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Brochure Discourse and the Tourist Gaze: a Critical Reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*

ABSTRACT

The present paper scrutinizes the phenomenon of island tourism, drawing a comparison between tourism and colonialism through a critical reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988). Kincaid's work portrays and narrates the arrival of tourists on the Caribbean Island of Antigua, observed through the lens of the narrator, unmasking the brutal side of tourism, which jeopardizes both native populations and their environments, with visitors neglecting the very identity of those who inhabit these 'fetishized' and mythicized places. Extending this perspective to all the island *paradises* which became target destinations for a certain kind of tourism after decolonization – for the promotional discourse around these idyllic places features the semantic field of paradise – the paper reflects on the impact of brochure discourse on the perception of island destinations.

KEYWORDS

Island Tourism; Brochure Discourse; Jamaica Kincaid; *A Small Place*; Postcolonial; Paradise.

ABSTRACT

Il presente lavoro indaga il fenomeno del turismo insulare attraverso un confronto tra turismo e colonialismo che prende le mosse da una lettura critica di *A Small Place* (1988) di Jamaica Kincaid. Nell'opera di Kincaid, lo sguardo e la voce della narratrice ci offrono una rappresentazione dell'arrivo dei turisti ad Antigua, nota isola dei Caraibi, e il ritratto che ne emerge smaschera una fisionomia brutale del turismo che può arrivare a costituire una minaccia per le popolazioni autoctone e il loro territorio nel momento in cui i visitatori non riconoscono l'identità e l'essenza di chi vive in tali luoghi "feticizzati" e miticizzati. Estendendo una simile prospettiva all'insieme dei *paradisi* insulari divenuti meta di un certo tipo di turismo dopo la decolonizzazione – proprio in virtù del fatto che la promozione di questi siti idilliaci ruota sistematicamente intorno al campo semantico del "paradiso" – nel saggio si evidenzia l'impatto del linguaggio pubblicitario sulla percezione delle destinazioni turistiche insulari.

KEYWORDS

Turismo Insulare; Linguaggio Pubblicitario; Jamaica Kincaid; *A Small Place*; Postcoloniale; Paradiso.

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1. Introduction

After religion, tourism is our most ambitious collective experiment in organizing fictions of desire.
Dean MacCannell, *The Ethics of Sightseeing*

Since Global North travelers began to fly comfortably towards exotic island destinations, these have become the epitome of paradise in tourism promotional discourse. For some destinations, tourist flows began shortly after independence. Today's journeys towards 'virgin' lands echo the journeys colonialists undertook to expand their empires, and these territories – «scattered confetti of empire» (Kapstein, 2017: xxxvi) – are nowadays promoted as breathtaking and pristine destinations in brochure discourse. Indeed, marketing campaigns for Western consumers have delved into the *topos* of paradise, stretching it to the extreme, to the point that 'island paradises' and their inhabitants end up all looking the same in promotional discourse, in what seems a farcical *mise en scene* of the myth of paradise. In fact, the *topos* of a "virgin paradise" is not only related to brochure discourse on island destinations but also deeply rooted in colonial discourse. In the words of Anthony Carrigan, «contemporary island tourism can be interpreted as a late capitalist product of previous western colonial projects, bound up discursively with the fetishization and creative manipulation of island space» (2011: 17).

Brochure discourse is a term introduced by Ian Gregory Strachan (2002) to address stereotyped discourses embedded in destination marketing texts. The brochure as a text genre plays a crucial role in portraying tourist destinations; «[i]t is informative but mainly promotional, as it is meant to construct a positive destination image and to turn readers into visitors» (Francesconi, 2011: 344). As Strachan suggests, marketing campaigns for Caribbean destinations are generally not written by Caribbean companies; «tourist advertising is typically the work of foreign advertising firms enlisted by the tourist ministries of local governments, and it contains scenes that middle-class Americans and Europeans want to see of "the islands," as they are homogeneously known. Or, at the very least, tourist advertising offers what local governments believe their foreign clientele want to see» (Strachan, 2002: 1).

To accomplish this task, brochure discourse has target-specific master narratives which exploit a selection of keywords and images, stimulating the image of paradise in readers' minds; «Gaze», as Graham Dann states, «has been shaped by phrase» (1996: 23).

As John Urry has extensively explained, the tourist gaze is «socially organized and systematized» (Urry, 2002: 1) and there are «industries developed to meet that gaze» (Urry, 2002: 38). Brochures, catalogues, travelogues, DMOs, DMCs, etc. all contribute to shape the image of a destination and have a crucial responsibility in *widening* or *limiting* the tourist's gaze:

> Via static and moving pictures, written texts and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients. By addressing them in terms of their own culturally predicated needs and motivations, it hopes to push them out of the armchair and on to the plane – to turn them into tourists. Later, the language of tourism gently talks to them about the possible places they can visit by introducing various pull factors or attractions of competing destinations. Thus, since much of this rhetoric is both logically and temporally prior to any travel or sightseeing, one can legitimately argue that tourism is grounded in discourse (Dann, 1996: 2).

Staging a paradise implies an effort to shape the image of a place as pristine and un-spoilt, standing still, void of crowds. The result is a lexical and visual repertoire which portrays myth-places inhabited by people living a 'natural life' as opposed to Western lifestyles.

Brochure discourse often gathers around crystallized and stereotyped descriptions of tourist destinations conveying a message which is highly tautological and limited in content: «[a] cursory perusal of current tourist brochures shows that tropical islands throughout the world are marketed according to similarly clichéd images of sea, sun, sand, swaying palms, and sexual permissiveness» (Carrigan, 2012: 16).

In brochure discourse, the tourist gaze is channelled towards specific attractions and sights while undesirable aspects are generally obscured. The act of taking pictures is itself a matter of selecting a subject and moulding its meaning, detached from other connected subjects/meanings. Clearly, what needs to be assessed, investigating brochure discourse, is what is 'omitted from the picture'. The manipulative strength of brochure discourse is also reflected in what consumers/travelers recount of their tourist experience; interestingly, the very same images spread on catalogues and websites are transferred into personal social media (i.e. Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, etc.) used by travellers to narrate their journey, or simply to flex. In the last two decades, with the increasingly spasmodic need of self-exposure of one's own private life, travellers have become brand ambassadors of destinations via posted images and texts. A quick check on posts published during a 'stay in paradise' seems to confirm the permanence of the gaze on palms, empty white beaches and crystal-clear waters.

Apparently, gazers reinforce brochure discourse by confirming having seen what they had been promoted: a picture by the beach, sipping a cocktail laying on a hammock with a backdrop of swaying palms or, thinking of Europe, a picture by the Eiffel Tower, people 'holding' the leaning tower of Pisa, the Colosseum, etc. What is usually taken out of the pictures are the tourists themselves, the queues, the crowds, the traffic and the sweat. With the use of pow-

erful filters to improve images, both people and spaces are polished and made 'flawless' in an uncanny process of hyper-beautification.

> The tourist imaginary depends on systematic restrictions and exclusions. Something almost never depicted in travel poster imagery is the one thing most noticeable at popular tourist destinations: crowds. The idea there might be large numbers of people, locals and/or other tourists, is disturbing to the ego (MacCannell, 2011: 156).

What tourists *see* and take pictures of is what they have been drawn to see, typically reinforcing provided stereotypes rather than challenging them. In this perspective, Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, artfully defined by Carrigan a «counter-ethnographic travelogue» (Carrigan, 2012: 129), metaphorically subverts brochure discourse showing how impaired the tourist vision is and making the readers see the backstage of the tourism industry's display.

Although Jamaica Kincaid's other works are deeply connected to postcolonialism, for the purpose of this paper I have decided to look exclusively at *A Small Place* for its strong bond to brochure discourse.

Published in 1988, after a journey Kincaid undertook to decolonized Antigua (which became independent in 1981), after twenty years from her last stay on the island, this long essay represents «Kincaid's most vehement manifesto on the impacts of mass tourism on the lives of the Antiguans» (Baleiro and Quinteiro, 2018: 676).

Divided in four sections, the first section is focused on post-independence Antigua and on the tourist's gaze; the narrator exposes the 'behind the scenes', showing the readers the impact of colonization and decolonization on an island whose urban space is punctuated by signposts from the past. The second part is a recollection of Antigua during colonialism, gathered from the memories of a seven-year-old child (the author's), while the third part focuses on the figure of neo-colonialists and bitterly alludes to the corruption spread on the island after independence, partly 'sold' to foreign entrepreneurs to build concrete condos, casinos, etc. transforming Antigua from a «colonial enclave into a tourist enclave» (Baleiro and Quinteiro, 2018: 678). The fourth and last part of Kincaid's work is a celebration of Antigua's beauty, its almost unreal attractiveness and fascination.

On the whole, *A Small Place* sabotages brochure discourse, confronting the readers – addressing them directly – with a series of questions and sharp statements (often put between brackets) which leave no room for a reply; the narrator is angry and she exposes the readers to her rage, a rage that nothing can take away: «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» (Kincaid, 1988: 32). The use of second personal pronoun to address the audi-

ence seems to echo, if not mock, the use of second personal pronoun used in the brochure discourse to create engagement.

In *A Small Place*, the narrator drives readers to see the fierceness of tourism outlining a parallel with the fierceness of colonialism which forced upon each colonized country British rules, British architecture, British customs, and the English language; «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: 24).

Whereas *A Small Place* does not leave the reader/tourist with a chance of redemption, I maintain that reading Kincaid's work, along with the work of many diasporic authors who 'return' to their country of origins with their works, may induce a change in perspective and teach both tourist operators and visitors to change attitude towards tourist destinations and their local people, as well as shaping a different promotional discourse around island destinations.

In 2023, Antigua and Barbuda hosted over 930 thousand visitors, an increase of circa 43% compared to 2022[1]. Antigua's perimeter is about 87 km, and it covers an area of 280 square km[2]. It is indeed a small island and its beauty, like that of other Caribbean 'paradises', seems to be its curse. Like many other small places which are constantly 'invaded' by a number of visitors exceeding actual physical capacity, provoking overtourism phenomena which negatively impact residents' and visitors' lives, flows need to be monitored and controlled keeping in mind the goals of sustainability listed in the 2030 Agenda[3].

It has been repeatedly argued[4] that tourism is an important source of income for Small Island Developing States (the so-called SIDS) but it is essential to keep in mind that many SIDS tourist hotels and resorts are owned by foreigners and that local people do not get rich from tourism; «while tourism can be an important income generator, on its own it cannot close the global gap between the Rich and the Rest. Quite the contrary, neocolonialist tourism often perpetuates and even exacerbates the void between the Rich and the Rest» (Jaakson, 2004: 180).

Reading *A Small Place* from an eco-tourist perspective, Toya Nath Upad-

[1] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/816323/antigua-and-barbuda-number-of-tourist-arrivals/#:~:text=Antigua%20and%20Barbuda%2C%20an%20island,year%20by%20about%2043%20percent> (20.08. 2024).

[2] <https://www.britannica.com/place/Antigua-and-Barbuda#ref54579> (22.08.2024).

[3] <HTTPS://SDGS.UN.ORG/GOALS> (06.10.2024).

[4] See, for example, <https://unctad.org/news/small-island-developing-states-face-uphill-battle-covid-19-recovery; Impact of COVID-19 on tourism in small island developing states | UNCTAD>; <Full article: Small Island Developing States (SIDS) COVID-19 post-pandemic tourism recovery: A system dynamics approach (tandfonline.com)>; <Tourism and COVID-19 – unprecedented economic impacts | UNWTO; Small Island Destinations in Critical Need of Urgent Support as Tourism Plunges, UNWTO Warns>.

hyay (2024) states that Kincaid requires tourists to transform into human beings: «[i]f 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» (Upadhyay, 2024: 94).

2. The Image of Paradise as a Legacy of Colonial Past

The bond between postcolonial studies and tourism has been significantly consolidated by scholarly research[5]. This bond is cemented both by the fact that many tourist destinations were colonies and by the way these countries are now promoted and gazed upon, as paradises to be 'conquered'. Like colonizers who reached lands and exploited their abundance and their native populations, tourists reach islands to find their treasure, their 'booty' to take home. «it was the accounts of French and English voyages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which confirmed the discovery of 'paradise'. […] Government utilised and encouraged such images in order to encourage settlement and imperialist mercantile and political expansion» (Hall and Tucker, 2004: 9).

The very notion of paradise, and its use in promotional discourse, reveals the west-centric nature of brochure discourse. The image of 'tourist paradise' in exotic destinations is tailored for Western tourists as the metaphor of paradise on earth may not be fit or adequate for other cultures. As Mohamed Zain Sulaiman (2016) showed in his linguistic analysis of the multilingual Australian official website[6], Malay readers found the use of the Malay word for paradise (*syurga*), utilized in the Malay version of the website, awkward and inadequate in the context of tourist promotion; to the Malays, «'paradise' is strictly a matter of the Hereafter and the quest for an earthly paradise, which exists in modern Western society, does not exist in the Malay culture» (Sulaiman, 2016: 36).

In portraying an island destination as a pristine paradise, suspended in time, brochure discourse 'freezes' Global South destinations (and their populations) in a time bubble, reinforcing an unequal balance between the Global North and the Global South. While one part of the world seems to progress, the other seems to remain still and 'uncontaminated' to provide overstimulated and stressed contemporary travelers a place to detox and regenerate, experiencing healthy sensorial 'deprivation'. This reinforces an unbalanced rapport between host and guest and leads to a myopic vision of the host, exactly as happened in colonial regimes.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid mentions a place, the Mill Reef Club, which was

[5] See, among others, Bruner (2001); Carrigan (2011); d'Hauteserre (2004); Hall and Tucker (2004); Kapstein (2017); McMahon (2019); Mietzner and Storch (2019); Nash (1989); Palmer (1994); Strachan (2002), Vitorio (2019).

[6] <www.australia.com> (10.07.2024).

«built by some people from North America who wanted to live in Antigua and spend their holidays in Antigua but who seemed not to like Antiguans (black people) at all, for the Mill Reef Club declared itself completely private, and the only Antiguans (black people) allowed to go there were servants» (Kincaid, 1988: 27). Those people, we read, «were strangers in someone else's home, and then they refused to talk to their hosts or have anything human, anything intimate, to do with them» (Kincaid, 1988: 27). Interestingly, the Mill Reef Club still exists and thrives as a «rare, shining tribute to a gentler, less commercial vision of paradise», claiming to be «a private club offering its members and their guests an exclusive vacation paradise»[7].

The desire to near and penetrate 'virgin' lands seems to represent the common denominator between colonial expansion and tourist expansion; different 'arms', of course, and different outcomes.

> Turning the gaze to tourist sites of the 'global south' reveals not only that colonial continuities shape limitations in engaging with one another, but also that the politics of current global mobilities are very much the politics of movements that resemble, in their directedness and economies, movements in the era of colonialism (Mietzner and Storch, 2019: 5).

Kincaid's *A Small Place* confronts the mentioned topics; the author portrays the journey of tourists picking them up from the airport and following them through the island, investigating their expectations, unveiling their desires and their lack of perception of what natives actually think of them. Kincaid repeatedly weaves the memories of colonial past, naming places and streets that the tourist sees in her/his taxi ride, recalling the name of the few roads that were paved for the Queen's visit in 1985 (Kincaid, 1988: 12), refreshing the memory of the visitor who is unaware of too many things to be left in peace to enjoy her/his slice of paradise.

Kincaid questions the tourist being unperceptive of the colonial past of Antigua: travelers *must* wonder why names of streets and places on a Caribbean Island are British. The «onomastic inquiry» (Storch, 2019: 84) she propels is aimed at showing the open wounds of the colonial past. The sites tourists see «bear witness to the violence of history and geography and the corruption of authority» (Aljahdali, 2020: 134).

Addressing the tourist, mentioning the fact that the airport is named after the Prime Minister of Antigua, the narrator (Kincaid herself) says: «You may be the sort of tourist who would wonder why a Prime Minister would want an airport named after him – why not a school, why not a hospital, why not some great public monument?» (Kincaid, 1988: 1). The reason is that tourists

[7] <https://millreefclub.ag/web/pages/home> (25.08.2024).

have no idea of the conditions schools and hospitals are in Antigua, nor do they care, because they are on holiday and do not want to spoil their holidays with unpleasant things. But the narrator also tells the tourists that they should not neglect the conditions under which the hospital operates:

> You pass the hospital, the Holberton Hospital, and how wrong you are not to think about this, for though you are a tourist on your holiday, what if your heart should miss a few beats? What if a blood vessel in your neck should break? […]. Will you be comforted to know that the hospital is staffed with doctors that no actual Antiguan trusts; […] that when the Minister of Health himself doesn't feel well he takes the first plane to New York to see a real doctor; that if any one of the ministers in government needs medical care he flies to New York to get it? (Kincaid, 1988: 7-8).

In a process of obliteration of negative aspects, tourism promotional texts tend to obliterate 'uncomfortable things'. Inducing travelers to feel guilty for the past is clearly not a winning card to play in tourism promotional discourse, threatening a ruined journey, and Kincaid is well aware of that; «you needn't let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday» (Kincaid, 1988: 10).

3. 'If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see'

For the invisible to be seen, it need only have
its cover peeled off, be viewed from another
angle, or looked into more deeply.
Dean MacCannell, *The Ethics of Sightseeing*

Antigua, like other Caribbean destinations, is moulded within promotional discourse into the framed cliché of 'paradise', with its perfect climate and its welcoming and smiling natives. As previously stated, in *A Small Place* we observe a counter-narration of the island; the process of unveiling witnessed by readers takes place in a peculiar narrative form; «[f]raming the reader as a tourist, the narrator traverses the manufactured world of Antigua while reconstructing its local agency and history» (Aljahdali, 2020: 132).

By portraying the tourists' gaze, *A Small Place* shows their impaired and limited vision. Tourists move through Antigua – as through any destination – with virtual blinkers, with a pre-packed baggage of notions on the destination gathered from brochure discourse. In the words of Beverley Ann Simmons, «travel mediators teach tourists to surface graze. With one eye open, they en-

courage tourists to adopt the privileged status in the fantasy and to appreciate the spectacular beauty of place through the tourist gaze. With the other eye tightly closed, they encourage the tourist to shut out the realities of the everyday in its multiple forms» (Simmons, 2004: 53).

To make their travel dream come through, tourists are set in a bubble, their gaze is metaphorically scotomized. The process of being swallowed in the bubble starts at pre-trip level, as promotional material on a destination represents the first contact with it. Once at the destination, each traveler works hard to move within the borders of the bubble.

> Conventional tourist imagery is constructed so as to suppress all possible metaphoricity except the singular, simple, and docile depiction of tourist fulfilment. There should be no nuance or suggestion of something other or different from what you think you are seeing. There should be no detail that "pricks the image" (MacCannell, 2011: 162).

While looking at the signs they have been fed with, through promotional discourse, tourists look for those signs, iconic of each place, and expect to find them, discarding or neglecting other signs. In the first line of *A Small Place* we read: «If you go to Antigua as a tourist, that is what you will see» (Kincaid, 1988: 3) and since the tourist is a white American or a European – and not «an Antiguan black returning to Antigua from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives» (Kincaid, 1988: 4) – disembarking runs smoothly and swiftly, bags are not searched, and the tourist is ushered into the dream. The reader may already feel that someone is left behind, someone gazing at another scenario, someone whose cardboard boxes are being checked.

Addressing the just-landed tourist at the airport, the narrator states: «You emerge from customs into the hot, clear air: immediately you feel cleansed, immediately you feel blessed (which is to say special); you feel free» (Kincaid, 1988: 5). The passage grasps the immediate feeling of relief of the tourists who enter their bubble. It is at this point that most tourists hope their dreams begin, but to make the dream come 'true' things must be unseen, certain things (i.e., lack of water, poor conditions of roads, hospitals and schools, lack of a library, etc.) must not cross the tourist's mind nor field of vision. The psychological necessity for an exotic island to regenerate implies the existence of a paradise on earth and a paradise must be virgin and lush. In this perspective, as Aljahdali aptly puts it, the tourist gaze «seems indirectly controlled by the collective subconscious of a Western culture that perceives postcolonial lands through Eurocentric norms. […] The colonial legacy of England continues to govern tourists' perceptions of Antigua» (Aljahdali, 2020: 133).

Even if the roads are very bad, the tourists on their taxi rides take it for an experience: «You are feeling wonderful, so you say, "Oh, what a marvellous

change these bad roads are from the splendid highways I am used to in North America." (Or, worse, Europe.)» (Kincaid, 1988: 5). Tourists are excited by the reckless driving of the Antiguan taxi driver. Something tourists should be familiar with, the narrator highlights, as «most of the taxi drivers in New York are from places in the world like this» (Kincaid, 1988: 6).

There is a counter narrative being written alongside the main plot; those who left Antigua to find a job abroad, those who drive New York taxis and come back to visit family with cardboard boxes.

The idea of gazing is strictly related to Urry's idea of tourist gazing (Urry, 2002) as the gaze of the tourists is constrained within scenarios which have been created for them, predigested for them. This leads to a «selective viewing» (Carrigan, 2012: 37) which reduces the spectrum of what is being seen. The «banality of touristic observation» (Carrigan, 2012: 38) prevents tourists from seeing the impact on destinations in terms of sustainability and the historical legacy weaved into the landscape, as magnificently outlined in the following passage from *A Small Place*:

> *You see yourself* taking a walk on that beach, *you see yourself* meeting new people […]. *You see yourself* eating some delicious, locally grown food. *You see yourself*, *you see yourself*… You must not wonder what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it. You must not wonder where your bathwater went when you pulled out the stopper. You must not wonder what happened when you brushed your teeth. Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in; the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, […]. But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean is even bigger; it would amaze even you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up (Kincaid, 1988: 13-14, my emphasis).

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid shows the act of seeing from a limited position. The tourist is observed while s/he looks from the taxi window, providing a clear example of the «selective viewing» mentioned by Carrigan (2012: 37).

While the tourist sits in the taxi and looks outside – «(because you want to get your money's worth)» (Kincaid, 1988: 6) – the narrator names and describes the places s/he encounters. What seems to be «some latrines for people just passing by» (Kincaid, 1988: 7) is the school of Antigua, the following building is the Holberton Hospital, that the tourist gaze neglects (and should not), the decayed building the tourist sees next was the library, damaged by the 1974 earthquake, and never repaired. After these wrecked sites, the taxi passes next to buildings standing as the legacy of British colonization: the Government House, the Office of the Prime Minister and the Parliament building, followed by big villas owned respectively by a Middle East family – «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» (Kincaid, 1988: 11) – a mansion owned by a drug smuggler, and a woman that locals call Evita. Not being provided with information, the passenger looks at a landscape without deciphering its signs. At the end of the ride, readers may guess that what has been gazed at has not been seen. In the words of Carrigan, «As a result, the richly connotative, socio-political landscape bisected by the taxi is rendered illegible to an imagination saturated with tropical island place-myths» (Carrigan, 2012: 39).

After the taxi ride, the tourist is again engaged in looking through another frame, this time from the hotel window:

> What a beautiful island Antigua is – more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen, and they were very beautiful, in their way, but they were much too green, much too lush with vegetation, which indicated to you, the tourist, that they got quite a bit of rainfall, and rain is the very thing that you, just now, do not want, for you are thinking of the hard and cold and dark long days you spent working in North America (or, worse, Europe), earning some money so that you could stay in this place (Antigua) where the sun always shines and where the climate is deliciously hot and dry for the four to ten days you are going to be staying there; 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 […] must never cross your mind (Kincaid, 1988: 3-4).

The narrator is here alluding to the suffering endured by natives due to lack of rain, which is something that a tourist would never want to hear while on holiday. The issue of sustainability is tackled here as resorts and hotels provide plenteous clean and fresh water which is wasted by guests.

A Small Place spoils the tourist experience and subverts the image of paradisiac Antigua; the narrator undermines the tourists' sense of tranquillity. By vehemently blaming tourists, ridiculing them – «A tourist is an ugly human being» (Kincaid, 1988: 14) – Kincaid leaves the reader with an awkward feeling, a warning: you cannot visit a place without seeing the people who inhabit it, without knowing the historical scars that a specific land carries and – above all – without being conscious of the *rubbish* you take into a small place like Antigua.

4. Brochure Discourse and the Missed Encounter with the Other

Tourism promotional texts often portray what Anne Storch calls «a moderate kind of paradise» (Storch, 2019: 81) allowing visitors to crave for the

tempting snake – because temptation and sexual permissiveness is a very appealing attractor for tourists – minus the punishment, a place where to feel free but not in danger, where the others are *always* good and welcoming.

In the words of Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker, «the term 'paradise' is often utilized in the promotion of postcolonial island states in a manner that reinforces Western ideas of a romantic other» (Hall and Tucker, 2004: 9-10).

The myth of island paradises is profoundly connected to past literary representations of the islands embedded in Rousseau's romantic notion of the noble savage (Hall and Tucker, 2004: 9; Hennig, 2002: 176; Wels, 2004: 85) and in the first travelogues of the European explorers.

> The noble savage lives in harmony with the forces of nature, in contrast to modern man, who has become alienated from his origins. Paradisiacal man is simple and undemanding, cheerful and communicative; he lives spontaneously and is guided by his instincts. He does not know ambition, competition or the desire for power. He lives a carefree existence, unburdened by the pressures of civilization. […] Tourist publications of all kinds show mostly happy faces of simple, content, 'unspoiled' people smiling at the readers. Native inhabitants are portrayed preferably in traditional dress and costumes, and celebrating traditional feasts seems to be one of their main pastimes. If they are shown at work, their occupations are almost exclusively pre-industrial activities (Hennig, 2002: 176).

In order to 'sell' the image of welcoming natives, tourism promotional discourse often comes with the commodification of the Other; natives in natural paradises are often objectified (Storch, 2019: 82) and stuck in the past.

In *A Small Place*, addressing the tourist who travels in order to overcome an «awful feeling of displacedness» (Kincaid, 1988: 16), to escape the banality of her/his ordinary life, the narrator highlights the feeling of pleasure travelers get when looking at the Antiguans, «marvelling at the harmony (ordinarily, what you would say is the backwardness) and the union these other people (and they are other people) have with nature» (Kincaid, 1988: 16).

Allochrony (Fabian, 2002 [1983] in Storch, 2019: 82) is a recurrent *topos* in tourism promotional discourse; framing indigenous people in a primordial setting represents «a strategy that afford power, and the tourism industry clearly is able to provide it» (Storch, 2019: 82).

In *A Small Place*, a reference to a distorted perception of time recurs when, metaphorically accompanying the tourist in her/his taxi ride, passing in front of the library, there is a sign saying «THIS BUILDING WAS DAMAGED IN THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1974. REPAIRS ARE PENDING» (Kincaid, 1988: 9). After ten years, when the tourist passes by, the sign is still there: «and you might see this as a sort of quaintness on the part of these islanders, these people descended from slaves – what a strange, unusual perception of time they have.

REPAIRS ARE PENDING, and here it is many years later, but perhaps in a world that is twelve miles long and nine miles wide (the size of Antigua) twelve years and twelve minutes and twelve days are all the same» (Kincaid, 1988: 9).

The presence of natives in brochure discourse often turns into backwardness and «smiling black "natives" chopping open coconuts, ready to serve, ready to please, gesturing with their hands for the viewer to come and join in the fun. Only, this world has as much authenticity for indigenous residents as would a stage prop or movie backdrop» (Strachan, 2002: 1). Tourism discourse around Antigua is no exception. Lush and green, the epitome of paradise, with very little rain and 365 beaches to enjoy, Antigua is often promoted as a fetishizing tropical Eden (Carrigan, 2012: xiii), where «the pace is slow»[9], and people are loving. On the official website of Antigua and Barbuda, the headline says: «Welcome to our twin-island paradise» and, among the reviews written by visitors, we have: «Antigua is paradise on earth, the Antiguans are kind, fun and loving people», «This island is paradise!»[10]. As for the lifestyle, there seems to be a certain attitude:

> Last but not least is our 'no problem' attitude towards life. We locals are a friendly and good-natured bunch, delighted (and proud!) to share our idyllic island with our overseas visitors. It might take you a few days to unwind, but you're sure to adapt to our unhurried way of life in the end.[11]

The «discursive maneuvers» (Carrigan, 2012: 35) displayed in marketing texts have created the image of Antiguans as people living a 'simple life', happy to welcome tourists. A quick scroll through the web confirms this attitude:

> Antigua's shoreline is washed almost exclusively by the Caribbean Sea and is hugged by 95 miles of superb coastline. Her sister Barbuda is surrounded by protective reefs and features a large lagoon and Frigate Bird sanctuary. The islands are best known for their *friendly and welcoming people*, *pink and white-sandy beaches, crystal clear waters and the most satisfying and enjoyable climate in the world* (my emphasis).[12]

The limited gaze of the tourist, embedded in promotional discourse which reinforces the image of paradises inhabited by «friendly and welcoming peo-

[9] <Read This Before Visiting Antigua: Ultimate Antigua Travel Guide (2022) (wanderlustchloe.com)> (20.07.2024).

[10] <https://www.visitantiguabarbuda.com/> (22.07.2024).

[11] <https://www.theantiguan.com/> (25.08.2024).

[12] <Visit Antigua & Barbuda – The beach is just the beginning (visitantiguabarbuda.com)> (26.08.2024).

ple», hastens the possibility of an authentic encounter with the Other. Locals' attitude and lifestyle are promoted and commodified as a service, something expected and due. In the words of Strachan, «once Caribbean governments become dedicated to offering "paradise" to tourists – that usually means feeding metropolitan escapist fantasies and creating an atmosphere of comfort, entertainment, delight, and ease; in short, fashioning the "out of this world" experience – they are encouraging many of the locals to work intensely, and routinely with little long-term benefit for themselves» (Strachan, 2002: 11).

The encounter with the Other, when staying in paradises, is negligible or banal. Dean MacCannell highlights the fact that «The "other" in the travel poster is pure backdrop to the tourist gaze» (MacCannell, 2011: 155).

In some exotic tourist destinations, natives are either banned from some beaches, thus being denied the status of vacationers, or occupy subaltern positions, replicating relations in colonial times (Urry, 2002: 57). Kincaid blames for this the Hotel Training School of Antigua, «a school that teaches Antiguans how to be good servants, how to be a good nobody, which is what a servant is» (Kincaid, 1988: 55).

In occupying 'subaltern' positions, the Other is detached from her/his humanity. Tourism operators stage alterity in brochure discourse building it on stereotypes.

> The tourist image can, and usually does, powerfully dehumanize the world in both figurative and literal senses. So long as the image of the other is accepted as flat and unary it suppresses the resources we must draw upon to connect with otherness. The flat tourist image suggests there is no need to understand the other as a being like ourselves with depth, dimension, inner strengths, and invisible feelings. It reduces the depths of the other to a handy, compact thing neither alive nor dead, just over there someplace. This is perhaps the most unethical formation of consciousness supported by the apparatus of contemporary tourism (MacCannell, 2011: 164).

The native, then, is part of the scenery, devoid of personality. As such, the tourist/traveler perceives her/his unicity as an individual, s/he feels worthy of a holiday, delving into a new place yet to discover, but the natives are usually a tool to embellish the backdrop.

Cliched-narratives of the exotic are dangerous, they lead people to visit a place unethically; «[a] demeaning instrumental reduction that routinely occurs in tourism is the tendency to view native peoples as just another component of the local landscape, or nothing more than scenery to be gazed upon and photographed» (MacCannell, 2011: 21).

A Small Place goes further by unveiling the hypocrisy and reversing the camera:

> In a tone of voice that is unmistakably angry, she attacks the typical tourist psyche of objectifying Otherness and proceeds to describe the various ways in which the tourist is also objectified by the locals. […] The point here is that Antiguans eschew the role of mere victims assigned to them by the dominant West and creatively seek ways to turn their situation around (Osagie and Buzinde, 2011: 221).

The Others, in fact, are, «people you do not like really, people you would not want to have as your actual neighbour» (Kincaid, 1988: 18) and, as a matter of fact, the Other loathes the tourist:

> An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and that and taste that, and it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place […] cannot stand you (Kincaid, 1988: 17).

The reason residents cannot stand tourists is because residents of certain parts of the world are not allowed to be tourists themselves.

> That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives – most natives in the world – cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere (Kincaid, 1988: 18-19).

An authentic humane experience seems ephemeral in destinations where the imbalance between guest and host is marked and this unbalanced relation between guests and hosts needs to be investigated, highlighted, to enhance more sustainable models of travelling. MacCannell emphasizes the unethical aspect of reinforcing such an image of tourism but also suggests more ethical forms of gazing, believing in the possibility that travel patterns and mindsets can be oriented towards more ethical directions. Marketers, destination managers, local governments all play a crucial role in leading a change in perspective. Images of island destinations recall 'colonial images' of myth places which forge the actual gaze of Western tourists (Wels, 2004: 76). When the host country commodifies the hosting destination for the visitors, there is an odd process taking place: hosts commodify the destination for the tourist gaze and

the tourist gaze itself commodifies the target destination (Mietzner and Storch, 2019: 9).

5. Conclusions

Traveling without being receptive to the Other, without seeing the alterity embedded in habits, traditions and languages has eventually shaped a new form of colonialism in tourism phenomena, with the visitor becoming a new typology of usurper/colonizer, encountering diversity and alterity without actually seeing it and reinforcing imbalance in the distribution of power.

The bond between postcolonial studies and tourism studies has been emphasized as a key instrument to reshape travel practices, capable of redirecting the tourist gaze. Since tourism has "reopened the old wounds of colonialism and imperialism" (Osagie and Buzinde, 2011: 215), a critical reading of *A Small Place* can play an important role in dismantling "the crippling web of neo-colonialism" (Osagie and Buzinde, 2011: 215).

So far, the tourist experience in developing countries has echoed colonial relationships (Hall and Tucker, 2004: 185) and master narratives of places have often neglected past wounds. As one of the most celebrated postcolonial authors, Kincaid uses her work to solicit a response, to awaken consciousnesses. As suggested by Samar H. Aljahdali, 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» (Aljahdali, 2020: 138).

Through the years, especially when flying became cheaper, small island destinations have been commodified to become tourism targets and when an island 'made for two' becomes an island invaded by millions, issues related to sustainability, local culture commodification, and exploitation are thrown up.

Tourism scholars have stressed the importance of an ethical distribution of wealth; if the income from the tourism in a host country is «repatriated to companies based elsewhere» (Urry, 2002: 57), benefits for the local population are almost non-existent; «Many of the facilities that result from tourism (airports, golf courses, luxury hotels and so on) will be of little benefit to the mass of indigenous population» (Urry, 2002: 57).

To find «more equitable tourism practice» (Carrigan, 2012: xii) and promote a typology of tourism which does not overlook the host country's history and culture, attention should be paid to these issues. In this perspective, *A Small Place* is huge in its potential. Very stringent and severe, Kincaid's essay portrays the island of Antigua as a place haunted by a colonial past whose legacy manifests in decaying buildings – once places of prestige and badge of the colonialists – portraying the mess the colonialists left, making local neocolonialists gain power and control the country leading to a gap between rich and poor, honest and dishonest. By accompanying the tourist in an *off the*

beaten track journey, *A Small Place* expands the tourists' gaze making them see what they obstinately do not want to see, telling them another story.

> Kincaid's *A Small Place* can be taken as an exemplary work on eco-tourism 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 (Upadhyay, 2024: 96).

For island destinations to be visited ethically and sustainably, the tourist gaze needs to be re-adjusted reshaping master narratives and establishing a more balanced (and down-to-earth) relation between *gazer* and *gazed*. Enlarging the *Tourist's Gaze* by rewriting master narratives would make travellers become more aware of their impact on the territories they visit and understand what they are seeing passing by a square named after an English colonel or a member of the royal family.

A Small Place thus allows us to shine a light not just on our past, but our present and our future too.

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