

TOURISM AS A MEDIUM OF NEO-COLONIALISM: A READING OF JAMAICA KINCAID'S *A SMALL PLACE* (1988)

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Abstract

Being a contemporary Antiguan-American writer, Jamaica Kincaid in her writings explores the themes of colonialism, colonial legacy, post colonialism and neo-colonialism. In her short but highly effective work of creative nonfiction, *A Small Place* (1988), she explores the British colonial legacy in Antigua from both an outsider and native perspectives through her experiences of growing up in Antigua. The book comprises of four sections with a combination of social criticism upon colonial effects still functioning in every aspect of life in Antigua. Based on the idea that "Antigua where the sun always shines and where the climate is deliciously hot and dry..." Kincaid argues that Antigua made itself exist only for the pleasures of its previous colonizers, thus, although it is a free country on paper, it is not totally free from the colonisers (1988, p. 4). Upon this perspective, my aim is to analyse Kincaid's discourse from a point that tourism has become a new tool for colonizing a country. The main aspect of the paper will be to demonstrate certain references to the characteristics of tourism functioning as a medium of colonialism. By revealing these characteristics we will prove that the notion of tourism in this travel writing has acquired another dimension by being a metaphor for neo-colonialism.

Keywords: Neo-colonialism, Tourism, Travel-writing, Criticism

JAMAICA KINCAID'İN *A SMALL PLACE* (1988) ESERİNDE TURİZM: SÖMÜRGEÇİLİĞİN YENİLENMİŞ HALİ

Özet

Çağdaş Antigua doğumlu Amerikan yazar olan Jamaica Kincaid eserlerinde sömürgecilik, sömürge mirası, post-sömürgecilik konularını ele alır. Kısa ama oldukça etkili kurgusal olmayan eserinde, İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin Antigua üzerinde olan etkisini hem dışarıdan bir göz hem de orada yetişmiş birinin bakış açısıyla ele alır. Eser Antigua'da hayatın her alanında halen gözle görülebilecek olan sömürgeciliğin etkisini toplam dört bölümde ele alır. Antigua'nın Avrupalı turistlere hitap eden bir manzaraya dönüştürülmesi fikrinden yola çıkan yazar, ülkenin kâğıt üzerinde özgür olmasına rağmen, sömürgecilerden halen kurtulamadığını öne sürer. Bu açıdan bakarak, çalışma Kincaid'in eserini turizmin yenilenmiş bir sömürge şekli olarak analiz etmektir. Öncelikle eserde turizmin sömürgecilikle olan benzerliklerine değinilecek, böylelikle turizm kavramının bu eserde farklı bir boyut kazanıp, yeni bir sömürge aracı olarak ortaya konduğu tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürgecilik, Turizm, Gezi Yazısı, Edebi Eleştiri

Jamaica Kincaid is an Antiguan-American novelist and essayist who was born in St. John's, Antigua in 1949. Thematically, her writings cover issues of gender, race, colonialism, mother-daughter relationships and neo-colonialism. Her experiences in growing up in a colonized, poor country and her failing in her relationship with her mother cause her writings to be edgy, ironical, satirical and evocative.

Nearly twenty years later after leaving her native country at the age of 16, Kincaid visits her native island. When she had left, it was 1966 in which Antigua was still under British hegemony. *A Small Place* was published in 1988, after Kincaid's visit to her hometown. The work reflects a strong criticism upon seeing the corruptions that Antigua undergoes thus the voice of her earlier writings could be claimed to be different in tone, since she not only raises criticism to the colonizers (in this case, *the tourists*), but also to the nation that she once was a part of and now estranged because the same nation seems to be unable to take a step forward in constructing an independent (in a real sense) nation, instead, being an instrument to a renewed version of colonialism, which is indirectly claimed to be *tourism*. Her discourse criticizes the institution of tourism and tourists that seem to be incapable of understanding their role and impact on the places they temporally be part of. She claims that Antigua and similar native islands are decorated only as holiday spots, although they look calm and peaceful, there are many injustices that the tourists are reluctant to see the realities of the place they visit. Therefore, the writer's novel could be accepted as a "performance of culture and a way in which the colonized speaks back" (qtd. in Buzinde, 2011, p. 213).

A Small Place, as the book's title indicates Antigua offered leisure and pleasure as a tourist destination since Americans saw the island as a heaven for tourist and because the tourism has been the means of economic survival for the island. However, Kincaid's work becomes a way for her to defy the tourist gaze in Antigua and also critique of betrayal of

the islanders to their nation by allowing the hegemony of the imperial power.

A Small Place begins with: “IF YOU GO to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see” (Kincaid, 1989, p.3). From the very beginning, the author cuts off any possible thoughts that reader possibly produces and by forcing them to be the listener of her discourse. The voice of the speaker is angry towards the tourist and also contains the traces of certain nostalgia for the status quo of Antigua. In order to save Antigua from its temporary situation as a tourist land, she starts her discourse by unveiling the injustices of tourist industry, the corruption of the government and the function of neo-colonialism. Her readers in this 81-page long journey will not only use their imagination to witness the events but also will be guided by a local tour guide.

In her discourse, Kincaid uses the strategy of addressing the reader directly by second person labelling “*you*” in order to set an emotional separation between the narrator and the reader and puts the reader in a tourist/colonizer position with a blaming tone. Keith Byerman suggests for the usage of “*you*” that: “Such a characterization not only calls into question the self-image of the tourist, but also “signifies” on the language used by colonizers and others of the First World in defining the colonized” (1995, p. 92).

In addition to the language of the work, since Kincaid has a double understanding of the events by being an insider and outsider, her narration reflects Homi Bhabba’s theory of doubleness and this strategy also decentres her from the text through her alienation from her own society. The reader/listener relationship allows writer to manipulate the reader’s mind in creating an effect to leave an impact on the mind of the tourist. Thus, she forces tourists to vanish their reluctance to see the realities of the place they visit through a very strong, realistic tourist guide narrator. The journey that she takes the visitors will certainly be different from what they have seen in the brochures of Antigua in which the sun

always shines, the sea is always in “many shades of blue” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 77).

Kincaid uses oppositions in her point of view as being a black native and emphasizing the clear division with the white tourist. For a tourist the beautiful sunshine is a source of inspiration and enjoyment, however, for natives it implies the drought conditions. In the course of the novel, the writer will inevitably be depended on contrasting images in the gazes of the tourists and those of a local's.

One of the most important criticisms that the writer directs is that Antigua was made a non-nation; therefore the title of the work becomes an irony for Antigua's lack of place. Kincaid says: “And so everywhere they went they turned it into England: and everybody they met they turned English. But no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly like them would ever be English” (1989, p. 24).

From this perspective, it is obvious that what was left after the colonial history of Antigua was merely a nation, since everything local was destroyed in the process of Anglicisation. The anger of the narrator is caused by the fact that tourists are unwilling to see the situation of the place where they pay a visit as travellers who condones the reality and thus she writes:

and since you are on your holiday, since you are a tourist, the thought of what it might be like for someone who had to live day in, day out in a place that suffers constantly from drought, and so has to watch carefully every drop of fresh water used (while at the same time surrounded by a sea and an ocean—the Caribbean Sea on one side, the Atlantic Ocean on the other), must never cross your mind. (Kincaid, 1988, 4)

However, tourists will always be reminded by our sarcastic narrator the realities of Antigua and their short journey will not turn out as what was expected to be. Throughout the work, Kincaid seems like she is not able to recover from the ghosts of her colonial past, and she utters: “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, 1988, p. 32). The anger and rage of the author obviously stem from her entrapment in her past that is full of injustices, the tragic remedies of her memories and her account of non-ending colonialism which reigns in her country.

The old library waiting to be repaired with a sign hanging on the building in which it is written “THIS BUILDING WAS DAMAGED IN THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1974. REPAIRS ARE PENDING” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 9) becomes another symbol of how the place is neglected and since the tour guide reminds the reader that the earthquake happened nearly one decade ago, not long after when Antigua got its independence from England. She also mentions that the library was one of the buildings from the colonial times; however, the current situation of the building also directs a criticism upon the indifference of the natives as well.

Kincaid in her work intentionally generalises all the tourists on the island as “pastrylike-fleshed woman” walking on the beach with a “pastrylike-fleshed men” to reverse the common stereotype that all coloured natives are the same (1988, p. 13). From this perspective, Corinna Mcleod states that:

But account after account, experience after experience, has shown that while theoretically not all British are white, in practice, all ruling British are white. Theoretically (as Kincaid herself shows us) not all Antiguans are black, but practically speaking, when describing a nation and its underdeveloped population, the population is black. (2008, p. 86)

The narrator defines being a tourist as “a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze” and reflects the native’s point of view to the foreigners by saying that: “behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 17) and puts forward the fact that their Western values and traditions are not valid in this native land. In the same manner colonizers ridiculed and abused the colonized, here the visitor, coming from a world of mere reality is the subject to mockery. However, the tourists are still not completely unaware of the fact that they are not completely welcomed there, thus, the first section ends with the

implication that when tourists return their home, they need of a long rest so that they can recover from their life as tourist.

The second section of the work starts with writer indirectly revealing her alienation from her own society. Kincaid claims that the Antigua she knew, she grew up is not the Antigua a tourist (ephemeral visitor) would see. The alienation of the writer herself reminds us Lévi Strauss' description of the ethnographic art in which the observer himself becomes the subject of his observation.

The ethnographic demands that the observer himself is a part of his observation and this requires that the field of knowledge * the total social fact - must be appropriated from the outside like a thing, but like a thing which comprises within itself the subjective understanding of the indigenous. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 301)

Later Kincaid mentions the British colonial system with a very strong language expressing her anger towards slave-trading by referring to a bank in Antigua which is claimed to have earned their money from slave-trading. From this point on, the actual tone of her writing appears as Kincaid states: “cannot forgive and cannot forget” since there is neither a way to justify their actions, nor an enough punishment (1988, p. 26).

Kincaid also refers to the problem of language in formerly colonized countries. After the colonial experience, in Antigua the official language was changed into English and it is the only language she can use to express the crime committed “is the language of the criminal who committed the crime” (1988, p. 31). Since the language of the dominant power is so limited for natives to express their experience, the oppressed must either choose to be silent to the event, considering the fact that they do not have an Antiguan language, writer chooses the second option, using the language of criminality.

In *A Small Place* (1988) race is used by the author as a tool to divide the reader from the narrator. The tourists, the “you” being the reader are considered to be white and very much like colonizer. In her speech, the author disturbs the silence and abstractedness of the reader (that is put to a position of the colonizer and listener of her speech) for instance, by

anticipating an imaginary reaction from the reader: “Are you saying to yourself,” she writes “Can't she get beyond all that, everything happened so long ago, and how does she know that if things had been the other way around her ancestors wouldn't have behaved just as badly, because, after all, doesn't everybody behave badly given the opportunity” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 34).

From this point onwards, she criticises the manner of Western colonizers all demanding, corrupting the pureness of societies by their colonial apparatuses, erasing their social identity and finally deserting them. Therefore, Kincaid claims that Antigua as a formerly colonized nation will never be like the West because memory of all these colonial past is: “so strong, the experience so recent, that we can't quite bring ourselves to embrace this idea that you think so much of” (1988, p. 37).

Kincaid cleverly implies that the way colonizers behaved were not polite by comparing their manners in an ordinary human relationship to show that it is not only the crime that was committed was wrong but also the manner in which they committed the crime was wrong:

You came. You took things that were not yours, and you did not even, for appearances' sake, ask first. You could have said, “May I have this please?” and even though it would have been clear to everybody that a yes or a no from us would have been of no consequence you might have looked so much better. Believe me, it would have gone a long way. I would have had to admit that at least you were polite. (1988, p. 35)

To demand politeness from the colonizer is rather ironic, yet it certainly refers to the notion that English people are very close to be a stereotype for their English-manners becomes for Kincaid something to be make fun of. Upon this Suzanne Gauch claims that: “If the manners that marked politeness were precisely what first and foremost distinguished colonizer from colonized, then it must follow that their suspension rendered the colonizer indistinguishable from the colonized” (2002, p. 15). However, Kincaid claims that Antiguans in the end felt obliged to reshape their personality according to the standards of these English manners.

The situation of the library which is waiting for repairing becomes a recurring theme which is dealt with in every few pages throughout the text. The symbol becomes apparent when the reader is informed, after the independence; the library was moved to top floor of an old weak building reflects the disorder and poverty, indirectly symbolizing the postcolonial position of the formerly colonized nation in strengthening (in this case not strengthening) their nations by promoting libraries, hospitals, public spheres. The difference of library in its position represents the decline of literacy among Antiguans, especially Antigua's youth. McLeod interprets this situation as: "then we must point out that by rejecting the established library, by rejecting the foreign books and foreign histories of economics, the narrator of *A Small Place* is writing a new account, a new history of Antigua" (2008, p. 84).

In addition to the reminiscence of library from old colonial times, the other significant reminder of colonialism is Hotel Training Schools which are for Kincaid a renewed apparatus of neo-colonialism. These training schools are defined in her work as: "teaches Antiguans how to be good servants, how to be good nobody," (Kincaid, 1988, p. 55). The training schools become ironic when she says that people of Antigua celebrates the event of graduating from these schools, since they cannot see any relationship of this with slavery. Furthermore, Antiguans were allowed to go to a golf club only as servants, or even though all the beaches in the country are legally public, in some of the hotels they were not allowed. Therefore, it is possible to summarise their position in their own country as servants, fun-providers, caretakers of the tourists from the West.

Despite the noble ancestors' of Antigua who successfully evaded the tyrant of colonialism, their lives still continue in corruption of every kind without any awareness of their nation, or any consciousness. In a way she not only criticizes the tourists but also the natives by being only the pawns of the game being played.

In her autobiographical work, Kincaid refers to her mother as a person who is “painfully frank, quite unable to keep any thoughts she has about anything” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 50). She recalls a scene with in which she was “ a supporter of a political party which is actually “the second party Antigua has ever had” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 50). The conversation her mother and the Minister of Culture had reveals a scandalous event of issuing stamps for the interests of a certain group of people, namely syndicate's.

The last section of the work is dedicated to praise the physical beauty of Antigua as if the writer turns the form of the narrative into poetry. The description goes beyond and expresses this beauty as “unreal” even like a background setting painted for a play. Yet, the poverty of Antiguan's experience is another part of the depiction painted into this scenery. The small island, Antigua surrounds the people like a prison in which the people are locked into this scene of beauty, which looks too beautiful to be real.

They have nothing to compare this incredible constant with, no big historical moment to compare the way they are now to the way they used to be. No Industrial Revolution, no revolution of any kind, no Age of Anything, no world wars, no decades of turbulence balanced by decades of calm. (Kincaid, 1988, p. 79)

However, the unrealistic beauty of the island makes it only a small piece of land and it will only be a scene for brochures for tourist, unless the people, the descendants of the noble slaves change their course and be free in a realistic sense.

The outcome of Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988) can be claimed neither as a manifesto nor as a poem of praise. Although in Antigua seemingly the regime has changed, and they are now free, the power of control has changed through one of the renewed tool of contemporary colonisation, that is, tourism.

All in all, Jamaica Kincaid not only questions but also destroys the concept of tourism which from a point onwards became a tool for a new, more legalized way for colonializing a country. By using a narrator

containing double-perspective, she is able to speak for the natives and interprets the possible reactions, answers from the *silent* listener assumed to be a white tourist, more often presumed as being very similar to the colonizer. Furthermore, Kincaid attacks on stereotypicalisation of island nations as being places to enjoy tourists on their short visit to these nations. Therefore, Kincaid's text becomes an anti-guide to reveal the complexities and long-term effects of colonizers in creating a myth of Antigua as a small paradise and the destructive effect of tourism in Antigua.

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