculum, while Nyachae Ohito & Nyachae (2018) highlight how *Girl* serves as a poignant narrative capturing the dynamics of power and language, especially within the context of Black feminist poetry and critical discourse analysis. Guthrie (2016) delves into a reparative reading of *Girl* through Black feminist theorizing, shedding light on emotional memory and difficult knowledge within educational contexts. Furthermore, Bailey (2010) praises Kincaid's narrative in *Girl* for its discourse on the construction of womanhood in postcolonial Caribbean contexts, presenting the story as a significant work in Kincaid's literary repertoire. Aghasiyev (2024) examines *Girl* through a postcolonial feminist lens, unraveling themes of double colonization and subalternity within the narrative. Ohito (2016) extends the discussion by offering a Black feminist reading of *Girl*, underscoring the importance of reframing the curriculum to empower Black female subjects through critical engagement with texts like Kincaid's. Kincaid's *Girl* has also been analyzed from a feminist stylistic perspective by Suwan (2024), who interprets the story as an autobiographical piece reflecting societal expectations imposed on girls. The exploration of power structures and societal expectations in the narrative is further scrutinized by Roseline (2024) using Van Dijk's framework, providing insights into the complexities of gender dynamics depicted in the text. Additionally, Recchioni (2022) focuses on fostering critical response-ability through feminist close-readings of transnational literature, using Kincaid's short stories as a case study to enhance students' critical engagement with identity formation and memory. The intersection of gender, power, and representation in Kincaid's *Girl* is a recurring theme in the literature. Bailey (2016) discusses how Kincaid's narrative voice in *Girl* contributes to the poetics of girl-child storytelling, aligning her work with other prominent writers in the genre. Valens (2004) explores desire between the girls in Kincaid's *Annie John*, shedding light on the nuanced representations of girlhood and relationships in Kincaid's works. Furthermore, Emará (2016) delves into mother-daughter relationships in Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*, emphasizing the centrality of familial dynamics in Kincaid's exploration of gender and identity. In conclusion, Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl* remains a seminal work that continues to engage scholars across various disciplines, offering profound insights into gender, power, language, and postcolonial experiences. Through diverse critical lenses such as Black feminism, postcolonial theory, and feminist stylistics, academics have unraveled the complexities of Kincaid's narrative, underscoring its enduring relevance in discussions surrounding girlhood, identity formation, and societal expectations.

The research question this study aims to explore is how the short piece *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid uses intergenerational trauma to depict the consequences of an unspecified cultural trauma for the mother and daughter. The fact that the mother passes on instructions, stemming from the fears and worries that she has to her daughter as reflected in the text, and the latter only answering in a few limited responses reveals the dynamics of multigenerational trauma and its survival mechanisms. The study will primarily focus on trauma studies, paying particular attention to Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and her findings on historical trauma among indigenous peoples.

Despite the cultural trauma in the literary piece not being explicitly named, it can be understood based on the author's background and the story's setting. Since the author is of Antiguan origin, the cultural trauma could be related to colonialism and slavery. This unnamed trauma underlies the mother's hypervigilance, the daughter's concern, and invisible fears, and even the overall tension between the two. It remains a powerful undertone, influencing the interaction between the characters and signaling the lasting impact of large-scale cultural traumas on individuals and cultural groups.

However, applying trauma studies to such a short piece of literature as *Girl* undoubtedly has some limitations. The length and absence of explicit information on the characters' pasts makes it challenging to accurately diagnose or classify the trauma. Moreover, the reader only receives the mother's experiences and vision, leaving out significant details about the daughter's internal struggles and comprehension of events. To address this limitation, certain general assumptions are applied in the text analysis. Specifically, it is assumed that the unnamed cultural trauma in this case stems from the legacy of colonialism and slavery, primarily from the author's background and the story setting. Furthermore, despite the lack of a detailed description of the woman's experiences, it is assumed that the mother's behavior and fears are a response to the trauma transmission process. Lastly, even though the original trauma doesn't directly target the daughter, it is assumed that her mother's parenting experience exposes her to the intergenerational transmission of it.

Although these assumptions are necessary to consider the potential role of intergenerational trauma in the text, they also emphasize the need to recognize the constraints. Therefore, the analysis confines itself to identifying patterns and specific themes, eschewing generalizations and definitive assumptions about the characters' experiences, in lieu of trauma studies. Thus, allowing these limitations while making informed assumptions to guide the analysis can make an important scholarly contribution in the form of a nuanced perspective into the various ways trauma can manifest across generations and affect individual and familial dynamics.

## 3. Intergenerational Trauma

One of the central concepts in trauma studies is intergenerational trauma, which explores how an event they did not actively experience affects generations of descendants. Researchers noticed that the second and third generations of trauma survivors exhibited trauma symptoms, despite never having experienced the atrocities, during their studies of the Holocaust in the twentieth century ("Intergenerational Trauma and Healing," 2021). Central thinkers include Marianne Hirsch (1997), the creator of the "postmemory" framework that describes the relationship that the second generation has with their ancestor's trauma, and Cathy Caruth (1996), exploring the "latency" of trauma. Yael Danieli (1998) has also developed a model of intergenerational trauma transmission, concentrating on

psychological and social factors like family composition, social integration, memory formation, and normalization processes. This concept applies not only to family dynamics but also to social demographics such as the state. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2003) has further elaborated on the concept of historical trauma and its impact on the collective experiences of entire communities, spanning generations.

The concept of intergenerational trauma transmission suggests several channels through which the trauma passed may affect the next generations. The theories of postmemory and latency clearly show that silence, combined with trauma, has a profound impact. According to Caruth (1996), we cannot directly speak about traumatizing experiences, which leads to unspoken memories and fills in the gaps with distorted elements from the event. There are various ways to transmit silence, including through denial or avoidance. These, however, create an atmosphere of secrecy and shame around trauma transmission. Transmission also occurs through the body. For instance, epigenetics or even simple learned behaviors can transmit trauma through physical forms of illness or chronic pain (Yehuda & Bierer, 2009). Moreover, children may act out unconsciously to what their parents' feel in terms of their emotional states or coping mechanisms, showing that even without knowledge of the specific traumatic event, children may still internalize trauma (Knight, 2019).

Although silence is what comes to mind when one thinks of intergenerational trauma, *Girl* shows how, through narrative, trauma can be passed on. The mother's relentless warnings to her daughter are explicitly intended to keep the next generation safe, but they instead continue the cycle of fear and anxiety. Thus, these theoretical constructs can help visualize the intricacies of intergenerational trauma and encourage the recognition and healing of unspoken memories and bodily experiences as part of the recovery process.

#### 4. Trauma and Literature

Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory indicates that trauma circulates beyond individual experience and is also transmitted through narratives, cultural rituals, and notes of genetics (Hirsch, 1997). Literature reflects the patterns of how people produce and receive those traumatic codes across generations. For example, a character's anxiety or defiant attitude may also be the struggle of an ancestor. A person may prioritize safety precautions or struggle to fully trust others because of their grandparents' horrific wartime memories. Moreover, they never faced those threats, but hypervigilance or distrust might be genetically transmitted. In the view of epigenetics, trauma changes the level of molecules, so it is possible to observe the alteration of gene expression that affects the following generation. On the other hand, literature can represent the transfer of cultural trauma by the same means. For instance, in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the ghost of a dead child haunts the family, symbolizing the trauma resulting from slavery. In this way, literature has the capacity to artistically show how trauma continues to influence the characters' identities and behavior years after the event.

Furthermore, literature may seek to explore the many unspoken anxieties that are brought about by intergenerational trauma. Despite not knowing the reason behind their guilt, shame, or anger, some characters continue to experience these emotions. By exposing the many unspoken anxieties that result from this kind of trauma, literature can enlighten readers on how hidden, complicated, and undetectable trauma's harm can be for generation after generation.

In Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl*, the mother's seemingly endless stream of thoughts is rooted in the trauma of her own experience and enacted on her daughter through her panic-laden instructions and ceaseless warnings. This echoes Marianne Hirsch's description of postmemory, which is likewise characterized by the transmission of trauma through narratives and rituals. The mother's language is an oral record of this unspoken cultural trauma, which shapes her daughter's worldview and relationship to it.

Traumatized mothers might recount episodes or voice anxieties about trauma they experience, conveying such fears consciously or subconsciously to their children. These traumatic stories frequently induce horror and fear, which children acquire from their mothers (Fivush & Sales, 2006). Children also mold their mindsets and emotional responses based on what they see. A traumatized mother may be hypervigilant, withdrawn from family members, and overprotective of her children, traits that children may learn as coping mechanisms (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2011).

#### 5. Method

The research design used in this study is qualitative, and it will apply a literary analysis of the literary piece by Jamaica Kincaid called *Girl* to examine how intergenerational trauma between mother and daughter is represented and inherited. Drawing on theorists' studies on intergenerational trauma, including Bessel van der Kolk, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, and Marianne Hirsch, the analysis presents a close reading of the text with thematic coding that analyzes the mother's monologue and her daughter's replies.

#### 6. Discussion

##### 6.1 The Mother's Voice: Hints of an Unseen Trauma

Intergenerational trauma functions as a threateningly urgent undercurrent of the mother's words in *Girl*. Bessel Van Der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) mentions hypervigilance, a characteristic of trauma patients, as a characteristic of the unending monologue of orders without breaks or conversation. The mother's endless flow of threats and instructions is not all concerned with teaching the girl; it is an attempt to safeguard her using any means available against a dangerously inimical and unpredictable world.

Certainly, the perceived fear is not irrational. The mother's valid reasons for fear stem from the unnamed cultural trauma, likely linked to the enduring memory of colonialism and slavery. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory suggests that this fear is not only her own, but also a legacy of a tragic history that spans many generations. The story doesn't elaborate much on the mother's personal experience,

but her psyche already bears a significant imprint of violence and helplessness.

The need to control, seen in the mother's detailed wants for seemingly simple activities such as washing the clothes: "wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap," is a byproduct of this trauma. The mother is desperately trying to impose structure in a world that has been largely chaotic and unpredictable for women of color throughout history. She feels the need to dictate her daughter's every move in the hopes of saving her girl from facing the same trials she has faced. However, this control stems from her desire to shield her daughter not only from her environment but also from her cultural identity, adhering to social norms in a historical context where minorities have either been eradicated or forced to assimilate. In this way, the mother's control in the form of making a daughter responsible for household tasks and aligning with a traditional understanding of gender roles is resistance.

At the same time, this can be understood through the traumatized psyche of the mother as well. She threatens her against speaking to "wharf-rat boys" and warns her to "try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming." While it is clear that the problematic behavior of the mother relies on internalized misogyny and classism of women in general and of the mother herself, what she is doing is attempting to make her daughter a decent lady in reaction to the devaluation and dehumanization of black bodies and identities.

More fundamentally, the mother's repeated accusation that her daughter is hell-bent on becoming a "slut" suggests more profound anxieties regarding not only sexual morality but also social stature. One could see in this repetition a lodging of the mother's own experience of trauma and terror. Through theories of trauma that suggest how the impact on the individual, and thus reflection, can be passed down through generations. The mother's use of the word "slut" is coming from a place of judgment and years of society looking down on women if they have many partners. Therefore, she attempts to control or limit her daughter's actions by enforcing strict guidelines that could potentially lead to shame and the trauma of social exile. This is an attestation to the mother's preoccupation with sexual purity and her hold on inward cultural norms, which she herself had likely experienced to some extent.

Thus, the allusion of "throwing away a child" adds a sinister subtext to the mother's list of advice. The interpretation of this sentence, "This is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child," suggests that the mother is referring to a horrifically traumatic and morally complex subject, such as abortion or infanticide. From a historical perspective, the realities of unwanted pregnancies drove many women in tenuous social and economic positions to desperate measures, often with fatal results. The mother's reference to such an extreme, past solution attest that she too understands how far women may go in order to maintain social status or economic sustenance. It is probably because back in the day, before women had proper reproductive rights or even access to birth control, having an unwanted child was hugely traumatic. In giving her daughter these instructions, we see the mother transmitting a bleak way of survival, thus hinting at some of the experiences she may have gone through. Its brutal practicality, however, reflects the immense fear held by this mother and her past.

In the end, the mother's intense feeling of urgency, fear, and the urge to control in *Girl* are not merely indicators of a specific form of personality. It is evidence of a more extensive, intergenerational kind of trauma. The mother's narrative serves as a means of transmitting this type of trauma to her daughter, to which she is highly susceptible. This speech about the trauma has paved the way for a life that is conditioned and marked by fear and suspicion. Nevertheless, it also reflects her strength and heart for her daughter's good, which she pursues despite the loss of personal liberty in the process.

What strikes the reader in *Girl* is also the mother's silence about her own experience. In this case, the silence manifests at several levels: the mother does not talk to the daughter as freely as one would expect, and the cultural memory, despite being passed on, has an urgency of needing to be repeated over and over again. To begin with, the mother's not speaking freely implies that there is no background on which her daughter can rely. Such a lack of context can imply confusion in the daughter. The rules and reprimands may appear unfounded and arbitrary to the girl. It is from her imagination and intuition that she must receive the sense of her mother's deeper motivations and fears. Therefore, such silence may also leave the daughter without learning a lot about the mother, making the emotional connection between the two quite weak.

At the same time, silence continues to perpetuate a cycle of unspoken trauma. The mother's refusal to talk about her personal experiences or the collective trauma of their community further exacerbates the trauma, contributing to the belief that it is somehow shameful or too painful to talk about. This feeling promotes the invisibility of trauma and creates an atmosphere of shame and secrecy around it. Speaking about the traumatic experience and the emotions that surround it is a crucial step towards healing (van der Kolk, 2014). Therefore, it becomes harder for the victims to process their feelings and experiences and to seek help when needed in such circumstances as these. In the case of *Girl*, the daughter might internalize the belief that her identity is something to be ashamed of on account of her mother's admonishments.

Moreover, the mother's silence tacitly forbids the sharing of personal life stories alongside the cultural traditions. By dictating commands to her daughter, the mother passes on her knowledge of the world. These oral instructions awaken the daughter to the world around her, enabling her to be aware and survive with the knowledge of how and why. However, the absence of stories and personal connections turns what could have been a heritage passed down into tedious learning. Also, the mother's silence demonstrates the power-play aspect of intergenerational relationships. As the mother acts as the sole arbiter of authority, she controls the means to illuminate the issue at hand. The power to remain silent and compel her daughter to do the same without providing a complete framework is a means of control. It enables her to assert power over the situation, as well as her daughter, who is forced to obey her mother's decision-making abilities.

However, the mother's silence cannot be reduced to her refusal to provide information on the subject. After all, it is more likely a result of

her own past trauma and the society's innumerable norms banning a comprehensive discourse around difficult topics. Following this logic, the mother may have learned from the previous bitter experience that keeping silent is a defensive mechanism that allows one to protect oneself and close people from pain and additional suffering. Thus, it can be argued that the mother's silence is a complex matter that is a result of both personal and social conditions.

### 6.2 *The Loss of Innocence*

The girl's childhood is not a stage of discovering through play and joy but rather a series of dos and don'ts that instill fear or anxiety. The mother's constant pressure to be proper and well-behaved, mindful of traditions and gender roles, prevents the girl from experiencing the world and learning about what is much more real. The mother's conditioning, reinforced by society's inherent evil, takes away the girl's innocence by forcing her to abandon the carefree life of a child and make her aware of a life of uncertainty and responsibilities.

Childhood is a time for play, discovery, and the development of one's personality. The girl in the text does not seem to be able to experience any of these. Each of her movements and actions are predetermined by the mother's orders. The woman's habitual prohibitions and dismissals paint even the lightest occupations of the child, such as playing marbles and plucking flowers, in a fearful light. This fear reflects upon the world, making it specifically limited in the young girl's eyes. The child living every day under absolute surveillance without any possibility of navigating or experiencing her surroundings herself might be deeply affected. This restriction could lead to a state of claustrophobia, which might oppress the young girl's natural infantile curiosity and will to freedom.

Moreover, the high regard for domestic skills and social etiquette shown by the mother promotes the girl's confinement within specified gender roles. The girl is required to demonstrate a high ability of engaging in household chores, cooking, and sewing instead of exploring intellectual capabilities or inclinations towards her own distinct interests. The emphasis on domesticity creates this image where the girl is prevented from experiencing more in life and might perceive that her self-worth is in her ability to conduct domestic tasks. The girl's future becomes narrowed down to one path, leaving no chance for her to identify her personal talents or interests.

The girl is likely to develop a sense of anxiety that could be deeply internalized while listening to her mother's endless stream of warnings long before she even has to face the alleged evils of the world. The constant preparation, both explicit and implied, for all possible worlds in which the girl's primary role is to avoid problems by following the established code of conduct is established. After internalizing the anxiety of the societal expectations and dangers of the world, the girl's self-esteem and the feeling of her emotional worth would be deeply shattered. Especially shameful and confusing are the mother's concerns about the girl's obedience to sexual purity standards—making the source of her worth external and perverted.

Finally, the regular exposure to threats can pass on hypervigilance and paranoia to the girl. Instead of having rational concerns, she might become too cautious with human interactions, people, and activities due to the fear of dangers and criticism. In this way, she might become socially isolated, unable to develop enough self-confidence and self-assurance to see, explore, and experience the world.

Loss of innocence in *Girl* is more than a one-time experience. It is a shocking event that could potentially impact the girl's personal development and relationships right into adulthood. Moreover, the girl is exposed to the anxieties and demands of adulthood from early childhood, which is likely to become the cause of numerous emotional and psychological issues. The underlying issue is the girl's self-image. If she is used to being constantly evaluated and devalued depending on how compliant she is with the external requests and demands, it is logical to think that the expression of evaluations soon becomes a part of self-assessment. Therefore, the girl might have difficulties in setting boundaries and expressing preferences and might constantly look for ways to seek validation through others.

Finally, her loss of innocence can lead to an even greater sense of alienation from her peers. Raised under the strictest standards of behavior, she disguises the entire reality surrounding her. It is safe to assume that the transition from childhood to adulthood might never be completed, which might further contribute to the girl's otherness, leading to further social problems. Soon, she would stay misunderstood and eventually isolated. Also, there is a high likelihood that the girl might be more prone to developing an anxiety disorder or depression as the emotional pressure causes a high level of stress. Intimacy can also be a problem since the fear of being judged and, eventually, abandoned will stand in the way of building deep connections.

### 6.3 *Adaptive Strategies*

Thus, the continuous flow of negative reinforcement intensified by the absolute lack of regular praise or support may cause core damage to the girl's self-esteem, making her feel inadequate, worthless, and damaged to the core. Furthermore, this constant negativity could undermine the girl's self-efficacy, which is the belief in oneself and one's ability to achieve and thrive in various aspects of life. Finally, it could prevent the girl from developing resilience, which is the capacity to recover from harsh assessments and continue moving forward.

It could also result in a lack of positive reinforcement, burying the negative feelings even deeper. Children need to know they are loved and wanted, and hearing quite the opposite will encourage them to assume they are disliked and unwanted (Bowlby, 1988). The lack of validation could turn into a hunger for attention and affection that might be difficult to fulfill—when the narrator's mother talks about her daughter, she does not say anything good. In the face of this emotional strain, the girl could afford numerous coping strategies. One of them being overcompliance (Skodol, 1977). Thus, in an attempt to keep up with her mother's demands and avoid any further judgement, she might follow her mother's every rule to the letter, even if it is not necessary. This drive to comply can be on account of the constant need for validation. While it may bring the girl temporary relief, it will prevent her from developing a healthy sense of self and self-reliance.

However, the girl could also generalize such experiences and learn how to deal with them by emotionally withdrawing (Gilligan, 1996). Exposed to constant instructions on how to be, the girl might feel compelled to repress her own feelings and needs and transfer them to her unconscious, where she can withstand them. Therefore, this girl may either cultivate a stoical demeanor, be inclined to avoid vulnerable situations, or have a challenging time establishing a bond. Alternatively, she may revolt against her mother's authority and seek approval and freedom from unhealthy patterns of conduct. Nonetheless, all these patterns may also imply a sign of a desperate attempt to retain one's identity. Such conduct may nevertheless open the floodgates to a variety of threats in her life, from addiction and promiscuity to misconduct, undermining her wellbeing and jeopardizing her future.

#### 6.4 Cultural Trauma as a Result of Colonialism

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's research of historical trauma among indigenous peoples" may help to outline the kind of unspoken trauma that cripples the characters in *Girl*. According to Brave Heart, historical trauma refers to the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations emanating from massive group trauma experiences. In the case of *Girl*, the unnamed cultural trauma is likely caused by the shared cultural and historical trauma of Caribbean colonialism.

The repercussions of colonial history also contribute to the power dynamic depicted in *Girl*, in which the mother tightly controls various aspects of the daughter's life. The mother's lexicon—in combination with her authoritarian method of speaking—overlaps with the ethnographic record on domesticity at the time, in which colonial powers attempted to manage and construct identity in colonial subjects. The trauma between generations of this loss is evident as the daughter is taught only to adhere. Carrying trauma through generations is a strong motif; the mother is a subject who has been colonized, and the daughter is an object who will continue to be colonized. A meticulous examination of *Girl* substantiates the contentious assertion that the aftermath of colonialism continues to impact our societies, underscoring the ongoing struggles of those affected by the process.

Undoubtedly, the historical context of colonialism in the Caribbean is an instrumental factor in discussing the intergenerational trauma presented by Jamaica Kincaid in the text. The Caribbean has been one of the most colonized regions, with European powers, including Britain, Spain, and France, engaging in dominating the islands. The legacy of colonization and oppression in Caribbean history runs deep and is associated with merciless exploitation, forceful labor practices, and the tragic trade system known as the transatlantic slave trade. In fact, the history of colonialism is characterized by horror, the deployment of native cultures, and the destruction of indigenous ways of living. Indeed, the colonial hangover continues to influence societies, economies, and cultures shaping the Caribbean in multiple ways. As such, *Girl*, Kincaid presents the experience of a mother passing on strict instructions to her daughter, reflecting the idea that trauma across Caribbean families is being passed on. Thus, colonialism emphasizes the complexity of the discussions about narrative, identity, power relations, and cultural theft.

Furthermore, the daughter's obedience to her mother's commands exacerbates the cultural displacement Kincaid portrays, illustrating a persistent cycle of oppression over time. Our analysis of power and control phenomena in the mother-daughter relationship explains this cultural displacement, showing it in familiar behavior. In addition, when analyzing cultural identity in postcolonial societies, one must account for the complicated interdependence on history, memory, and power relations. Post-colonial societies experience a profound sense of cultural homelessness, disturbed by colonial practices that continue to shape social reality and identity (Said, 1978). The text represents a powerful and painful example of the struggle between the expectations nurtured in the colonial past and the realities of the post-colonial present. Viewing the story through the prism of intergenerational trauma, one might see how Kincaid suggests that history deeply informs contemporary understandings of identity and leaves a permanent scar on the personal interpretation of self and others. Expressed differently, by reflecting on the complicated nature of cultural identity, Kincaid encourages readers to decipher how cultural trauma reappears generation after generation, manifesting in expressions of personal identity.

#### 6.5 The Path to Healing

Thus, the future of the daughter in *Girl* might involve the long process of unlearning the fear and anxiety instilled by her mother's relentless instructions. In order to get there, she must challenge the assumptions underpinning her mother's entire worldview and develop a more nuanced understanding of the societal and cultural forces that have shaped her. The girl's maturation and exposure to a variety of perspectives and lived experiences will likely prompt her to question the brutal gender dynamics and societal pressures imposed upon her. Such a self-discovery process might include the following: exploring personal interests and passions; engaging with mentors or role models who choose to empower the girl; and developing actual agency in life (Bandura, 1997). By fostering curiosity and a desire to learn, the girl may realize that her mother's perspectives are not the only ones that exist. She may challenge the status quo and avoid conforming to stereotypes. The discovery of her independence and self, however, will allow her not only to believe in her skills but also overcome her trauma (Masten, 2001).

However, the girl's future may also involve other aspects of healing the wounds of intergenerational trauma—the ability to form healthy relationships. In light of the broken communication with her mother, she may strive to establish relationships that center around openness, trust, and respect. Exploring the world through people and talking openly to friends, partners, or a therapist can allow her to unveil and express the unspoken anxieties and fears carried through the generations (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Closeness with others can help the girl form her own voice and understand the meaning of a safe space. Just as importantly, she can uncover that many have endured similar experiences as hers, forming a community in which she can belong. Prioritizing communication and emotional closeness could help the girl fight the silence and separation of intergenerational trauma (Danieli, 1998). Learning to develop relationships based on understanding

and respect will pave the way for her to lead a fuller, more connected life.

### 6.6 A Call for Empathy

Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl* stands as a testament to the power of literature in communicating the lifelong effects of generational trauma. The work also illustrates the horrible consequences of silent suffering and serves as a call for empathy, compassion, and understanding in family dynamics. This poem serves to evoke some deep emotions from the reader and explores the more profound toxicity of the mother-daughter relationship. The text serves as a source of empowerment, as Kincaid recognizes and validates these pains.

While the mother comes across as harsh and overly controlling, she is herself a victim of trauma. She does not act the way she does because she wants to, but because she fears the consequences of deviating from learned behaviors. By acknowledging the source of her anxieties, it becomes easier to understand her actions and empathize with the struggles she faces. The same applies to the daughter—while she appears compliant and passive, she is another victim of intergenerational trauma. Her fears and anxieties are not a sign of physical weakness; rather, they are the outcome of the silent burden her mother has passed on to her. Identifying this, one can express empathy and understanding, thereby giving the victim permission to be kind herself and to escape the circle of fear and manipulation.

Promoting active and open conversation is the only way to address and resolve intergenerational trauma. When individuals have the opportunity to discuss their experiences, fears, and anxieties, they can ultimately close the chapters of their traumatic history and begin forming relationships without any negative impact. Hence, it is not enough to simply discuss trauma; instead, it is crucial to encourage deep listening and validation (Herman, 1992).

In *Girl*, the reader has the freedom to determine the girl's future. Nevertheless, the text's refrain invites the reader to empathize and learn about trauma, offering a transformative hope. Fostering understanding for how traumatized generations of the past can pass on trauma can ensure that future generations are not physically and mentally scarred. The daughter might not have chosen freedom for herself in the text; however, her story could serve to open dialogue on trauma.

## 7. Conclusion

Jamaica Kincaid's short story *Girl* provides profound reflection on the intergenerational impact of trauma and demonstrates how cultural and historical inheritance influences family relationships. The mother's monologue lets the reader understand that this trauma has taken its toll through generations, affecting behaviors, attitudes, and anxieties related to which might result in a severing of the mother-daughter relationship. *Girl* demands that we work to understand the inevitable nature of intergenerational trauma and promote mutual empathy and support as steps on the path towards healing through openness, trust, and respect. Accepting and affirming the existence of this trauma presents one way to dismantle the wall of silence and promote community resilience.

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### Authors' contributions

Dr. Sushma S Raj was responsible for the topic selection, revising and editing. Ms Shanice Anne Ranade drafted the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript..

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No additional data are available.

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