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Research Article

Ethical Tourism Development: An Ecotourism Perspective in Jamaica Kincaid's Travel Narrative

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Abstract

This study reads Jamaica Kincaid's travel narrative *A Small Place* (1988) from the ecotourism perspective. The narrative paints a bleak portrait of the post-independent Antigua that has been promoting capitalism vis-a-vis the government ministers and foreign traders consequently engulfing the gap between the rich and the poor, and the tourists and the hosts. The author deplores the way the government has fostered tourism, which, bourgeoned along with the rise of capitalism, has sustained neocolonialism by adversely disrupting the environmental, economic, and social aspects of Antigua. Due to the deleterious consequences of tourism, the author expresses her vile rant on the tourists (who belong to the white race) relegating them to ugly human things. She describes them as choosy to see certain things. Here, this raises a question: why does the author dehumanize the tourists as ugly things who see only certain things not others? The study resolves this question that the author reduces the tourists to that position because they perpetuate their forefathers' masterly position in gazing the native Antiguans as servants. They see only those things that they like to see from the perspective of the tourist gaze. For the analytic purpose, the study engages theoretical insights from scholars in the ecotourism perspective such as Martha Honey, Robert Fletcher and others, which as propounded by these scholars, promotes responsible and ethical tourism by underscoring environmental conservation, economic development, and respect to native peoples and their cultures. Finally, the study concludes that Kincaid denounces the ongoing trends in tourism that are thoroughly adverse for Antiguan environment and people. She urges the tourists to get transformed from ugly human things to human beings by discarding their self-proclaimed master's yoke. The study expects to add a critical reading into Kincaid's narrative, as well as into the area of ecotourism.

Keywords: Travel narrative, ecotourism development, ethical tourism, Antiguan environment

Introduction

This paper reads Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988) from the ecotourism perspective to explore and analyze how this travel narrative delivers environmental concerns in the post-independent Antigua. By the time the narrative was produced, Antigua had gained independence for the self-rule from the colonial clutch of the United Kingdom, but she remained incompetent to prevent the neo-colonial influence that spread out in the form of capitalism aided by tourism. Antigua's predicament got unstoppably worsened. The narrative portrays such a bleak picture of Antigua that has been debilitated by the corruption of the government ministers and their indifference to the construction of basic infrastructures, stagnation of development, grip of the foreign traders in the national economy, conversion of fertile land into commercial mansions and condominiums, pollution on the beach and waters of the ocean, exploitation of the natives, tourism, and so on. Against this backdrop, the author expresses her vile rant on the tourists (who are westerners) relegating them to ugly human things and describes what they see and what not. This study revolves around the question: why does the author portray the tourists as ugly things who see only certain things but not others? The study interprets that Kincaid portrays the tourists as such because they have appropriated their forefathers' role as masters. As their colonial forefathers' role, they have left home and intruded other people's land where they enjoy the natural beauty at the cost of the exploitation of local people and environment. They see only what they like to see but not the real hazards brought about by themselves and their forefathers in the life of Antigua. The tourists do not see the environmental pollution produced by their excretion, bath water and so on. Nor do they see the desecration of the fertile land through the construction of streets and buildings of concrete. This paper finds that Kincaid's rant underlies the urgency of the transformation of the tourists from insensitive humans to sensitive ones towards the well-being of the Antiguan people and environment. Kincaid is not absolutely against the tourists and tourism rather against the existing practices of tourism. Finally, this paper concludes that Kincaid's narrative advocates for ecotourism or ethical and responsible tourism that pays, as the scholars of ecotourism propound, a necessary attention to environmental conservation and cultural preservation of the indigenous peoples. For the interpretive and analytical purpose, the study engages both available critical responses and conceptual insights from scholars in ecotourism perspective such as Martha Honey, Robert Fletcher and others.

Various critics have offered their views on Kincaid's *A Small Place*. They have mostly read it as a counter-travel narrative for its sharp attack on colonialism, neo-colonialism, and tourism and its impacts. For example, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan read it, along with Caryll Phillips's *The European Tribe*, as a work of counter-travel writing in the sense that it "pits itself against the dominant Eurocentric model" (22). According to them, both the narratives strongly raise the voice against the European cultural prejudice and destructive value-systems of racial hierarchies. In the same line to Holland and Huggan, Sherin M. Johnson and Meenu B. read the narrative as a counter-travel narrative against the dominant western travelogues. According to them, Kincaid reverses "the colonial gaze" by reducing "the tourist to the level of humiliation and dehumanization . . . putting them in inferior position and rebuking them" (215). Another critic, Keith E. Byerman understands the book to be an expression of Kincaid's anger against the contemporary situation of Antigua which has resulted from colonialism, corruption and tourism. Byerman states that the book is an "extended attack on colonialism, corruption, and tourism as a kind of neo-colonialism" (92). Closer to Byerman's reading, Lesley Larkin too reads the book as a critique of tourism that builds on neo-liberal economy and ideologies. But Larkin, acknowledging the book as a literary

agent or a teacher that is aimed at modern tourists as its readers, calls upon them to be critical, and denounces the contemporary practices of "affinity with global tourism and imperialism" (194). Similarly, critics such as Munazza Majeed, Uzma Imtiaz and Akifa Imtiaz interpret the book as a historicization of Antiqua past as well as present and also Kincaid's claim of the reterritorialization of land via raising voice against environmental justice and racism. According to them, "Her writing is an act of historicizing the Antiguan past as well as present—and act of reterritorialization which involves a reclaiming of the land by giving voice to environmental justice and environmental racism" (7). This way, there are different critical responses on the text which depict the narrative's attack on colonialism, neo-colonialism and tourism. Despite the fact that the critics consider this novel as a counter-travel narrative, my reading departs from theirs in that it focuses on the need of ecotourism. It argues that, Kincaid humiliates and dehumanizes the tourists to witness the prevailing hazards brought by them but ultimately asks them to get transformed into human beings. If transformed, they will be sensitive and responsible towards the Antiguan environment, economy, people, and cultures consequently assisting in economically sustainable development, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and mutual international relations. This study reads the narrative from this angle as it is under-researched yet.

Linking Conservation and Ecotourism Development

Modern mass tourism began in the 1840s when Thomas Cook first organized package tour for holidays. It was developed out of capitalism, which has now been "one of the largest and most profitable" industries in the contemporary globalized world (Ginder 1). Tourism has association with colonization: "[It] is understood to be the same as, or continuous with, acts of European exploration set in the past" (Braun 189). Ecotourism, a branch of tourism itself, emerged in the 1960s out of environmental movements. Originated then primarily as a marginal, countercultural pursuit, ecotourism has now "become the center of a substantial global infrastructure, practiced in nearly every nation" (Fletcher 7) and "the most rapidly expanding sector of tourism industry" (Honey 6). Mass tourism has both positive and negative impacts as David A. Fennel elucidates: "Tourism has been both lauded and denounced for its capacity to transform regions physically. In the former case, tourism is the provider of long-term development opportunities; in the latter the ecological and sociological disturbance can be overwhelming" (6). Fennel confirms that tourism can bring economic and physical development in tourist destinations but it often causes adverse damage in the ecological and sociological balance. To control the negative consequences of tourism, ecotourism emanated as an alternative tourism. It advocates for the ethical and responsible travel into natural areas with awareness about the conservation of the environment and the wellbeing of the indigenous people.

Since its conception, ecotourism has been explained/defined from different angles. Historically, the term was first introduced by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican environmentalist, in 1983. Ceballos-Lascurain defines ecotourism as "travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas" (qtd. in Fennel 9). According to this definition, ecotourism involves going into natural areas for studying, admiring and enjoying wild life as well as cultural manifestations. But it misses to speak on the conservation of environment and culture.

Jim Butcher argues that ecotourism keeps a symbiotic relationship between development and conservation. He holds, "Ecotourism can constitute sustainable

development in the rural developing world on the basis that it can bring a symbiotic, or mutually reinforcing, relationship between conservation and development" (134-35). According to Butcher, ecotourism emphasizes proportionately on physical development and environmental conservation. But this definition again misses the cultural aspect of ecotourism.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) founded in 1990 as a non-profit organization aimed at the promotion of ecotourism offers a broader definition of ecotourism: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the wellbeing of local people" (qtd. in Honey 6). In the current brochure, TIES defines ecotourism as "a viable tool for conservation, protection of biocultural diversity, and sustainable community development." According to TIES's definition, eco-tourism is a responsible travel for the conservation of the biodiversity as well as of the sustainable development and upliftment of the community.

Considering ecotourism synonymous to ecotravel, Deborah McLaren refers its mission as: "At its best, ecotravel promotes environmental conservation, international understanding and cooperation, political and economic empowerment of local populations, and cultural preservation. . . . At its worst, ecotravel is environmentally destructive, economically exploitative, culturally insensitive, 'greenwashed' travel" (91-92). McLaren's definition covers the cultural dimension of ecotourism along with the conservation of environment, international cooperation, and empowerment of indigenous peoples. But, McLaren also warns, if the mission goes wrong, it brings negative impacts the ways tourism does.

Martha Honey acknowledges the practice of ecotourism to be a cure for the depredations of tourism has caused in ecosystems, indigenous communities and cultures. Honey maintains,

> Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and, some claim, build world peace. (4)

As Honey contends, ecotourism can be a tool in raising funds for conservation and scientific researches. It can protect ecosystems, promote economic standards of indigenous communities, and preserve their cultural heritage. It can also awaken environmental awareness and social conscience in tourism industry by educating tourists to be unbiased. Similarly, it can even be an effectual tool for the building of peace in the world. Honey's definition is an inclusive one.

Similar to Honey's definition, Robert Fletcher sheds light on the two dimensions of ecotourism: material and cultural or discursive. In its material dimension, it promotes economic and physical development of the tourist areas. In cultural dimension, it pays heed to the local traditions, values and norms. Fletcher argues, as a material process, ecotourism becomes "a means by which economies and physical environments are transformed to conform with the industry's expectations" and as a cultural or discursive process, it embodies "beliefs, norms, and values that . . . are implicitly propagated via ecotourism's promotion as a strategy for sustainable development and environmental conservation" (3). Ecotourism aims at sustainable development and environmental conservation by way of propagating local beliefs, norms and values.

Finally, despite diverse definitions, it can be explained at large that ecotourism is a responsible and ethical practice of tourism that pays an equal attention to the economic and physical development as well as to the preservation of local beliefs, norms and

values. Kincaid's *A Small Place* can be taken as an exemplary work on ecotourism since it attacks sharply on the environmentally irresponsive tourists and the government, and the ongoing practices of tourism industry in post-independent Antigua. It also conveys a message to the concerned authorities and the tourists to take necessary precautions to protect environment, national economy and value the local people and their cultures.

Textual Interpretation: From Rant on Tourists to Ecotourism

The main objective of this paper is to examine why the author reduces the tourists to ugly human things and presents them as choosy to see certain things but not others. Addressing to a tourist as her audience, the author begins her narrative: "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" (3). By the tourist, the author means "a North American or European—to be frank, white—and not an Antiguan black" (4). But, she caustically decries the tourist as an ugly human thing: "A tourist is an ugly human being" (14). But why? Kincaid lambasts the tourists by dehumanizing them as debased thing because she finds them to be the active players in perpetuating the irreparable damage initiated by their colonial forefathers under the facade of tourism. Appropriating their forefathers' masterly role, they intrude other people's land and exterminate the local economy, politics, culture, life style, and environment irrecoverably.

Tourism is, in a sense, a continuation of "European exploration" as Bruce Braun contends (189). Perpetuating the exploration trends of the past, tourists now see only those things they either wish to see or are set to see. Finding tourists' resemblance to their forefathers, Kincaid describes their choosy nature in seeing and not seeing things. The tourists will see only those sites that they opt to view from the perspective of tourist gaze. In the tourist gaze as John Urry contends: "Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered" (4). Exactly, the tourists choose those places that provide intense pleasures which are unavailable during customary encounters.

The tourists in Antigua will see only the touristic places and sites, and enjoy to the most. They will see the contrived Antigua not the real one. They will not see the impacts of exploitation, oppression and domination done in the past. Nor will they see the current complexities of the day to day life of the natives. But they will see sparkling waters of the ocean, sunny beaches, cozy hotels, cheap brothels, airports, Japanese model cars, concrete government offices, big commercial condominiums and mansions of foreign businessmen, and so on. They will see the fascinating scenery of Antigua that is incomparable in the whole West Indies. Kincaid displays, "You are a tourist and you have not yet seen a school in Antigua, you have not yet seen the hospital in Antigua, you have not yet seen a public monument in Antigua. As your plane descends to land, you might say, What a beautiful island is—more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen" (3). They will see the signboard of the airport named after the Prime Minister of post-independent Antigua. But, they will not see the markers of developments such as schools, hospitals or historical monuments because they are actually absent—the self-ruled government pays no heed to such infrastructures.

Kincaid is aware that the Prime Minister and his ministers have been promoting tourism industry for the benefit of their own. They prioritize the construction of the required infrastructures for tourism to solving basic needs of the people. Kincaid traces the transformation of colonialism into neo-colonialism. For this reason, as Byerman has argued, she attacks on "colonialism, corruption, and tourism as a kind of neo-colonialism" (92). Kincaid criticizes both the tourists and the government ministers for

playing an active role in transmuting the beautiful island into the present exacerbated condition.

The tourists require cars immediately after they land in the airport to get to their hotels. They will see brand new Japanese-made cars waiting for them for this purpose. The car drivers have recently purchased the cars under the bank loans. It is quite easy to get loans since, the government, gripped hard by the clutches of neocolonialism, readily encourages banks "to make loans available for cars" but "for houses not easily available" (7). Strangely, the government prioritizes loans for cars for tourists to houses for the destitute natives! More strangely, the government ministers themselves possess the dealership of cars. Kincaid reveals, "if you ask again why [loans for cars], you will be told that the two main car dealerships in Antigua are owned in part or outright by ministers in government" (7). The government has "affinity with global tourism and imperialism" as Larkin contends (194). Kincaid criticizes the government for this.

The tourists will not see schools, libraries, hospitals, and other institutions. While prioritizing tourism, the government has not built them. The Piggot's School, the Holberton Hospital and the splendid library established during the colonial times have been severely ruined and are now out of work. The Piggot's School building is "sitting in a sea of dust" looking like "some latrines" (7). The Holberton Hospital lacks qualified doctors—has only three doctors, even whom "no actual Antiguan trusts" (8). When ill, the ministers fly to New York for treatment whereas the ordinary people lose their lives in the absence of treatment. The splendid library, destroyed by the earthquake of 1974, hangs a sign reading: "REPAIRS ARE PENDING" (9). What a shame! The sign hangs there more than a decade and the government does not repair it! And the tourists will not see this because they will not need a book to borrow from. They have brought their "own books" to read (9). They read "books about economic history, one of those books explaining how the West (meaning Europe and North America after its conquest and settlement by Europeans) got rich" (9). They are interested in reading about the success of their forefathers but not in the "exploitation, oppression, domination" done by them upon the natives (10). They do not see the consequences of the bad deeds of their forefathers because they deny to witness them.

The tourists will not see the ghettos of the natives for they will be guided through different official buildings and big mansions of merchants. "[Y]ou are now, passing by Government House . . . the Prime Minister's Office and the Parliament Building . . . the American Embassy" remarks Kincaid (10). These buildings are built keeping the tourists in mind. Kincaid affirms, "If it were not for you, they would not have Government House, and Prime Minister's Office, and Parliament Building and embassy of powerful country" (10-11). Understandably, the tourism industry has been influencing the government of Antigua.

The tourists will also see the splendid mansions and condominiums built and owned by the foreign merchants. They will see a mansion, "an extraordinary house painted the color of old cow dung, with more aerials and antennas attached to it than you will see even at the American Embassy" (11). The owner of this mansion is a merchant family from the Middle East who entered Antigua less than twenty years ago and sold "dry goods door to door from suitcases they carried on their backs" (11). This family has prospered unimaginably and gained political power. One of the members has been appointed an ambassador. They have owned a big portion of Antiguan land. They regularly lend money to the government for the construction of huge buildings. Kincaid states, "Now they own a lot of Antigua; they regularly lend money to the government, they build enormous (for Antigua), ugly (for Antigua), concrete buildings in Antigua's capital, St John's, which the government then rents for huge sums of money; a member

of their family is the Antiguan Ambassador to Syria" (11). The Syrian and Lebanese merchants have owned a lot of land property in the countryside where they build condominiums and sell to the North Americans and Europeans. They build concrete buildings for rent. The government rents all the space. Kincaid worries about this as: "Why cannot the government in Antigua build its own government buildings? What is the real interest paid on these loans made to the governments?" (62). The foreigners own big commercial property, which the government neglects to regulate. It has completely fallen under the grip of neocolonialism. With a motive of attracting tourists, the government erects high concrete buildings and condominiums at the cost of healthy environment.

Near to that family's mansion, the tourists will see more other mansions. Two of them belong to a drug smuggler. Besides from smuggling, his affluence comes from selling cars in tens and tens: "ten of this one, ten of that one" (11). Overlooking his mansion, there is another mansion of a beautiful lady notoriously known as Evita. She is the girlfriend of "somebody very high up in the government" (12). Her relationship has made her the owner of many boutiques and big property, and enabled easy access to speak in the cabinet meetings.

Besides artificial structures of concrete, the tourists will undoubtedly see the natural beauty of Antigua as well. They will see, through the windows of their hotels, different color shades of water of the ocean. Kincaid mentions, "Far out, to the horizon, the color of the water is navy-blue; nearer the water is the color of the North American Sky. From there to the shore, the water is pale, silvery, clear, so clear that you can see its pinkish-white sand bottom. Oh, what beauty! Oh, what beauty! You have never seen anything like this. You are so excited" (13). The tourists will be lost in an utmost ecstasy to see such a fascinating view.

On the beach, the tourists will see other tourists—the white people again, who are incredibly ugly—enjoying with themselves. Kincaid writes, "You see an incredibly unattractive, fat, pastrylike-fleshed woman enjoying a walk on the beautiful sand, with a man, an incredibly unattractive, fat, pastrylike-fleshed man; you see the pleasure they are taking in their surroundings" (13). The tourists, then, will see themselves on the beach enjoying sunbathing, walking, and making new friends with their own kind. They will see eating locally grown delicious food. After all, the tourists will see only themselves not the local people and their miseries. "You see yourself, you see yourself" repeatedly exclaims Kincaid (13). The tourists will not see the pollution created with their excretion and the bath water.

The tourists will see the streets named after various colonial English rulers such as Rodney Street, Hawkins Street, Hood Street and Drake Street. Kincaid calls the English rulers criminal and bad minded since, during their rule, they turned everything and everyone into English: "And so everywhere they went they turned it into English; and everybody they met they turned English" (24). The tourists will see the Barclays Bank established by the slave traders, the Barclay brothers.

The tourists will see a place called the Mill Reef Club built not by the British but by the North Americans. This suggests the shift of power over Antigua from Britain to North America. To say in another way, colonial power has shifted into neocolonial one. The Mill Reef Club is the resident of the North Americans during their holidays. Except the servants, no Antiguan is allowed there. Kincaid describes, "Mill Reef Club declared itself completely private and the only Antiguans (black people) allowed to go there were servants" (27). Mill Reef Club has been a neocolonial tourist enclave.

The tourists will see only what they like to see and motivated to see via tourist eye. They do not see the bleak side of life that the native people are struggling with.

Tourism industry in Antigua has benefited only the people of high ranks, foreign businessmen and the tourists themselves not the local people. It has been "a metaphor of neocolonialism" as Oercan Tum alludes (103). Kincaid counters this kind of irresponsible and unethical tourism. Thus, she sarcastically calls the tourists ugly. Said that, however, Kincaid is not necessarily in favor of banning the tourists and the tourism completely. Rather, she is advocating for the ecotourism, which as discussed in the Ecotourism Development: A Theoretical Framework section above is a responsible travel. Ecotourism pays heed to promotion of "beliefs, norms, and values . . . [as well as] sustainable development and environmental conservation" (Fletcher 3). Ecotourism aims at benefitting all the stakeholders: the government, business persons, tourists and the local people.

Finally, Kincaid's narrative does not only counter the prevailing detrimental practices of tourism, but it also shows an alternative for control. For this, she basically urges the tourists to throw off their long-held masterly role, and be responsible and sensitive towards the Antiguan environment, economy, people and culture. If so, they will be no longer ugly things but human beings in a true sense. Kincaid expresses, "Of course, the whole thing is, once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to" (81). With this positive note, Kincaid signals at the need of ecotourism. If so, as Honey argues, ecotourism will be "hailed as a panacea" for the pervasive hazards caused by tourism (4). Antigua will transform into a beautiful ecotourist island advantageous for all the locals as well as the tourists equally.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how Kincaid's *A Small Place* has delivered ecotourism concerns in the post-independent Antigua. It has analyzed why Kincaid reverses the tourist gaze by relegating the tourists to ugly human things, and what they see or do not see there. It has interpreted that she identifies the tourists as ugly human things since they are the active agents of neo-colonialism in perpetuating the colonial legacy under the façade of tourism. Equipped with the masterly yoke of colonial forefathers, they intrude the Antiguan territory, behave with the locals as their servants, and damage the local economy, culture, and environment. While traveling, they see only the government buildings, streets, airports, big mansions, and condominiums, newly made Japanese cars, fabulous tourist sites, local food, local servants and so on. But they are blind to the hard lives of the native people. They will not see the hazards caused by colonialism and neo-colonialism alike. They will not see the environment being deteriorated because of them. They will see only what they wish to see from the perspective of their tourist gaze. Therefore, Kincaid makes a scathing attack on such tourists calling them ugly human things. But, she is optimistic that if they remove off the masterly yoke and behave as ordinary people, they will be transformed into beautiful human beings. There will not be exploitation of local people, their economy and natural environment. The author, thus, offers her insights into the urgency of ecotourism for the conservation of Antiguan environment, sustainable economic development, respect of local people and their culture, and mutual relationship between tourists and the natives. Finally, the study expects to have contributed a critical reading into Kincaid's travel narrative as well as into the area of ecotourism

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