

Counter-Travel Narrative of Resistance: An Analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's A Small Place as a Counter –Travel Narrative

Sherin M.Johnson, Meenu. B

Abstract: *This paper analyses Jamaica Kincaid's nonfiction travel work A Small Place from a postcolonial perspective in order to demonstrate it as a counter travel narrative against Western centric travelogues. A significant voice in Caribbean literature, Kincaid explores the tenuous relationship between mother and daughter as well as the themes of colonialism in her widely celebrated works of fiction and non-fiction. Her intensely personal, honest and provocative writings have earned her an appreciable place in the literary world. The publication of A Small Place in 1988 and Lucy in 1991 earned her bitter criticisms and reviewers were divided over the angry tone expressed in both works. In A Small Place, described as "an anti-travel narrative", Kincaid returns to her homeland after 20 years. She writes about post-colonial Antigua discussing problems that took place on the island during the 1980s, particularly addressing the issue of tourism. The article looks into how Kincaid inverts the idea of tourism as a normal and innocent activity by attacking the neo colonisers and revealing the point of view of the natives of Antigua.*

Keywords: Postcolonial, counter travel, tourism, neocolonisers

I. INTRODUCTION

A noteworthy voice in contemporary African American writing, Jamaica Kincaid was conceived in St. Johns, Antigua, when it was still under British pioneer rule. At seventeen years old in 1966, she moved to New York to function as a live in housekeeper. She didn't come back to Antigua until she was 36. By then Elaine Richardson had changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid and was an essayist for The New Yorker. Her first book, At the Bottom of the River, an accumulation of short fiction, was distributed in 1983, which made her a moment scholarly big name. Her first novel Annie John was pursued two years after the fact and furthermore ended up effective. A Small Place, distributed in 1988, got blended audits and was marked "an incensed article about prejudice and defilement in Antigua." Besides, A Small Place was the only one not recently distributed in The New Yorker in light of the fact that The New Yorker considered it to be excessively unforgiving and irate in tone. Thought about nonfictional and a life account, the book is a mix of social what's more, social analysis together with history of colonization to depict postcolonial Antigua. Her books and short stories are reminiscent depictions of family connections and her local Antigua wherein she investigates the repossession of oneself what's more, the attestation of individual autonomy notwithstanding dehumanizing history.

Revised Manuscript Received on May 28, 2019.

Sherin M. Johnson, Research Scholar. Department of English. Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Kochi, Kerala.

Dr.Meenu.B, Assistant Professor of English. Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Kochi, Kerala.

A Small Place belongs to her non-fiction prose in which she records her angry response to her homeland when she visited there in 1986 for the first time in 20 years. This paper aims to analyze A Small Place from a post-colonial perspective in order to demonstrate it as a counter travel narrative against the dominant western travelogues. The book is divided into 4 chapters in two sections: In the first one, the narrator describes the usual experiences a tourist has in the island. In the second section, she recollects her memories and her experiences, portrays Antigua and its mesmerizing island. The book starts by informing the reader: "If you come to Antigua as a tourist this is what you will see" (Kincaid 1). The welcome tone soon changes to an accusatory one and the reader is compelled to occupy the position of the potential tourist. Even though the phrase "as a tourist" implies that the tourist gaze is the kind of gaze through which the narrative unfolds, the evolving narration soon makes us realize that the book is quite the opposite of a tourists guide; it is a sharp invective against tourism and neo-colonialism and a polemic against the tourist's gaze, especially the western tourist. She seeks disidentification and estrangement with her readers and their lived experiences in contrast to the typical travel narratives where the narrators place themselves in par with the readers and describe experiences which they can relate to and identify with. Kincaid's memoir opens up Antigua's long history of colonialism to negotiation, and provides a counter history from a decolonial perspective. The binary opposition of the colonizer and colonized is reversed at the emotional core of A Small Place's attack on the white tourist are the same emotions historically directed at blacks by white racists" which are those "of disgust, contempt and anger. For Kincaid, the tourist constitutes a legacy of colonialism under the façade of tourism. She describes her homeland, Antigua, as an island in which exploitation, corruption and the mimicking of colonialism have become an unquestionable part of life. She says "As if, observing the event of tourism, they have absorbed it so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own." (Kincaid 43) Reversing the traditional roles of subject and object, the dominant and the dominated, she implores the American and European tourist to focalize the colonial discourse through the eyes of the oppressed and exploited subjects, rather than from that of the 'superior' colonizer west. She discusses the external forces that plagued the island and also points out the internal ones, namely corruption which exists today and are inherited from these external ones. Her effective use of repetition, anger and shame in A Small Place provoke her readers into recognizing past injustices that they have committed thus countering postcolonial ideologies of self and other. In her expedition towards



the colonial and neo-colonial legacy in Antigua, Kincaid's gaze adopts the perspective of different protagonists, Kincaid herself, the tourist and the native Antiguan. Her polyphonic narratorial voice employs the discourses of the Western tourist, the colonist, and the ex-colonized to convey the conflicting discourses on Antigua. In Kincaid's memoir, the tourists are a "collective Columbus, new colonists, brash cultural invaders" (Kincaid 25). She deconstructs the tourists gaze because according to her, the tourist is "an ugly human being, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that" (Kincaid 13). Her powerful strategy to counter the western gaze include addressing the reader as "you" with a bitter and sarcastic tone when she discusses Antigua's colonial history and tourism, and anger as the predominant mood of deployment (Moro 3). In the beginning of *A Small Place*, Kincaid addresses the reader directly with a sarcastic tone and says "And so you needn't let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday" (Kincaid 10). In *A Small Place*, whether she talks about the neocolonial present or the colonial past, the main feature of the narrator's voice is her anger. She seems too angry to leave her past: "But nothing can erase my rage-not an apology, not a large sum of money, not the death of the criminal-for this wrong can never be made right, and only the impossible can make me still: can a way be found to make what happened not have happened?" (Kincaid 32). Throughout the text, the repetitive use of the word 'you' is used perhaps as a means to confront the perpetrators and remind them of the heinous crimes and injustices they have inflicted on Antigua's past. You disembark from your plane. You go through customs. Since you are a tourist, a North American or European – to be frank, white – and not an Antiguan black returning to Antigua from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives, you move through customs swiftly, you move through customs with ease. Your bags are not searched. You emerge from customs into the hot, clean air: immediately you feel cleansed, immediately you feel blessed (which is to say special); you feel free. (Kincaid 4–5) Kincaid here seems to address a certain tourist, who has some awareness on Antigua's history of colonization and the exploitation that it undergoes at present in the name of tourism. The tourist that she implies is a "North American-to be frank, white" (Kincaid 4), who views Antigua and its people in terms of his own standards, desires and perspectives. Through repeating the word "you" many times in this passage, Kincaid is attacking and accusing the tourists but it is probably her way of writing about different perspectives in order to allow the readers to understand different sides of Antigua. By reversing the colonial gaze, she reduces the tourist to the level of humiliation and dehumanization. The same emotions of disgust, contempt and anger used to dehumanize the blacks are now directed against them, tourists are reduced to the level of humiliation and dehumanization, thus putting them in inferior position and rebuking them. During the narration, Kincaid describes the experiences of the tourist and compares it with that of an Antiguan. She also uses irony to mock his ignorance about various aspects of the island and its inhabitants. She uses this template to introduce and explain the various problems and scandals occurring in her country. The tourist in *A Small place* is turned to an "ugly

human being" (Kincaid 14. She says: "Every native would like to find a way out...But some natives cannot go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives." (Kincaid 18). Even after decolonization, the balance of power has not changed. Caribbean countries still suffer from poverty and inequality. Neocolonists under the façade of tourism has replaced colonists. "While they lay in private beaches and stay in luxurious hotels, Antiguan remain poor citizens whose government is least concerned about improving their living conditions" (Moro 47). Interesting to note is her attitude towards her own people when she finally turns against the Antiguan. She switches from the position of the oppressed insider to that of the privileged outsider. Consequently, the previous 'we' is now divided into 'I' and 'them'. She is capable of understanding the situation of the island and its people, a reality that the Antiguan are not able to comprehend still, because they have succumbed to a destiny from which she has escaped long ago. When she turns against the English colonialists, she places herself with the Antiguan and with the colonized in general: "But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans" (Kincaid 31). Kincaid presents a detailed description of the landscape with the sad and bitter narratives of the colonial past and the postcolonial present. "The picturesque sea that we perceive through the eyes of the tourist is transformed into a horrifying palimpsest carrying multiple narratives of its own land. She traces the incongruity of the dilapidated cars and the expensive car models running on them. Even the electric and telephone poles lining these roads and the cars running on them marked by power politics are shown to be perfect manifestations of corrupt postcolonial eco-political alliances" (Sethi 3), thus offering her readers a powerful and engaging critique of a debilitating colonial enterprise and an equally oppressive neo-imperial world politics and the inevitable linkages between them. She makes use of "tourism" as the template to carry this critique. The narrator addresses the figure of the modern tourist and takes him on a tour of Antigua on her terms. She juxtaposes the 'real' picture of the island with the romanticized façade built by tourist guides. The hospital building exposes the terrible and non-existent health system, the old library building stands for the decaying system of education, the long periods of drought that the natives must suffer lures behind the beauty of the sun and the sea. In sharp contrast to most travel narratives where the traveller exercises the power to perceive and reflect on, the narrator presents the psyche of a typical First World white male tourist as he explores Antigua, as well as her narrative, which constantly combats the tourist stereotypical gaze. In her endeavor to dehistoricize and decontextualize the tourist gaze, she mocks at the incongruity of the bad roads, the expensive Japanese car, and the latrine like hospital and school and urge the traveller to revisit his knowledge of history which is full of glorified narratives of West erasing a history of the colonial narrative of oppression.

II. CONCLUSION:

Kincaid's critique of tourism in Antigua reverses traditional travel writing trends in which First world perceptions dominate over the Third world. In most



travel narratives, the traveller is the one possessing the power to see, while his presence remains invisible, in *A Small Place*, this gaze is inverted and the tourist and his gaze are made visible. Thus, the narrator simultaneously presents the psyche of a typical First World white male tourist as he explores the new space of Antigua, as well as her narrative, which is constantly in conflict with the tourist's superficial gaze. The two accounts, thus, seem to co-exist. She collapses binaries oppositions such as tourist/native and black/white to argue that tourism is implicated in this hegemonic process. Making use of the metaphor of a guided tour, she redirects the imperial gaze. Thus *A Small Place* can be considered as a "counter-travel 'narrative as it sets itself against the dominant western centric form of the travelogue. Using the second person, she immediately puts herself in a position of superiority in relation to the tourist. It is the black woman who now takes the control and reverses the dominant cultural conceptions and the canon of travel literature and imposes herself above the white man. Kincaid reverses the colonial and racist discourses. She takes the language of the white man and uses it to attack him. Using his tools, she tries to show the tourist/reader how and why the presence of a person like him is not accepted by Antigua natives, and tries to make him feel ashamed, the shame colonized people like her had to suffer for not being white and European. The racism ideology that prevails in Western societies is inverted. In *A Small Place*, it is the white man who assumes negative features; it is the tourist who becomes the outsider. "An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste at that...people who inhabit this place in which you have just paused cannot stand you...they laugh at your strangeness. They do not like you. (Kincaid 17). Her last chapter expresses her intense desire for her home as a small and simple place in all its ordinariness rather than an unreal and eroticized spectacle for the outsiders gaze.

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