

HOME AS A SITE OF INTERNAL COLONIALISM IN EASTERINE KIRE'S  
*A TERRIBLE MATRIARCHY*

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**Abstract**

*Literature for the Nagas has become a way of remembering the past and documenting the rich cultural and tribal heritage of the people. The paper attempts to discuss Easterine Kire's A Terrible Matriarchy in terms of internal colonialism and postcolonial theory to identify how the domestic sphere serves as a place of oppression and revolt. Through the theory of internal colonialism by Robert Blauner, the paper focuses that the authoritarianism of the grandmother in the case of Dielieno is a replica of colonial rule in the home where the denial of education, mobility and forced dependency are a reflection of dominant societies at large. At the same time, the idea of Homi Bhabha's third space helps to see the gaps in this oppressive system and realize the way in which Dielienodevelops her identity through minor forms of resistance. The analysis therefore illustrates the contradiction of the home as a repressive and a conflicted zone of empowerment that makes romanticized images of matriarchy intricate and highlights the presence of colonial logic in intimate cultural places. The paper predetermines the interplay of domination and resistance by positioning the novel of Kire in a wider discussion of patriarchy, postcoloniality and reproduction of power in the daily life.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Internal Colonialism, Third Space, Identity, Postcolonialism.

**Introduction:**

Literature for the Nagas has become a way of remembering the past and documenting the rich cultural and tribal heritage of the people. Contemporaneous Naga writers like Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang and Monalisa Changkijawrite with the cohesive aim to be heard in order to propagate a better understanding of the Naga worldview. They have all lived through the most disturbed times in Naga history and therefore "their writings are also reflections of the generation that has seen one of the most turbulent phases in Naga history" (Pou 46). Therefore, through their writings, they have exhibited a collective experience of the

Nagas and they become the voice of their people which have been silenced for decades. In their writings they have also shown the interconnectedness of the past and the present and how it is of paramount importance in maintaining and continuing a tribal identity.

Easterine Kire is a creative Naga writer who writes with sensitivity, often voicing out a series of opinion that are constructively communicative. She has to her credit a number of poetry collections, *Kelhoukevira*, *The Windhover Collection*, *Jazzpoetry* and other poems. She is also best known for her novels and short stories. Her fictional works, *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Life on Hold* (2011), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Forest Song* (2011), *Once in a Faraway Dorg* (2011), *When the River Sleeps* (2014) and *A Respectable Woman* (2019), are a realistic read on Naga society that transcendently witnessed large scale changes in cultural, social, religious and political arena. She is also a recipient of several awards and Literary Prizes for her works.

The novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire is a remarkable examination of the problem of power, authority and resistance in the domestic context of the Naga society. It is a bildungsroman novel about a young girl Dielieno whose development and independence are systematically suppressed by her grandmother Vibano as the mother of the family. Unlike the traditional perception of the home as the place of safety and support, Kire reinvents it to be the place of domination, where the hierarchy, cultural norms, and patriarchal values are colliding together to control the lives of female subjects. Being the protector of tradition, Vibano, the grandmother implements strict regulations which limit mobility, education and self-expression of the protagonist and place her and other young women as dependent and subservient members of society.

As an attempt to understand this dynamic, the theory of “internal colonialism” by Robert Blauner proves to offer an excellent analytical framework. According to Blauner, internal colonialism can be referred to as the organized oppression of the disadvantaged in a society whereby the economic, political and cultural power is effectively vested in the hands of a ruling group. Blauner’s notion of “colonization” (Blauner 83) as shared core elements of domination echoes with Kire’s depiction of the Nagas. Her novels reveal how Nagas, though within India, endured cultural erasure and political subjugation, exemplifying internal colonialism in a local context. In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, it is clear how the home serves as a colony within, and the role of the grandmother is that of a domestic colonizer, who brings about obedience and maintains a state of hierarchical domination. The sphere of the family is politicized in this domestic empire and the traditional power is realized in those patterns which are rather reflected in the systems of colonial domination. Kire’s depiction of a female

character like Vibanoas a distributor and enforcer of the power of patriarchy makes it harder to interpret patriarchy in traditional ways. She becomes the paradox of female domination in a matriarchal structure, and this process has been internalized and reproduced in her. The family in the novel is a politicized place of cultural value, generational superiorities and patriarchal thoughts coming into collusion. The home is not, therefore, simply the location of confinement but also a landscape of conflict and possible opposition, as the younger generation starts to maneuver and bargain over identity, independence and agency. This paper attempts to consider the novel using the prism of internal colonialism, and what Kire believes to be the reenactment of hierarchical power in intimate spaces, and how this is challenged and redefined by the very people who experience it.

The importance of this study lies in showing how the domestic sphere and the wider socio-political power structure overlap, revealing how patriarchal and colonial systems operate within the home. Through Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the prism of internal colonialism and the third space, sheds light on how intimate spaces may reproduce the systemic oppression and yet also act as the resistant sites and places of identity negotiation. Collectively, these structures show how the home in the novel of Kire is a micro-level of colonial and patriarchal power as well as offers spaces where the resistance and identity formation can establish themselves. The work contributes to the postcolonial and feminist literary criticism by showing that oppression is not external or political as well as exhibiting the fact that it can be internalized and reproduced in families and communities. Moreover, it highlights the benefits of literature to unmask the mechanisms of power, continuation and resistance of culture, providing the evidence of the experience of the people of the Naga community and the intricate nature of gender, tradition and authority in subjugated societies. This study aims to explore the dynamics of home as a space of internal colonialism in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, where domestic environments serve as zones of domination and oppression. Simultaneously, it seeks to examine Dielieno's path of resistance and identity development through Bhabha's notion of the third space, emphasizing how she balances between enforced customs and her evolving self-perception.

In his book *Racial Oppression in America*, Robert Blauner coined the term "internal colonialism" to define the state of the minority groups in a dominant society where the minority are exposed to various forms of economic exploitation, political marginalization, and cultural domination similar to the classic colonialism. In contrast to external colonialism, which entails the domination of territories at the geographical limits, internal colonialism takes place when oppression is imposed on minority groups within the territories of the nation or community. The major characteristics of internal colonialism are deprivation of autonomy,

cultural practices, economic exploitation at a system level and imposition of dependency. This structure is a parallel of Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*. The home, which should be a nurturing environment, turns into a colony within oneself, where Dielieno cannot have any access to education, mobility, and even to form her identity. Vibano who serves as the keeper of tradition plays out the role of colonizer: she decides what Dielieno will do in her day, turns her into a figure of obedience and regulates her desires. The paradox of this oppression has been explained by Blauner model, the colonizer is not the external power but an internal authority in the family, who recreates the patriarchal and colonial values. Through the perception of the grandmother as a home-based colonial ruler, the reader becomes aware of the fact that the processes of intimacy reflect the processes of the colonial world: the administration is perceived as normal, agency as suppressed, and subjugation as a transmitted process. Based on the prism of Blauner, the family in the novel of Kire turns into nothing more than a neutral cultural unit; it becomes a political system of domination, reflecting the colonialism logics in the personal life of the subjects in it. This framework lays stress on the ways in which *A Terrible Matriarchy* can reveal the existence of the invisible but potent colonial logics in the daily life.

*The Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha proposes the notion of the "third space", a place of cultural negotiations, hybridity, and identity construction. It is a transitional place where established binaries like colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed are dismantled to give way to new hybrid forms of subjectivities. According to Bhabha, a third space emerges as "in-between" space at boundaries where different cultures meet and where "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing" (Bhabha 5). Importantly, the third space emphasizes the fact that domination is never absolute, and there are spaces of resistance and change even in the systems of oppression. This third space is represented in the experiences of Dielieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. The desire Dielieno shows towards education, her friendship with Vimenuo, who do not belong to the domestic universe and her inability to internalize the viewpoint her grandmother had on the world are all forms of negotiation. She does not just accept the subordination but creates a hybrid identity; she accepts her cultural hierarchy, but at the same time, she crosses the lines that she is expected to live within.

The concept suggested by Bhabha highlights the paradox of the authority of the grandmother. Her move to impose purity of culture and tradition unwillingly invites Dielieno to the realization of other options. She is denied an opportunity to be educated but this only adds to her ambitions of seeking knowledge as a way of resistance. In this sense, the house emerges as a conflicted space—oppressive yet generative, silencing yet productive. The domestic is

meant to recreate the traditions of the patriarch, but Dielieno turns it into an arena of identity bargaining and insurrection of the smaller scale. The home is no longer an oppressive system through the third space. It is rather a place where the cultural meanings are disrupted, the authority is put into some sort of trouble and the subjectivity is re-structured. Dielienobecomes the image of the hybridity of the third space: she is neither submissive nor rebellious but is “in-between” (Bhabha 5) as she is always negotiating and redefining her identity.

### **Home as a Site of Internal Colonialism in Easterine Kire’s *A Terrible Matriarchy*:**

In *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Easterine Kire transforms the home, which is usually presented as a protective place into a domicile of power. The authoritative nature of Vibano is similar to the colonial logic, the autonomy is not allowed, the conformity within the cultural environment is strictly imposed. As the experiences of Dielieno in the house of her grandmother show, the realm of the household serves as the “little factory” (Kire 16) of the colonial power and the relations of hierarchy and the control of the hierarchy reproduce the situation of oppression, which Robert Blauner in his theory of internal colonialism. The model by Blauner highlights the fact that the colonized groups are denied their agency, movement, and cultural independence at the broader levels of the nation-state. Equally, Dielieno is deprived the chance to get an education when her grandmother believes that “but with girls, it is different...I really do not approve of girls getting educated. It only makes them get fancy notions about themselves and they forget their place in the family” (Kire 22). These prohibitions are not accidental; they are the part of a well-tended system of control that assures the younger generation of being submissive to the traditions of patriarchy. The same way the colonizer defines the colonized as not having the ability to think rationally or make their own decisions, the grandmother plays with the identity of Dielienobeing obedient, silent, and a household keeper. Thus, Kire portrays domestic oppression in ways that echoes with Blauner’s theory of internal colonialism.

The irony of female domination is particularly remarkable in the novel. This domestic colony is not led by a man; it is led by a woman- the grandmother whose power is as a result of her status as the guardian of tradition. This makes it hard to apply traditional interpretations of patriarchy as male-dominated. Taking the values of patriarchy into herself, the grandmother subjects her granddaughter and applies these ideas as a victim and perpetrator of oppressive systems. Her position is indicative of how the process of internal colonialism works: not just by imposing it externally but also by internalizing colonial reason by those who practice it in the communities in which they live. The motherly figure, thus, does not liberate the society, but reproduces patriarchal order. She ends up being a colonial administrator as it is defined

by Blauner, making sure that the structures of social power and gender continue to exist between generations. Dielieno's mobility and independence are restricted to household chores, reflecting the limited freedom imposed under colonial rule. The grandmother's rigid enforcement of patriarchal traditions mirrors cultural domination by a colonizer, treating these customs as unquestionable truths. The paradox of this situation, as mentioned in the novel is the fact that the same person who might have given strength to Dielieno, continues to oppress her. Moreover, by positioning herself as the custodian of both patriarchal and colonial structures, the grandmother sustains a hierarchy that echoes the authority wielded by colonizers to maintain control. The hegemony of the grandmother recreates the same processes of colonial domination on the household scale, which at the same time politicizes the domestic space. In that regard, *A Terrible Matriarchy* also criticizes patriarchal oppression, but it also reveals the functioning of internal colonialism in cultural institutions, as an instrument of domination in the name of tradition. Meanwhile, the story also highlights the instability inherent in this kind of control since the nascent resistance of Dielieno ends up being directed towards the prospect of change.

The idea of the "third space" by Homi Bhabha, expressed in *The Location of Culture*, opposes binaries like the colonial/colonized, oppressor/oppressed without focusing on the fact that cultural identity is never determined outside parts of encounter wherein cultural exchanges occur. The third space is not oppressive or free, but a zone of transition, in which hybridity is created and where the oppressed can rewrite and change the discourse of the powerful. This paradigm reflects in interpreting the life of Dielieno in *A Terrible Matriarchy*. However, despite the fact that Vibano tries to keep her in the state of total control by means of restricting her in terms of education, mobility and self-expression, these same restrictions create the means of resistance. Dielieno starts to view education as a privilege of liberation as she confesses, "School was the best thing that could have ever happened to me" (Kire 31). Her persistence in questioning the authority of her grandmother becomes moment of negotiation when she is starting to fill the gap of hybrid identity as she is both traditional and desiring to be modern and independent.

The ambivalence of the core of the grandmother power also displays the concept of Bhabha. Vibano, on the one hand imposes patriarchal principles in an iron fist; on the other hand, she is overly strict that the very structures she tries to enforce really reveal the weaknesses inherent in them. She refuses Dielieno the education thus making the education more valuable and desirable. Through this, resistance is driven by repression and oppression provides possibilities to redefine. It is this tension or what Bhabha describes as productive quality of the "third space" that opens up even in the system of domination there exist

fissures where new identities and new forms of agency can be created. The third space in the domestic sphere is seen in how Dielieno gradually gets to envision about her grandmother whom she once “steemed myself and stood still” (Kire 37) felt “horrified” (Kire 9) turned into “My fear of her changed to pity” (Kire 253). Her silent resistances through dreaming about education, imagining the alternative life, and not absorbing the worldview of her grandmother are some of the ways of resistance that are disrupting the alleged totality of internal colonialism. A binary model denotes the complete control of the oppressor over the oppressed, but the third space brings to the fore the way Dielieno manages to negotiate her identity out of the structures supposed to silence her.

Therefore, the home in the novel cannot be just perceived as a place of repression. It is also the contentious ground of a possibility, in which sub-ordination and power are at awkward coexistence. Vibano is also trying to replicate the patriarchal principles in the home, yet Dielieno transforms this forced space into the resisting space of creativity. In this regard, the novel shows that internal colonialism can never be absolute and definite. Dielieno is able to create space of negotiation, agency and transformation even in the circumstances that are restrictive to the utmost. The spirit of the third space described by Bhabha is reflected in the way Dielieno is resilient in the narrative by Kire: the third space is not rebellious but a place of minor resistance, hybridity and rearticulating of identity. This construct assists us in a better understanding of how the struggle of Dielieno is not only intimate but shares the symbolic nature of the processes that marginalized groups struggle and reconfigure the same processes that attempt to keep them in place.

### **Conclusion:**

The analysis of *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire proves that the domestic space, which is usually considered as a place of nurturing and shelter, may be a micro-colony of internal colonialism and control by the male. Using the concept introduced by Robert Blauner, the authority of the grandmother appears as a system of systematic oppression depriving the younger generation of education, movement, and freedom. At the same time, the third space proposed by Homi Bhabha shows that even in such a suppressive space, the areas of resistance, negotiation, and formation of hybrid identities appear, which makes Dielieno gain control and redefine her subjectivity. Thus, the paper highlights how the narrative by Kire criticizes how hierarchical systems of power persist in intimate spaces and the intricate nature of oppression and resistance in defining identity, agency, and cultural survival.

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