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## THE ANGRY VOICE OF A NATION ECHOED IN A SMALL PLACE (1988)

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#### ABSTRACT

Colonialism, and its aftereffects, is considered as one of the most controversial concepts in which is being dealt by many contemporary writers and theoreticians from a post-colonial perspective. Most of these thinkers are from countries where have recently achieved their independence and are the authentic voice of their colonially suppressed nation. Even though colonialism as its traditional practice might seem to be abrogated, yet its aftereffects extend up to the present, and hide itself under new disguises. Jamaica Kincaid is one of the West Indian female writers, who throughout her fictions has severely criticized British colonialism, its aftereffects, and tourism as a manifestation of neocolonialism. This paper attempts to provide an analytical account concerning the authoress' elaboration of a harsh,

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occasionally rude, tone instead of a welcoming hospitable attitude toward western tourists in her novel *A Small Place* (1988), recognizing the business as a postmodern manifestation of imperialism and neo-colonialism.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Jamaica Kincaid was born Elaine Potter Richardson in St. Johns, Antigua, in 1949 (Bloom, 2008, p.4). In the contemporary Post-modern literary world, she is known as one of the iconic female indigenous Anti-colonial Caribbean writers, whose fictions as a critique toward Eurocentrism, deal with the colonization from the colonized perspective and not European point of view (Milne, 2009, p.134). Among her works, *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), *Mr. Potter* (2002), *A Small Place* (1988), and *See Now Then* (2013) outshine. Her writings such as *A Small Place* (1988), *My Brother* (1997), *Talk Stories* (2001), *My Garden Book* (2001), and *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalayas* (2005) are counted as her non-fictional narratives.

Studying Kincaid's works provides the readers with an authentic perspective which helps them to have a new definition of colonialism from those who have undergone the process of otherization. This can lead to revolutionary conclusions regarding colonialism and its aftereffects, since the cause is approached by a previously or still colonized subject, relating the colonial past

and post-colonial present. Unlike what used to be witnessed during the colonial era, that an individual from a colonizer pole would deal with the colonial issues, in the present time, a grandchild of a colonial subject re-narrates old colonial stories and debates the ongoing effects of colonialism in his/her native land.

## **II. THE ANGRY VOICE OF A NATION ECHOED IN A *SMALL PLACE***

Publishing *A Small Place* in 1988, Kincaid intended to reintroduce her native land to the colonizer; a land that once used to be a British colony. The work's endeavor is not to entertain its western readers with a hospitable attitude, but rather the harsh and direct message to the western tourists intends to make them understand what her island and its inhabitants have gone through. Meanwhile, she attempts to clarify the serious outcomes and aftereffects of tourism as a neocolonial form of imperialism. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid debates numerous economic, political, cultural, social, and even environmental issues that Antigua has to deal with. This intelligent elaboration of such contemporary problems does not merely intend to motivate the inhabitants of the island toward post-colonial reformation, but also to make tourists, as the grandchildren of the colonizer, understand the irreversible consequences of colonialism.

Being a highly autobiography-oriented authoress, Kincaid works are mostly influenced by her memories of childhood, when she was living in Antigua as a British colonial subject. Her harsh and extremely direct criticism of the colonial activities, imposed on her native land by the colonizer, has made her an



internationally recognized anticolonial female icon. Antigua as a British colony and its inhabitants as English colonial subjects were educated to look up at the English as a cultural, economic, and social model. In other words, “The colonizers believed that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized, sophisticated, or, as postcolonial critics put it, metropolitan” (Tyson, 2010, p.419). As Kincaid in her novel states, “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, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 24).

The hostile tone is reflected prominently almost in all Kincaid’s works. *A Small Place*, in spite of its small volume, could be considered as a magnificent postcolonial Antiguan manifesto that illustrates anger as the historically ongoing discourse between the colonizer and the colonized. Sara Ahmed relates anger with pain and oppression and considers it as “a reasonable response to social injustice” (Ahmed, 2014, p.177). In her works, Kincaid clearly spends little effort to hide her anger towards colonization. Such a great deal of antipathy and abhorrence toward colonialism and its contemporary aftereffects is conspicuously reflected in her polemic and her textual current events. On the other hand, Kincaid’s non-fiction is a direct critique of Antiguan Culture; a thematic inclination that is equally tackled in her other novels. Though *A Small Place* approaches Antigua from a social and public point of view, the authoress’



other works like *Annie John*, and *At the Bottom of the River*, respectively, allocate more effort to emphasize individual and psychological perspectives.

Kincaid's transparent hatred expressions towards tourism and tourists is a multidimensional issue. This is not a surprising behavior from a figure who is an "extent of the British Empire and increased her compassion for the postcolonial poor demoralized by a legacy of cultural erasure and tourism, a modern version of slavery" (Snodgrass,2010, p.165). She defines a tourist as an ugly empty being who resembles rubbish. For her, a tourist not only is a souvenir from the old colonial past, disguised in form of neocolonialism, but also is one of the main reasons that her island has to deal with drug smuggling, prostitution, and gambling as its contemporary issues. After Antigua's independence, tourism took over agriculture. Agriculture had provided a good chance of employment and livelihood for the islanders, though it was mainly under the control of the British empire. Kincaid finds her people as colonial subjects more productive than free irresponsible individuals. The alternative industry is monopolized by a certain group of government officials who have control over the capital. This situation has converted Antigua into a mono-cultural economy country. Consequently, the capitalists have become richer, and common Antiguan became even poorer than they used to be. Locals in a developing country "are not able to reap the benefits of tourism due to large-scale transfer of tourism revenues out of the host country and due to the exclusion of local businesses and tourism products" (Saner, Yiu, and Filadoro, 2015, p.11).

Therefore, in Kincaid’s opinion, tourism as a post-colonial accelerating factor for poverty is a subject of hatred. Furthermore, tourists who travel to Antigua intend to spend a good time at any cost. This precisely matches the nature of tourism that is a process and act of spending time, in a place other than home, in order to pursuit pleasure, relaxation, and recreation, through making the best out of the provided commercial facilities (Walton,2018). Being in a higher financial situation than their host, they find themselves more privileged than the normal Antiguan inhabitants. They would not care if what they demand may lead to the island’s social corruption such as prostitution and drug smuggling. “They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go” (Kincaid, 1988, p.19).

As a means serving neocolonialism, tourism serves the capitalists, especially those of the industrial and developing countries, to enhance and fixate their financial position. Such an activity undermines public interests and is merely concerned with the individual benefits of the financier. In this regard, Eagleton states; “In a self-interested social order, the springs of public virtue are likely to appear obscure” (Eagleton,2009, p.19). Simultaneously, a tourist does not show any interest in the cultural, social, and political reality of the toured region, but in contrary, his perspective is too romanticized, hence sees the environment the way he fancies; “The road on which you are travelling is a very bad road, very much in need of repair. You are feeling wonderful, so you say, "Oh, what a marvelous change these bad roads are from the splendid highways



I am used to in North America” (Kincaid, 1988, p.5). Kincaid believes that the Antiguan people not only have achieved any success to show the real Antigua to others but actually they have played a facilitating role toward the visitors’ unreal perspective; “when the Queen came, all the roads that she would travel on were paved anew, so that the Queen might have been left with the impression that riding in a car in Antigua was a pleasant experience” (Kincaid, 1988, p.12).

In a deliberate act of genderization, *A Small Place* masculinizes the Antiguan social institutions; a society that the most influential public and private sectors are dominated by the male. In other Kincaid’s works such as; *Annie John*, *Lucy*, and *At the Bottom of the River*, it is suggested that the oppressed female, symbolizing culture, needs to live outside her limiting environment and apart from her mother in order to go through the process of maturation. This ideology, of a daughter being up brought in isolation from her mother, is naturally derived from the notion that in a male-dominated society, influenced by colonialism, a mother attempts to train a daughter whose behavior is socially accepted, and in consequence, unconsciously provides her society another dominated subject. Almost in all Kincaid’s works a female’s voice, criticizing masculine social institutions, is clearly heard who is striving to convey her authentic message, avoiding to be censored or colonially infiltrated by a mother. Hence, Kincaid appreciates the aesthetics of a rebellious angry voice for a colonial outlaw Antiguan daughter who will eventually become a future anticolonial mother. This is where anger plays a dialectic role and demonstrates a state of affirmation or denial. In this regard, Byerman (1995) notes that “Kincaid attacks society and



the culture while acknowledging the power of the mother(land) over her novelistic voice.”

Unlike Kincaid’s other works that occasionally acknowledge a motherly novelistic voice, *A Small Place* could be considered as an extended essay founded upon a direct attack toward colonialism, corrupt governmental institutions, and passive social mindset. Narrating the story, the writer first identifies the environment as her territory and determines her dominance over the reader, supposedly a tourist from a first-world country, by eliciting the first pronoun (I) for herself and the second pronoun(you) for the reader. Kincaid defines a tourist as “an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that, and it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you” (Kincaid, 1988, p.17). This way, she draws a distancing line between herself as the real owner of the environment and the tourist as a stranger to her and her ecology. She finds such a belittling definition vital to attack the colonialist’s assumption of itself as the superior party; a misbelief conveyed from the colonial era to the post-colonial period. Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978) clearly discusses this misconception and defines it as an instrument that the colonialist utilizes to justify its economic conquests or military invasions; a colonial point of view that is shaped by its own political, cultural, and religious background (Dobie,2015, p.209). Elaborating a discounter discourse in such a hostile context, Kincaid attempts to directly object the notions of colonialism, its values, and the colonialist’s superiority. Such notions were once elaborated as a colonial



facilitator to domesticate colonial subjects through immersion in the “universal” values of the literature of the colonizing country (Logan,2011, p.564). She portrays an island that belongs to her and the other inhabitants, hence the colonialist’s judgmental scales do not have any validity or credibility. Kincaid, via her harsh vocabulary, attempts to depict an authentic reflection of the colonialist’s image as an alien in the inhabitants’ mind and to clarify the falsehood of the self-imagined superior figure that he has in his consciousness. Such alienation of the colonizer and its culturally unaccustomed behavior exceeds to the edge of silliness that seems funny by the inhabitants;

“behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness (you do not look the way they look); the physical sight of you does not please them; you have bad manners (it is their custom to eat their food with their hands; you try eating their way, you look silly; you try eating the way you always eat, you look silly” (Kincaid, 1988, p.17).

In Antigua, a tourist either being himself or imitating the inhabitants is a subject of mockery for the originals. He cannot be or behave identically to an islander. Meanwhile, his own behavior does not belong to that environment and remains an outsider. This notion does not exclude the English language as an exception. On the contrary, language plays the most important role in imposing colonial hegemonies on the colonized. Ashcroft on this occasion asserts, “the interpolation of imperial culture, and the appropriation and transformation of



dominant forms of representation for the purposes of self-determination, focus with greatest intensity in the function of language” (Ashcroft,2001, p.56). Hence attacking the colonizer’s language facilitates encountering the colonizer’s values and ideologies. Even though Antiguans’ first language is English, yet the English spoken by British tourists tends to be funny for them. For Antiguans, the British accent sounds funny, because it doesn’t belong to the original people of the island. The Antiguan post-colonial English language is a culturally authenticated tongue that has undergone through, what Ashcraft calls; “the simultaneous abrogation of language as normative standard and the appropriation of language as cultural mode in the post-colonial text” (Ashcroft.etal,2002, p.53:54). Meanwhile, abrogation, as a linguistic means of decolonization, plays an important role to reject the imperial hegemonies and to motivate the colonized to look for original substitutions. Kincaid consciously targets the colonizer’s language, noting; “they do not like the way you speak (you have an accent); they collapse helpless from laughter, mimicking the way they imagine you must look as you carry out some everyday bodily function” (Kincaid, 1988, p.17). Also, the authoress indicates her profound abhorrence and the queer feeling concerning speaking the language of a bunch of criminals who colonized her land. She finds this situation ironic since the language of those people is the only available communicational means to convey her message. In spite of her hatred toward the language of the criminal, the writer decides to speak up the pain of her people rather than suffocating herself behind the closed doors.



Unlike what a western tourist might assume about himself as a superior figure in Antigua, based on his Eurocentric beliefs, the island's inhabitants have a belittled image of him as an alien to the island's environment and its inhabitants' culture. From another perspective, a western individual, who is unaccustomed to Antiguan culture, in Antigua seems as much mockingly odd as an Antiguan person scaled by Eurocentric scales in Europe by Europeans. From an Antiguan's point of view, such a distorted image deserves nothing but to be mocked and mimicked. Kincaid criticizes that such mimicry is performed behind the Antiguan's closed doors, due to their lack of courage. Being herself an Antiguan woman and aware of the ongoing conversations behind closed doors, she breaks this silence and becomes the voice of a voiceless nation. These mocking mimickers, once as a colonized nation, were forced by the colonizer to mimic its cultural values, social norms, and theological principles since the colonial discourse's primary objective are the conversion of radical others to domesticated subjects (McLeod, 2011, p.51).

In her essay, Kincaid sheds light upon an ironical contradiction, as an awakening fillip, to question the western culture and morality, especially the British Empire, comparing to the Antiguan's cultural and moral etiquette. In the following statements, she claims that even when the Antiguan's were British subjects, their human standards were significantly higher than the colonizers and that their behavior fundamentally contradicted from what they were taught about their culture and religion at the school and in the church;



“We thought they were un-Christian-like; we thought they were small-minded; we thought they were like animals, a bit below human standards as we understood those standards to be. We felt superior to all these people; we thought that perhaps the English among them who behaved this way weren't English” (Kincaid, 1988, p.29).

In spite of achieving independence in 1981, Antigua has made no eye-catching economic, political, or social progress. The ratio of poverty is too high since the public wealth is being distributed unfairly and the private sector's dominant businesses are run exclusively by a certain group of officials who have control over the state capital. Even though the state officials are original Antiguan, yet they have little concern about their people's prosperity and economic enhancement. They have granted the foreign countries, like Japan and the U.S, certain economic and military privileges for their own personal purposes. Furthermore, people are being kept silent, more specifically women who have no voice in their own male-dominated motherland. Antiguan, sincerely believe that the party which has to be blamed for all the above-mentioned contemporary issues is the colonialist. It was first the British Empire that introduced slavery to their land and made slaves the subjects of masters who were themselves other subjects of the British imperialism. In other words, they exonerate all the interior post-colonial factors like the corrupt government and their own passivity, claiming them to be “the descendants of those noble and exalted people, the slaves (Kincaid, 1988, p.81).



Simultaneously, this could be the general Antiguan mindset regarding colonialism as an escape gate from responsibilities, even though Antigua is now independent and its inhabitants are no longer slaves or colonial subjects. They need to be reminded that freedom costs free choice, and free choice leads to consequences. Kincaid attempts to penetrate into the core of her colonized culture via this social critique, that titles such as “noble and exalted people” were generally used by the colonizer to domesticate their Antiguan slave ancestors. The post-colonial Antiguan are stripped off such procrastinating titles, but instead, they are free people now. In other words, passivity and collective justification to have a corrupt present by a free nation is another way to give colonization credibility. Kincaid reminds her people that;

“once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings” (Kincaid, 1988, p.81).

One of the linguistic traits that can be observed in Kincaid’s language is her eclectic tactic in the way she deals with colonialism and its representations and the manner she directs her critique toward her people’s passivity. Kincaid, addressing the colonialist, adopts a harsh and direct tone, without any procrastinating mask. She attempts to illustrate the pain caused by the colonial



oppression in her language and clearly declares her opposition toward the British Empire as a colonial pole. For instance, for Kincaid, colonialist Britain resembles an “animal” and lacks human standards. Unlike her straightforward tone addressing the colonialist, Kincaid criticizes the Antiguan’s indifference and passivity in neat and implanted ironical statements. In the above-mentioned excerpt from *A Small Place*, the Antiguan are reminded that how the colonialists used to address the Antiguan people’s ancestors as “noble and exalted people” who were actually enslaved subjects. Kincaid believes slavery and subjugation are in contradiction with nobility and exaltedness. Hence, if a nation desires nobility, first it has to reclaim its freedom. For the writer, achieving freedom and independence is only one side of a coin and the other side of it is accepting the responsibilities that freedom brings after itself. Kincaid believes that such irresponsibility has made the Antiguan people look like tourists who visit Antigua for a short period of time to enjoy their vacation.

In a small isolated place like Antigua, that its people are imprisoned and have no way out, a library plays the role of a “big always open window” to the external world. Kincaid recalls when Antigua’s public liberty was not destroyed yet by the earthquake happened in 1974. Living as a girl in a limited colonial environment ruled by a patriarchal system, a library is the only place where Kincaid could have a better understanding of her identity in relation to her external world. Antigua’s library for the narrator, in spite of being an old wooden building, carries a bigger space than the whole Antigua. It’s from there, where the real identity of the speaker forms. Destruction of such an important building



for the speaker is so important. She considers it a general symbol of corruption since its repair has taken more than fifteen years.

Throughout the course of her long semi-autobiographical essay, Kincaid is in a constant challenge to introduce a real motherland to her addresses. Antigua is an island that many people from other nationalities like Syrian and Lebanese own big portions of land. Real Antiguanians are the descendants of the African slaves who were brought to the island by the British Empire to work on sugarcane plantations. If so, the arrival of the slaves simultaneously happens with the arrival of their masters, or maybe even later. Hence, the Antiguan community was born by colonialism. Such an allegory is affirmed by the cold mother-daughter relationship through most Kincaid's works. The story lacks such claims as formation of local and original natural and social movements that would become the foundation of a new Antigua, but the available shreds of evidence prove just the opposite. Antigua lacks originality which leads it to the blind imitation of a second-handed colonial culture. For instance, the only language spoken in Antigua is English; a language that is not imposed on an original local language. With this background, every Antiguan including the narrator of *A Small Place*, would have no choice but to shelter under the shade of a replicated colonial culture.

Anger is a natural emotional reaction toward pain and oppression. Kincaid's angry tone, in her *A Small Place*, represents the voice of the colonially suppressed Antiguan people. Deliberate elaboration of the first-person pronoun for herself as the Antiguan representative and second person pronoun for the



addressee, Kincaid initiates her argument against colonialism and declares her dissatisfaction toward the foreigner's presence in her land. Placing herself at the center of the discourse, she clarifies that in her land, colonial standards have no value. Kincaid enraged by her land's colonial history, people's cultural hollowness, passivity and indifference of the islanders, corruption, and tourism as a new form of capitalism decides to have a universal voice and speak up in a language that does not belong to her. Her authentic scolding tone is the direct reflection of her feelings in opposition to colonialism.

## **CONCLUSION**

Kincaid's Antigua, as a small island, is a significant model to observe postcolonial aftereffects from a present perspective. Being a previously British colony, Antigua severely suffers from colonialism aftereffects such as; administrative corruption, lack of national and individual identity, high socioeconomic differences, and serious ecological damages caused by tourism. Kincaid frustrated from the Antiguans' passivity, speaks up to disclose the serious harms which tourism as a manifestation of neocolonialism has left on her island. She finds the Antiguans' indifference toward the island's colonial past and tourism and a form of neocolonialism. She believes these factors are the instant reasons for her country's social, cultural, and economic backwardness. For her, a real Antiguan is the one who feels responsible toward the island and its future, unlike western tourists, the island's corrupted officials, and even the passive islanders.

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## پوخته:

داگیرکاری و نجامین وی ل سردمی نوی دهینه هژمارتن وهک نیک ژ چه مکن گرنگ بین پتر گهنگشه ل سر هاتیه کرن ب دیتنا قوتابخانا پاش داگیرکاری ژ لایی نفیسر و بیردوزقانتین سردم قه. پتریا فان بیرمندان ژ وان وهلاتانه بین ژنوی سر بهخویا خو راگه هاندی بیندهینه هژمارتن وهک دهنگین رهسن بین نهمو بین خو بین کو ب زوری هاتینه داگیر کرن. هر چه نده دقئ سردمی دا داگیرکاری ب شیوزای خویی کهن نهمایه لی تا نوکه کاریگری بین وی هر دهینه دیتن، و خوب چند شیوه مکن نوی خویادکته. جامیکا کینکید نیکه ژ نفیسرین ژن ژ هندیین روژ نا قایی یا کو د رومانا خو دا ب توندی رمحنی ل داگیرکاری ننگلیزان دکته و کاریگری بین وی و گهشت و گوزار وهک داگیرکاری نوی د دهته دیار کرن. نهف نامایه همول ددهین قه کولینه کا شیکاری پیشکیش دکته سهبارت دریز بییدانا نفیسر د رومانا وی دا "جهمکی بجویک" یا سال ۱۹۸۸ ب هملویستی وی بی توند، و هند جارن ژ بی توره، بهرامبر گهشتیارین روژ نا قایی ل جهی کو بخیر هاتنا وان و میهفانداریا وان بکته، هر وهسا قی کارن بازار گانی وهک نیمیز یالیزم و داگیرکاری نوی د دهته نیاسین.

صدی غضب امة في مكان صغير ; جزء من رسالة ماجستير بعنوان "الماضي الاستعماري وحاضر ما بعد الاستعمار في جامايكا كينكايد ; صدى غضب امة في مكان صغير (1988)، ولوسي، والسيرة الذاتية لوالدي

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## الملخص:

يعتبر الاستعمار ومخلفاته واحدا من اهم المفاهيم المثيرة للجدل اللتي يتم تناولها من قبل العديد من الكتاب والمنظرين المعاصرين منطلقا من منظور دراسات ما بعد الاستعمارية. معظم هؤلاء المفكرين

من دول نالت الاستقلال مؤخرا, حيث يعتبرون صوت حقيقي لامتهم المنكوبة استعماريا. وعلى الرغم من ذلك, لربما يبدو ان الاستعمار وممارساته التقليدية الغي او ابطل, لكن لا يزال اثره ومخلفاته تمتد حتى وقتنا الحاضر متخفيا باوجه جديدة ومختلفة عن السابق. جامايكا كينكايد هي واحدة من كاتبات جزر الهند الغربية, التي انتقدت بشدة الاستعمار البريطاني ومخلفاته وتأثيراته اللاحقة وكذلك السياحة كمظهر من مظاهر الاستعمار الجديد من خلال رواياتها وقصصها الادبية. يسعى هذا البحث تقديم تقرير تحليلي متعلق بشرح وضع المؤلف لهجة قاسية و احيانا فظة بدلا من موقف مرحب بحسن الضيافة تجاه السياح الغرب في روايتها "المكان صغير" 1988, مبينة ان العمل التجاري هو مظهر جديد للاستعمار والامبريالية بعد الحداثة.