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Not Merely a Tourist Site: Jamaica Kincaid's Evocation of Antigua in *A Small Place*

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Jamaica Kincaid in her book *A Small Place* (1988) describes Antigua as a holiday destination. As she revisits her homeland after a long period, she adopts a postcolonial perspective in viewing the island's contemporary socio-political system. Though the British colonizers and slave traders have left, the colonial legacy persists with their heirs' continual arrival to the island as tourists. Meanwhile, Kincaid notes that the majority of Antiguans, who were descendants of former slaves, remain subjugated. The writer argues that the histories of slavery and colonialism are hindrances to Antigua's formation of its identity as an independent and self-reliant state. This paper studies Kincaid's narration from the perspective of a solo female traveller travelling back to her native land as a tourist. By doing so, it will examine the difficulties she confronts during her travel that affect her narrative.

Keywords: Kincaid, *A Small Place*, postcolonial, female solo traveller, tourism and tourist

Introduction

Jamaica Kincaid is an Antiguan-American novelist and essayist. Her 1988 book *A Small Place* deals with sensitive issues like racism and corruption in Antigua. It describes postcolonial Antigua through virulent cultural criticism. Kincaid examines the national and political challenges faced by the island after the end of an oppressive European colonization. Most significantly, she highlights Antigua's position as a holiday destination and investigates how the flourishing tourist industry, patronized by the Antiguan government and its former colonizers, has reduced the place into a mere tourist site. According to her, Antigua exists without a self-identity due to its inability to be free from the British colonizing experience. Therefore, this eighty-one-page short book is her attempt to introduce her homeland Antigua outside its comprehension as a tourist locale. She identifies past misdeeds of the colonizers and demands a recognition of Antigua as an independent and sovereign land.

This paper will firstly discuss Kincaid's observation of Antigua and explore the reasons she adopts the point of view of a white tourist (in the first part of the book) in her harsh description of the island, though she herself is an Antiguan black woman travelling alone to her country. Secondly, it will study the challenges faced by a solo female traveller like Kincaid and how they affect her narration. Finally, the paper will examine her achievements and how her book is crucial for our understanding of tourism in former colonies of the West.

The Geographical Location of Antigua

Kincaid (1988) informs readers that Antigua is a twelve-mile-long beautiful island "discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493" (p. 80), establishing European hegemony and the colonial link. Its tropical climate is consistently, yet delightfully, hot and dry. Though it is surrounded by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, it suffers from constant drought; hence, the inhabitants here frugally consume fresh

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water and the agricultural yield is meager with only cotton and pineapple as flourishing crops. The country's economy is entirely dependent on its banking and tourism industries. This island is basically known to European travellers as a tourist destination and a resort location to visit during their holidays. This is how Kincaid initially delineates her country. She describes the pitiful conditions of the roads which are "very much in need of repair" (Kincaid, p. 5). She points out evidence of unsustainable development in the fact that the new modern Japanese cars plying on Antiguan roads make awful sounds like splintered machines, for leaded gasoline, is used to drive them rather than the unleaded gasoline required by the engines. However, the drivers are unaware of it; they might not have even passed the driving test and banks make car loans easily available here.

Kincaid (1988) mentions that Antigua is a haven for anyone who has a lot of money and can afford a luxurious life. The rich Arab merchants who come here from the Middle East lend the government money and build massive economic centres in the capital. The mansions are inhabited by "rich drug smugglers and courtesans" (Kincaid, p. 11); anyone wealthy can live here in peace. Meanwhile, the native Antiguans suffer due to corruption, poverty, and injustice. The government depends on tourism and earns revenue by promoting the land as an ideal place for rich tourists to visit. Thus, it is recognized as a tourist locale to the world.

The Inhabitants

The descendants of the white British colonizers and their black African slaves are the chief inhabitants of Antigua. While describing them, Kincaid (1988) clearly illustrates the racial division between the white masters and the black workers of African descent. It is difficult to recognize their similarities, which are essential to form a singular, unified nation. According to McLeod (2008), a group of people identifies themselves as a nation when they share a collective history; moreover, they stand united when they overcome challenges together, and they emerge as a singular entity through the pain and the violence they communally suffer. However, the white and the black people of Antigua have different pasts because they belong to different cultures; consequently, their lifestyles, histories, and customs vary greatly. She assumes that the lack of national consciousness between these two races hinders their function as a nation.

Furthermore, Kincaid (1988) argues that in postcolonial Antigua, the native Antiguans have not been able to become fully independent from the colonizers. When Antigua was released from Britain's colonial rule, the Antiguans were very happy and proud, but they were indoctrinated by the British code of life in such a manner that they forgot their own norms, beliefs, and principles. Therefore, according to Kincaid, though the colonial masters have left the country to their colonized subjects, they still perpetuate their colonial rule through their legacies, agencies, and enterprises, instilling British norms and customs in the natives' minds. She considers the tourism industry in Antigua as a mode that continues the white colonial venture. This is one of the reasons behind the tension and hatred between the black and the white Antiguans.

Kincaid (1988) holds slavery and slave trade to be the root causes behind the hatred and hostility between the white and the black communities. The whites were the cruel, oppressive masters of the black slaves, and the present-day Antiguans denounced slavery as "large ships filled up with human cargo — their ancestors" (Kincaid, p. 54). Many of these slaves drowned in the sea while being transported from their native lands. They were separated from their families, and some were even

tortured to death; the ones who survived were forced to work under brutally inhuman conditions. After years of torture and oppression, the blacks were given emancipation.

However, she claims that despite gaining apparent freedom, their white masters invented new tools to perpetuate their subjugation. For example, they made a school where black history was distorted and erased only to glorify white supremacy. In Antigua, the native children are educated under the colonial system of education. Kincaid (1988) reveals that she received an excellent education abroad, something not available to the young people of Antigua, who seem to her almost illiterate because they are being trained to remain servile and unassertive. She thinks that they are also unaware of the history of their ancestors, including the abuse and torments they suffered. Speaking of the knowledge of history, Kincaid describes the splendid library of Antigua during colonial times. Sadly, in 1974, the library building was extensively damaged by an earthquake and now it stands as a monument of lost knowledge, and its disrepair (though due to economic reasons) connotes Antigua's postcolonial conditions. She also recounts the story of the slave traders, the Barclay brothers who founded the Barclay Bank after the English had stopped the business of slavery. This bank lent money to the natives and profited from the high interest they charged the locals. She further argues that such financial operations continue the oppression of black inhabitants of Antigua by the whites. Furthermore, she upholds tourism as another operative system to extend black subjugation**.**

Tourism in Antigua

As mentioned earlier, Kincaid (1988) claims that white tourists perceive Antigua as a place of retreat from reality. They have exoticized the Caribbean Island and transformed it into a vacationers' dream locale, which serves only to enhance the tourists' experience. Even though Antigua became fully independent from the British colonial authority in 1981, it remains virtually a colony for its inability to construct its self-identity. Kincaid reveals her frustration through her despair over the language the Antiguans speak:

> For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak about this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? The language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed. (p. 31)

Kincaid demonstrates that the Antiguans do not have any language of their own. They still speak and function through the language of their cruel white masters. She remarks that colonizers leave their homes to accumulate wealth in the colonies; after extracting all the resources, they abandon the colonies. For the former colonizers Antigua now exists as "a discarded space" (McLeod, 2008, p. 91). Nonetheless, the colonial overlords and their offspring still arrive here for recreation. Though this place is no longer a colony, it is yet to be released from the grasp of the colonizers. Kincaid strongly condemns this condition of her own country.

In line with Kincaid (1988), Pastran (2014) suggests that white colonizers through industries like tourism continue their colonial venture. Tourism is introduced as a development measure intended to earn money in the colonies that have become poor due to years of colonial rule, and based on the belief that postcolonial nations are unable to govern themselves, the colonial masters re-enter the colony to control and oversee business. From a postcolonial theoretical perspective, "development" is often regarded as a Western imperial project to colonize now-independent postcolonial states (Pastran, p. 46). This became prominent during the 1980s when decades of such ironic "development" in newly independent states failed to reduce corruption, poverty, and inequality. The white supremacy of colonialism lingers through tourism, as it is a means to sustain economic growth among these nations. Tourism also

perpetuates the idea of keeping these nations as docile and subservient to their former colonizers. This issue is reflected in Kincaid's description of various institutions of Antigua (mentioned in the earlier part of the essay).

Similar to Pastran, Urry (1990) criticizes the tourism industry in *Tourist Gaze*, an explicitly postcolonial text. He argues that the white tourist tours across former colonies to perceive the black native as the 'other'; in this way, a duality between the white (the superior) and the black (the inferior) is created. Kincaid (1988) subverts this duality by giving the native Antiguan a position where s/he becomes the superior one of the two. Habtu (2015) notes that Kincaid deconstructs the relationship between master and slave to advance the story of injury by letting the world know about the plight of indigenous communities. McLeod (2008) claims that by the end of the book, Kincaid establishes the conflict between the colonizers and the colonized, demanding a recognition of the past sufferings, which is essential to rebuild Antigua's self-identity. In this way, Kincaid rejects the view that Antigua, the small place, is empty and insignificant. Instead, she perceives it as a creative space where old customs are destroyed and new angles of viewing the world from a humanitarian ground are welcome. It is significant to note that this indicates an ambivalence since it contradicts Kincaid's earlier views that Antigua is merely a holiday destination.

Furthermore, Kincaid (1988) addresses the tourist as the 'you' in her text. This issue can also be analyzed from a postcolonial angle, for McLeod (2008) mentions that the use of this 'you' separates the narrator and the reader. Thus, she wilfully sets a binary opposition to serve her cause. The very title of *A Small Place* is a metonym for an unimportant place which connotes Antigua as a place where the 'you' can go and assume control. This 'you' or the tourist is indifferent and negligent. In addition, Kincaid, the writer, also operates as the tour guide. Antigua is her home, a place where she belongs. Therefore, Kincaid is aware of the miseries of the Antiguans and, unlike the tourists who come here to escape, she foregrounds the tourists and their motive because tourism is the main source of income for Antigua. At the same time, it is also linked to the worst form of colonization, leading Kincaid to opine that tourism is a new way to enslave her nation.

When Kincaid arrives at the airport, she sees that the white European or North American tourist can "move through customs with ease" (Kincaid, 1988, p. 5); his bag is not searched. On the other hand, an "Antiguan black returning to Antigua from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives" (Kincaid, p. 4) will have her bags checked. She provides this example to illustrate the point that the officials of Antigua treat the whites better than the blacks. The white tourist is served with respect, and he can "feel cleansed" and "blessed (which is to say special)" (Kincaid, p. 5); he is provided all kinds of pleasure and comfort, whereas a black native woman like her is not shown a minimum courtesy. She expresses a strong reaction on behalf of the natives which gives her narration a raw quality.

To unconventionally highlight the troubles in her land, Kincaid (1988) decides to describe Antigua from a non-native's perspective. She adopts the stance of a white tourist who has come here for a holiday trip; this tourist, however, faces hostility from the natives in Antigua despite the whiteness, due to racial, habitual, and hereditary reasons. The natives mock the white visitor because he cannot eat his food with his hands, which is the Antiguan custom to eat. They do not also like the way he speaks. They collapse helplessly from laughter and mimic the way he carries out his everyday bodily functions. This is how Kincaid shows the tourist from the natives'

perspective. For the natives, a tourist is loathsome. They compare these white people to mannerless 'pigs' (Kincaid, p. 27).

Kincaid's (1988) shift from identifying with the white tourist to empathizing with the natives is indicative of a contradiction in her narration. She is not always persistent in her arguments which produces textual ambivalence. However, despite certain incongruities, Kincaid's account of Antigua has its own worth. Sürme (2022) states that women travel not for pleasure only, but also for self-empowerment as well as to discover their inner selves to attain gender equality. The next segment of the essay will explore the issue of Kincaid's solo travelling as a woman and try to connect her experiences with this ambivalence.

Kincaid and Solo Female Travellers

Kincaid (1988) in her book is seemingly travelling alone, for she does not refer to any travelling companion throughout the book. She articulates that the land in which she was born and brought up has changed:

> The Antigua that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, a tourist, would see now. That Antigua no longer exists. That Antigua no longer exists partly for the usual reason, the passing of time…" (p. 23)

Kincaid's confident stance as a privileged visitor to Antigua and her assertive tone match Falconer's 2009 observation which is that initially, solo female travellers appear strong, decisive, and smart. Nevertheless, they simultaneously exhibit discomfort and dissatisfaction while describing the local people and unfamiliar customs, as Kincaid does in the first part of her book. Also, a sense of fear and insecurity of being a woman meddles with their vulnerability in a strange land. To be more specific, when solo female travellers start to narrate their travel stories confidently, they become overpowered by the difficulties they have encountered as women. Their stories are not usually of joy and victory because they are marred by feminine tensions. Nonetheless, the reasons behind such disturbances are not explicitly mentioned, and the female authors mostly assume that their readers will readily understand them. They often contradict, omit, and avoid such issues that create gaps in their narration.

In addition, Falconer (2009) reminds us that for centuries only men have travelled beyond the seas, keeping their women homebound. It was the duty of their women to tend to their lands and offspring in their absence. Much later, a number of female travellers began to venture around the world, but they always had to depend on male assistance. During the 1960s, young men as well as women of the West adopted travelling as a form of social resistance and individual development. Based on their experiences, a few of them started to pen travel writings. But when female travellers independently started to travel and write, their gender identities intervened in their composition which often resulted in a "fragmented and conflicting narrative" (Falconer, p. 21), for they often bring their own feminine experiences in their narration.

When women participate in global tourism, they offer newer insights and contribute to the tourism industry. Women travel for the formation of their self-identity and the enhancement of their self-esteem. They learn about themselves by studying others. Meeting new people and places provides them with a sense of freedom and autonomy. It is difficult to precisely identify the actual reasons behind women's travelling, but this much is clear that they are different from the reasons for men's travelling. Women travel for business and leisure; they can even travel to

escape the hostility, male dominance, and demands of their domestic life. In addition, based on the motives of their travelling, they choose their destinations.

In this way, women's travel narratives read like personal accounts challenging the patriarchal, masculine, seemingly ordered and organized male narratives. Hence, as we interpret women's travel writings, their feminine perspective is crucial in understanding their motives. It is also important to note that women's individual accounts are not static; they are gravely influenced by their gender status in their society, and they change throughout their lifetime. When women tell stories, their feminine identities undergo continuous constructions and reconstructions as they delve deeper into the realms of their memories. They are neither discovering new places nor are they wandering on uncharted lands. They are describing places that have already been described by male tourists, but as soon as they adopt a feminine angle, issues like hygiene and beauty standards appear more prominently in their narration.

For example, Kincaid (1988) fervently expresses that the island is a vacant and peripheral space; and that the plights of the native Antiguans, regarding hygiene and sanitation, are never taken into consideration; only the pleasure of the tourist is given importance. The roads of Antigua are bad, but when Queen Elizabeth II visited in 1985, they "were paved anew" (Kincaid, p. 12) so that she could leave the country with pleasant memories. This contrasts with the poor road conditions that common Antiguans have to face. In addition, Kincaid notes other deprivations and hardships that beset the locals. The natives do not get an adequate supply of fresh water, and they do not even have a proper drainage and sewerage line: "There is no proper sewage-disposal system" in the island and consequently "the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water" (Kincaid, p. 14). She repeatedly blames the Antiguan government for not paying heed to these issues. The government only promotes tourism and works on enhancing the tourist's experience, when the people of the land still "squat down over a hole they have made in the ground" (Kincaid, pp. 16–17). Here, Kincaid's own concerns regarding cleanliness and hygiene appear noteworthily.

Moreover, Kincaid's (1988) consciousness of beauty standards intervenes in her narration as she conjectures that the native Antiguans consider a white tourist visiting their island as "an ugly human being" (p. 14). The white tourist also finds the black Antiguans detestable and pitiful. The visiting whites are described as "an incredibly unattractive, fat, pastry-like fleshed woman enjoying a walk on the beautiful sand, with a man, an incredibly unattractive, fat, pastry-like fleshed man", and their foreign bodies are presented as "stilled body stinking and glistening in the sand" (Kincaid, pp. 13, 16). However, there are moments when the ugliness is transformed and occasionally even the Antiguans find beauty in the white visitors. Kincaid writes that a tourist can suddenly become self-conscious of a native looking at him with "absolute pleasure". This positive response assuages the tourist for "then you realize that you are not as revolting a presence as you think you are (for that look just told you so)" (Kincaid, p. 15).

Kincaid's Demand for Justice

Kincaid (1988) employs several figurative devices to convey the actual condition of Antigua. On the one hand, her language is rhythmic and musical; she employs a poetic approach to narrate her country's history and politics. In this way, her writing seems convincing, genuine, and sincere. On the other hand, she plays a dual role of the insider/the narrator transmitting her messages to the outsider/the reader. In

addition, Kincaid uses repetition as a dominant figurative device. It generates an emotional effect on the reader's mind. For example,

> In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated, blown up, turned over and over, and then absorbed into every day so that at any moment it can and will roll off the inhabitants of the small place's tongues. For the people in a small place, every event is a domestic event; the people in a small place cannot see themselves in a larger picture… (Kincaid, p. 52)

Repetition of the word 'small' creates rhythm or a musical sense. It generates strong effects in the mind of the reader and produces a sense of resistance. It fosters power over the narrator and provokes the other to submit.

Habtu (2015) argues that Kincaid's (1988) repetition of the word 'you' is also used to create the same effect. This will be planted in the tourists' minds when they read the book. By adopting a direct method in addressing the reader she is forcing the readers to pay attention. They will take the criticism as a personal attack, which will make them rethink Antigua's condition. Therefore, this repetition will produce resistance among them. Moreover, it will also make them curious to know the Antigua that Kincaid visited as well as its past, politics, government, and people. The anger invested behind the repetition of the word 'you' will make them see themselves from the natives' eyes.

Habtu (2015) also suggests that Kincaid is angry not only with the unjust and oppressive colonizers but also with the people of Antigua who live in this small place and see things in a very small way. She wants to shake them out of their stupor. The traveller is angry because her forefathers had been tortured and subjugated, and now their oppression is continuing even today in the form of tourism. Her anger issues from their plight and exploitation. She is creatively using her rage to respond to the wrongs done to her ancestors. Thus, she uses anger as a tool to assert the truth. She attacks the white colonizers for enslaving the black Africans and for continuing the oppression that has not yet been resolved even though Antigua has become a free country. By claiming themselves superior, the whites execute their power on the weak and inferior slaves, only to satisfy their hunger and greed for material gain. It reminds the white tourists of the pain that the Antiguans still carry within them.

Resistance and Reconciliation

Jurney (2006) observes that Kincaid (1988), towards the end of her book, suggests a change. This change can be brought about by redefining the white/master-black/slave relation. At first, she asks the white tourist to learn Antigua's history of slavery and colonization. On a similar ground, Habtu (2015) remarks that Kincaid shows that only by deconstructing the roles of the white tourist and the native Antiguans, Antigua can earn self-recognition. They should develop a feeling of openness, and this mutual understanding will restore the nation by negotiating its past and promoting Antigua's self-identity.

By the end of the book, Kincaid (1988) writes that Europeans are suffering from being lonely and empty — "a European disease" (p. 80). They settled in Antigua and enslaved the black Africans to gain power and wealth. But now they are not the masters anymore, "no longer human rubbish" (Kincaid, p. 81). Similarly, the Antiguans are no longer noble and exalted because they have been oppressed as slaves and are now free. She asks both parties to dispose of the trappings of these artificial masks and become more human. She uses negative phrases to attack and to insult. This technique is a powerful weapon to provoke her readers to rethink Antigua's situation from humanitarian grounds. Thus, she uses anger as a medium to

reinforce these facts and to form a collective understanding between the colonizer and the colonized.

Limitations

A Small Place (1988) received mixed reviews as it dealt with sensitive issues like racism and corruption in Antigua. Moreover, *The New Yorker* refused to publish it because of its very harsh tone, unlike Kincaid's previous works. Habtu (2015) mentions another weakness that the book disappoints its readers when they become aware that the narrator hardly represents any average Antiguan. The island's story is narrated from an expatriate's point of view. Kincaid was born in 1949 in Antigua's St. John's under the name of Elaine Richardson. She changed her name after moving to New York in 1966 at the age of 17. She served as a writer for *The New Yorker* and only came back to her country at the age of 36. Having lived abroad for 19 years, she might not have the ability to fully grasp the present and past conditions of her country.

However, it is too simplistic to assume that Kincaid (1988) is unable to describe her country because she has been living abroad. On the contrary, she is better able to comprehend the island's socio-political conditions as she has lived both inside and outside of it. Therefore, she understands how Antigua is still used by its former colonizers for garnering profit, long after the era of slavery and colonization. Her experiences have enabled her to effectively circulate her messages to a wider audience.

Importance in Postcolonial Reading

McLeod (2008) contends that Kincaid's (1988) text simultaneously traverses multiple genres: autobiography, travelogue, fiction, essay, and so on. Thus, the very ambiguity of its subject and the difficulty in putting it in any specific genre, demonstrate the challenges Antigua faces as a postcolonial state. When a reader reads the book from a postcolonial angle, s/he acknowledges the truth of slavery and colonialism and understands Kincaid's criticism of the tourism and travel industry. Therefore, as Habtu (2015) points out, the book is important for postcolonial reading, for it demands a justification for the pain colonizing nations caused. It discloses the sufferings of natives and provides them a chance to recover and heal. By doing so, it pays careful attention to the plight of postcolonial nations which are still struggling to form their self-identities.

Kincaid (1988) attempts to restore Antigua's image as a self-reliant country by removing the image constructed by the British colonizers. This latter image is perpetuated by the tourism industry, and the white tourists visiting here sustain its existence. By reading the text, one can learn of the island's painful history, and its struggle to survive as a nation. Through an acknowledgment of the sufferings of the black natives, Kincaid provides a ground for reconciliation between the colonizers and the colonized. This reconciliation based upon politically humanitarian grounds can serve to reform Antigua's identity and help it shed its stereotype as merely a tourist locale.

Conclusion

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid (1988) takes the reader on a trip to her homeland which has now become strange and unfamiliar. Her journey is complicated by her gender, as women travellers face economic hurdles as well as familial and social restrictions while travelling alone. Nonetheless, with the advancement of globalization and

tourism marketing, women are increasingly travelling solo. Women need to travel more for their well-being and to bring necessary changes in their society because they "travel to gather their own stories" (Falconer, 2009, p. 28). In travelling back to her homeland Antigua, Kincaid finds that certain aspects have become strange and unfamiliar over time. As a solo female tourist, there is a possibility that she has faced social stigmas, unwanted attention, and harassment in a place that she once called her own. Therefore, she expresses genuine frustrations in her narration. From her account, it is also clear that the issues of cleanliness and sanitation are important factors as women travel. Since women's personal experiences shape their narration, women travel writers like Kincaid need to be more open and liberal while addressing these issues.

Travel also makes women more politically and culturally aware. This is also the case with Kincaid (1988). Through her writing of this book, she is seeking her identity as an Antiguan and creating political as well as cultural awareness among her readers. Kincaid was displeased with the tourist perception of Antigua which made her homeland a quaint, nice, docile, and entertaining Caribbean Island, filled with poverty and corruption. She uses her narrative as an exploration of the reasons behind this deplorable condition. She trudged through the pages of Antigua's history and discovered that two races, the blacks and the whites, are still prejudiced about their roles as masters and slaves, and industries like tourism perpetuate such notions. A postcolonial reading of her book discloses her desire that her readers and the people of her country consider Antigua's situation from a humane ground.

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