

**“Monument to Rottenness”:
Postcolonial Enclave Tourism in Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place***

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Abstract

Postcolonial criticism has recently recovered tourism from the margins of postcolonial studies. This paper aims to contribute to the postcolonial discourse on island tourism by exploring Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988) as a discursive subversion of a tourism industry centered on the exclusion of local agency and history. Framed in postcolonial theory, the study focuses on enclave tourism as an unsustainable economy based on tourist/host division. It draws on Edensor’s (2000, 2001) and Carrigan’s (2010a, 2010b) conceptualizations of enclave tourism. Kincaid’s representation of postcolonial Antigua reveals the complicity of colonial legacy with unsustainable tourism development. Sites of ruins and decline become tourist attractions and monuments to rottenness, signifying the dispossession of the local Antiguans and the erasure of their culture. The study reveals how tourist enclaves, as represented in Kincaid’s travel narrative, do not only produce a divided and contrived space but also limit the tourist experience of the real Antigua.

Keywords: Island tourism, Enclave tourism, Postcolonial writing, Caribbean literature, Travel counter narrative, neocolonialism, Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

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Introduction:

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. (Kincaid, 1988, p. 23)

Theorizing discourses of tourism, gender, and culture, Aitchison (2001) questions: “Can the subaltern speak (in tourism)?” (p.133). With the publication of Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988), an emergent postcolonial female voice has reclaimed tourism from the margins of postcolonial literature and criticism. Yes, the subaltern can speak in tourism and signal a subversive position of enunciation. Kincaid moved to New York City in 1966 and returned to visit Antigua in 1986 after twenty years of absence from her homeland. In her travel narrative, the author describes a postcolonial island which, to her disappointment, still suffers from ongoing forms of (neo)colonial hegemony. This paper explores the complicity of postcolonial island tourism industry with colonial and neocolonial power politics. Arguing that tourism is implicated in Euro-American hegemony, Kincaid’s narrative redirects the tourist/reader gaze to the injustices inflicted by the exclusionary ideology and the unsustainable development of this economy on the small Caribbean island of Antigua.

Literature Review:

While postcolonial discourses have engaged with the production of space and the dynamics of power and economy in travel writing, tourism has long been off focus in postcolonial studies (Carrigan, 2014). Only recently, postcolonial criticism has opened up to intervene emergent discourses on the tourism industry in the particular socio-historical contexts of postcolonial islands. Carrigan (2010b) has sketched ways to understand postcolonial tourism through literary engagements with discourses of environmental appropriation and cultural consumption.

Environmental appropriation, cultural commoditization, and tourist space planning are manifested in the construction and careful management of what came to be known as enclave tourism. Edensor (2000) defines Enclave tourism in relation to the construction of purified spaces, emphasizing the centrality of control and policing to keep “undesirable elements and social practices” from intruding and disrupting the enclosed space (p. 328). Emphasizing its exclusionary nature, Saarinen (2017) conceptualizes enclave tourism as “a well-defined perimeter (that) separates the tourism space from the rest of socio-spatial environment” (p. 428). Theorizing enclave tourism, Edensor (2001) draws distinctions between enclave and heterogeneous tourist spaces based on the rigidity of the divide that borders the inside tourists from the local community outside. The borders of enclave tourist spaces are less porous than the blurred boundaries of heterogeneous tourist spaces, and prevent contact with the locals. Types of enclave tourist spaces include resort enclaves, mobile enclaves, and urban tourist enclaves, among others.

The exploitive forms of the tourism industry have become a major concern in postcolonial criticism. These tourist projects have accelerated environmental and social transformations, replacing the plantations and the sugar economy of the Caribbean with enclosed spaces “for pleasing the leisured” (Carrigan 2010a, p. 155). Focusing on how tourism remaps St Lucian Lake

as represented in Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), Carrigan (2010a) argues that this epic poem opens space for industry futures peculiar to St Lucian's modality while simultaneously critiquing exploitive practices (p. 156). Carrigan (2010a) emphasizes Walcott's use of the word 'erosion' to grapple with the postcolonial conception of tourism as both a vector of change and a sign of colonial consumption. With a particular focus on dark tourism, Carrigan (2014) contends that Kincaid's literary text, *A Small Place*, makes clear how "one person's paradise can be a site of conflict and suffering to others," suggesting the usefulness of postcolonial theory to provide "rich and nuanced understanding of these tensions in site use and evaluation" (p. 246). This study will take Carrigan's argument further by engaging with the tension between an enclave tourism, based on the production of circumscribed space, and unsustainable development in Kincaid's representation of postcolonial island tourism.

Recently, postcolonial studies have shifted attention to the (neo)colonialist practices underpinning the tourism industry, particularly in the Caribbean islands. Kincaid's engagement with tourism in Antigua has made *A Small Place* a major text for postcolonial revisions of island tourism. Baleiro and Quinteiro (2019) investigate Kincaid's narrative as a useful material for promoting an interdisciplinary dialogue between literary and tourism studies. The literary tourism, experienced by readers/tourists of Kincaid's travelogue, suggests a counter effect to a tourism industry based on the division of space and the marginalization of local heritage and community. Arguing that *A Small Place* represents tourism as a form of neocolonialism that challenges the consolidation of local Antiguan culture, the study proposes the text for the production and staging of literary tourism. Literary tourism products and experiences, according to Baleiro and Quinteiro (2018), might offer reclamations and reenactments of tourist itinerary, tours to Kincaid's places, literary festivals and café, which bring tourists closer to local hosts and readjust the tourist focus to local sites and culture. However, since it is impossible for literary tourism to replace an economy based largely on mass tourism industry, the study suggests this mode as a subversive and complementary enterprise to foster more responsible and sustainable tourism practices. However, Baleiro's theorization of literary tourism needs further clarification by charting ways for using literary accounts to discursively revisit the hidden sites and marginalized histories of the locals, or possibly using narratives to reproduce the cultural identity of the tourist space.

Johnson, S. and Meenu, B. (2019) argue that Kincaid's *A Small Place* offers a counter travel narrative of Antigua, reversing the power politics of the colonial gaze in Western travelogues. By shifting the position of enunciation between the Western tourist, the native Antiguan, and the Antiguan who revisits the land after years of absence in the diaspora, the narrative negotiates the polyphony of multiple and diverse voices and stories. The narrator, according to Johnson and Meenu, invites the tourists/readers to redirect their gaze to the untold stories of local colonial history, and the perpetuation of neocolonial hegemony under the guise of tourism industry. Tũm, O (2017) articulates a similar position by deconstructing tourism, reducing it to a tool for a new, "more legalized" form of colonization (p. 111). His study inverts the tourist gaze and redirects it against the injustices of tourism that reproduce the tourist/host relationship in terms of the colonialist master/servant binarism.

Bringing together Kincaid's *A Small Place* and Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, Beriault (2017) argues that both texts disrupt the construction of manufactured, sanitized, and beautified islands, and reconstruct the local histories of Antigua and Jamaica respectively. Beriault's intervention examines how the two postcolonial narratives unsettle the production of homogenous, artificial, and ahistorical spaces and re-inscribe the agency of the local community in the production of lived social space. Here, this paper builds on Beriault's argument by exploring the interrelation between enclave tourism and unsustainable development, which, while stimulating economic activity, simultaneously relegates the native land away from global dynamics of change and improvement.

Methodology:

This study is informed by the postcolonial theoretical framework. The subversive rhetoric of postcolonial writing provides a useful frame for understanding Kincaid's counter narrative and reconstruction of Antigua's local history and culture. Moreover, the paper draws on emergent conceptualizations of enclave tourism as charted by Edensor (2000, 2001) and Carrigan (2010a, 2010b).

Analysis:

As the introductory quote from *A Small Place* might suggest, the text grabbles with the colonial legacy inherent in the production and consumption of tourism. Kincaid's (1988) non-fictional narrative features the return of the postcolonial immigrant to her native land. The narrative opens with a direct address to the tourist; "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" (p. 3). Framing the reader as a tourist, the narrator traverses the manufactured world of Antigua while reconstructing its local agency and history. Calling for a multiplicity of perspectives, Bruner (2001) contends that "all tourism and all tourists were not the same" (p. 881), and Kincaid's contribution offers a postcolonial perspective on enclave tourism in the particular context of the Caribbean islands.

Kincaid's emphasis on the tourist gaze is central to understanding the dialectics of power and space in the narrative. Guides, guards, and boundaries manipulate what the tourist gaze can see. In *A Small Place*, the narrator follows the tourist path from the point of arrival at V. C. Bird International Airport to the final destination in one of the tourist resorts. Through this short journey, the tourist gaze is directed, as particular 'sites' are made possible to the viewer while undesired elements of the local culture are kept away from the scene. A tourist can see the brand new cars of taxi drivers but cannot imagine the modest houses where they live, which are "far beneath the status of the car" (Kincaid, 1988, p. 7). The taxi driver here functions as a guide, intervening in the tourist's perception of the place. From the limited perspective allowed by the taxi's framed window, the tourist can observe an island that seems, by European standards, both static and exotic. The exotic effect of decline and ruins seems entertaining to a Western tourist coming for leisure. Carrigan (2010a), however, highlights how the mobility of the taxi affects the tourist's perspective, adding more dynamics and flexibility to the point of view. In contrast with Kincaid's representation of the taxi as a limitation to the tourist experience of place, Walcott's poem, *Omeros*, according to Carrigan (2010a), reveals the dynamic, "complex and multilayered

vision of St. Lucian modernity ... generated from the perspective of that fast-paced, double-edged emblem of modernity and change, the taxi" (p. 160).

The tourist gaze, however, seems indirectly controlled by the collective subconscious of a Western culture that perceives postcolonial lands through Eurocentric norms. In the process of the visual consumption of space, Urry (1992) theorizes how the tourist gaze is manipulated by the viewer's collective memory and cultural constructions. The colonial legacy of England continues to govern tourists' perceptions of Antigua. With much emphasis, the narrator exclaims:

Have I given you the impression that the Antigua I grew up in revolved almost completely around England? Well, that was so. I met the world through England and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England. (Kincaid, 1988, p. 33)

The vision of Kincaid's tourist/reader is narrowed by a reservoir of cultural constructs associated with colonialist discourses and stereotyped images.

These boundaries that control the tourist's gaze are central to the manufacturing of enclave tourism. Kincaid's narrative offers a subtle critique of a type of tourism industry organized around the coasts of postcolonial Caribbean islands, and defined by enclosed tourist spaces. Being exclusively and carefully planned spaces, tourism enclaves usually allow very limited access for the local Antiguan. It is impossible to cross the divide between host and guest in these 'tourist bubbles,' to use Saarinen's description (2016). "Even though all the beaches in Antigua are by law public beaches," Kincaid (1988) observes, "Antiguans are not allowed on the beaches of this hotel; they are stopped at the gate by guards; and soon the best beaches in Antigua will be closed to Antiguan" (p. 58). Beriault (2017) reads Kincaid's passage in relation to measures taken by Antiguan authorities to erase locals' visibility by pushing them to lesser beaches, suggesting a form of tourism industry firmly entrenched in colonial legacy.

However, the nature of the border and the measure of its porousness depend on the type of the enclave, the social and political backgrounds of its visitors, and its entertaining activities. A clear example of an enclave tourist space is the Mill Reef Club. "The Mill Reef Club declared itself completely private, and the only Antiguan (black people) allowed to go there were servants" (Kincaid, 1988, p. 27). The boundaries are tightened to prevent the infiltration of the undesired local community. The walls that separate the tourist guest from the native Antiguan host remain "clean and white and high" (Kincaid, 1988, p. 25). Tourist enclaves include hotels with coastal activities, entertainment facilities, and gambling casinos. "Gambling, linked here completely to tourism," notes Kincaid, "is another popular industry in the West Indies" (p. 61). Kincaid opposes a discourse that supports this gambling business in terms of providing job opportunities for the wretched of Antigua. These tourist enclaves, along with their gambling casinos, represent an exploitive form that fails to impact sustainable development.

The construction of tourist enclaves requires the manufacturing of a contrived space to meet the tourists' needs, standards, and aspirations. Kincaid's (1988) narrative criticizes how the

natural and the built environment have been rejuvenated in preparation for the visit of the Princess of England who has come for leisure in Antigua:

how every building that she would enter was repaired and painted so that it looked brand-new, how every beach she would sun herself on had to look as if no one had ever sun there before (I wonder now what they did about the poor sea? I mean, can a sea be made to look brand-new?) and how every-body she met was the best Antiguan body to meet” (p. 33).

The reinvention of tourist enclaves as untrodden spaces reflects the legacy of British colonization, based on the virginity and emptiness of the colonial land, and the negation of local culture and history. These tourist projects are based on absencing the local Antigua from the sights of Western tourists.

Kincaid’s (1988) representation, however, demonstrates how the tourism industry in the postcolonial island of Antigua has not only failed to effect sustainable development, but also monumentalized corruption. With dismay, Kincaid (1988) laments a colonial intervention that has turned sites of rottenness and negligence into tourist attractions:

that strange voice, then—the voice that suggests innocence, art, lunacy—that they say these things, pausing to take breath before this monument to rottenness, that monument to rottenness, as if they were tour guides; as if having observed 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 tourist attraction. (pp. 68-69)

Here, “the strange voice” is metaphoric of mediums, discursive or otherwise, that intervene and mediate tourist consumption of space.

While taking the reader/tourist in a virtual journey from the airport to the tourist destination, *A Small Place* introduces a palimpsest of the colonial past and postcolonial present of Antigua through memorial sites. These sites bear witness to the violence of history and geography and the corruption of authority. Passing by the ruins of the public library, which was damaged in the earthquake of 1974, the narrator mourns the loss of knowledge and the absence of serious plans for repair. As a tourist, you might find it entertaining to stop by the site and read the sign placed on the front: “This building was damaged in the earthquake of 1974. Repairs are pending” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 9). Since that year and until the publication of the narrative in 1988, repairs have not been resumed; books are carelessly stored in “cardboard boxes in a room, gathering mildew, or dust, or ruin” (p. 43). Boutiques for tourists, Kincaid observes, have invaded and transformed the landscape of what has been a splendid library and house of knowledge. The damaged building has remained ‘a monument to rottenness,’ signifying ‘degradation and humiliation.’

The damage of the library, albeit by a natural disaster, monumentalizes the corruption of an authority that gives more attention to the tourism industry than sustainable development. “Only

tourism itself is more important” (Kincaid, 1988, p. 59). Kincaid cites another example of a monument to rottenness, namely the rusting refinery of “West Indies Oil” (p. 67), which stands there singing a eulogy for the decline of the Antiguan dream. Central to the tourism industry, despite its disreputable history, is the Barclays Banking business in Antigua. The Barclays brothers, former slave-traders, shifted to banking when England outlawed the slave trade. Their branches along the road represent monuments to rottenness, reminding both tourists and locals of the colonial legacy of the slave trade in the region.

Tourism in postcolonial islands is highly associated with the transformation of the local landscape. The main roads in Antigua that tourists usually drive through are renamed after English militants and government officers. Kincaid (1988) cites the examples of a street named after Horatio Nelson, Rodney Street, Hood Street, Hawkins, and Drake Street, to mention only a few (p. 24). Foreign architectural designs have been imposed on the land by Syrian and Lebanese investors. The imported style of building, known as ‘condominium’ has replaced local building forms. According to Kincaid:

The condominium style of building, ugly in any climate, is especially ugly in a small, hot place. Imagine these concrete, box-like structures, stacked against each other as if they were tinned goods in a store with not enough shelf space overlooking an expanse of three different shades of blue seawater. (p. 62)

The concretization of Antiguan space, while enclaving both tourists and locals, unsettles any designs for sustainable development.

Antigua is also enclaved from the dynamics of historical progress. According to Bériault (2017), Kincaid intervenes in the margin between the lived and the conceived to disrupt the fabricated stories of Antigua’s historical stasis. The tourism industry that keeps the local community out of its enclosed circles and the lack of sustainable economy have rendered Antigua a timeless space. Having experienced life in the West, Kincaid (1988) is able to maintain a critical distance while observing her native land. Upon returning after years of absence, she expresses her disillusionment by the stagnant conditions of a Postcolonial Antigua:

They [Antiguans] 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. Nothing, then, natural or unnatural, to leave a mark on their character. (pp. 79-80)

History has left no mark on this small island. British colonization has not impacted real advancement in economy, industry, health care, or even urban planning and infrastructure. What remains of Western intervention is a timeless island with enclaved tourist spaces for European and North American communities, looking for a ‘calm’ place for their leisure.

The dissonant heritage that includes sites of death and disaster becomes part of what is defined as ‘dark tourism.’ While giving more attention to island tourism centered on the sea and the sun, Kincaid (1988) points, though only in passing, to the tourist practice of visiting traumatic sites. The narrative ridicules the tourist’s lack of real understanding of the historical stories behind these tragic sites; “being a person visiting heaps of deaths and ruins and feeling alive and inspired at the sight of it; to being a person lying on some faraway beach, your stilled body stinking and glistening in the sand” (p. 16). Discourses on dark tourism, Carrigan (2014) contends, draw attention to the reassertion of marginalized stories and suppressed voices. However, the tourist in Kincaid’s representation, leaves the dark scene, back to the enclaved resort, unchanged and unenlightened.

From a Western colonial perspective, the beauty of Antigua resides in this timelessness and remoteness from history and changeability. For a fuller tourist experience, Antigua must remain an enclave island and “A Small Place,” as the title suggests. Kincaid (1988) reflects on this postcolonial imprisonment;

It is as if, then, the beauty—the beauty of the sea, the land, the air, the trees, the market, the people, the sounds they make—were a prison, and as if everything and everybody inside it were locked in and everything and everybody that is not inside it were locked out. (p. 79)

The narrative emphasizes the continuity of a neocolonial hegemony that justifies fencing off the postcolonial Caribbean island and distancing it from history and geography in terms of the tourism industry—a place for tourist attraction and leisure.

Integral to the narrative’s critique of Western colonial hegemony is the succinct commentary on a monologic Western form of Enlightenment. Addressing the Western colonial figure, Kincaid (1988) challenges: “You might feel that you had understood the meaning of the Age of Enlightenment [...]; you loved knowledge, and wherever you went you made sure to build a school, a library (yes, and in both of these places you distorted or erased my history and glorified your own” (p. 36). For Kincaid, the “utter ruin” can be ascribed to a history of colonization, justified by a Western form of Enlightenment (p. 36). That Enlightenment has undermined other histories to meet imperial expansionism and exploitation of other lands and other people.

This colonial hegemony that tends to transform colonies into mimics of the colonial center produces an in-between form of identity that belongs nowhere. Kincaid’s (1988) *A Small Place* relates the postcolonial degradation and backwardness of Antigua to British colonization and its racial ideologies:

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” (p. 24).

This appropriation of the land and its heritage causes harm to the native cultural identity. Marschall (2004) emphasizes how commemorative practices associated with historical monuments and heritage sites can be empowering both to the tourism economy and to the reassertion of cultural identity. According to Kincaid's representation, Antigua represents a type of 'harmful' neocolonial tourism that separates itself from the local community and culture.

Reconstructing Antigua, Kincaid (1988) understands beauty in terms of a genuine and unique representation that remains faithful to the original. "Antigua is beautiful," the author contends, "Antigua is too beautiful. Sometimes the beauty of it seems unreal" (p. 77). The beauty of Antigua resides in its natural elements: the sea, the sun, the shore, and the trees. "No real sand on any real shore is that fine" (p. 78). However, that beauty of the virgin land has been buried under the present contrived space, manufactured by foreign control. What the colonizer has produced is a disfigured Antigua that pleases nobody but the Western tourist.

Kincaid (1988) critiques the complicity of the tourism industry in postcolonial Caribbean islands with historical erasure. For Kincaid, Antigua stands on a "rubbish heap of history" (p. 31). The narrative cites the event of burning books in the 1930s by the Antiguan Prime-Minister, who was then a young bookkeeper, working for a merchant-importer. The narrative relates the dubious fortune of the bookkeeper to possible designs with colonial powers to manipulate history by demolishing the stories of "honest" local political leaders (p. 71): Moreover, the landscape of postcolonial Antigua seems empty of monuments to glorify key moments or figures of its local and anti-colonial history. The restoration of the public library has been delayed, or more accurately replaced by plans to build tourist shops over that plot of land. Only tourism is more important than national history.

This link between tourism, historical erasure, and foreign exploitation explains the negative attitude in *A Small Place* towards tourism. The tourism industry, in the form of enclaves invested by foreign companies, fails to effect sustainable development in Antigua. These projects are described by Saarinen (2017) as "environmental bubbles," "tourist bubbles," and "tourist utopias" that exclude its local neighborhoods (p. 428). The refinement of these enclosed spaces is contrasted with the lack of a sanitary system outside its walls. However, tourists are not immune to the harm of this unsustainable economy. Addressing the reader framed as a tourist, Kincaid (1988) warns: "the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua, there is no proper sewage-disposal system" (p. 14). Having set the scene for the Antiguan's harmony with a timeless backwardness, sustained by unsustainable and exclusionary industry, Kincaid, then, contents "[t]hat the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain" (p. 18).

Conclusion

After years of absence, Kincaid revisits Antigua both physically and discursively, confirming that the subaltern can speak in tourism. Her travel narrative, *A Small Place*, signals an act of resistance to the ongoing impact of Western hegemony. Drawing on the postcolonial

framework, this study has explored the interrelation between island tourism and (neo)colonial practices in the particular context of the Caribbean island of Antigua. Kincaid's counter narrative redirects the tourist gaze to see the unseen reality of the land. For Kincaid, the tourism industry is a form of neocolonial unsustainable economy that has reinforced the guest/host binarism and maintained the degradation and poverty of the local community.

A Small Place offers a critique of the racial ideologies and exploitive practices underwriting the manufacturing of enclave tourism in Antigua, and by extension, many other Caribbean islands. These enclave tourist spaces are marked by the invisibility of the natives and the bordering of tourists' locales. The present tourist enclaves constitute a new version of the past colonial enclave of the Caribbean island. Kincaid's postcolonial intervention brings local Antigua back to the scene, and reconfigures the Antigua that the present tourist cannot see. Through this discursive subversion, Kincaid reclaims local agency and history, and promotes an opposing voice to the exploitive forms of the tourism industry.

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