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An Analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988):  
Between History and Auto-Biography, Modernism and  
Postmodernism.

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**Summary**

**Introduction** í í í í í .í .í í í í ..í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ...5

**1. A Biography of Jamaica Kincaid** í ..9

**2. The Caribbean Region.**í í .í í í í í í í í í í .....11

2.2 History of Antigua í í í í í í í í í .í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í 11

2.3 Literature í ...13

**3. A *Small Place* (1988)** í ....í í í í í í í .í ...í í í í í í í .í ...í í í ...15

**4. Location: Between Neo-colonialism and Immigration** í í .í í í í í í .....22

4.1 Neo-colonialism in Antigua í ..í ..í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .....23

4.2 The vision of North America in Antigua í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..26

4.3 Emigration from Antigua: the Significance of Kincaid's Personal Story....í .....31

4.4 History and the Caribbean Region ..í .í í ...í í í í í í .í í í í í í .í .....35

4.5 A Controversial Vision of Antigua í .....í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í 39

**5. Colonialism** í í í í í í í í .í ...í í í í í í í í í í .í ..í í í í í ..55

**6. Women, Mothers and Gender** í í í í í ..í í ..í í í í í í í í í ..í ...53

6.1 Mothers and Daughters í ...í ....í ..53

6.2 Women as/and Other Subalterns í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .....57

**7. Autobiography**.....í ....í í í í í í í í í í í í í ...í í .....61

**8. Language** í í í í í í í í ..í ..í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .í í 64

8.1 Repetitions í .64

8.2 Modernism í .67

**9. Characters and Structure** í ...71

9.1 Evolution of the Characters í ...71

9.2. Postmodern Structure.....73

**10. Content: Between Modernism and Postmodernism** í í í í í í í í í í 76

10.1 Postmodernist Voice í í í í í í .í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..76

10.2 Postmodern Modernist Themes í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..80

**11. Conclusion** í í ...í í ...í í í í í í í í í í í í í .í í í í í í í ....83

**Bibliography** í .í ...í ...í ...88

*A Small Place*

*But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean is even bigger; it would amaze you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up (1988, 14).*

## Introduction

While I was looking for an author from the United States to write about for this thesis I chose Jamaica Kincaid. I wanted to gain an understanding of how America is portrayed by someone who does not fall within the traditional realm of American literature, such as Hawthorne or Henry James, for example and someone who is also neither Native American nor African-American, that is to say, an immigrant. I was interested in the question of identity in the United States and in particular, on a Caribbean identity in this country. Also, I thought that we know little about the Caribbean region and even less about Caribbean women writers. For this reason, I was interested in Jamaica Kincaid's writings and in particular in *A Small Place* (1988). There is no systematic and comprehensive study of this book. I hope that this essay will be one, as much as possible.

Kincaid shares points of view with African-Americans and with Native-Americans but also not. Therefore, she presents a within (an insider's perspective) but also a without perspective (an outsider's perspective) as a resident of North America but native of Antigua. To explain this duality significantly Jamaica Kincaid writes in my *Garden (Book)*: "I am living comfortably in a place that I am not from, enjoying my position of visitor, enjoying my position of not-the-native, enjoying, especially the privilege of being able to make sound judgments about the Other" (qtd. in Covi 2003, 60) (we will see in the course of the essay who the Other is for Jamaica Kincaid and how important it is in her work).

In this essay, I consider how an immigrant writer like Jamaica Kincaid changes the North American perspective and the perspective on North America and how she complicates it. Her work, *A Small Place*, speaks of a writer embedded in traditional

Antiguan culture, but also embedded in Western and particularly American culture. She discusses themes from colonialism to feminism using a modernist and a postmodernist approach. Therefore, we have an insider/outsider dichotomy, as well as a traditional/western duplicity.

My thesis is that *A Small Place* is not a simple book. It is a complex one that raises very important issues. It forces us to revisit our notion of history, gender and politics and to construct new ones that apply to native populations. It is first of all a postcolonial work. Its modernist and postmodernist elements serve to this purpose. "History", argues Edouard Glissant, "[with a capital H] ends where the histories of those people once reputed to be without history come together" (1992, 64). It is precisely to end this history and to create a new one that Jamaica Kincaid writes. By "taking back" her past she wants to construct a new one that belongs to the native population of Antigua and of the Caribbean region (Ferguson 1994, 168). We can argue that the following thought by Edouard Glissant applies to the book *A Small Place*:

"If the changes of our present history are the unseen moments of a massive transformation in civilization, which is the passage from the all-encompassing world of cultural Sameness, effectively imposed by the West, to a pattern of fragmented Diversity, achieved in a no less creative way by the peoples who have seized their rightful place in the world" (1992, 97).

We see this diversity in Jamaica Kincaid's book and in the whole of her literary production in the emphasis on magic, especially Obeah, in the use of a creative language and in the postmodern production. More in general, we can say that this book invites consideration over the following idea by Stuart Hall, another Caribbean writer, that "identities are never unified and in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and

fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different discourses, practices and positions (1996, 4). This point of view is important to understand the complexity of the American society.

I conduct a close text reading and a textual analysis of *A Small Place* from a narratologic point of view. I also conduct a thematic analysis, namely, from a modernist and postmodernist, postcolonial and feminist point of view. I also consider others books by Kincaid. I contend that this book is the core of her work. I analyze this non-fiction book paying particular attention to the relation between Antigua, which is the country described in the book and North America. I want to reach an understanding of how the USA is portrayed by this author: how it is described and its significance for the author and for the inhabitants of Antigua. I hope to propose an understanding of the relation between North-America and its surrounding shores. Many of them fall, in fact, within its realm of influence and Geo-politically are considered part of North-America. Some of them entitle their citizens to American citizenship as they are considered part of the United States (Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands), too.

The driving question behind my essay is: "What is the significance of *A Small Place* in the context of America and of the Caribbean region?". This entails questioning what does North America represent for its surrounding Caribbean islands and more specifically, what it represents for Jamaica Kincaid. I will start with the usual premises of looking at the history of the Caribbean region, at its literature and at the biography of the author. Then, I will start my analysis. I will first consider how the book is built and the main themes discussed. There is a debate on whether Kincaid's writings should be considered postcolonial, feminist, autobiographic or black African-American (see Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerebert (1999), Diana Simmons (1994) or Giovanna Covi (2003), for

example). I maintain that her work is postcolonial, feminist and autobiographical and that it fits some African-American and American standards, although it is Caribbean and also modernist and postmodern.

I argue that for Jamaica Kincaid the United States is a successful place, (she fulfills her "American dream") but also a place to criticize as it is built on slavery and by the descendants of people who colonized the country and other places. It is a neo-imperialistic country in its military endeavors. In Kincaid, we, therefore, have a different picture of the United States than the one provided by other literature about it such as for example, literature such as Henry James or Hawthorne or Faulkner or Mark Twain African American or native American literature. They provide a picture of the United States, which mirrors the different historical and political context in which the authors lived. At the same time, Kincaid is fascinated by the United States and provides a picture of America, which resemble more traditional literature.

We could spend a whole very long essay (a book, many books) discussing the differences and similarities in the portrayal of the United States in American literature in the different periods, obviously. For example, Henry James pictures a white America and its difference with Europe and also Europe itself. Herman Melville portrays an America more of the dispossessed who engage on whale hunting. Faulkner mentions characters of color although they do not have major roles and it presents predominantly the difficult race relations in the South of the United States from the perspective of a white man. In Twain, I would say that although they are somewhat important the role of African-American characters is secondary. Most notably Jim is a somewhat shadow figure and in a sense a secondary character. Obviously, we have the African-American tradition starting from Phillis Wheatley, which instead focuses on the black American character

completely and presents the skills and abilities of African-Americans. Today, we have a much more amalgamated picture of America, which questions identity, an America to borrow the title of a book by Rebecca Walker, *Black and White* and also religiously diverse, Jew in her case. However, in this essay I will concentrate on this Caribbean author that live in the United States to show her America, her vision of the United States.

Although, there are many differences with other American authors, I contend that Jamaica Kincaid owes to the Anglo-American tradition of modernism, although her writings are also postmodernists and first of all postcolonial. I argue that Jamaica Kincaid's writing is a journey into the meaning of history and of human existence. I show that the themes discussed in this book are also developed in other writings.

An introduction to this book: *A Small Place*, clearly falls within the realm of postcolonialism. Therefore, some considerations on this topic and on its origins are necessary. Also, it is important to take a look at the history of the Caribbean region. I argue that the book has a narrator: Jamaica Kincaid, the author, who is the narrating voice. The focus is Antigua and colonialism. The book comprises four parts with several subsections. The first part focuses on tourism; the second part studies the colonial legacy of the island, childhood memories and slavery; part three runs through the political situation of the island; part four analyzes the minds of the people and expresses some hopes for the future. In my opinion, this small book is probably the key to the whole of Jamaica Kincaid's literary production to enter and to understand her point of view.

We can sense from *A Small Place* a strong reference to colonialism. Most of Jamaica Kincaid's literary production is focused on the relations between the Caribbean region, especially Antigua, and England due to the history of colonialism that lies behind it. In *A*

*Small Place*, Kincaid writes, significantly, referring to the British as criminals, "The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed inflicted on me" (1988, 32). In her books, she tries to present the later side of the story.

The immigration of Jamaicans to the United States is that of a people colonized by the British and for this reason, resentful to them and to England. Yet, one of Kincaid's merits is to be able to speak to the colonized but also to the colonizer and to analyze the position of both during colonialism and today.

## 1. A Biography of Jamaica Kincaid

I shall start with an introduction about Jamaica Kincaid's life. Her biography is important to understand the author and her books, her work is in fact very autobiographical.

Jamaica Kincaid was born Elaine Potter Richardson on May 25th 1949 in St. John, Antigua. She grew up in the same place, that is the capital of Antigua. She has three step-brothers. At the age of sixteen she moved to New York City, in the United States, to work as an au pair. She was sent by her mother and has remained there ever since. She lives in North Bennington, Vermont, United States. She was married and has two children, Annie and Harold. In 2002, she divorced from her husband, Allen Shawn. She loves gardening and has written several books and articles about this hobby.

She grew up with her mother, a home-maker, and with her stepfather, a carpenter, before being made to drop out of school at the age of sixteen. She was sent to Scarsdale, a suburb of New York, in 1965. She worked as an au-pair, as her mother took her out of school due to the family's financial situation. While working as an au-pair, she quitted her job to move to Franconia College, in New Hampshire, on a full scholarship. After a bit more than one year, however, she returned to New York City. While working as an au-pair, at night, she also attended for one year the New York School for Social Research, to study photography. It was at this time, in 1973, that she changed her name into "Jamaica Kincaid" to establish a linkage with her native Caribbean. Then, she was working and writing interviews for a teenage girls' magazine. The name Jamaica was coined after the homonymous country. At this time, she began to write essays, as well as creatively.<sup>1</sup> She

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<sup>1</sup> See: [www.umn.edu](http://www.umn.edu)

changed her name for this reason: she did not want her mother to know that she had started writing. It was while she was in college that she started this endeavor for the first time.

In an interview with Moira Ferguson, Jamaica Kincaid recounts that she thought "Oh, something could be done; somehow my thoughts could be written down" (1994, 163). In 1978, her first short-story, "Girl," appeared in *The New Yorker*. It was later incorporated, with the same title, in the collection *At the Bottom of the River*, in 1983. In 1979, Kincaid married the composer and Bennington College Professor Allen Shawn. She divorced from him in 2002. He was the son of her editor William Shawn of *The New Yorker* (in 1976 she had become a staff writer for the magazine and collaborated with it for the next nine years).<sup>2</sup> In 1985, she published her first novel *Annie John*. Her work is considerably autobiographical, as we can find several elements of her life and of her mother's life in it. For example, she gives her surnames, Richardson and Potter, to the protagonists of her fiction books *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and *Mr. Potter* (2002). The narrator of *Mr. Potter* is Elaine Cynthia Potter and she is born in 1949, like the author—we do not know if it is a fictional ego of the author, the author in disguise, or the actual author recounting the life of Mr. Potter; it is probably a fictional autobiography, as I argue in this essay—. Also, there are many other autobiographical references in her books.

Jamaica Kincaid was selected for the 1985 International Ritz Price Hemingway Award for her work *Annie John* (1985). She received the Anifield-Wolf Book Award and the Lila-Reader's Digest Fund Award. She received a nomination for the 1997 National Book Award for the book *My Brother* (1997).<sup>3</sup> Kincaid is the first writer from Antigua.<sup>4</sup> She was

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<sup>2</sup> See: [www.umn.edu](http://www.umn.edu)

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.umn.edu](http://www.umn.edu)

nominated for a Pen/Faulkner Award for Fiction. She has been a visiting professors at the Harvard University Department of African American Studies and she now teaches creative writing at Claremont McKenna College, in California.

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<sup>4</sup> See: Moira Ferguson, 1994.

## 2. The Caribbean Region

I will now look at the history of Antigua and Barbuda and of the Caribbean region to gain an understanding of Jamaica Kincaid's background and of the history behind her books. I will also look at the literature from the region to place Jamaica Kincaid in a literary context both in the Caribbean region and in the United States.

### 2.1 History of Antigua

The Caribbean region consists of the Caribbean sea, its islands and the surrounding coasts. It is located north of South America, east of Central America, south east of the Gulf of Mexico and North America. Antigua comprises the small island of Redonda and with it forms one state. It is in Central America and it is part of the smaller Antilles. It is part of the Leeward islands. There are also the greater Antilles: the smaller and greater Antilles make up the Caribbean region.

More in general, the Caribbean region is known as Antilles. Earlier on existed the British, Dutch and French Antilles. In British Guiana after emancipation in 1838 the planters sought to retain their control over the previously enslaved labor force, which they considered their labor, at as low a cost as possible. On the other hand, the latter tried to increase their income and to improve the quality of their life. As a consequence, there were strikes in the island. In the British West Indies in general, after 1838, several laws were enacted that restricted migration and forced various types of taxation to enforce wage labor and thus, curbed the independence of the newly freed population and imposed the

development of police, magistrate and prison systems to punish law breakers. In Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados the population was controlled successfully. In other colonies, such as Jamaica and Trinidad, there was a low population density and more land, the population created a large peasantry.<sup>5</sup>

Little is known about the history of Antigua. There are few books about it, especially about the period when the Spanish had control over the island. We know that Antigua was discovered in 1493 by Christopher Columbus. Columbus sailed past it, without stopping and called the island Santa Maria de la Antigua after a church in Seville. We do not know much else about the period between 1493 and 1632 when the British came to the island.<sup>6</sup>

Columbus has an important meaning in Jamaica Kincaid's work. He is the primary symbol of colonialism for some of the characters created by Jamaica Kincaid. The Spanish kept the island for approximately two hundred years.

The British have retained possession of the island since 1632 when the English sent a party from the neighboring island of St. Kittis. The United Kingdom has retained possession of the island since then except for a period in 1666 when it was captured by the French. In 1667, it was announced a British possession under the treaty of Breda. The island of Barbuda was formerly a slave farm that belonged to the Codrington family and was annexed to the territory in 1860. Until 1959 it was administered as part of the Leeward islands. In Antigua Slavery had been abolished in 1833. In 1951 the first elections were held under universal suffrage in the island. It was part of the West Indian Federation from 1958 until 1962. In 1967, it became an associate state. In 1975, the

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<sup>5</sup> See: Hilary Beckles ed., (1993, 107-123)

<sup>6</sup> See: Beale 2008, 17

Associate state agreed that they would seek a separate road to independence. From 1967 until 1981, Antigua was an associate state, with independent internal politics but was dependent on the United Kingdom for foreign policy and defense. The island became independent in 1981 with Vere C. Bird, Sr. as the country prime minister; the first person to hold such position.

In Antigua, the legislative power is exercised by the parliament. It has mostly a black and English speaking population that live mostly in the biggest island Antigua. The main resources are agriculture, tourism and small industries textile and food. It has a large tourism especially from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. The American government has two military bases in Antigua, which contribute to the national product. Although in the last years they have sought closer trade arrangements with the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) they maintain privileged and traditional trade agreements with the United States and the United Kingdom. In fact, Antigua contributed to the U.S. military invasion of Grenada in 1983. As we can see there are strict political and economic links between Antigua and the United States.

Prior to colonialism, the first residents of Antigua were the Ciboney people, which were followed by the Arawak and by the Carib people. The Arawak were the first group of people to settle in Antigua, according to the documents that we have. They came from Venezuela. They cultivated corn, sweet potatoes, chili peppers, guava, tobacco and cotton among other things. Most of them left Antigua in 1100 A.D. Those who remained suffered raids from the Caribs coming from Venezuela. The Arawak and the Carib populated much of the South American and Caribbean islands. In 1674, sugar became the main crop in Antigua resulting in the importation of slaves. These populations and were subsequently

killed with the arrival of the Spanish almost completely due to malnutrition, slavery and diseases.

A note on education in Antigua to understand Jamaica Kincaid's personal history (she was made to drop out of school at sixteen years old because her family was too poor to make her continue but as we have seen she continued her education in the United States and this episode is present in her books). In this island education is free, compulsory and universal for eleven years from age five until age sixteen. In the 1980s the literacy rate was 88, 7%.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. Literature

It is important to consider the literature from the Caribbean region, to gain an understanding of Jamaica Kincaid's work and to situate them in a context. There is a wide array of literature from the Caribbean region. The first major West Indian novelist was Claude McKay, who wrote *Banana Bottom* (1933) and was part of the Harlem Renaissance in New York. One of the most famous authors today is Derek Walcott from St. Lucia but there are numerous others from the past including Marcus Garvey, Franz Fanon and more recently Paul Gilroy. To discuss literature from the Caribbean region in its differences, we would have perhaps to divide the authors from the English-speaking region from those of the French speaking region, from those of the Spanish speaking region and so on and so forth.

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<sup>7</sup> Estimate by George Thomas Kurian (1987).

To restrict ourselves to Caribbean women's writings in English already means to have to deal with a vast group of writers. We have those born in the Caribbean region and those born abroad of Caribbean parents like Audre Lorde who was born in New York City of Caribbean parents. To restrict ourselves even further to Caribbean women writers writing in North America we can say that some of the most famous ones writing from North America are Erna Brodber, Joan Cambridge, Velma Pollard, June Hefrey, Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid. Dionne Brand lives between Trinidad and Toronto.

The question that comes natural is obviously "How does Jamaica Kincaid fit into Caribbean literature?". She is part of those Caribs who write from abroad and precisely from the United States yet she is Carib and her work is embedded in Caribbean culture. The question is also "How does Jamaica Kincaid fit into North American literature?". For a long time Jamaica Kincaid has been placed among African-American authors and it is only recently that she has been discovered as a Carib author as Giovanna Covi (2003) notes. In this essay, I will consider her a Caribbean writer who lives in the United States.

Although Giovanna Covi centers her discourse on Jamaica Kincaid around the Caribbean region, she notes how her work fits an African American aesthetics. Covi argues that her stories in the collection *At the Bottom of the River* "move at the beat of drums and the rhythm of jazz so that we may be tempted to subsume them under the label of Black Aesthetics" (Covi 2003,71). Giovanna Covi also argues that if according to Henry Louis Gates "signifying" is the main feature of Black Aesthetics, "At the Bottom of the River" is a successful example of this Afro-American rhetorical strategy. (Covi 72). We will discuss this aspect later on.

Apart from Giovanna Covi, other writers have placed Jamaica Kincaid among African American writers. She is included in *The Columbia Guide to Contemporary African American Fiction* by Darryl Dickson-Carr (Columbia University Press 2005) along with writers from Ishmael Reed to Toni Morrison.<sup>8</sup> She is also invited as a guest speaker to read excerpts from her books for the celebration of the African American History Month. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* writes, however, that Jamaica Kincaid's writing for *The New Yorker* "often chronicled Caribbean culture". Moira Ferguson included Kincaid in her 1993 study of the East Caribbean Region. This author is also included in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* and in other books about Caribbean writers. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert (1999) notes how many critiques enumerate Jamaica Kincaid among Caribbean writers because of her insistence in her books on re-writing Caribbean history from a postcolonial point of view, in spite of the fact that she is an author living in the United States (1999, 411 ff). We can notice this aspect of her writing first of all in the book *A Small Place*. We, therefore, have the picture of an author acknowledged as an African-American author for some aspects and as a Caribbean author for others, but mostly Caribbean.

Jamaica Kincaid is not the only female author from the Caribbean area to talk about colonialism, the United States and the Caribbean region in *A Small Place* and in other books that she has written. In fact, they are common themes among Caribbean female writers. For example, Michelle Cliff is another Caribbean author who lives in the United

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<sup>8</sup> Jamaica Kincaid fits into the stereotype of the angry African-American/black female writer. In an interview with Alyssa Loh (2013), Kincaid argues that "anger is a legitimate response to oppression".

States to also develop these issues in her writings. However, is one of the few to talk strongly about gender and feminism, even though Kincaid herself would not like such classification.

Michelle Cliff is originally Jamaican. She is very attentive to racial problems in the United States, as we can see in her story collection *Bodies of Water* (1990). In "Screen Memory", which is part of this collection, Cliff writes about a mixed child who is separated from her black grandma because it was not fit for her to live with her darker grandma. The girl runs away from the foster home and goes back to live with her grandmother. In "Burning Bush", Cliff talks about a "girl from Martinique" who is object of attention at a Circus because her skin is "patched" and therefore, of different colors (1990, 76). In "A Woman who Plays Trumpet", Cliff talks about racial prejudices and racism against a trumpet-player in the United States. She also investigates class differences and social problems in her native Jamaica, for example in the short-story "Columba". In this story, we have the friendship between a boy who is made to work as a servant for a family and a girl who is sent to live with this family.

Although racial issues are discussed by other Caribbean writers (such as Michelle Cliff, in particular in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1988), in addition *Bodies of Water*), feminism is a topic less frequently touched upon. In this lies Kincaid's merit: she almost proposes an innovative frame of thought to Caribbean writers and to people all over the world by investigating with almost brutality gender, sexuality and the independence and assertiveness of women. Indeed, although Michelle Cliff also considers the situation of a woman who lives by herself and her sexuality, she does not go to the extent that Kincaid does. Cliff's primary concern is race, even though gender and the independence of women are also important. Although the critique of colonialism is a topic already deeply

discussed by writers such as Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon and other Caribbean writers, as it is developed by a Caribbean woman like Kincaid, in *A Small Place*, it offers a singular perspective.

### 3. *A Small Place* (1988)

The book that I will analyze is *A Small Place*. It was written by Jamaica Kincaid and published in 1988. I choose this piece of writing because I argue that it is Kincaid's most important work. It contains the themes that she has developed in all of her work. It is probably the single strongest piece of her work against colonialism and neo-colonialism in the Caribbean region, although all of her writings are very important in this regard.

Kincaid wrote it in the United States in the 1980s (Ferguson 1994, 77). Today, Jamaica Kincaid is a fairly well-known author, who gives talks all over the world and whose books are published in many countries. In the 1980s, when *A Small Place* was first written, however, she was probably much less well-known. It is, in fact, the third book of the author. At the time of publishing it, Jamaica Kincaid had already written *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) and *Annie John* (1985). She had also published stories in journals like the *Paris Review*, *Rolling Stones* and *The New Yorker*. In 1978 she published the poem *Girl*, which appeared the 26 of June 1978 on *The New Yorker* [it was afterward, published in the collection *At the Bottom of the River*]. On May 9<sup>th</sup> 1983 she published *Figures in the Distance* in *The New Yorker*. Today, she has written numerous fiction and non-fiction books and stories: *Annie*, *Gwen*, *Lilly*, *Pam*, and *Tulip* in 1989, *Lucy* in 1990, *Biography of a Dress* 1990, *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1995), *My Brother* (1997), *My Favorite Plant: Writers and Gardeners on the Plants they Love* (1998), *My Garden (Book)*

(1999), *Talk Stories* (2001), *Mr. Potter* (2002), *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalayas* (2005) and *See Now Then* (2013). She also published the essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" in *Harper's Magazine* in 1991 and numerous other non-fictional essays and children's literature in magazines. She has co-authored other books, too.

*A Small Place* (1988) focuses on a small country in the Caribbean -also known as West Indies-, Antigua. The book is divided into four parts that analyze the reality in Antigua from different points of view. The narrating voice, the narrator, is most probably that of Jamaica Kincaid who addresses a tourist, a fictional tourist. It is a small book that appears to be almost invented, but in reality it is non-fictional and it is very dense. The first part is about the Antigua that a tourist visiting it would now see. The second part is about the Antigua of the past, the place in which Jamaica Kincaid grew up. The third part is about post-independence Antigua and the contrast with Antigua of before independence, the Antigua of colonialism. The fourth part expresses hopes for the future of the population and of the island.

At first, the book seems a tourist's guide of Antigua. In fact, Jamaica Kincaid writes: "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see. If you come by aeroplane, you will land at the V.C. Bird International Airport" (1988, 1). This understanding of the book is, in reality, deceitful because the book is quite the opposite of a tourist's guide: it is an accusation against tourism. It discusses the fact that the Caribbean region has a history of British colonization and that it cannot get rid of this heritage. For Kincaid, the tourist constitutes a legacy of this colonialism. In short, in this book, Jamaica Kincaid subtly equates colonialism and neo-colonialism to tourism because, although everyone is a native of some place, the majority of natives are too poor to travel. Those who can afford it are usually Europeans or North Americans. According to Kincaid, they are connected in one

way or another to colonialism or to a luxurious life-style, which is sustained at the expenses of poor people. Also, Kincaid says:

“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” (1988, 69).

Clearly, Jamaica Kincaid points out that tourism brings misery to the native population in a similar fashion to colonialism, although the modalities are different.

Kincaid describes the tourists in negative terms because they impose themselves on a people, who would rather live without them. She says that as a tourist one is:

“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 taste that, it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you, that behind their closed door they laugh at your strangeness” (1988, 17).

We can see from these few lines how the attitude Kincaid ascribes to the tourist is a bit of the colonizer and there is the same incomprehension with the native population.

In this work, Kincaid changes the traditional roles of subject and object, of the dominant and of the dominated/subaltern. The “you” becomes the tourist, alias colonizer and the “I”, the native Antigua. Moira Ferguson calls what Jamaica Kincaid does “counterknowledge with a vengeance”: “Out of love and anger, Jamaica Kincaid pleads with Antiguan to reclaim agency and extirpate corruption” (Ferguson 1994, 100).

I would have written out of love and knowledge. This is the case because Kincaid's position relative to the rest of Antiguans derives from love and anger but also from knowledge. This position allows her to call for a change in the status quo in the island. As Kincaid points out in many of her books, knowledge was, in fact, very important for her throughout her life. Without such knowledge she would not be in a position to consider her own history and that of Antigua critically. She was lucky and intelligent enough to build a considerable culture on the history and political situation of the island and thus she is in a position to view her history critically. But this is not the case for the majority of the inhabitants of Antigua. For example, Jamaica Kincaid knows that the same food that you will eat in your expensive hotel in Antigua comes from North America, but it was probably first purchased in Antigua itself, in a first place, by North Americans to be then, bought again, perhaps, processed in one form or another, by Antiguans for tourists at a more expensive price from North America. It is her knowledge that makes her angry and not every inhabitant has such knowledge.

In *A Small Place*, significantly, she says:

“Might not knowing [for Antiguans] why they are the way they are, why they do the things they do, why they live the way they live and in the place they live lead these people [Antiguans] to a different relationship with the world, a more demanding relationship, a relationship in which they are not victims all the time of every bad idea that flits across the mind of the world?” (1988, 56-57).

Obviously, this comment is very important and can be applied to any person, anywhere. Kincaid, in fact, questions the level of knowledge of the native population. She comments that if they were more knowledgeable of their past they might be able to establish a more meaningful relationship with the present. If the population really knew the causes behind

their present condition, as Kincaid does, they would not feel guilty about their present but perhaps, resentful and angry. Thus, they would be able to overcome the yoke of colonialism. It is precisely their ignorance that prevents them from establishing a meaningful relationship with the present. Pretending that colonialism never happened, that is to say, trying to annihilate it with ignorance, is a difficult method to establish a significant relationship with the world because of the international forces behind trade and politics that do exist and cannot simply be forgotten.

The writer uses direct and clear cut words against colonialists without any euphemisms and calls those whom the English consider famous and important people or war heroes, like Horatio Nelson and Drake, "criminals" (1988, 24). She calls the Barclays of the famous Barclay financial group "slave traders" (they were in fact originally slaveholders) (1988, 26). She calls the settlers of Antigua "human rubbish from Europe" (1988, 80). In fact, as Diana Simmons puts it, "Kincaid is determined that the picture of colonialism be defaced" (1994, 139).

But *A Small Place* is not merely a book that seeks to condemn colonialism or a plain accusation of English colonialism and of its legacy in Antigua. It also an attempt to trace the re-entrance or the entrance "depending on whether one starts from before slavery and colonialism or afterward- of blacks (Africans and natives of the Caribbean region) in the political and social scenario of the island. Jamaica Kincaid enumerates the first Black Antiguan to be hired by the Barclay group, the first to enter the Mill Reef club house, etc. It is very much a testimony of anti colonialism and of a history from below, ideas that started to enter the world scenario in recent decades<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Howard Zinn's *A People History of the United States* (1980) is a very famous book

As we have seen, Kincaid discusses the external forces that plagued the island, in the name of colonialism. She also points out to the internal ones, namely corruption and gossiping, which exist today and are inherited from these external ones.

The "small place" the title of the book alludes to is Antigua. It is not only a small place symbolically but also concretely. As Jamaica Kincaid writes "it is nine miles wide by twelve miles long" (1988, 80). However, we can say that in the book "a small place" is a trope for the whole world both throughout history and across history, which is to say throughout the years and across a given period in time. We find in a given era the same problems all over the world that we find across historical periods. The "small place" is really the whole world, which, after all, is "a small place". In fact, as we will see the problems that Antigua witnesses are the problems present in the whole world, or at least in the underdeveloped majority of it.

Because it is a small place concretely, according to the author:

"In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated blown up, turned over and over, and then absorbed into everyday, so that at any moment it can and will roll off the inhabitants of the small place's tongues." (1988, 52).

As we can see from the previous excerpt, the small place is defined metaphorically as a place where everyone knows about everyone else's business because of the tiny size of the territory. It is described as a small town, although Antigua together with Redonda is a state. "The small place" is also characterized as a location where the passing of time is not felt, but where the past is as vivid as the present in the memories of its inhabitants. Because time never passes by, "the event is turned into everyday" and "the everyday is turned into an event" (1988, 56). In particular, the event that is most vivid in everyone's

mind is slavery that is as vivid in the memories of Antiguanas as if it had just happened. For this reason, the resentment against colonialism and slavery is something that cannot be eradicated.

Apart from slavery and the gossips present in Antigua, another problem that Jamaica Kincaid discusses in this book is the corruption of the government. She says that one of the biggest scandals that everyone talks about on the island is the dealership in Japanese cars sponsored by the government that has a share in the trade. We have several lines and pages dedicated to this scandal that indicate the corruption present in the island and the role of the government in it, according to Kincaid, a heritage of colonialism.

Significant is the following sentence by Jamaica Kincaid, which indicates the corruption of the government: "The government is for sale; anybody from anywhere can come to Antigua and for a sum of money can get what he wants" (1988, 47). Kincaid wants to point out the state of misery and devastation in which Antigua lives. According to Kincaid this is the outcome of colonialism, of the presence of Europeans in the island. She states, in fact:

"Have you ever wondered to yourself why it is that all people like me seem to have learned from you is how to imprison and murder each other, how to govern badly, and how to take the wealth of other countries and place it in Swiss bank accounts ?" (1988, 34).

Kincaid argues that it would be better, if it were possible at all, to go back to the period before colonization. Then, although Antiguanas may have been living like "monkeys" they were living in peace and there was none of the problems that they are forced to deal with now (1988, 37). Another Caribbean writer, Edouard Glissant, expresses the same concept

using different words. Glissant argues that 'the French Caribbean people do not progress unconsciously to a consciousness of themselves, as would have been the case with a people who would have created themselves in former times' (1992, 214).

More than an account and denunciation of the situation in Antigua, however, this book is an attempt by Jamaica Kincaid to find 'a small place' for the island in the world through a revisited history of the Caribbean region. It is also an attempt by the author to find 'a small place' for herself in the world, which makes sense in the midst of the chaos of de-personification, lack of rights, de-humanization and corruption created by the slave-trade and by colonialism to the inhabitants of various countries in America and Africa, who were enslaved. And she does. She concludes:

'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 human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings.' (1988, 81)

Kincaid tries to find 'a small place' for Antigua in a revisited history of the country not only by challenging the dichotomy winners/losers showing that the losers are in fact 'noble' and the winners 'human rubbish', but also by creating a poetical tone, which shows the beauty and peace that can be found once such opposition is eliminated. Her writing seems in fact a poem, more than prose.

The book, therefore, is a strong account of the history and situation in Antigua, as well as a personal autobiography, especially as far as childhood memories are concerned. In fact, the symbol of the status quo in Antigua is the public library where Jamaica Kincaid

would borrow books as a young girl and which was then destroyed by a natural phenomenon óan earthquake- and never again re-built, but constantly in reparation. Clearly, the failure to repair the library indicates the poverty of the government and its inability to allocate money for such an important cause. It is, in short, the permanent symbol of the poverty and mismanagement present in the country. It symbolizes also the little importance that the government and people who are rich and have power tribute to Antiguan and to their knowledge.

In the book, importantly, Jamaica Kincaid indirectly argues that it is not only the past that matters to her but also the present. In contrast, to colonialists, who no longer have colonies, it matters only the past of the island because they no longer have any possession in Antigua. Kincaid's is a period that continues, not one that is over, as for the English colonialists. Antiguan not only have the colonial past óunfortunately- but also their independent present like the English and other free populations. They possess the present of Antigua unlike the English who no longer have colonies. Kincaid places a very heavy burden on time in this book to emphasize how important the present and the past are for colonized people: the past because of what they had to suffer and the present and the future because of what they have to build and to transform.

It must be noted that *A Small Place* is very different from her previous books *At the Bottom of the River*. As Moira Ferguson observes, Kincaid herself notes that *At the Bottom of the River* follows much more a colonial ideology than the subsequent books she wrote (Ferguson 1994, 7ff). *At the Bottom of the River* is, in fact, much more uncritical of colonialism. We could also add that *A Small Place* is different from *Annie John*, too, in some ways. This is not because *Annie John* does not criticize colonialism but because the setting is very colonial and there is an exterior acceptance of such situation, which is not

present in *A Small Place*. In particular, Moira Ferguson (1993) is correct in stating that "In *A Small Place* the author forthrightly presents a point of view that demands some meditation. Thus the polemical perspective in *A Small Place* complements and enriches the play of signification in *Annie John* (Ferguson 1993, 132). With these words Ferguson means that *A Small Place* is forthrightly a polemical and accusatory book, *Annie John*, instead, requires more reflection on the problematic exposed.

Perhaps, the difference between the books can be explained with the presence of a colonial government in Antigua up to 1981. Kincaid made her trip to Antigua only many years after it had become independent, while she had already written her first two books. This may mean that she was still taken and absorbed by the colonial setting of the island - however, I argue that her non-fiction is much more critical than her fiction, in general-. Kincaid wrote this book "A *Small Place*- seven years after Antigua became independent and it is a response to a trip she made home after the independence of the island (Ferguson 1994, 3). She expected the independent government to have made much more for Antigua. She, however, herself explains the reasons behind such inability in this book. This point of view will resonate in later books, too.

In this book, as well will see, we encounter the main themes, topics, that Jamaica Kincaid develops throughout her works: the theme of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the theme of autobiography, the theme of North America, England, Antigua and of the Caribbean. The following sentence in *A Small Place* summarizes the previous themes: "But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and

most painful of all, no tongue" (1988, 31). Kincaid points out the cultural dispossession to which Antiguan were subjected.

We also find in this book mentioned the theme of the mother-daughter relationships and of the position of women/girl in society. Kincaid mentions, in fact, the care her mother had for her before bringing her to see the doctor. Also, the author writes: "For the people in a small place, every event is a domestic event; the people in a small place cannot see themselves in a larger picture, they cannot see that they might be part of a chain of something, anything." Later on, she says: "The people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness, for that would demand a careful weighing, careful consideration, careful judging, careful questioning. It would demand the invention of a silence, inside of which these things could be done" (1988, 52-53). These sentences summarize what Kincaid does in analyzing the mother-daughter relationship and the position of women in society. She looks at the larger picture of women in modern society and also she carefully weighs, considers and judges their situation. This is also what Kincaid does with her considerations on colonialism.

The title of the book stands in contrast to the events described. It is striking and disheartening that such a small place as Antigua can have such a troubled history and still has such a troublesome present.

#### 4. Location: Between Neo-colonialism and Emigration

In the first and third chapter of *A Small Place*, but also in other parts of the book, Kincaid discusses the problem of neo-colonialism.<sup>10</sup> For Kincaid, neo-colonialism consists in the imposition of the economic terms of richer countries on poorer ones, without allowing and aiding their natural and, we could say, indigenous development. In the first chapter, Kincaid mentions this problem when she says that in Antigua all cars are Japanese, that the dollar is the currency used in the island and when she criticizes the fact that food first grown in Antigua is brought to North-America and then sold back to Antiguan processed. In the first two chapters of this book, we have a change in the vision of the United States from John Winthrop's "City Upon a Hill" speech. We have a more multisided look at the United States and a less idealized one. In particular, we have an emphasis on its neo-colonialism.

Neo-colonialism is strictly related to emigration from Antigua. They are related themes because Antiguan are forced to emigrate to earn a living, due to the bad government of the country and to the bad economy, which are a consequence of the colonial past but also of present international forces. Because of the poverty of the country, those who can afford it emigrate to the United States. This is what Kincaid herself has experienced.

Location is important in this book. The very title, *A Small Place*, which refers to Antigua, suggests this. It is a theme associated to neo-colonialism and emigration from

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<sup>10</sup> The first person to write about neo-colonialism was Kwame Nkrumah. He was prime minister of Ghana in the 1950s. He wrote the book: *The Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), in which he conducts an analysis of the economic phenomenon, which he calls neo-colonialism.

Antigua. It has both a physical and a more metaphorical meaning. It is a concrete place, Antigua, United States, England. It is also a dreamed and fantasized place for many Antiguan. Also, "a small place" refers to the fact that the whole world is in fact "a small place". There are similar trends all over the world.

Location is important in all the four chapters that compose the book as a place of emigration and as a place of immigration, in this ambiguity. Also, it is important because of the impact that rich countries have on poor ones. In short, for Kincaid, location means five things: neo-colonialism, emigration, immigration/refuge, the historical and political situation of Caribbean islands and the bad government of Antigua together with its beauty.

The vision of the Caribbean region that this author offers is important, especially, in the second chapter. Once considered the periphery of the world, a heavenly place populated by uncontaminated and uncivilized people, now, in this book, it is becoming the center. It is no longer an inviolate paradise but a globalised environment.

As the book that we are discussing, the whole of Kincaid's literary production is very much focused on Antigua and on the Caribbean region and on the United States. They are recurring issues in her work. We will analyze each of these locations one at a time and consider their significance in *A Small Place*. This book, especially in the first and last chapter, is part of Jamaica Kincaid's very important wider project of creating a new map and history of the world and of ascribing a new meaning to them; to go beyond the world as "a small place". This is what other Caribbean writers from Edouard Glissant to Frantz Fanon have sought to do. In Jamaica Kincaid's work, America pretty much always resonates, although we have obviously a part dedicated specifically to Antigua and to the Caribbean islands. In her work, England and the United States are associated to one

another due to historical reasons and due to their economic and political impact in Antigua.

#### 4.1. Neo-colonialism in Antigua

In *Neo-Colonialism the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), Kwame Nkrumah argues:

“The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from the outside” (1965, ix).

This is the point of view that we find in *A Small Place*. Throughout the four chapters of this book, but especially in the first and third one, Kincaid accuses foreign powers, in particular, North-America, of holding a strong economic, military and political power in Antigua. She also accuses the corrupt Antiguan government of collaborating with these powers to the disadvantage of the country. For example, she observes that the French government bribed an Antiguan government official to build a specific type of industrial plant (1988, 66). In her book *Jamaica Kincaid's Prismatic Subjects* (2003), Giovanna Covi points out that in *A Small Place*: “Kincaid's recollection of the British colonial imperialism becomes a Foucauldian counter-memory and a ten-by-twelve-mile island becomes the focus for understanding the contemporary imperialism of the US and of global capital” (2003,14).

This discussion around neo-colonialism starts at the beginning of the book when Kincaid associates the tourists to the international political and economic asset that makes the Northern Hemisphere rich at the expenses of the Southern and poorer one. She argues

that undoubtedly Antiguan have a Government House, a Prime Minister's Office, Parliament buildings and embassies of powerful countries because of people like the tourist, from Europe or North-America (1988, 10-11). This is due, however, to the past colonization of the island and to unequal present international forces. These forces allow people from rich countries to travel, to lead a rich life and to build opulent buildings but make people in poor countries stay at home in utter poverty.

In the first and third chapter, but also in the second one, Kincaid speaks about the political, economic and social influence of North-America on Antigua. Specifically, she interrogates herself: "And what were these people from North America, these people from England, these people from Europe, with their bad behavior, doing on this little island?" (1988, 28). Thus, she emphasizes that North-American like Europeans were an unwelcomed presence in the island. She also writes: "What surprised me most about them [Antiguans] was how familiar they were with the rubbish of North America" (1988, 44). Thus, she points out the social influence that North-American has in Antigua.

Kincaid also speaks about the social influence of North-America in Antigua in terms of the racial division they contributed to create. She contends that the Mill Reef Club was built by North Americans "but who seemed not to like Antiguan (black people) at all, for the Mill Reef Club declared itself completely private and the only Antiguan (black people) allowed to go were servants" (1988, 27).

Along with the social influence, she also mentions the economic influence of the United States in Antigua. She says that "Syrian and Lebanese nationals own large amounts of land in Antigua, and on the land they own in the countryside they build condominiums that they then sell to North Americans and Europeans" "It's true condominiums degrade

everything around themö (1988, 62). She also states that öSome gambling casinos in the hotels are controlled by mobsters from the United Statesö (1988, 60). Lastly, Kincaid emphasizes that in Antigua the dollar is the currency everyone aspires to have and that is used in big business, for example in the selling of condominiums to Europeans and to North Americans. Kincaid says öSyrian and Lebanese nationalsí build condominiums that they then sell (prices quoted in United States dollars)ö (1988, 62). In this way, she shows that business in Antigua is not conducted in the local currency but in American dollars. In addition, Kincaid mentions that food that is cultivated in Antigua is sold to the United States and then sold back to Antiguans at a higher price (1988,14). This means that there is an economic exchange favorable to the United States.

She also speaks about the military arrangements that saw Antigua helping the American army in the invasion of Grenada (1988, 72). This occurrence shows that Antigua does not have an autonomous army of its own. In fact, she is under the influence of the United States, militarily. Thus, Kincaid touches upon problematic aspects of North America, which speak of its economic success but also of its negative impact on other countries, especially about its negative impact on Antigua.

Since the first chapter we notice that in Antigua Europeans and North Americans are the symbol of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The former, in particular the English, colonized the island. Jamaica Kincaid says: öSince we were ruled by the English, we also had their lawsö (1988, 25). Afterward, referring to the Barclays brothers she says: öThe human beings they traded, the human beings who to them were only commodities, are deadö (1988, 26). The latter, connected to the English for obvious historical reasons, exploit the territory. Through trade and through military arrangements North-Americans take advantage of the resources of Antigua.

In general, in the first chapter, these two world powers are the symbols of colonialism and imperialism in the island because they exploited the free labor of populations like Native Antiguan and Africans to build their empires (although in different forms, since North America technically never was an empire) (1988, 10). As Jamaica Kincaid notes, however, history books are hypocritical about this historical occurrence and they explain that the West (meaning Europe and North America) got rich (not from the free and then undervalued labour, for generations, of the people like me you see walking around you in Antigua but from the ingenuity of small shopkeepers in Sheffield and Yorkshire and Lancashire, or whatever) (1988, 9-10). These considerations show that for Jamaica Kincaid the world is a small place: rich countries become richer and richer at the expenses of poorer countries. Also, the world is a small place because there is a recurrent attempt to undervalue the importance of African and Caribbean people, in general, and in particular to the making of the West.

More importantly, today, Europeans and North Americans are the tourists that visit the island. They are the famous tourists that accompany the narration at the beginning of the book (the one you Jamaica Kincaid addresses (the thing that you have always suspected about yourself the minute you become a tourist is true) (1988, 14) -. They are the symbol of neo-colonialism because they are the rich Europeans and North Americans versus the poor Antiguan with the West trying to impose its economic terms on Antigua. They are the audience to whom *A Small Place* is addressed.

We can say that due to the colonial history, as J. Michael Dash notes in the introduction to *Caribbean Discourse Selected Essays* (1992) by Edouard Glissant, as in the Martinique, the history of Antigua is characterized by "No collective memory, no sense of chronology" a number of pseudo-events that have happened elsewhere (1992,

xxii). This is what Jamaica Kincaid points out when she says in *A Small Place*: "For the people in a small place, every event is a domestic event; the people in a small place cannot see themselves in a larger picture" (1988, 52). Later in the book, she says: "Then they speak of emancipation itself as it happened just the other day, not over one hundred and fifty years ago" (1988, 55). This seems to be what Edouard Glissant meant when he spoke about "nonhistory": "The dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all" "the erasing of the collective memory" (1992, 62). In fact, we can see in Kincaid's book that the inhabitants of Antigua speak about slavery as if it happened yesterday leaving behind the history in between. This is what Kincaid means when she argues: "The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account, of themselves" (1988, 53). In other words, to use Glissant's language, Antiguanians have a "non-history", their history has been erased.

Edouard Glissant also says about the history of the Caribbean region:

"Slavery was accompanied by reification: all history seemed to come to a halt in the Caribbean, and the peoples transplanted there had no alternative but to subject themselves to History with a capital H, all equally subjected to the hegemony of Europe" (1992, 248).

Kincaid argues that this is what happened in Antigua.

To counteract this situation, in *A Small Place*, Kincaid seeks to rewrite history. She emphasizes that North America is not only economically successful but that it owes its success to the exploitation of other countries, such as Antigua. Thus, she points out an aspect, which is commonly little discussed. This point of view is part of Kincaid's fight against

colonialism and neo-colonialism that have imposed and impose their economic and political terms on Antigua.

Towards the end of the book, Kincaid writes:

I suppose that somewhere there is a stamp syndicate and that from time to time its people decide what would be best for the syndicate's financial interest, and they issue these stamps to these poor sap countries like Antigua (1988, 52).

With these words, Kincaid emphasizes that Antigua does not even have economic and political control over the stamps that they issue.

The library on Main Street in St. John, Antigua, is the ultimate symbol of the poverty and exploitation of the colonial past and neo-colonial present of the island. It is the symbol of colonialism because it was built during that time. It is the symbol of neo-colonialism because it reflects the present bad government of Antigua. Such government is due, among other factors, to international forces. The library was destroyed by a natural disaster, an earthquake, in 1974, and never re-built. It has constantly a sign saying that it is being repaired (1988, 42 ff.). There are no resources to repair the library because the government is too corrupt. It has economic and political ties with other countries that prevent it from managing the country in an efficient way.

#### **4.2. The vision of North America in Antigua**

If North America is presented in *A Small Place* in its neo-colonialist aspect, it is also portrayed in other terms. On the positive side, in the first chapter of the book, Kincaid observes that "there are splendid highways" in North America, in contrast to the bad

roads in Antigua (1986, 5). In the same chapter, she also notes that 'most of the taxi drivers [in New York] are from places in the world like this [like Antiguans]'. Thus she emphasizes the multiculturalism of the United States, as well as the poverty of Antiguans that are forced to take one low-paying jobs in other countries (1988, 6). She presents a vision of the country based on race, too. She states: 'The Syrians and Lebanese are called "those foreigners" North Americans and Europeans are not foreigners; they are white people' (1988, 63). Thus she establishes a link with the North-American tradition of looking at society in terms of race. These are three aspects of the vision of the United States that she offers in her third book, alongside her perspective on neo-colonialism.

Kincaid describes North-America as a place of refuge when she says that healthcare is bad in Antigua and that, those who can afford it, fly to North America. Kincaid wonders: 'Will you be comforted to know that the hospital is staffed with doctors that no actual Antiguan trusts' (1988,8). Later on the same page, she writes: 'when the Minister of Health himself doesn't feel well he takes the first plane to New York to see a real doctor' (1988, 8). Rich Antiguans prefer to spend their money on foreign health-care rather than on improving health services at home.

Kincaid also presents North-America as a source of fascination for Antiguans, especially, for the Ministers of Antigua. In fact, she says that all the Ministers of Antigua have green cards, which make them legal residents of the United States (1988, 8). This is part of the ambiguity of the United States. On the one hand, it is a place that exploits Antigua. On the other hand, it is a place where to go to, in case of necessity, such as for medical care, or for pleasure. Fascination for North America is present at all levels of society 'not only among the upper classes-. When Antiguans look at the president of the Antigua Trades and Labour Union they see, in fact, 'George Washington, liberator and

first president of the United States or Jackie Presser, then head of the Teamsters Union in America (1988, 69-70). Antiguans are also familiar with and influenced by American traditions, such as Teenage Pageant, which they perform in Antigua and which Jamaica Kincaid considers nonsense, rubbish (1988, 43).

Kincaid's analyses of the United States, however, shows that its influence on Antigua is a consequence of its global power. As Kincaid analyses in the second chapter of the book, the bad health-care that is present in Antigua is due to the bad management of the country inherited from colonialism and a result of the present international situation.<sup>11</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>11</sup> We have to consider the short-story collection *At the Bottom of the River* (1985) to understand the significance of North America in Kincaid's *A Small Place*. This is the most lyrical book Jamaica Kincaid has written. The short-story "Holiday" in this collection describes a person, a man, from New York sitting on a porch and observing flies. He is in the countryside. He has taken a car a "small car" and has driven to the country (1985, 32). He has three children, three "chums": two boys and a girl (1985, 33). They play cards after dinner and teach each other jokes. He observes the mosquitoes and the flies that are present and a family of skunks "spraying the family dog" (1985, 33). He tries to catch a cricket ball (1985, 33). Outside a blind man is walking. The two boys are fishing and have visited the museum dedicated to Mark Twain in Missouri. The atmosphere is idyllic: the children are "gay", there is "great laughter", milk and eggs from a farm, no electronic devices, the sound of a piano from afar, ducks, "wide smiles" and "funny postcards" (1985, 36). There is a reference to African countries in this short-story in the form of an old song that the male protagonist "whose name we do not know" remembers. The song is about a man from British Guiana who played a "piano" "His foot slipped. His trousers ripped" (1985, 32). This song may be a reference to the many African immigrants who populate the United States who, like the Antiguans of *A Small Place*, leave their country for another.

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In this short-story, Kincaid offers an idyllic picture of North America. This vision, in part, contrasts with the vision of this country she proposes in *A Small Place*. However, this is part of the fascination that emigrants, poor people, and those who live in Third World countries feel for North America. America is still considered the island of opportunities and of idyllic life by many. In *A Small Place*, we see this facet when Kincaid argues that some Antiguan inhabitants imitate American traditions (1988, 43).<sup>7</sup>

*Lucy* is, in many ways, an idyllic story about North-America, too. In this book, Jamaica Kincaid recounts the story of a girl, Lucy, who moves from Antigua to the United States to work as an Au-pair for a family. The family she stays with is beautiful: beautiful husband and wife and children. The house is beautiful, the landscape is beautiful and the time she has with them is awesome. However, in this fiction Jamaica Kincaid also brings to light the contradictions that she sees apparent in the life of this American family. For example, she contrasts the concern of Mariah for the desertification of the surrounding countryside with the fact that she and her husband had contributed to it in a first place by building a house, where before there were only plants and trees and also through the husband's job as a stockbroker. She also emphasizes the envy that Mariah's best friend Dinah feels for her and her ignorance of geography. She does not deny the hypocrisy that exists in marriages when the husband or the wife, in *Lucy* it is the husband, betrays the other partner. She wants to emphasize that although such betrayal and hypocrisy happens in the United States, a country that many see as a mirage, more so than in Antigua.

In line with her criticism of the United States in *A Small Place*, in *Lucy*, Kincaid tries to demystify the United States, which in some cultures appear as a mythical country. Although an immigrant to the United States, Kincaid retains a critical outlook towards this country, as an outsider. She wants to point out the difficulty of life in a world where there are so many hypocrisies. She argues, in contrast, that in her native Antigua the relationship between man and woman, their needs and their lives are less mystified. In Antigua life is much easier and less hypocritical. This is what she seems to argue in *A Small Place* when she contrasts the tourist with

Kincaid says that the fascination that North-America exercises on Antiguans is due to its increasing economic power in the island. She points out that the United States are practically replacing the role that England had as a colonial power. They are, in other words, a neo-colonialist power. Specifically, she says:

“What surprised me most about them was how familiar they were with the rubbish of North-America ócompared to the young people of my generation, who were familiar with the rubbish of England” (1988, 44).<sup>12</sup>

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Antiguans. Kincaid says in *Lucy*: “I was looking at ruins, and I knew it right then. The actual fall of this Rome I hope not to be around to see, but just in case I could not make my own quick exit I planned to avert my eyes” (1994, 88). With this sentence she is probably wondering, in reality, how long can a country with so many hypocrisies survive. This is probably the ultimate message that Kincaid gives in the third and last chapter of *A Small Place* when she says that masters were “human rubbish” “lonely and empty” meaning people with no values (1988, 80). Also, in *Lucy*, Kincaid criticizes colonialism and explorers, as in *A Small Place*, when she writes: “On their way to freedom, some people find riches, some people find death” (1994, 129).

<sup>12</sup> As in *A Small Place*, in *Mr. Potter*, we have a discussion of neo-colonialism. We have a reference to the attraction that North America exercises on Antiguans (North America as the land of opportunities). *Mr. Potter* constitutes an evolution of *A Small Place*. It discusses a similar thematic but in a narrative form. In particular, we have a reference to the fascination that foreign cars exercise on Antiguans and to the trade in foreign cars that exist in the island, as in *A Small Place*. Specifically, we have a reference to Mr. Potter buying a North American car that he sees as something magic (2005, 135) (metaphorically he sees the United States as magic).

We can perhaps think about the United States as described, for example, by Henry James, the America of the upper classes as a source of fascination for Antiguans or the United States described by Thornton Wilder in his play *Our Town* (1938), a rural America but an idyllic life.

Kincaid also emphasizes a possible connection between the United States and the murder of some Antiguans. She says that "A calypso singer's sister's body was found, with the head chopped off, near the island's United States Army base" (1988, 63).<sup>13</sup>

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Most probably, however, it is the North America that comes through the television that catches the imagination of Caribbean people.

<sup>13</sup> *In Talk Stories* (2001), Kincaid mentions other places whose citizens she met in New York that struck her mind. For example, she writes a piece on Kenya emphasizing the beauty of the country and of its people. She talks about the first Kenya Trade Fair. She also writes about a trip she made to China. She writes about the ancient kingdom of Benin and about an exposition that was made about the kingdom in New York at which the King of Benin at the time was present, too. Perhaps, this double vision of North-America is part of the vision of the United States as a fascinating place, where one hopes to immigrate that she offers in *A Small Place*. In *Talk Stories* Kincaid comments on the integration of the various ethnic groups in the United States. This book is a collection of essays written in the third person plural, a "we". It offers a very telling picture of North America as Kincaid saw and experienced it. She says that "an ethnic group has made in the country when you find its food at your local grocer" (2001, 23). She also mentions the black power movement by writing that it was the "black power" age and that "every time I have some of it [Third World dessert], I think kindly of Mr. Shabazz and everybody with an "X" after his name" (2001, 24). It is interesting this inversion of names since Betty Shabazz was Malcolm X's wife and Shabazz was her surname, not his. Perhaps, we can read this inversion in line with Kincaid's feminist stand.

In this book, Kincaid talks a lot about the music you could hear in New York in the 1970s, especially African-American music. She also makes some sarcastic comments about Antigua, which stand in contrast with her writings on New York. She writes that she met a friend from Antigua in New York and that her friend commented that Antigua was very much like the United

In the second chapter of her 1988 book, Kincaid criticizes Antiguan for imitating American traditions. Edouard Glissant writes on this subject: "Martinicans have been deeply affected by liberation movements in Africa, by the struggle of Black Americans, which make them sense that there are other ways to conceive of the world or to live than through imitation" (1992, 179). The whole of the Caribbean region, in fact, has been influenced by the struggle of Black Americans. Vice versa, black Americans have also been influenced by Caribbean people (For example, by Frantz Fanon and by Marcus Garvey, among others).

In other books, such as *Lucy* and *See Now Then*, Kincaid talks about idyllic life in North-America. She transcends, or does not talk, about color barriers, which she, instead, mentions in *A Small Place*. In the latter book, she contrasts, in fact, white Europeans and North-Americans with black Antiguan in at least two parts, in the first part of chapter two and in the third part of chapter three. In contrast, for example, in *Lucy*, Kincaid talks about the beautiful friendship between Lucy and Peggy that transcends color barriers. It is a

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States. When asked if in Antigua there was an African Institute she marveled and said "Oh in an overly polite tone of voice" (2001, 66). When asked if in Antigua there was a TV program called "The Fonz", a popular American television show at the time, she replied that "even if it takes years we'll know about him. We pick up the really good, stylish American things" (2001, 67). We can clearly see the subtle irony in Kincaid's words. We can notice how her comments on her native Antigua are almost sarcastic and bitter, instead her comments on New York and her vision of the city is very positive and very jolly. This is part of Kincaid's vision of Antigua as a place strongly influenced by North-America, which she offers in *A Small Place*. Her admiration for N.Y city is due to the fact that she is an immigrant who was living the best of the city. Kincaid writes in a light hearted voice, which reflects her enjoyment of the vibrant New York City at the time.

genuine friendship that will only stop eventually because of personal differences, like any friendship. Also, the relationship between Lucy and the other characters (Mariah, her lovers Hugh and Paul) is not contaminated by this problem.

Although Kincaid speaks about North-America in favorable terms in other writings, if we analyze them closely we can see that she does not leave out of them her critique of colonialism and neo-colonialism and of the exploitation of native people around the world, which she introduces in *A Small Place*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" (1991), Kincaid significantly defines the United States as "a powerful country that takes up more than its fair share of a continent" to live. This view ratifies the vision of North America as a neo-colonialist country, which is presented in *A Small Place* (1991, 37). In the essay entitled "The Little Revenge from the Periphery" (1997), which is the counterpart of the essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" (1991) Kincaid writes that she heard about the United States for the first time in a school in Dominica. The teacher was reading a story about hatred against black people on the part of a man called George Wallace who lived in Mississippi. At the time, she suggested to send this man a bible and some missionaries because she thought that he was a "savage" (1997, 70). This suggestion to her class serves Kincaid to write about the importance of African-Americans for America because without them there would be "no benchmark against which to measure oneself" (1997, 70). With this sentence she means that in America people who are black are obsessed with defining themselves because they stand in opposition to most of society. They are the Other, and the color of their skin defines their lives. Because they were the most exploited, Kincaid argues that the people who needed the Declaration of Independence the most were the African slaves brought to America to serve the needs of slave-owners. She contends that Thomas Jefferson in a paragraph he wrote understood too well that it was, in fact, the slaves, who were part of a "market where MEN should be bought and sold" (1997, 72), who needed the most the Declaration. However, he was probably

We can say that North America is presented in *A Small Place* as a nice place, for some people; as a first world country, where some Antiguan long to live. It is almost a mirage for many Antiguan who live in a poor third world country. However, Jamaica Kincaid proposes a vision of North-America, which reflects its problems and contradictions. Kincaid does not offer an exalted vision of the United States. She is able to see beyond the American mirage and to be a witness to its problems. This is the vision of the United States of an outsider, of a person who is not born and raised in the country and who, therefore, can look at it critically.

Kincaid's vision is important because it emphasizes the impact that North-America has on other countries. In this sense, she approaches African-American and Latino literatures, which are witnesses to the internal contradictions of the United States. Like African-Americans, Antiguan slave came from Africa and thus share a common history with them. They have the same roots. Edouard Glissant notes: "the first generation of slaves brought here [in the Martinique] wished for death in order to return to Africa" (1992, 59). They share a common sensibility.

Edouard Glissant observes that "The Caribbean Sea is not an American lake. It is the estuary of the Americas" (1992, 139). Placing these lines in relation with Jamaica

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deemed mad by his fellow men. In this essay, Kincaid summarizes the history of the United States from the point of view of an African-American. She continues her journey towards the reclamation of history for herself and the creation of a space in history for native people, which she starts in *A Small Place*. Because of the similar exploitation suffered by natives and Africans in the Caribbean and in the United States we can see that Jamaica Kincaid is correct when she alludes that the world is "a small place" in her homonymous book. We can see from her defense of African-Americans in this essay and from *Lucy* that Kincaid advocates a pluralistic society in America.

Kincaid's book, I interpret them to mean that the Caribbean region does not simply accept American points of views, life-style and thoughts, full stop, but that it elaborates them to fit its own reality. Nevertheless, the Caribbean region is under the influence of North-America.

#### **4.3. Emigration from Antigua: Tracing the Significance of Kincaid's Personal Story**

Antigua as a place of contradictions and emigration and the United States as a place of fascination and immigration resonates not only in Jamaica Kincaid's book but also in Kincaid's personal life. This can be seen from the autobiographical references in her work. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid mentions black Antiguan's "returning to Antigua after a long absence" (1988, 44). From her biography, we know that she is one of them. In the book *My Brother* (1997), she speaks more in details about her immigrant experience.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It is an autobiographical work about the death of Jamaica Kincaid's brother Devon. Kincaid recounts the last three years of her brother in Antigua, while she had already had a successful career as a writer in the United States and had established herself in Vermont. The book comprises two parts with various subsections. The first part is about the sickness of Kincaid's brother and memories of her childhood; the second part starts with her brother's death and talks about the last days of his sickness until his death. The narration is very quick: it betrays the strong emotions that the illness and afterwards, the death for HIV of her brother had on the author. This book is very personal and, at times, crude in its description of this sickness. This is an attempt to give a vivid picture of her emotions to the reader, to make her brother's sickness as real as possible. Kincaid

In comparing Antigua to the United States, in this reflection-autobiography *My Brother*, Kincaid gives a different picture of Antigua than the one she presents in *A Small Place*. In a sense, it is a more positive one, as she compares and contrasts the situation in Antigua with the situation in North America, while she runs back and forth between the two countries. Although she takes some distances from her family and from her past while visiting her brother in Antigua, Jamaica Kincaid, because of her brother's sickness sees her fellow Antiguan population differently than in *A Small Place*. In this autobiography she says that she discovers a solidarity that she did not know before. In contrast, in *A Small Place*, she is mostly critical of the present situation of the island.<sup>16</sup>

Although the description of Antigua that Kincaid offers in *My Brother* is more positive, it is not less crude. We have in *My Brother* the ambiguity of emigration portrayed more strongly, or more in details, than in *A Small Place*. The anger with which Kincaid justly describes Antigua in *A Small Place* is replaced by a sense of mute consideration. But yet, again, also in the case of HIV, which is the main theme of this book *My Brother*- the

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mentions the time she spent travelling between the United States and Antigua because of her brother's sickness.

<sup>16</sup> In *My Brother*, Kincaid states that she met at a workshop held by the most famous doctor on HIV in Antigua, Dr. Ramsey, a couple whose daughter died at thirty-two years of age. They attended the workshop because they hoped they could help other parents (1997, 29 ff). Yet, again, although in *My Brother* Kincaid describes Antigua in more positive terms than in *A Small Place*, we can notice that Kincaid is correct in the latter book when she says that Antigua is 'a small place' like a village. In fact, it is in villages that we find more solidarity than in bigger cities because people live in closer contact with one another. In this sense, we can think once again, about the play *Our Town*, where we find solidarity in the small village of Grover's Corner.

world is ða small placeö. Rich countries are less affected by HIV/Aids than poorer ones. Also, poorer people, in particular Antiguan, are most affected by HIV. This is a common disease in third world countries and in Antigua because they do not have the resources to educate the population against it and to fight it with the proper medicines. In the United States the African-American community is the one most affected by HIV/Aids.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In *My Brother*, Kincaid decides not to bring her brother back with her to the United States to receive adequate cures. It is not racism that makes act in this way, but an unwillingness to create problems to her present life. She also considers her brother's situation as a consequence of the corruption of the government in Antigua. The government is unable to supply adequate cures to the population. She also consider this situation a matter of personal responsibility: she was responsible in her life accepting its ups and downs, her brother was not (1997, 37 ff.) This is the picture of Antigua that we find in *A Small Place*: that of an unfortunately poor country and with a corrupt government. Kincaid's criticism of the government in *A Small Place*, her description of the poverty in the island and her comparison with North America, therefore, raise important issues that concern the social situation in the island and beyond and that resonate in other books by the author, too. In *My Brother*, Kincaid relates her immigrant experience in the United States. She describes her life while her brother was sick. She takes distances from her native Antigua, which is no longer part of her life but it is part of her past. She has changed since she left Antigua: she no longer speaks the English they speak in Antigua but another English, a ðstandard Englishö, probably an American English, since she has lived for so long in the United States (1997, 12). She no longer feels at ease at home, in Antigua, with her mother. Kincaid seems almost afraid that her mother and siblings may bring back past memories or even that they may appropriate themselves of her present (1997, 24ff.).

The picture of Antigua that emerges from *A Small Place* is slightly controversial. This is because, as an emigrant, Kincaid can take some distances from her land of origin, although she remains inexorably linked to it. In this book, she is, in fact, critical towards her country, which means that she has taken some distances from it. At the same time, she recounts childhood episodes linked to the library, which denotes that she is very close to the country (1988, 44 ff).

Perhaps, what Edouard Glissant says about immigrants from the Martinique to France applies to Jamaica Kincaid, as well. Glissant argues:

“It is very often in France that migrant French Caribbean people discover they are *different*, become aware of their Caribbeaness; an awareness that is more disturbing and unliveable, since the individual cannot, however, manage to return to his origins (í .they will find him too *assimilé*, too European in his ways, etc.) and he will have to *migrate again*” (1992, 23).

It is in, fact, only in the United States that Jamaica Kincaid takes the pen and writes about her Antiguan identity critically and in Antigua she feels an outsider.

In an interview with Moira Ferguson, Jamaica Kincaid calls Antigua “a suburb of America and of the worst part of America” They [Antiguans] just see these people [Americans] having fun í .(the) ideal of living is just to put on clothes and dance and spend money because that is what they see successful people doing” (1994, 174). This is the image of Antigua that Kincaid presents in *A Small Place* when she says that Antiguan imitate American traditions (1988, 43). She also says: “some gambling casinos are controlled by mobsters from the United States” (1988,60). She argues that big condominiums are built to be sold to Americans (1998, 62). Kincaid denominates Antigua

a "suburb of America" to point out the global influence that the United States has in the country.

One may wonder how to account for the change in Kincaid's vision of Antigua from *A Small Place* and this interview with Moira Ferguson to *My Brother* (her criticism of Antigua in the first two writings, as opposed to her ability to see solidarity in the island beyond all that goes wrong). From my point of view, Jamaica Kincaid clearly has a critical line of thought that she carries on in all her books. However, her outlook on a particular issue depends on the specific moment in time, in which she is writing and on her experiences in life.

As an immigrant to the United States, she has ambivalent feelings towards her mother country. Yet, Kincaid's criticism of Antigua in *A Small Place* is sound and probably allowed the author to see beyond it in later books. More specifically, as Moira Ferguson notes, in the 1980s, when she was writing *A Small Place* and she returned to Antigua, Kincaid realized that "I spent all the time I had been away from the West Indies and from my mother building some kind of 'literary monument' to it [Antigua], and it was interesting that when I got back it had changed so radically. I was shocked it had changed for the worse" (qtd. in Ferguson 1994, 78). However, when later on she was writing *My Brother* she was able to see something different in the island than what she had seen at the time of writing *A Small Place*. She could see the mutual support that existed among people.

Moira Ferguson wonders: "How much of her anger [Jamaica Kincaid's] is compensation for the privilege she gains from living in the United States and being part of that very North America whose colonial practices have played havoc with Antiguan

people remains unclear?ö (Ferguson 1994, 99). From Ferguson's point of view, Jamaica Kincaid expresses her anger to öveil any privilege she gains from being a voluntary expatriateö (Ferguson 1994, 99). I agree with this point of view. However, I also think that it is due to the course of history that writers from Africa, from the Caribbean region and Asia emigrate to the United States to find resources to write their books, even though it is a contradiction.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid offers a different perspective on Antigua than the one that a person who has lived all her life in the island would offer. She talks about the languages, perceptions, uses and customs of Antiguan. For example, in chapters one and two, she mentions how Antiguan perceive tourists and how they perceived English people. However, she is also critical of her country. In the first and third chapters, she mentions the corruption of the government. This criticism does not mean that she is trying to forget Antigua in favor of new places. Kincaid, in fact, criticizes the United States like she criticizes England. However, Kincaid wants to offer a critical view of her country. She uses her experience to develop a critical view of history, society and politics in Antigua, as we also see in other books she has written.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kincaid seems to have been aspiring to and to have reached a North American life-style. She seems part of the tradition of poor or relatively poor people who emigrate to North-America from poorer countries in search of fortune. However, beginning with *A Small Place*, throughout her work she presents different facets of North-America. She mentions the positive aspects of the country but she also examines the stereotypes surrounding it. She tries to give a realistic picture of the country. She also tries to show that the world is öa small placeö with people struggling to meet ends, dying while carrying on their jobs and being troubled by relationships. She criticizes slavery and the condition of blacks in North America.

In this 1988 book, therefore, the United States and Antigua are portrayed by Kincaid as places that stand millions of years apart from one another but that are also close, almost the same country, due to globalization and neo-colonialism. The first modern, the second traditional, the former rich, the latter poor. In Antigua, however, we find similar uses and customs to the United States. Kincaid criticizes them both. We see two aspects of these countries: one positive and one negative. This is the portrait of Antigua that we find in *My Brother*, too, although Kincaid was able to see beyond the negative situation of Antigua. Despite her criticism of them both, these locations are dear to Jamaica Kincaid even though she has a difficult time reconciling with her native Antigua, which has been for her source of much anguish and pain. There are perhaps some contradictions in Jamaica Kincaid's life but the problems that she raises in *A Small Place* are important socially and politically. In particular, she notices in the book that Antigua is a suburb of the United States. Kincaid makes sound comments when she criticizes the neo-colonialism of the United States that tends to homogenize the world. She is correct in advocating a move towards a post-neocolonialism, in this sense. It is her emigrant/immigrant experience that allows her to be critical towards her place of birth and towards her place of residence.

#### **4.4. History and the Caribbean People**

The historical notion of the Caribbean people that emerges out of *A Small Place* is important: that of a people who share a common history with African-Americans, who suffer from neo-colonialism on the part of Americans and who, at the same time, through migration, contribute to the making of the United States. It also emerges the picture of a

region, where countries have a political impact on one another. Kincaid's fundamental attempt in this book is to link the history of Caribbean countries together to propose a reinterpretation of their history.

In the second chapter of this book, Kincaid argues: "Antigua has an army of sorts, an army that can only stand around as decoration, the way it did in Grenada when the United States invaded that island in 1983 (1988, 72). Antigua, in fact, has adopted pro-U.S. policies and has aided the invasion of Grenada. She writes in the book, in a prophetic tone: "and they [Antiguans] imagine that such a man will materialize in Antigua and he'll do Maurice Bishop-like things and say Maurice Bishop-like things and come to a Maurice Bishop-like end" (1988, 74). Maurice Bishop was the Grenadian revolutionary and politician overthrown by a coup-d'état supported by the United States. Kincaid also writes in her book: "And they [Antiguans] point to the other son and say that they are reminded of Papa Doc himself, for he is the ruthless son, the one who is not afraid of anything, the one who won't resign his post in government" (1988,73). "Papa Doc" was the 40<sup>th</sup> president of Haiti who governed the country from the mid-fifties to the early seventies. Kincaid says with irony: "I thought, then, that I should ask the Minister of Education about the library" "but at the moment I wanted to ask him this question he was in Trinidad attending a cricket match, something he must have been bound to do, since he is not only the Minister of Education and the Minister of Culture but also the Minister of Sport" (1988, 48). With these words Kincaid is trying to offer a critical panorama of the political situation in the Caribbean region.

From passages like the above, we can see that in *A Small Place*, in particular, in the second chapter, Kincaid links the political situation of the small Caribbean islands

together. She offers one single panorama of this region. Correctly, she emphasizes that the Caribbean region supports the American army, often against countries in the same region.

Kincaid mentions the historical and social reality in the islands, too. In particular, she mentions slavery and comments on its effects in the Caribbean. In the first chapter, she says: "you needn't let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination [in Antigua] develop into full-fledged uneasiness" (1988, 10). Later on in the chapter, she comments: "But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean is even bigger; it would amaze you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up" (1988, 14).

The impact of slavery on the Caribbean islands is a theme, which is very important and sound. Throughout her work there are comments on the common history of slavery, which the Caribbean region share with other lands. Through these observations, Kincaid offers the picture of a people, the Caribbean people, who have been enslaved and who still suffer the consequences of slavery, today. The heritage of slavery cannot be eradicated so easily from a culture or forgotten and forgiven.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Starting from these reflections, we can observe that, in *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), Kincaid considers more in details the effect of slavery on Caribbean people. She writes: "You cannot trust these people, my father would say to me [the children the protagonist's girl living in Dominica- would go to school with]". "That these people were ourselves, that this insistence on mistrust of others [her father's insistence] of that people who looked very much like each other, who shared a common history of suffering and humiliation and enslavement, should be taught to mistrust each other, even as children, is no longer a mystery to me" (1996, 48). A little afterward, she comments: "We were not friends. We walked together in a companionship based on fear" (1996, 48). In this book, she poignantly captures one of the consequences of slavery,

To counteract these consequences of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Kincaid seeks to claim a small place for herself and for Caribbean people in history. In *A Small Place* she

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colonialism and neo-colonialism: is the imposition of the *divide et impera* precept. In the previous pages of the same book, capturing another consequence of slavery and colonialism, Kincaid writes about her teacher: *My teacher was a woman who had been trained by the Methodist missionaries; she was of the African people and she found in this a source of humiliation and self-loathing, and she wore despair like an article of clothing, like a mantle, or a staff on which she leaned constantly, a birthright which she would pass on to us* (15).

Kincaid's comments are poignant. They probably come from the reflections she makes in *A Small Place*. Specifically, in the third chapter of *A Small Place*, she notices that slavery is an episode that is still very much present today in people's mind. She argues: *In Antigua, people speak of slavery as if it had been a pageant full of large ships sailing on blue water. Then they speak of emancipation itself as it happened just the other day, not over one hundred and fifty years ago* (1988,55). These reflections remind us of a similar situation in the United States: the ignorance about one own past. In the book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), for example, Alice Walker interrogates herself on the difficulties she encountered in teaching black writers to both black and white people because of the lack of knowledge that they have about them. Walker writes: *How do you teach earnest but educationally crippled middle-aged and older women the significance of their past? How do you get them to understand the pathos and beauty of a heritage they have been taught to regard with shame?* (1983, 28). Later on, she says:

*Try to tell a sixty-year-old delta woman that black men invented anything, black women wrote sonnets, that black people long ago were every bit the human beings they are today. Try to tell her that kinky hair is delightful. Chances are she will begin to talk *Bible* to you, and you will discover to your dismay that the lady still believes in the curse of Ham* (1983, 28).

does so by criticizing the corruption that exist in the political scenario of the Caribbean region, perhaps, in an attempt to awaken change. Also, she challenges traditional history.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In other writings, Kincaid uses a more symbolic approach. She constantly reclaims the beauty of blackness. For example, in *The Autobiography of My Mother* she writes of a woman whom she and a group of friends see drowning in a river. She writes: "She was a beautiful woman, more beautiful than any woman we had ever seen, beautiful in a way that made sense to us, not to a European way" (1996, 36). Similarly, in the essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" (1991), Jamaica Kincaid writes that if she could force English to live in a place where the sun burned constantly they would "look more like me" "the people I love and treasure and hold dear" (1991, 38). By contrast, in her books Kincaid challenges the notion of whiteness and everything that is associated with it.

In a similar fashion to what we have seen in the previous writings, in *My Garden (book)* (2000), although in a different context "in the United States", Kincaid reclaims blackness as an important and valuable aspect of life. She writes: "and then the *Lilium Orientalis* "Black Beauty," which is not black at all, but how I long for it to be that, black "a flower that is the color black, black like the night or like something that is instantly recognizably black is so rare that in the garden, in a flower, I long for it" (2000, 13).

We find a similar attempt to claim a place in history for Antiguans in the earlier short-story collection *At the Bottom of the River*, in particular, in the short-story entitled "Blackness". This collection can be considered a prelude to the subsequent book *A Small Place*, in some ways. It elaborates some of the issues that we find discussed in *A Small Place*, although it does not have the same critical tone. In this short-story about blackness, Kincaid describes how it falls, its visibility, and invisibility. Kincaid writes, "I hear the silent voice; it stands opposite the blackness and yet it does not oppose the blackness, for conflict is not a part of its nature" (1985, 52). Clearly, the blackness that falls, the blackness of the night, is a metaphor for the color of the skin. Jamaica Kincaid writes that it carries no conflict with it. It is not an oppositional blackness but a

To explain, in part, what Jamaica Kincaid does with history, in this book, we can consider a comment she makes in an interview. She said in a 1994 interview with Moira Ferguson: "More and more people who look like me cling to their narrow definitions of themselves. What you really have to do is to take back. Not just reclaim. Take-period." (1994, 168). What Kincaid does in the 1988 book, in fact, is not only to "reclaim" her history, what has been done with populations from the past, such as native Americans by placing them in museums. She also writes history anew using what she knows about the past, with different concepts and definitions taken from the past of native people. She takes history back<sup>21</sup>. Kincaid considers the place of Antiguans in history.<sup>22</sup> In *A Small*

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participative and inclusive blackness, as Giovanna Covi (2003) notes. Giovanna Covi aptly observes that the subaltern can speak according to Audre Lorde "when the blackness is "at last erased", the dominating voice rejected, and the silent voice liberated in its definitionless complexity" (2003, 70). This is the message that Kincaid seems to offer in *A Small Place* when she says: "once you throw off your master's yoke, you are a human being. Once they are no longer slaves, they are just human beings" (1988, 81). In her work, Kincaid shows the complexity of the voice of the subaltern and tries to liberate it. She also tries to reject the voice of the conqueror, the oppressor, and to give a new dignity to the subaltern. In the interview, Moira Ferguson calls Jamaica Kincaid's work "oppositional critic" (1994, 174).

<sup>22</sup> In the *Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), the author writes:

"I also knew the history of an array of people I would never meet. That in itself should not have kept me from knowing of them; it was only that this history of peoples that I would never meet -Romans, Gauls, Saxons, Britons, the British people- had behind it a malicious intent: to make me feel humiliated, humbled small. Once I had identified and

*Place*, she does not simply recall the uses and customs of Antiguans. She does not simply retell their history. She goes beyond this and tries to explain the present by showing the historical forces behind it. For example, she considers the disruption of the culture of native Antiguans caused by colonialism. She "takes back" the past with rage and anger (Ferguson 1994, 168).<sup>23</sup>

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accepted the malice directed at me, I became fascinated with this expression of vanity" (1994, 59).

With this comment, Kincaid considers her position in history: she recognizes the fact that she occupies a secondary position but she is not dismissed by this consideration.

<sup>23</sup> In the book *The Autobiography of My Mother*, too, Kincaid claims a history for herself with long considerations over history. She claims that she cannot forget the past and that it is the present that matters to her not the future, although she longs to make space for herself in the future. It is through her body that she seeks to reverse the course of history: in the book *The Autobiography of My Mother Xuela*, the protagonist, marries an English man, a doctor, although she does not love him and she tries to subdue him with her body and person and to change the past and to bring about what she seems to imply that is the inevitability of history -that the defeated become winners and the losers rise to victory-. She says: "I married a man I did not love. It allowed me to make a romance of my life. Romance is the refuge of the defeated; the defeated need a sweet tune to soothe themselves. For when they are awake it is a nightmare" (1996, 216). At the end of the book, however, the author does not try to find consolation in her husband but she tries to make sense of what has been the past, of the relationship between history and the winners and history and the losers and of the relationship of both with themselves. She writes: "And this man I married was of the victors, and so much part of him was this situation. . .that only through a book of history could he be reminded of a time when he might have been something other,

In this 1988 book, Kincaid, therefore, investigates the problems that the heritage of slavery left to Caribbean people. Significant is the following sentence in the last chapter: "Eventually the masters left, in a kind of way; eventually, the slaves were freed, in a kind of way" (1988, 80). "In a kind of way" does not mean completely. Thus she emphasizes that the history of slavery and colonialism is not really over. As Frantz Fanon puts it: "One day the White Master, *without conflict*, recognized the Negro slave. But the former slave wants to *make himself recognized*" (2008, 169).

Very importantly, Kincaid tries to counteract what Edouard Glissant called "non-history" of Caribbean people, as we have seen (1992). More specifically, Kincaid tries to reverse what according to J. Michael Dash, in the preface to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourses*, is Edouard Glissant's notion of history as "ultimately a fantasy peculiar to Western imagination in its pursuit of a discourse that legitimizes its power and condemns other cultures to the periphery" (1992, xxix). We could say that she is trying to make the world a bigger place. *A Small Place* is, in reality, an investigation of Antiguan's lack of history and of the significance of the history created by Europeans for Antiguan, how this history has depersonalized and alienated them. We can draw a parallel between the problems of Caribbean people and the problems of previously enslaved people in other

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something like me, the vanquished, the defeated" (1996, 217). Later, she says: "He did not have a future, he had only the past – it was not a past he was responsible for all by himself, it was a past he had inherited" (1996, 217). Significantly, she asks: "What can bring happiness? At the moment the conqueror asks such a question, his defeat is secure" (1996, 217). Clearly, she wants to signify that colonialism cannot survive although it has managed to defeat a people because it cannot be sustained and bore by the conqueror himself. Again, we find an attempt to promote a different vision of history from the traditional one, as in her earlier book *A Small Place*.

countries, such as North-America. In her work, Kincaid reclaims a place in history for Caribbean and black people, more in general, along the lines of African-Americans and the negritude movement by emphasizing the value of blackness.

#### **4.5. A Controversial Vision of Antigua**

In *A Small Place*, Antigua is portrayed as the place where Jamaica Kincaid was born and grew up. It is the primary object of her work. This is so despite the fact that she kept a controversial relationship with the government of the island who invited her not to go back after the publication of the book<sup>24</sup>.

The first image of the country that Kincaid's third book offers is that of a poor country. In the first chapter, she mentions the bad streets, the poor houses, the latrines, the decadent hospital. These are the aspects of the country that a potential tourist would see on his way to his hotel. Specifically, Kincaid says: "The road on which you are travelling is a very bad road, very much in need of repair" (1988, 5). Later on, she comments: "they [cars] look brand-new, but they have an awful sound, like an old car-a very old dilapidated car" (1988, 6). In the following page, she asserts: "You would pass a building sitting in a sea of dust and you think, It's some latrines for people just passing by, but when you look again you see the building has written on it PIGOTT'S SCHOOL" (1998, 7).

Kincaid also mentions, in contrast, the rich buildings that are present in Antigua such as the Government House, the American embassy, the mansion of a drug-dealer and the

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<sup>24</sup> See: "An interview with Jamaica Kincaid" by Allan Vorda (2013, 69) and Lizabeth Paravisini-Herbert (1999, 32-33).

beautiful beaches and hotels. For example, Kincaid says: "Now you are passing a mansion, an extraordinary house painted the colour of old cow dung, with more aerials and antennas attached to it than you will see even at the American Embassy" (1988, 11).

Similarly, in *Mr. Potter* Kincaid describes the life of the humble and poor people in Antigua. Particularly, she describes the life of a taxi-driver, Mr. Potter. The first Mr. Potter, Nathaniel Potter was a fisherman and had eleven children. The second Mr. Potter, Nathaniel Roderick (known as Roderick and "Drickie" when he was young or by the people who knew him well or loved him) is a taxi driver. He works for Mr. Shoul, an immigrant to Antigua from Lebanon or Syria (the narrator does not know). He is the protagonist of the book, the father of the person who says to be writing the story, the homodiegetic fictional narrator who like Jamaica Kincaid is a writer. It is with him, Mr. Potter, that the book starts. *Mr. Potter* complements the vision of Antigua that Jamaica offers in *A Small Place*. We become familiar, more in details, with the life of poor people in Antigua.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Roderick Potter has many daughters with many different wives but marries only one woman. All his life he drives a taxi. The description of the birth of Mr. Potter, Roderick Potter, with the description of the poverty that surrounds him is particularly interesting: the bare room and the clothing, the feelings of the mid-wife and of his mother at his birth, her feelings in the first years after his birth (she does not have much to feed him with) (2005, 51ff). It is through Mr. Potter and through the eyes of one of his daughters that we learn the reality and life of poor people in Antigua. Giovanna Covi notes that "Mr. Potter might be considered the representation of the 'small place' he inhabits, a cultural space so relentlessly and overwhelmingly marked by stories of 'displacements' that the ultimate political and philosophical significance of *Mr. Potter* is its articulation of colonialism and a thick network of displacements" (2003, 119).

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In *Mr. Potter*, Kincaid also talks about the life and, in a sense odyssey, of other dispossessed people. They are the Lebanese and Syrian immigrants to Antigua, who are also mentioned in *A Small Place* (1988, 62, 63). The figure of Mr. Shoul (another displacement, again caused indirectly by colonialism), symbolizes these immigrants. He and his father and his mother left the Middle East and lived in Suriname, English Guiana and Trinidad before finally arriving to Antigua óhis mother died en route- and finding a place where to settle with his trade of precious and fashionable cloth and of necessary goods. In the other countries his father either could not speak the language, did not like the place, or found other immigrants from the Middles East already in the trade (2002, 89). Mr. Shoul is the counterpart of Dr. Wezenger. They are both immigrants who leave behind histories of disasters, in the case of Mr. Shoul or of human provoked disasters, wars, in the case of Dr. Weizenger. They have different sensibilities. When they die the former has many and many people coming to his funeral, whose life they felt he had made better through his work, the latter has practically no-one in spite of the fact that he was a doctor because he despised the people he cured (this is not to say that Antiguan love Middle-Eastern immigrants. As Kincaid says in *A Small Place*: "Antiguan hate them" (1988, 11). They probably hate them in a different way, though).

In *Mr. Potter*, we also learn about the environment in which poor people live. This is a house with four windows and one door, sometimes, two doors, like the one the narrator, Elaine Cynthia Potter, lived in with her mother (2005, 106). In this book, Kincaid also talks about the ignorance of the descendants of African slaves. She mentions, for example, that in their "ignorance" some Africans were Adventist of the Seventh Day, like Mr. Daniel (2005, 98). What it is interesting about *Mr. Potter* is that we find the theme of colonialism and of the indifference of the West towards the sufferings of the population of Antigua, as in *A Small Place*. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid comments: "That Antigua [colonial Antigua] no longer exists partly for the usual reason, the passing of time, and partly because the bad-minded people who used to rule over it, the English, no longer do so" (1988, 23). Thus, she summarizes the history of the island in a short-

In the last part of chapter one of this book, Kincaid also introduces Antiguans. She describes them as people who can offer a beautiful smile to tourists, as people who live in harmony with nature, who can do many things with an ordinary piece of cloth and as people whose ancestors were not ruthless (1988, 16-19). She also says that the ancestors of Antiguans were not as clever in the ways that of the tourist were (1988,15). She presents the negative perceptions that Antiguans have of tourists (1988, 14-19). Kincaid always present Antiguans in antithesis to the tourist. She wants to emphasize the large difference in culture that exist between them and encourage the tourist to look at Antiguans acknowledging this difference.

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sentence. In *Mr. Potter*, we find the theme of colonialism in the very name of the main figure, Mr. Potter. The narrator bitterly comments that the mother of Rodney Potter, the taxi-driver, called his son Rodney after the English admiral George Brydges Rodney, in the hope that his son may too end up in the pages of history (2005, 53). The narrator defines the English admiral a criminal (2005, 53) . This comment is important because it links inevitably Antigua to a particular history. It also portrays the particular frame of mind of the inhabitants. In *Mr. Potter* the indifference of the West towards the sufferings of Antiguans is incarnated in the figure of Dr. Weizenger ó he is the same doctor whom Kincaid says in *A Small Place* she could visit only after she was clean and tidy and which she judges racist, for this reason (1988, 28). Although a Jew escaping from Nazism, he is rich and is not sympathetic towards Mr. Potter. He cannot even understand the ignorance and poverty of Mr. Potter, despite being a persecuted person. It is the narrator who brings the reader inside the humility of the protagonist towards the doctor and inside the happiness that nevertheless Mr. Potter feels in opening the windows of the house of Dr. Weizenger, in Antigua. Mr. Potter is distantly related to the window-maker and in opening the windows he feels as if he were opening the future to Dr. Weizenger, in Antigua.

In this book, therefore, it emerges the picture of an Antigua inhabited by poor or fairly poor people but very beautiful. In *Mr. Potter*, too. In the latter book it emerges the picture of a country made of a mixture of people: from the descendants of the native Indians who inhabited the island first, to the descendants of the African slaves, to the Middle Eastern immigrants. It is an island full of contradictions but that, despite the recent colonial history, manages to live in an equilibrium with nature.

In the following chapters, Kincaid also talks about the uses and customs in Antigua. She is, however, very critical towards Antiguan. For example, she says:

“In accounts of the capture and enslavement of black people almost no slave ever mentions who captured and delivered him or her to the European master. In accounts of their corrupt government, Antiguan neglect to say that in twenty years of self-government or another they have, with one five-year exception, placed in power the present government” (1988, 55-56).

Kincaid wants to provoke Antiguan to show that the situation in the island is also their own making. With a similar tone, she says:

“I look at this place (Antigua), I look at these people (Antiguan), and I cannot tell whether I was brought up by, and so come from, children, eternal innocents, or artists who have not yet found eminence in a world too stupid to understand, or lunatics who have made their own lunatic asylum, or an exquisite combination of all three” (1988, 57).

If Kincaid defends Antiguan from the tourists, she also presents a provocative vision of them. On the one hand, such vision challenges traditional perceptions on native population as stupid, idles and ignorant. On the other hand, it probably hopes to encourage Antiguan to reflect on their situation.

Speaking about Antiguans, Kincaid also says that today most young people are illiterate (1988, 43). She comments: "In Antigua, people cannot see a relationship between their obsession with slavery and emancipation and their celebration of the Hotel Training School, which teaches them how to be good servants (1988,55). These lines summarize Kincaid's critical vision of Antiguan inhabitants throughout the book. Probably, she uses strong words to encourage reflection on these issues.

In addition to the building and the people, the landscape is another important aspect of Antigua described in this book. Kincaid wonders: "That water- have you ever seen anything like it?" (1988, 12). Later on, towards the end of the fourth chapter, she dedicates almost one page to describe the beauty of the Antiguan landscape. She states "Antigua is beautiful. Antigua is too beautiful. Sometimes the beauty of it seems unreal" (1988, 75). In *A Small Place*, we discover the beauty of the beaches in Antigua, of the sun and of the weather, as well as of the natural environment. In Jamaica Kincaid's words: "From there to the shore the water is pale, silvery, clear, so clear that you can see its pinkish-white sand bottom" "an amazing sun (a sun so powerful and yet so beautiful ready to stamp out any cloud a sun that is your personal friend)" (1988, 13). It seems a Dantescan journey to paradise. Indeed, Antigua must be very beautiful. In fact, in the last chapter of *A Small Place*, we find a large section dedicated to the beauty of Antigua. Jamaica Kincaid emphasizes that Antigua is so beautiful that its cities are "No real village", especially, she emphasizes that "if no real village would be so beautiful in its pauperedness, its simpleness, its one-room house" (1988, 78).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> As far as the Antiguan landscape is concerned, in *Mr. Potter*, as in *A Small Place*, we learn about the deep blue of the sea, the beauty of this blue and the beauty of the deep blue of the sky

In an interview with Selwyn R. Cudjoe, talking about the changes she has witnessed in Antigua, particularly as far as the Caribbean Sea is concerned, Jamaica Kincaid gives a recent picture of the equilibrium between human beings and nature, which ratifies the vision she proposes in *A Small Place*. She writes: "But it turns out that we're not interested in the Caribbean Sea – we're interested in New York" (Cudjoe 1989, 405). Through this statement she wants to indicate that nowadays the mentality of the people in Antigua is oriented towards making money and achieve a life-style as close to the American as possible. For this reason, they exploit the sea. This point of view is present in *A Small Place* when Kincaid emphasizes the beauty of the land but she criticizes the changes in the landscape that she has witnessed throughout the years. She comments with irony in the book, "Far out, to the horizon, the colour of the water is navy blue; nearer, the water is the colour of the North American sky" (1988, 13). This difference is due to the exploitation of the beaches to make them as much a mirror of the American ones, as possible.<sup>27</sup>

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(2005,34). In the first chapter of *Mr. Potter*, we are also told about the permeating light of the sun (2005, 21).

<sup>27</sup> In the essay *Biography of a Dress* (1992), we are told more about the uses and customs in Antigua, particularly in the household of Jamaica Kincaid. In this piece Jamaica Kincaid recounts that when she was two years old her mother sewed her a dress of yellow poplin and had her ears pierced and made her wear a pair of golden earrings. She also made her wear some silver bracelets. At the time Jamaica would eat a boiled cornmeal. Her mother, then, brought her to a photographer and had a picture taken. It was a custom to take pictures of two-years old, at the time, in Antigua. We, therefore, have a further snap-shot of live in the island of Antigua.

In the third chapter of the book that we are analyzing, Kincaid presents a controversial vision of the country, which emphasizes the corruption of the government. For example, Kincaid comments: "For I could see the pleasure she took in pointing out to me the gutter into which a self-governing 'black- Antigua had placed itself" (1988, 47). She is very critical of the post-colonial government in Antigua because it is not administering the island well. Kincaid points out that such misgovernment is a consequence of colonialism, however: in fact, bureaucracy and the Ministries are a colonial creation, alien to the native people of Antigua (1988, 36-37). She also contends that it is the product of the neo-colonialism that exists today in the island, which favors foreign countries at the expenses of Antigua. Kincaid also presents Antigua as a traditional place with local traditions, for example, the Carnival, but that are influenced from outside, in particular, from the United States (1988, 43-44).

Magic is relevant to *A Small Place*. Kincaid says that the building where the old library used to be is now occupied by a carnival troupe called "Angels from the Realm" (1988,

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*Annie John* gives a different picture of Antigua than the one present in *A Small Place*. In this earlier book Kincaid describes the life of the wealthy inhabitants of the island. The childhood and coming to age of Annie is possible thanks to the friendships she establishes with other girls at school and thanks to the relations she has with her mother and is dictated by dresses and by her behavior. In many ways, this is an Antigua that tries to mirror much more English people and England. The girls that go to school dream about going to England or talk about their brothers in Canada. Also, they wear school uniforms and hats and eat breakfast to mirror an English way of life. They have a prefect system in school and they read English books. They raise the English flag at brownies meetings and they "swore allegiance to our [their] country, by which was meant England", too (1997, 115). Eventually, Annie leaves for England to study for a nursing degree.

46). This sentence shows that the idea of magic is linked to the Carnival in Antigua. She also mentions that Antiguan make holes in the ground, which they associate with holiness and magic (1988, 17). In other books, Kincaid dwells more in depth on the magical beliefs and traditions of Antigua. In particular, in her writings ófrom *Lucy* to *The Autobiography of My Mother*- she speaks about the belief in òObeahö. Obeahs is a cult that protects against evil and magical spirits or that can cast a spell on people. The only way to protect yourself from such spirits is to put a water stream between them and yourself or to have an Obeah doctor (a woman who is believed to deal with evil spirits) coming, better if from across the sea, to cure you. This is what Xuela's parents do in *The Autobiography of My Mother* to cure her step-brother Alfred who is sick. They call a woman native of Guadeloupe and therefore, from across the sea, to come and cure her brother.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In *Annie John*, the protagonist's mother consults an Obeah woman along with two other women. She concludes òfrom the look of things around our houseö that a woman her husband had loved was trying to harm her and her daughter through evil spirits (1997, 14). In the same book, the Obeah woman is supposed to be the only one to know what Annie's mother's brother John died of (1997, 69). Also, Ma Jolie, this is name of the Obeah woman, is consulted when Annie gets sick and stays with her throughout the sickness. In *Lucy* Jamaica Kincaid mentions the belief in the Caribbean region that when someone wanted to hurt another person she would send the evil spell in the form of an animal, the *jablesse*. She mentions other uses and traditions in Antigua to keep evil spirit far away such as the bathing of children in water with boiled leaves and flowers of some plants. Water is presented as a powerful remedy against evil in *Annie John*, too, when Ma Jolie says that with all the heavy rains there could not be any evil presence around the house. In *Annie John* we too have Annie and her mother taking purifying baths together to protect Annie from the influence of other women his father had loved.

In *A Small Place*, Antigua is portrayed as a place of contradictions. This is an important vision that Kincaid offers again in *Mr. Potter*, *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *Annie John*. Antigua portrayed in this way hopes to raise the awareness of the population to their history and culture and also to their political, social and environmental problems. Kincaid's awareness of the environment is important to awaken Antiguan to its state of destruction. Antigua is "a small place" in the sense that it has the problems that many Third world countries have as a consequence of colonialism and of exploitation by First world countries. It is a traditional place, too, where European ways of life cohabit with magical beliefs and traditional ways of life, heritage of native Antiguan and African cultures. It is a beautiful place in the Caribbean ruined by exploitation of the inhabitants who seek to make it as close a mirror of the United States as possible .

## 5. Colonialism

The first chapter of *A Small Place* is dedicated to the tourist, who is subtly equated to a neo-colonialist. It portrays the problems that exist in the island, which Kincaid considers as a consequence of its specific past. Like neo-colonialism, or better, before neo-colonialism, colonialism is a central theme of the book. Kincaid develops this theme

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Perhaps, the exemplification of the contrast between traditional culture and urbanized/ western culture lies in a comment that another powerful Obeah woman, Ma Chess (Annie John's grandmother) makes after a reply of Annie John's father. When she asks what he really did for a living he replies that he builds houses and she says: "A house? Why live in a house? All you need is a nice hole in the ground, so you can come and go as you please" (1997, 126). This statement shows the need for freedom of traditional cultures versus the need for protection of western cultures and the simplicity of traditional cultures versus the complexity of modern ones.

especially in the second chapter. She describes the reality during that period and the Antiguan society that emerged out of this experience. She talks about her education, the names of the streets, in which she lived and the running of the country while there was a colonial government. She talks in details about the de-personification of the people and the imposition of a new identity. She mentions the erasing of the history of Carib and African people and the construction of a new history, linked to that of the colonial power. It is, in particular, in the second chapter, that she talks about the colonial past of the island. Kincaid is very straightforward in saying that "this empire business was all wrong" (1988, 23).

In the first part of the second chapter, Kincaid mentions the streets and location where she lived, while she was growing up and there was still a colonial government. Subsequently, she focuses on the public library and on the effect of colonialism on people and on the colonial education. The third chapter is equally important because it talks about Antiguan's perception of colonialism. The last chapter is also centered around colonialism. It asks what is the future of Antiguan, the ex-slaves, in face of their colonial past.

The most significant aspects of the two central chapters of the book (second and third), from my point of view, are two. First that everything in Antigua had British names and that Kincaid's education focused only on England. Second that Antiguan can only think about the period of slavery and independence and cannot live their present. The first aspect is exemplified by the long account of the English names of the streets in Antigua: "There was Rodney Street, there was Hood Street, there was Hawkins Street and there was Drake Street" Government House, the place where the Governor, the person standing in for the Queen lived was on East Street" (1988, 24- 25). The second aspect is exemplified by the fact that Antiguan neither had a political perception of their situation during

colonialism nor an historical one (1988, 30 ff.). Kincaid argues that in Antigua the inhabitants continued for years to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday without asking themselves "Hasn't this extremely unappealing person been dead for years and years?" (1988, 30). This lack of historical perception, perhaps, is due to the fact that Antiguanians have traditionally relied on oral traditions, which do not leave a mark on a piece of paper and establish it as history, as past. Probably, traditionally, native Antiguanians have a different conception of time than Europeans. Another important aspect that emerges out of these chapters is the reason behind Kincaid's antagonism towards colonialism.

In the last part of the second chapter, Kincaid considers that the only thing that Antiguanians have learned from colonization is to "murder each other", "imprison" "murder" and "govern badly" because this is all they witnessed (1988, 34). She also says that all Antiguanians have learned is "how to take the wealth of our country and place it in Swiss bank accounts" (1988, 34). In fact, she says that during colonialism "You imprisoned people. You robbed people. You opened your banks and you put your money in them. The accounts were in your name. The banks were in your name." (1988, 35). Thus she shows that the actions of Antiguanians today are a direct consequence of the behavior of colonizers. The second chapter is one of the two most central chapters of the book and it presents a central argument of the text. It is also one of the most personal chapters.

In the third chapter, Kincaid talks about the Antiguan government, today and how it is a direct product of the colonial situation, of what Antiguanians saw and learned during colonialism. The transition between the second and third chapter is significantly charged with skepticism. It says: "And so you can imagine how I felt when I asked myself 'Is the Antigua I see before me, self-ruled, a worse place than what it was when dominated by the bad-minded English?' (1988, 41).

The two main arguments of the second and third chapter remind of the book of another Caribbean writer, Aimé Césaire. He wrote a short book, *Discourse on Colonialism* [1955] (1972). In this work, we can find the same strong denunciation of colonialism in less than one hundred pages. We can find similar arguments against it. Certainly, Kincaid seems to argue for a return to a pre-colonial situation whereas Césaire is closer to proposing a Soviet model, nevertheless, the issues they raise are similar. We can, perhaps, find the similarity with Jamaica Kincaid's work summarized in the following question: "The Indians massacred, the Moslem world drained of itself— all this wreckage, all this waste, humanity reduced to a monologue, and you think that all that does not have its price?" (1972, 57). In *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid seems to ask the same question. Additionally, she thinks that ultimately colonialism is detrimental for both the colonized and the colonizer because of the brutality that was involved and the negative moral effects upon a person. Aimé Césaire seems to agree with this point of view.

In the second chapter of *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid is critical towards the government of Antigua during colonialism (to which Kincaid adds the criticism of the period after colonialism which, for that matter, we will analyze). The government presented one face of the country to the outside world while the Antiguan people spoke of another reality. This is the point of view that emerges out a comment that Edouard Glissant reports in the book *Caribbean Discourse* made by a group of black American students during a trip to the Martinique. These students said, according to Glissant, that "We speak to you, we speak with a representative of the French government. You say one thing; he says another. It is the same phenomenon as in the United States, for us and those who govern us" (1992, 114). I think that this comment catches the contradictions of the rule by the British in Antigua, too. They portrayed Antiguan in one way and Antiguan

saw their reality in a different way. Kincaid makes a similar comment in the second chapter of *A Small Place* when she says referring to Queen Victoria, "All they see is some frumpy, wrinkled-up person passing by in a carriage waving at a crowd. But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans" (1988, 31).

It is because the reality during colonialism was different than what history books officially reported that in *A Small Place* Kincaid calls British war heroes and famous bankers for what they were "criminals" and "slave owners" (1988, 24 ff). In *My Brother*, we find the theme of British colonialism discussed in similar terms. The author writes that a head nurse was called "sister", which is a hierarchical grade inherited from the British hierarchy (1999, 36). She also calls Orazio Nelson, John Hawkins and Francis Drake "thieves", for what they really did, which is to say stealing from native populations (1999, 66). Kincaid's anger towards colonialism is so strong that she calls those who love John Milton "servants of the British Empire" (1999, 117).

In the second and third part of the third chapter, Kincaid argues that memories of colonialism are alive and present in her mind and in that of the Antiguan population. This is, from my point of view, the second salient aspect of the discussion around colonialism in *A Small Place*. Like memories of the past, we have seen that the present and the future should be very important, too, for them but they are less so. Kincaid says that Antiguanians cannot "forgive and cannot forget" (1988, 26). Obviously, they have an oral tradition and they preserved their history in this way. On this issue, Edouard Glissant says that "the tale (in the Caribbean for instance) can react to a gap in history by acknowledging it" (1992, 84). However, these memories remain something that cannot be fixed and at the same time, eliminated from their mind. Perhaps, fixing something make it easier to erase it. Colonialism cannot enter history, in a sense.

Kincaid values gardening precisely because it brings back memories of the past but it is inexorably linked to a future. Kincaid writes in *My Garden (book)*: "Memory is a gardener's real palette; memory as it summons up the past, memory as it shapes the present, memory as it dictates the future" (2001, 168). This sentence really captures the linkage between gardening and memories, according to Kincaid, and also between the past, the present and the future.

Talking about Caribbean people, Edouard Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse* that "It is because Our quest for the dimension of time will therefore be neither harmonious nor linear", as a consequence of the fact that "only today [Caribbean communities] have access to a collective memory" (1992, 106). As we have seen, this is the reason why Kincaid writes in *A Small Place* that in Antigua it is as if slavery happened yesterday, that Antiguans have no sense of time (1988, 54 ff.) But if capturing the present, the past, and the future is important for Kincaid, more so is making a statement about this process; particularly making a postcolonial statement about the future. Thus, she ends the book *My Garden (book)*, precisely in such a way. She writes:

"A gardener wants the garden to behave in the way she says, and when it does not, she will turn it out, abandon it, she will denounce the garden, not in general, only as it is particular to her, and we who come after will have to take some of what she loved and some of what she didn't love, and accept that there are some things we cannot take because we just don't understand them" (2001, 177).

This is a powerful statement, once again against colonialism, that reverses what has been done in Antigua and in many other places of the world by colonialism. Kincaid asks for acceptance and love, instead of abuse and violence.

The reason why Kincaid is so concerned about colonialism in her work, as she explains in the third part of the third chapter of *A Small Place*, is that it was a dramatic and traumatic experience, which she cannot get over with. Analyzing her books, from *A Small Place* onwards, we can notice that, in fact, the theme of British colonialism is recurrent in all her books. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid links the present reality of Antigua to colonialism to allow the reader to understand that the present situation of the island is the consequence of colonialism and to remember – and never forget – the past: its economic and political situation but also the frame of mind of the people that live there.

The most compelling writing about colonialism after *A Small Place* is probably her essay “On Seeing England for the First Time” (1991). In this essay, Kincaid recounts her first tragic encounter with England. Jamaica Kincaid remembers that before she had been indicated England on a map at school she was already acquainted with “made in England”. She had already seen this trademark in all the products she ate for breakfast and in the cloth her mother bought for her, in her uniform, in the brand of her shoes and in her father’s brown “felt”. She could see “made in England” everywhere because Antigua was forced to import from England all the products and goods it consumed, as a colony. Kincaid was also aware that the way she ate breakfast was English and that the very reason she consumed a large breakfast in the morning was because it was an English tradition.

Since her first essay work on colonialism, *A Small Place*, is quite short, as we have said, about eighty pages long, Kincaid develops more in length her point of view in other works. She analyses some aspects that she touches upon in *A Small Place*, more in depth. However, this one is probably the single most dramatic and most angry piece of work she has written. In it, she has tried to conduct an analysis of colonialism and neo-colonialism

analyzing many different aspects and consequences. In four chapters, she considers the factors behind the colonialist project, its effect and its consequences in Antigua. Kincaid probably pondered about this subject for years and finally found the voice and the strength to write about it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In *Annie John*, Kincaid writes that being told to draw a map of England, (without such ability she would have not been able to pass any exam), was worse than a flat-out declaration of war. This is so because it implied the awareness that Antigua had already been conquered and that colonialists were trying to erase the memory of the inhabitants (1997, 34). She says that this was not any different from the impression of England her grandfather, who was named Alfred after the English King Alfred, had. The violence inflicted on the population by the first colonizers was the same Kincaid felt in learning about England, afterward. Every street where she lived spoke about England: each of the five street in the section of St. John where she lived was named after an English seaman. A criminal for Kincaid who was forced to a life of conquests, subjugation, humiliation, enforced amnesia (1997, 36). Her rage for the sufferings she had to endure as a consequence of being colonized and for the history of sufferings that she knows her ancestors had to bear is so strong that towards the end of the essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" Kincaid writes "I wished every sentence, everything I knew that began with England, would end up and then it all died; we don't know how, it just all died" (1997, 40).

The point of view that she offers in *Annie John* complements and reiterates the vision of colonialism offered in the second chapter of *A Small Place* as something that erased the names and history of native populations. In particular, in *A Small Place*, Kincaid says that she received an English colonial education and she analyses the meaning of such education. She contends that "Then there was a headmistress of a girls' school, hired through the colonial office in England" (1988, 29). In an interview, when speaking about her own education, she says that I "had an education that was sort of an English public school education. We got kind of the height of the

Despite the colonial education, Kincaid says in *A Small Place* that Antiguan, have retained a strong sense of self-confidence that makes them feel superior to English people. In fact, Kincaid says: "We felt superior to all these people; we thought that perhaps the English among them who behaved this way weren't English at all, for the English are supposed to be civilized" (1988, 30). When Kincaid speaks about "we" and says that "we thought they were small-minded" "we felt superior to all these people", referring to the colonizers (1988, 29), she is referring to the whole Antiguan population. She is trying to write a history from below that captures the feelings of the oppressed population. Kincaid personally developed very much despise for colonialism. In school, at nine years old, she would refuse to sing "Rule, Britannia" and "God Save Our King". She saw no sense to it (Cudjoe 2013, 397) - Cudjoe interviewed Jamaica at about the time she was writing *A Small Place*.

Probably, the origins and meaning of colonialism for Jamaica Kincaid can be best understood in her beautiful essay entitled "In History" (1997). In this essay, Jamaica Kincaid speaks about the discovery of the "New World" by the Europeans. She questions

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empire. So we learned Shakespeare, the King James version, Wordsworth, Keats. That's the tradition" (interview with Ferguson 1994, 168). This education, although a colonial education, was undoubtedly important for her writing career. Later on in the essay, she writes: "My writing if I owe anybody would be Charlotte Brönte, It would be English people. It would be Virginia Wolf. I had never read a West Indian writer when I started to write" (interview with Ferguson 1994, 169). Clearly, she is grateful for this education but she specifies the extent to which she was colonized and influenced by the United Kingdom: she was as much aware of English literature as ignorant of her own. Receiving a colonial education meant the erasure of her own history.

how should she call what happened to her and to the people who look like her after the discovery of the "New World" by Christopher Columbus. She points out that the discoverers started giving their own names to lands, which had already names that made sense to the people who inhabited them, in order to appropriate themselves of these lands. She wonders how should she call what happened to her people if naming serves for appropriation and if "history" is a name invented and given to events by the same people who started her demise.

This philosophical and philological essay is important because it forces the reader to reflect on the meaning of history, which, as we have seen, is a really important source of investigation for Jamaica Kincaid. It forces the reader to consider who created and creates history. I agree with Giovanna Covi's point of view that Jamaica Kincaid "reminds us that formerly enslaved Caribbean women did survive their holocaust and thus their voices must participate in the making of this history" (2003, 47).

Jamaica Kincaid describes a colonized society in this third book. It is a society subdued to the English, which struggles to appropriate itself of an identity and to regain its past. Similarly, the society that emerges out of other books she has written is one where parents teach their children how to be as English as much possible and how behave in as much an English way as possible through the lenses of their experience with the English colonial apparatus and with English people, which is to say from a position of inferiority (*Annie John*). In this book, as in others, it emerges a picture of a society in Antigua, which is very much defined along the color line. We can remember the beginning of the book *A Small Place* when Kincaid draws a line between the black Antiguans returning home and the white tourists visiting the island (1988, 4). Also, in *A Small Place* Antiguans are very much aware that they are black (1988, 27). They also see the Syrians and the Lebanese as

not whites and the English and Europeans as whites (1988,63). Similarly, for example Xuela, in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, is very much aware that she has Indian Carib blood and that her father has Scottish and African blood. Part of the division that exist with her step-mother is caused by the fact that Xuela is dark skinned and her step-mother like her father light skinned. We become aware of a world which is very much divided along the color line. People who have parents of different ethnic groups choose one side over the other. Xuela's father, for example chooses his African side over his Scottish one.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A conversation on gardening allows Kincaid to talk about colonialism. In the interview on gardening *On Gardening* (2002)-, she talks about the powerful role of naming in history. She recalls the fact that Europeans went and simply gave another name to the Caribbean islands they saw. In remembrance of that event, she calls each patch of land where she plants her seeds with the name of one of the islands in the Caribbean: "Hispanola, Cuba and so forth. In this piece, Kincaid shows once again how painful it is for her and for colonized people the vivid memory of colonization and we can say that in an attempt to exorcise it and to remember it she names her garden with colonial names. To cut down a tree, which is linked to the memory of someone is like "robbing someone of something" (2002, 795). She tries to exorcise colonization by reversing it in her garden. Thus, for example, she keeps all the plants she generates, whether she eventually likes them or not. She says that when a new plant arrives the old one seem to ask "do you still like me" and she replies "I still like you, all I just more, more, more." (2002, 797).

Like the interview *On Gardening*, the piece *The Garden the Year Just Passed* (2002) is used by Kincaid to talk about brutality and the significance of killing. She starts and goes on for six pages talking about different adventures of some gardeners with the trap Hav-A Hart trap (you can read Have a Heart trap). She concludes by stating that killing is killing and precisely "When things die in the garden, only stories of lamentation come from them" (2002, 789). With these words,

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Kincaid means that if you choose to kill an animal that falls in to one of your traps instead of releasing it, death will stay in your garden and with you and with it the lamentations of dead animal. According to her, death never goes unseen or unnoticed, anywhere. This is a metaphor for colonialism when death did not go unnoticed, although some people may have tried to justify the death of native inhabitants.

Kincaid's writings on gardening cannot but bring to mind the famous book by Alice Walker *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1984). This book is a collection of essays, or better personal thoughts and poetry on a wide range of issues but above all on blacks and the south and on lynching, education for blacks and in particular, for women, on black writers from Phillis Wheatley to Nella Larsen and on her own personal life history in Eatonton, Georgia. The garden Alice Walker is concretely looking for is her mother's, who was an admirable gardener. In reality, the garden is a metaphor for memories of the past and for the abilities and skills of black women that often passed by unrealized due to slavery and segregation and due to isolation. In the mist of looking for her mother's garden, for her mother's past and for her abilities, Alice Walker finds her own, which is to say her own voice. We can see how in another black woman's writing – although from a different geographical region- gardening is a device to speak about history, a history of abuse and prevarication and it is also a way to find oneself in the present. Kincaid's garden is very different from Walker's – and so are her writings-. However, we can see how they allow similar associations and bring to mind related memories. For both Alice Walker and for Jamaica Kincaid gardens are an instrument of resistance. For Kincaid, it is an instrument of resistance because during colonialism and slavery blacks did not have the luxury to cultivate their own garden. For Walker for similar reasons. Walker writes in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*:

“In a way, the whole book [she is talking about a book that contains her poem “Revolutionary Petunias” in an interview] is a celebration of people who will not cram themselves into any ideological or racial mold. They are all shouting Stop! I want to go get that petunia” (1984, 268)

Certainly, through *A Small Place* Kincaid makes a strong post-colonial statement when, at the end of the book, she says that there is hope for a better and more humane future for both masters and slaves (1988, 81). Another significant and powerful image of postcolonialism is present in her work *Annie John*. In the chapter entitled "Columbus in Chain", Kincaid writes that Annie John is punished at school for writing at the bottom of a picture of Christopher Columbus in chain being shipped back to Spain because he had had a quarrel and for this reason he had been punished by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella: "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go" (1997, 78). Clearly, to use the words of Moira Ferguson in *Colonialism and Gender Relations* (1993), Annie John is a subject who refuses obliteration as an ignorant and presumptuous colonized female object, which, instead, we can see that some of her schoolmates are, as they are interested only in frivolous activities (1993, 6).

As Elizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert notes (2003, 96), a comment that strikes the reader about colonialism is one Annie John makes in the homonymous book. She says that if her ancestors had traveled from Africa to Europe they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans and said "How nice" and returned home to tell their friends about it

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This comment applies to this book by Walker and to the writings on gardening by Kincaid because both writers recognize gardens as an instrument of resistance. For Kincaid naming plants is a way of taking back herself of a world that has been colonized. For Walker cultivating plants is a way to cultivate a talent and resisting segregation. Yet, Kincaid and most certainly Alice Walker are aware that gardening is not something native to aboriginal people since they did not have gardens, as far as we know. However, the luxury of tending your garden is such that is a strong and powerful sign of freedom for Kincaid, as for Walker.

(1997, 76). With this sentence the protagonist wants to contrast the friendships of natives with the enmity of Europeans. Kincaid shows how Annie John resists colonialism in her mind by reasoning on it and by understanding its inherent nonsense and idiocy and by comprehending that in many ways her colonized culture is ultimately far superior to that of the colonizers. This is what Kincaid does in *A Small Place*, the very aim of the book, and perhaps the way to move Antiguans out of their situation.

On this aspect, Diane Simmons, quoting Marjorie Pryse, says that "Kincaid has surely performed the most important conjure act of all – the transformation of black-as-object into the black-as-subject" (1994, 46). Kincaid operates a metaphysical change transforming the Caribbean person from colonized object to an imposing subject and that this is vital. This is what African-American literature has been doing for centuries. In *A Small Place*, she forcefully asserts the worth of Antiguans in face of their past and present. Importantly, she establishes herself and her fellow Antiguans as critical subjects and not merely as objects of tourism, which for Kincaid is a new form of colonialism.

We have seen how Kincaid's analysis of colonialism in *A Small Place* is important because it offers a complex point of view on the formerly colonized population. It is valuable because it shows the reality behind the political and social situation of Antigua, today. Kincaid also presents her important and valuable experience. We have also noticed how *A Small Place* is really valuable to understand Kincaid's work and vice versa, her work offer valuable insights to understand *A Small Place*. The book makes a strong postcolonial statement.

## 6. Women, Mothers and Gender

Women and gender are central themes in Jamaica Kincaid's writing *A Small Place*. In particular, it is important the relationship mother-daughter along with the idea of women as subaltern that emerges out of her work<sup>31</sup>. The first part of the third chapter of the book

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<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the relationship mother-son is absent from this book. This relationship (mother-son) is important in other books by Kincaid. Certainly, in her writings this relationship

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does not appear to be at the same level of the relation mother-daughter. For example, in *Mr. Potter* Roderick Potter waits for his mother óElfrida Robinson- to come and pick him up when she leaves him with Mr. Shepherd but she will never come back. Even though his mother is important for the boy, this relationship is not as important and as close as that mother-daughter in the prose of Kincaid. Elfrida Robinson is said to despise his son but none of the mothers is said to despise their daughters. Also, although the book *Mr. Potter* is theoretically dedicated to Kincaid's father, Mr Potter, the figure of her mother, who like Jamaica Kincaid's real mother after she gets married with her step-father is called Drew, is central and very important for the narrator (2005, 103). It is her mother who guides the narrator in life and who tells her about the first years of her life and about the only time that she saw her father, Mr. Potter.

In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the relationship between Xuela's stepmother and her son is important. It is a completely absorbing relationship. The son dies at the end, due to a worm he has caught. However, it is more a fake relationship than the one between Xuela and her mother. It is dictated by the awareness on the part of the mother that she can mirror herself in her daughter but not in her son. This means that her daughter can question her but not her son. It is also not a relation of symbiosis such as the one between Xuela and her spiritual mother. It is also unlike the relationship that Kincaid remembers having with her mother before her brothers were born in *My Brother*. Also, in at least two of Kincaid's books ó*The Autobiography of My Mother* and *Mr. Potter*- there is a son, a much awaited and beloved son, who dies young, unlike his female counterparts, namely sisters, who have a long life. For example, as we have seen, the step-brother of Xuela in *The Autobiography of my Mother* and also Luis, in *Mr. Potter* (the son of the wife of Mr. Potter with another man, whom Mr. Potter loves as his own son), die young. In both these cases, we have either a son that is actually the son of the father but does not look or act like the father or a son that it is not the son of the father but he is much beloved by the father as his own. However, it is not the son that actually impersonates and resembles his father but it is the daughter. This is the case of Xuela in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, or of the daughter-narrator and her

is dedicated to women: the head-librarian, the woman who helped restoring the old library, the narrator, her mother and also to other women such as the seamstresses and the saleswomen and to the friend of the narrator who ðjust came back from Switzerlandö (1988, 59). The investigation of the role of women in the Caribbean region and of the mother-daughter relationship, in this book, is important because they are not topics widely discussed. Historically, these topics have probably appeared little on books worldwide. As we will see, some Caribbean authors discuss the relationship between mothers and daughters but not with the same depth of Kincaid. Probably, these topics have not been investigated in depth because most Caribbean authors óand most authors in general- are male, for example, Edouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon. Also these authors

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sisters, *Mr. Potter*. They have inherited the same nose of their father unlike the son, who is much beloved but does not look like him.

It is as if Kincaid was saying that the daughters and not the sons are the ones who inherit the strength of their parents. Even in the book *See Now Then*, where the relationship between mother and son permeates the whole book and seems strong, it is not as strong as the relationship between mother and daughter. It does not reach the same empathy, although for the mother it is very meaningful.

The relationship mother-son is not as troubled as the one between mother and daughter because sons are given more emotional and personal independence, than daughters. Also, in Kincaid at least, they seem not to rebel against the colonial status quo, unlike daughters. Probably, we can say that Kincaid's brothers, in their own ways, tried to rebel against colonialism. Devon, for example becomes a Rasta. However, we do not know if it is a conscious rebellion.

write in the second half of the twentieth century. The contribution of Jamaica Kincaid to these topics, therefore, is very important.

In the third chapter of this book, Kincaid mentions what happened when she would borrow books from the library as a girl. She describes her emotions and feelings while at the library, looking through the books. She also mentions other women, "the girls", that worked for a woman who was "active in getting the old library restored" (1988, 47). She recalls her mother and her trouble during a political campaign. Jamaica Kincaid remembers that the Minister of Culture commented: "What is *she* doing here?" And to this my mother replied, "I may be a she but I am a good she. Not someone who steals stamps from Redonda" (1988, 50). This sentence, from my point of view, is central to Jamaica Kincaid's book: with this phrase the narrator emphasizes the importance of her mother as a human being and as an angry woman who speaks her voice. Also, with this sentence, Kincaid subtly emphasizes the contrast that exist between men and women in Antigua, probably because of machismo and patriarchy. Kincaid wants to underline the importance of women's contribution to the political and social scenario of Antigua.

An analysis of women and of the mother-daughter relationship in *A Small Place*, reveals that these themes are very important. They show, once again, that the world is "a small place". We find similar patterns all over the world as far as women are concerned. Women are central to others writings by Jamaica Kincaid, too. In fact, all the protagonists of her books can be said to be women "even in *Mr. Potter* the real protagonist is the narrator, a woman- and in *My Brother* the narrating voice and in a sense real protagonist is Jamaica Kincaid, herself

## 6.1 Mothers and Daughters

*A Small Place* is written by a woman and from the perspective of a woman. This is important because Kincaid looks at the world and she perceives reality from the point of view of a woman. In fact, the re-appropriation of the female figure is important in this book. Kincaid invests the female figure of a new power. She does so, for example, by mentioning her mother's support for a political campaign. She says: "My mother, at one time, was a supporter of the second successful political party Antigua has ever had" (1988, 50)). This episode places a woman on the political scene and uncovers the contribution that women bring to society.

By speaking with an angry voice, Kincaid also gives strength to the female figure. We can hear the growth from the girl who would steal book from the library to the woman who speaks with an angry voice. This is an indication of Kincaid's unease with the position of women in modern society, as well as a sign of her unease in modern post-colonial society, more in general.<sup>32</sup>

The figure of the mother is mentioned in the middle of the book. She seems the person from whom Kincaid derives her strength. Although an independent person, Kincaid

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<sup>32</sup> We can read this situation as part of the growth process in modern societies, as in *Annie John*. When Annie falls sick, as a result of her mother's changed behavior towards her, Ma Chess, her grandmother and Obeah, is aware of the problem and acts as a surrogate mother. Annie John says "I would lie on my side, curled up like a little comma, and Ma Chess would lie next to me, curled up like a bigger comma, into which I fit" (1997, 126). Clearly, we have the reduplication of the fetal position, as if Annie John had gone back inside her mother's womb to go through a second re-birth, that of maturity, which she cannot accept.

appears in the book as dependable on her mother psychologically or as having a close relation with her mother. We can notice this from the fact that she mentions her mother twice in a small book. She recalls when her mother brought her to the doctor and when her mother would tell her about her political campaign. The narrator, indeed, reflects on her mother, without describing her feelings for her. Her attachment, however, comes through from the fact that she mentions her repeatedly.

Moirá Ferguson notes that in this book, "Even though Kincaid talks sarcastically about her mother's actions" she still replicates her mother's acts. As a people's recorder, she defends her mother and publicizes her heroism as part of a revolutionary history" (1994, 104). In fact, in *A Small Place* Kincaid stands up for a cause like her mother and goes even further to denounce the political situation of Antigua in this very book. Kincaid says that her mother "is almost painfully frank, quite unable to keep any thoughts she has about anything" to herself" (1988, 50). This seems to be a description of Kincaid too, as she comes through in the book.

In addition to the mother, in this book, we find the presence of other female role models, for example, the head-librarian. This figure is almost a surrogate mother who helps giving birth to maturity. In fact, Kincaid says that the head-librarian was really dedicated to the library and observed visitors closely to make sure they would not steal books from the building. She speaks about her with affection and dedication. Among other factors, she underscores that she would go to the library because of this woman's dedication for the library (1988,44).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In the case of *Annie John*, the surrogate mother is the grandmother.

As many commentators have observed, such as Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert (1999), for example, the relationship mother-daughter is not altogether idyllic in some of Jamaica Kincaid's books. This is because in many of her books the mother represent the linkage with colonialism that the daughter wants to break, as well as a different generation, there is a generational gap.<sup>34</sup> The daughter wants to acquire her own independence. In order to do so, she needs to take distances from her mother by establishing a rupture, in the form of a quarrel or a fight. In *A Small Place* the narrator, as a girl steals books from the library, thus challenging parental authority. Despite this undeniable truth, however, the relationship mother-daughter remains essential in Jamaica Kincaid for the protagonist's well-being and growth.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The grandmother, such as MA Chess, in *Annie John*, represents, instead, the linkage with traditional culture, in fact she is often an Obeah woman.

<sup>35</sup> The relationship mother-daughter that is presented in *A Small Place* invites an association with the famous book by Toni Morrison *Beloved* (1987). Perhaps, we do not find in African-American literature such a close focus on this relationship but we have frequent, if not constant, references to it. We can think, for example, about the book, which I have already mentioned *In Search of Our Mothers's Garden* by Alice Walker. As in *A Small Place*, in *Beloved* we find this strong spiritual relationship between mother and daughter, testimony of the enormous love of the mother for the daughter. We do not find in *Beloved* the same positive and calm terms that we encounter in *A Small Place* but more troubled ones, as in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. I think that Kincaid makes an important contribution to American literature by focusing on this important relationship, which was for her so vital. We can notice that as in *Beloved* imagination is very important. In *A Small Place*, too. In the book, Kincaid emphasizes that in a small place people blow things up (1988, 52). In reality, this is the case because they have no written record of their history and so they use their imagination to recall events. This is also true of the mother telling her daughter

Both mother and daughter, therefore, are very strong figures in this book. The daughter, in fact, speaks with a clear and strong voice. She is not afraid to use direct words of accusation against colonialism and the corrupt government of Antigua. She also appears to be a strong and independent woman because she does not see her mother and family for many years and manages to thrive very well on her own. We can sense this when Kincaid says, in the first chapter:

“You disembark from your plane. You go through customs— you move through customs swiftly, you move through customs with ease. Your bags are not searched. You emerge from customs into the hot clean air: immediately you feel cleansed, immediately you feel blessed (which is to say special); you feel free” (1988, 4-5).

The antithesis to this “you” is the “Antiguan black returning home from Europe or North America”, from her other writings we know that Kincaid is one of them, and who has the opposite experience of the tourist: her bags are searched and has a difficult time moving through customs (1988, 4). It takes independence and self-confidence to go back to your country feeling treated as if you were almost not a free person or a first-class citizen, to use a definition that African-Americans use to indicate a similar situation in the United States. As a child, Kincaid’s need for independence is strongly reflected in her decision to borrow books from the adult section of the library (1988, 45). Also, her decision to steal books from the library to own them can be read as a sign of her need to be independent

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about her support for the political campaign. As Kincaid says, “an exact account, a complete account, of anything, anywhere, is not possible” for Antiguan (1988, 53). Perhaps, it is not possible for anyone who does not have a written tradition.

from other people. She says that "once I had read a book I couldn't bear to part with it" (1988, 45). We can also think about Jamaica Kincaid as a strong figure in this book when she goes around trying to earn support for the restoration of the public library (1988, 47 ff). Lastly, Kincaid comes through as a strong figure in *A Small Place* in her very condemnation of politics in Antigua.

Like the daughter, the mother is strong, too. As we have said, she goes around advertising for a political campaign and she is not afraid to answer back to the Minister of Culture (1989, 50).

The description of mother and daughter as strong and bold figures is important because they awaken and encourage other Antiguan women to political action. They are also important because they offer an insight into the life of ordinary Antiguan women. In contrast, in Western literature, mothers and daughters are often portrayed as passive and dependable figures, especially when they are alone. We can think about the notorious romance the *Scarlett Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne where Esther Prynne, although a strong person, does not oppose directly society. Certainly, the *Scarlett Letter* reflects a different historical period than the one described in *A Small Place* but we can say that Kincaid presents these figures in a feminist way. Presenting women as strong, rather than as weak characters, raises them from the status of objects to that of subjects.

As Jamaica Kincaid says in the interview with Moira Ferguson (1994), it is a characteristic of women from Africa and from the Caribbean to create strong female characters who do not bend because they have nothing to lose in life by being strong and everything to gain (1994, 177). This is probably a true characteristic of women in *A Small*

*Place*. The narrator comes through as a person who has nothing to lose by speaking her anger.

## 6.2 Women as/and Other Subalterns

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues in her complicated essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in the volume edited by Nelson that the subaltern cannot speak. She assumes a "historically muted subject of the subaltern woman" (Nelson ed. 1988, 295). She says that "if in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1988, 287). She argues that women are in such situation because in third world countries exist "in their case, the denial and withholding of consumerism and the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations" (1988, 288). As a consequence, "the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation" (1988, 288). Or, to put in other terms "intellectuals who choose a 'naturally articulate' subject of oppression" must reconcile with the fact "that such a subject come through history as a foreshortened mode-of-production narrative", which is to say a third-world subject goes through "the epistemic violence of imperialism" (1988, 289). In short, "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears" according to Spivak "not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (1988, 306). Spivak seems to ascribe to "the female intellectual" the task to speak, task which she "must not disown with a flourish" (1988, 308).

In Jamaica Kincaid's book *A Small Place* women and people of color are the Other and the subalterns. I agree with Giovanna Covi (2003) who argues that Jamaica Kincaid is the subaltern, to use the expression coined by Gayatri Spivak, who manages to speak by creating her own poetry so that she can speak neither in the subordinate nor the hegemonic voice (Covi 2003, 20). In particular, in *A Small Place*, the narrator is the subaltern, caught between tradition and modernity but who speaks her anger about the status quo in Antigua. She speaks her voice against the political, social, and environmental situation. In fact the narrator is a black woman previously subject to colonialism and probably not very rich. In the book, she tries to speak as a conquered to both conquerors and conquered. We can remember the conclusion of this book:

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 human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up too. So, too, with the slave. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings (1988, 81).

This conclusion shows the power of the voice of the Antiguan narrator.

The narrator of the book is a woman who tries to speak from the position of a person who is conscious to occupy a subordinate position in society and more specifically from the position of a West Indian woman, with her own distinctive voice. She wonders: "Can a way be found to make what happened not have happened?" (1988, 32). With this sentence she expresses her anger towards the past. In a sense Kincaid resolves this problem in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. Some people choose husbands, "I chose to possess myself" Xuela would say in (1996, 174). By choosing to possess herself Xuela appropriates herself of her body, of her personality and of her past. This is what ultimately the narrator of *A Small Place* does: she takes her past back with anger.

Speaking her mind and having a strong personality are characteristics that accompany Kincaid throughout all her work. In *Lucy* the West Indian au-pair sleeps in the maid's room but does not allow whether the owners or the maid to step over her. She always allows her personality to stand out. She speaks her voice to Mariah and to Lewis thus coming to be accepted with her strong character. Certainly, this is possible only thanks to the liberal attitude of the American family she lives with and in particular, of Mariah. However, had this not been the case Lucy would have certainly left the household, as she does at the end when she feels that is no longer the place where she wants to be. Thus, we have in *Lucy* a subaltern character who manages to articulate and to speak her voice.

In *A Small Place*, Kincaid is not solely interested in women and people of color as subalterns but also in those that are such due to relationship of power (Gayatri Spivak saw only colonize people as subalterns, however, we can find the same dynamics occurring with women in a patriarchal society and with another person that stands in a relationship of power relative to someone else, although colonized people and I would add also women, are or have been the subaltern *par excellence*). In general, in this book Kincaid is interested in all Antiguans as subaltern and in fact, analyses their position historically and presently. In *Lucy*, the protagonist considers the position of a Swedish person who works for the family where she is working. She wonders why Gus, a person who had been at the service of Mariah since she was a child, does not hate *the way she says your [his] name, as if she owns you [him]?* She concludes, however, that a person from Sweden is *altogether different from a person like me* (1994, 34). This conclusion implies that Kincaid sees ultimately black people and women as subaltern, more so than anyone else. We have an interest in another subalterns but we also have the conclusion that her position as a woman and especially her history of colonization is *unique*, in many ways. Earlier on

in *Lucy*, Kincaid does in fact feel that all the people who dine at the restaurant in the train that they have taken heading for the Great Lakes look like Mariah and that those who wait look like her. This consideration makes her reach the paradoxical conclusion that the world is not round but flat and that 'if I went to the edge I would fall off' (1994, 32). This means that the world is a particularly treacherous place for her and for people who look like her. This is the conclusion that she reaches in *A Small Place*, where Kincaid shows that Antiguans are in subordinate position relatively to Europeans. For example, comparing the position of Antiguans to that of tourists, she says: 'having observed the event of tourism, they [Antiguans] have absorbed it so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own tourist attraction' (1988, 69).

It is interesting what Moira Ferguson notes in *Where the Land Meets the Body*. She says that 'by invoking a feminocentric paradigm, she contests male colonial power' (1993, 12). We can say that she contests patriarchy, in general. In fact, Kincaid stresses very much female friendship and bonds in her books in *A Small Place* she emphasizes the relation between mother and daughter (in *Annie John* between Gwen and Annie, between Annie and the red haired girl and with her mates, too, in *Lucy*, between Mariah and Lucy and between Peggy and Lucy). This relationship creates an important power on which to rely upon, which generates obviously a universe of its own.

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert (1999) argues that the most feminist character in Kincaid's work is Lucy, the protagonist of the homonymous book. She argues:

'Lucy fits the traditional description of the feminist heroine: conscious of the unfairness of traditional gender relationships, aware of the exploitative nature of sexual practices, vowing to make a life for herself that does not include submission to a man, searching for

some measure of equality of power in her relationship with both men and women.ö (1999, 140).

From my point of view, the narrator of *A Small Place* is equally, or perhaps even more feminist than *Lucy*. This is so because she comes through as an independent woman who gives voice to her thoughts and breaks the barrier of silence and passivity to which women are traditionally relegated. She comes through as King Lear's youngest daughter who speaks the truth to him in the homonymous tragedy by Shakespeare (1603-1606) but she has the strength not be a victim, to fight back. She is an active woman with a very strong voice. The narrator raises the status of Antiguan from that of "girls" and "servants", as in *A Small Place*, the woman who was interested in the welfare of the library saw them (1988, 47), to that of women. In this book, in general, Kincaid tries to demystify stereotypical notions on Antiguan, women and black women, more in general.

## 7. Autobiography

Autobiography is an ancient genre and can serve many purposes. For example, it can help highlighting one's gestures or defending one self and one's actions.<sup>36</sup> According to Margo Culley, in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, critics argue that "women's autobiography displays unique narrative discontinuity (Jelinek), writes the self through the Other (Mason), tests boundaries between the public and the private sphere (Smith), exhibits a collective consciousness (Friedman)" (1992, 4).<sup>37</sup>

*A Small Place* is not an autobiography per se but it is autobiographical. In the first chapter of her book, Kincaid says that at the airport a tourist may encounter the black

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<sup>36</sup> We have many types of autobiographies that range from a lyric form to a collection of memories, from a commentary to a dialogue and so on. We find forms of autobiographies in Ancient Greece, in Babylon, in Ancient Egypt and in Ancient Rome. However, the modern autobiography aimed at showing the development of one's life and one's spiritual development can probably be traced to the advent of Christianity. *The Confessions* by St. Augustine is considered the most famous form of autobiography in this sense. In more recent centuries, we have had a wide range of autobiographies such as, for example, *El Milion* by Marco Polo or *La Vita Nova* by Dante, in Italy, or, for example, the *Autobiography* by Benjamin Franklin, in the United States.

<sup>37</sup> Culley also contends that in America there are fewer autobiographies published by women than by men "although we do not know if fewer are written (1992, 6). According to Culley, Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gertrude Stein, Mary Mc Carthy, Margaret Mead and Lillian Hellman but also Kipp Washington, Josephine Earp, Netfta Enzinga and Nancy Reagan are the most famous women in America who have written autobiographies, but there are many others (1992, 6).

inhabitants of Antigua returning home from Europe and North-America. We know from her writings, such as *My Brother* and *Talk Stories* (1988,4), that she is one of them. She also describes the Antigua that she knows with the buildings that are most familiar to her, such as the library, which she mentions repeatedly in the book. In the second chapter, she talks about her childhood memories in Antigua. She names the streets in which she lived and the laws that were in place, when she was young. In the third chapter, she describes her impressions of Antigua during a visit to the island. In the fourth chapter, she talks about her impressions of the Antiguan landscape. This book is an actual non-fictional essay about the history of Kincaid's native Antigua but also an account of her life.

Autobiography serves Kincaid to talk more in details about the history, social and political situation of Antigua. It also allows her to offer anecdotes about her life. With *A Small Place*, she "tests the boundaries between the public and the private sphere" which, according to Culley, is a method that characterizes women's autobiographies in America (1992,4). Kincaid shows that the boundaries between the private and the public sphere are very dim both at a general level and at a personal level. At a general level, she writes, in fact, that how we live at home is a consequence of the more general political and social situation in the country. For example, Kincaid recounts that "we lived on a street named after an English maritime criminal" and all the other streets around us were named after some other English maritime criminals" (1988, 24). She says that this is because Antigua was ruled by the English and it had their laws (1988, 25). At a personal level, Kincaid recalls the Antigua she knew as a child, the place "in which I grew up" (1988, 23 ff.). She recalls her mother (1988, 50). She also describes her impressions on the island. Through these memories, Kincaid portrays herself as an example of the average Antiguan. She also explains the history of the island. She is an I-witness, as well as an eye-witness.

Thus she shows how personal history is a reflection of the more general history of the people with whom we live and of the place in which we stay. By providing anecdotes about her life, she fills a gap in the history of the island. By presenting herself as a testimony of the past, Kincaid makes *A Small Place* a powerful tool to contrast the historiography of the colonizer.

More specifically, we can notice that, in this book, Kincaid intermingles comments and impressions and facts about her life with the narration. For example, she observes:

“In Antigua today, most young people seem almost illiterate. On the airwaves, where they work as news personalities, they speak English as if it were their sixth language. Once I attended an event at carnival time called a “Teenage Pageant” In this event, teenagers male and female, paraded around on a stadium stage singing pop songs- a hideous song called “The Greatest Love” -reciting poems they had written about slavery- there is an appropriate obsession with slavery” (1988, 43).

Kincaid starts commenting on the status of education in Antigua, then she starts writing about an event from her past that struck her mind.

In a sense, Kincaid gives a lot of importance to herself as an historical subject. By doing so, she is able to find very important elements that concern not only her life but also the history of the whole Antiguan population. This is the case, for example when she asks to herself or to the reader, but most probably to the reader since the “you” is capitalized, “AND SO YOU can imagine how I felt when, one day, in Antigua I asked myself: is the Antigua I see before me, self-ruled, a worse place than it was when it was dominated by the bad minded English?” and later on, “How did Antigua get to such a state that I would have to ask myself this? For the answer on every Antiguan’s lips to the question “What is going on here now” is “The government is corrupt” (1988, 41).The

exemplification of such strategy is the episode of the library. By examining her obsession with this place she is able to investigate the corruption that is present in Antigua. What Kincaid does is offering her own reasoned perspective on her country. This is probably the opposite of what European colonizers have done for centuries: they have offered their perspectives on other countries, Kincaid offers the perspective of a native, on her own country.

Kincaid's perspective as a Caribbean woman against colonialist and neo-colonialism is important because as Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido notes there is "the historical absence of the woman's writer text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social and cultural issues" (qtd in Pouchet 2002, 11). In contrast, As Sandra Pouchet notes, many Caribbean male writers, such as Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, Lamming and Walcott, have offered their "collective predicament in the ideal terms of a masculine self-positioning that is fundamentally nationalist-internationalist and Afrocentric in its representation of Caribbean space" (2002, 86)

The autobiographical elements that are present in Kincaid's third book denote the need of a generation of female writers who live across the colonial and the post-colonial period to relate their experience and to create a new paradigm in literature (for Kincaid, it was also a need to really express herself and to relate her experiences to the paper).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kincaid, therefore, belongs to the generation of African writers like Chinua Achebe (who wrote the famous book *Things Fall Apart* (1958)) and Ama Ata Aidoo and other African writers who lived in this period across colonialism and post-colonialism. Kincaid shares with them literary themes (the clash between traditional cultures and colonization, for example). She is also part of

In addition to consider the purpose of Kincaid's autobiographical references, we can consider the picture of the writer that emerges out of it, which we have in part traced in previous chapters. As we have mentioned, Kincaid comes through from the episodes she narrates as a strong and independent woman. Also, from the autobiographical references in the second chapter of Kincaid's book, we learn that she was an avid reader and that she would borrow books from the library from the adult section, once she had finished all the book in the children one. We also know that she was too poor to own books.

In the book, however, there is no mention of Kincaid's writing career. Various commentators have, however, noticed that in her interviews Kincaid writes that she would not have considered been a writer in a Caribbean context<sup>39</sup>. This is so because of family relations and because of the lack of freedom that she perceived in the Caribbean for a woman's writer. They emphasize the empowerment that comes with being a black American woman. In an interview with *Mother Jones* magazine (January/February 2013), Kincaid, in fact, states that she never wrote as a child because she did not have the tools. She also states, however, that she always aspired to be a writer while living in Antigua. In another interview with *Guernica* (June 17, 2013), she points out that in Antigua she did not know that it was possible to write. It is likely that with more financial freedom and

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the generation of writers like James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and many others (although some of them are older) who witnessed the independence of African countries, the end of segregation in the United States and many other changes and who share some of their reflections on paper. Many of them resorted to autobiography to relate their experience.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Donnel 2006, 135

with more freedom from family ties, in the United States becoming a writer was easier than in her home context in Antigua.<sup>40</sup>

Women's autobiographical resistance writings are something not new in the Caribbean region. For example, in the Anglo-speaking region, Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince* (1831) offers a testimony of resistance against slavery and colonialism. Kincaid's autobiographical book seems to be a testimony of a new form of resistance, of contemporary nationalism, against global capital. What Sandra Pouchet says in the conclusion of her book about Caribbean autobiography applies to Kincaid's *A Small Place*. It offers "opportunities for a critical reading of self-representation and strategies of self-preservation in communities with continually changing boundaries of self-definition" (2002, 261). Specifically, in *A Small Place* we have the self-preservation of Kincaid within the changing boundaries of self-definition owed to colonialism and neo-

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert points out that her family in Antigua undervalued her and probably this stifled her aspirations to become a writer, while at home (1999, 5). However, as Kincaid points out, in her interviews, her education in Antigua was crucial for her writing career (See, for example the interview "Our Sassy Black Friend" Jamaica Kincaid by Hannah Levintova, January/February 2013). It is possible that she felt empowered as a black American in the United States. Kincaid does, in fact, address this issue directly in more than one interview: she speaks of dying her hair blond and of identifying with black Americans. In "Our Sassy Black Friend" Jamaica Kincaid, which was held in 2013, Jamaica Kincaid says that since she was a child she identified with African Americans and wanted to be one of them, arriving to copy their hair-style on the magazines she saw, such as *Ebony*. Significant is the cover of the book *Talk Stories*, which shows a young Kincaid with a beanie hat, typical of the Black Panthers, blond bleached hair and red painted lips, which indicates how well she adapted to the probably African-American fashion and culture of the period in which she lived in the United States.

colonialism. For example, Kincaid shows the strategies of resistance she adopted while considering herself as a colonial subject and those she adopts as a critical free individual.

## 8. Language

Jamaica Kincaid's third book is a postcolonial work. Her language is modernist, as can be seen from the repetitions that she uses. However, there are also postmodernist aspects of her language, as we will see.

### 8.1 Repetitions

The repetitions in *A Small Place* are an important and striking aspect of Jamaica Kincaid's language. We can see the repetitions in the book when Kincaid wonders, for example: "Do you ever wonder why some people blow things up?...Do you ever try to understand why people like me cannot get over the past?" (1989, 26). Later on, she considers:

"Why, years after The Earthquake damaged the old library building, has a new library not been built? Why is the library above a dry-goods store in an old run-down cement-brick building? Why is she so undone at what has become of the library, why does she think that is a good example of corruption, of things gone bad?" (1988, 42).<sup>41</sup>

In the first example, we can notice the repetitions "Do you ever" and in the second one, "Why". Kincaid's repetitions give strength and emphasis to the words. It is also an iteration, which shows almost incredulity and disbelief. They make the concept that she is trying to put across clearer. We find similar repetitions throughout the whole book. For example, towards the end, Kincaid writes:

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<sup>41</sup> "The Earthquake" is capitalized probably because Kincaid refers always to a specific earthquake that struck Antigua in the 1970s.

“The father, they say, is old and weak” They say how much they are reminded of Baby Docí And they point to the other son and say that they are reminded of Papa Docí But thení they, Antiguan, say, perhaps notö (1988, 73).

We can notice the repetition “they say” in the above paragraph, which presents what is being said as almost a tale.

These repetitions remind of what Edouard Glissant writes about repetitions in the book entitled *Poetics of Relation*; namely, that repetitions resumes “something you have already said” an additioní that stubbornly persists in your knowledgeö (2010, 46). Emphasizing something that persists into your mind because it struck you as important seems, in fact, to be part of the purpose of Kincaid’s repetitions in this book.

Kincaid’s repetitions in *A Small Place* seem an attempt to establish a linkage with the Creole language, which is characterized by repetitions. Edouard Glissant notes that the Creole language “is the first area of diversion” (1992, 20). He says that traditional Creole language imitates the speech of a baby, for example in the repetition “pretty, pretty baby for very pretty child” (1992, 20). According to Glissant, the Creole language is not, however, “naive”. According to him, this characteristic of Creole is similar to “what black Americans are supposed to have adopted as linguistic *reaction* each time they were in the presence of whites: lispings, slurring, jibberish. Camouflageí .The Creole language was constituted around this strategy of trickery” (1989, 21).

If we analyze the repetitions carefully in the paragraphs in *A Small Place*, we can notice that they are not casual but that they are carefully constructed. All the repetitions present in the book are carefully put together. Sometimes, as in the first example from the book, they seem a flow of thought. More often, however, they appear as carefully constructed to

convey a certain meaning. Interestingly, they offer to the reader a portrait of the writer: she comes through as a person who really ponders words and situations carefully, who questions reality a lot and who tries to offer as much a vivid picture of the human beings she wishes to describe, as possible. For example, Kincaid emphasizes repetitions to convey the English that is spoken in Antigua. She writes: "The government is corrupt. Them are thief, them are big thief" (1988, 41). The use of "them" instead of "they" is a characteristic of Antiguan English and repeating it in this sentence it has an accusatory tone.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> As in *A Small Place*, in her new book *See Now Then* Kincaid uses repetitions. Throughout the book, she constantly says over and over again three words, -See Now Then-, in different forms, to speak about the caducity of time. For example, she starts the book with "See now then" (2013, 3), then she repeats "the seeing of Now being Then and how Then becomes Now" (2013, 7) and again, "a Then that she was seeing Now" (2013, 10) and again, "the present will be a now then and the past is now then and the future will be a now then" (2013, 13) and so on and so forth. Kincaid repeats the words "then" and "now" constantly. We can sense that she uses repetitions to give a poetic tone to her writing and to reiterate the importance of the concept she expresses.

We can notice a similar experimentation of language in *The Autobiography of My Mother*. In this book, Kincaid writes: "The people we should naturally have mistrusted were beyond our influence completely..." and immediately afterward:

"To mistrust each other was just one of the many feelings we had for each other, all of them opposite of love, all of them standing in the place of love. It was as if we were in competition with each other for a secret prize, and we were afraid that someone else would get it; any expression of love, then, would not be sincere, for love might give someone else the advantage" (1996, 48).

Although with a different aim, Kincaid's style of repetitions reminds of modernists writers like Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway, who was influenced and taught by Stein. In *The Sun also Rises* (1926), Ernest Hemingway writes, for example:

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We can see in this passage the repetition of the words "mistrust", "love" and "each other".

Throughout *The Autobiography of My Mother* Kincaid makes Xuela constantly repeating the same phrase about her mother to underline the importance that her mother has for Xuela. Xuela says over and over again: "my mother died at the moment I was born" (1996, 3), "I lay down to sleep and to dream of my mother" (1996, 31) and again, afterward, "my mother", "my mother", "my mother", "This was my mother. She was tall" (198) as if it is almost an obsession, someone really dear to her.

Another example of repetitions in Kincaid's works comes from *Lucy* (1994):

"It was the sort of bright sun-yellow making everything curl at the edges, almost in fright, that I was used to, but a pale-yellow sun, as if the sun had grown weak from trying to shine" "And so, seeing the sun, I got up and put on a dress" "The sun was shining but the air was cold. It was the middle of January after all. But I did not know that the sun could shine and the air remain cold; no one had ever told me" "I took completely for granted, the sun is shining, the air is warm, was not so" (1994, 5).

The word "sun" and "shining" are repeated several times. This is done to emphasize that it was really the sun that caught her attention. It is also meant to emphasize how important the sun shine was for her in the United States coming from the West Indies, where it is always hot and you only have one season; in contrast, in the New York City, you have four seasons.

"Listen to him. I'm going to England. I'm going to visit friends. Ever visit friends that didn't want you? Oh they have to take me, all right. How do you do, my dear? Such a long time since we've seen you. And how is your mother? Yes, how is my dear mother? She put all her money into French war bonds. Yes she did. Probably the only person in the world that did "And what about you Robert? Or else very careful talking around Robert "You must be most careful not to mention him my dear. Poor Frances has had a most unfortunate experience. Won't it be fun, Robert? Don't you think it will be fun, Jake?" (1926, 51).

We can see the numerous repetitions that are present in the above paragraph: "friends", "you", "mother", "Robert", "careful" and "fun". The repetition is meant to simulate a pedantic and insistent conversation, which offers an idea on the type of person that is talking. By repeating these words Hemingway gives emphasis to them. Similarly, in *A Moveable Feast* (1964), Ernest Hemingway writes:

"I had worked hard all day and walked through the courtyard with the stacked lumber. The lights were on in the bakery and outside it was the end of the day and I walked in the early dusk." (1964, 81).

We can notice the repetition of the verb "walked" in these sentences, which is typical of Hemingway's style. Repeating the same word, within few lines, aside from emphasizing the action that Hemingway wants the reader to focus on, adds a poetical tone to his writing. I think that Kincaid's style of repetitions in *A Small Place* reminds particularly of Hemingway's style of writing because, like him, she repeats one word from the previous sentence in the next one.

Because of this writing style, namely its repetitions, we can include Jamaica Kincaid among the modernist wake of writers. Kincaid, herself, writes regarding modernism:

“Well, I am not conscious of it, but when I finally did get around to reading what the modern writing experience was of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce- I thought, “This is really it.” (Cudjoe 2013, 402).<sup>43</sup>

Although the purpose was different, we can say with Gertrude Stein, in *The Making of the Americans*, that repetition applies to Jamaica Kincaid in the following way:

“Repeating then is in every one, in every one their being and their feeling and their way of realizing everything and every one comes out of them in repeating. More and more then everyone comes to be clear to someone. Repeating then is in every one, repeating then makes a complete history in everyone for some one sometime to realize in that one” (1966, 284).

In fact, in Kincaid the repetitions bring about realization and they also serve to clarify the thoughts and actions of the characters, as we have seen in the previous examples of *A Small Place*. It is almost an attempt to give meaning to thoughts by evoking a primordial voice, since new-born children are the first ones who repeat in order to acquire a new language. In Stein, it is more like a sermon. In Kincaid, it is also an echo of the Creole language.

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<sup>43</sup> In *Talk Stories*, Kincaid concludes with a sentence that clearly echoes Gertrude Stein’s style of writing. She writes: “I should like to go home and sleep in my bed now”, said a man. “My bed is a bed, I recognize it to be my bed. I wonder about anything when I am lying in my bed.” (2001, 247). We can assume clearly from these words that Kincaid was struck by and was interested in Gertrude Stein’s style of writing since the beginning of her career as a writer.

## 8.2 Modernism

We can say that the repetitions in *A Small Place* are, therefore, an indication of the modernism of Jamaica Kincaid. To really understand how Kincaid relates to modernism it is necessary to analyze the origins and development of this movement. It started in the Twentieth century. It has been often been defined as a "movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion, technical display, internal self-scepticism" (Bradbury 1979, 26). As Michael Bradbury puts it, according to Wallace Stevens modernism meant that "the poet must be able to abstract reality -which he does by placing it in his imagination" (Bradbury 1979, 25). Specifically, it meant "stream of consciousness narrative in the novel" (Bradbury 1979, 26). Also, it has entailed "producing a sense of 'formal desperation'", as Frank Kermode puts it (Bradbury 1979, 26). It involves "bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration" and a "crisis of culture" an "unhappy view of history-so that the modernist writer is not simply the artist set free but the artist under specific apparently historical strain" (Bradbury 1979, 26).

Malcolm Bradbury argues as an example: "it is also often an awareness of contingency as a disaster in the world of time: Yeats' 'Things fall apart; the center cannot hold'" (1979, 26). Also "it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos" (1979, 27). In Art, for the Expressionist and Surrealist, for example, "it is the anti-art which decomposes old frames of reference" (1979, 27). Also, from my point of view, it is important to say that modernism uses "anti-form or desecration of established

conventions – the hard and resonant, and –witty image and we can trace it to the western tradition of Sterne, Donne, or Villon (1979, 30).<sup>44</sup>

Richard Shepard notes that a characteristic of modernism is the idea that –linear and progressive notions of history are rendered dubious and that there is a –crisis of language (Shepard, 327 in Bradbury ed. 1979). As a consequence, argues Shepard, the modernist writer has to dis-aggregate the structure of conventional language and –explode language before he can create an adequate –verbal icon (Bradbury 1979, 328). He stops –to be the celebrant of a human order and becomes the experimenter – especially as far as poetry is concerned, but not only (Bradbury 1979, 329). An example of modernist figures are Kafka’s Hunger Artist who cannot find the adequate food inside society or within it, or Adrian Leverkühn by Thomas Mann, who is desperate –to say anything all (Bradbury 1979, 332). Another characteristic of modernism is the presence of an imagined but –only too real, interlocutor (Bradbury 1979, 338). Famous is the first

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<sup>44</sup> Anglo-American modernism draws from the French, who according to Cyril Connolly fathered it. Famous modernist writers are Proust and Valéry, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Edith Sitwell, Marianne Moore, Hemingway, Kafka, among others. Also, or in short, modernism, to use Malcolm Bradbury’s words, the ability to –discern a moment of transition (Bradbury 1979, 51). Bradbury, situates modernism especially in the 1930s, however, we can identify modernism in later writers, as well. To speak about modernism with the words of Graham Hough, we can say that there is a –dialectic between tradition and innovation, an –acute consciousness of a tension between the modern sensibility and the ancient ways of feelings (Bradbury 1979, 315). Also, characteristic of modernism is –conscious craftsmanship, especially as it pertains to poetry but not only (Bradbury 1979, 320).

line of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) by T.S. Eliot "Let us go then, you and I."

We can see the characteristics above mentioned of modernism in Kincaid's third book. In particular, the above definition by Shepard. Kincaid's, in fact, through language reiterates the message of the book, which is to doubt "linear and progressive notions of history" (Shepard, 327 in Bradbury ed. 1979). Such modernism in the form of repetitions indicates the conscious craftsmanship of the author. Repetitions almost give an idea of chaos and of the historical constraints -I would say, rather than strains- from which the writer wants to liberate herself through innovation, but also through disintegration and bleakness, in a sense. This point of view applies very well to *A Small Place*, where Kincaid is trying to exit the constraints posed by colonialism. Also, we can find modernism in the consciousness that what appears to be progress is, in fact, regress, which is the same feeling that we find in T.S. Eliot. In this book, Kincaid argues that it would have been better to live as monkeys than have the supposed progress brought about by colonialism (1988, 37).<sup>45</sup>

Some commentators have pointed out that the repetitions in Kincaid's work remind of Jazz. This is what has been said of Eliot, that he "gives way to what Crane himself

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<sup>45</sup> We can identify such bleakness and desire for disintegration and liberation from these historical constraints, in some ways, in *The Autobiography of My Mother* but also in other production, such as *Lucy*.

described as "an idiom for the proper transition of jazz into words" (Hyde in Cianci ed. 1991, 346).<sup>46</sup>

Very succinctly told modernism in the novel can be in part also be described with the words in the preface to *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* (2005) by John Marx. They suggest that:

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<sup>46</sup> We can find in Kincaid's work this attempt to translate music into words particularly in the books *At the Bottom of the River* and *See Now Then*. We can also notice that her book *At the Bottom of the River* is composed of short-stories that do not follow the traditional scheme of the short-story beginning, development and conclusion, but rather follow her line of thoughts. They can be considered short-stories that start in *in media res*. They remind of the stream of consciousness technique used by Gertrude Stein. The same we can say about the book *See Now Then*, where it seems that the writer was trying to write following the voice of her mind. We can notice this technique, for example in the short-story "What I have been doing lately" in the book *At the Bottom of the River*. In the story Kincaid writes:

"I looked north. I looked south. I decided to start walking north. While walking north, I noticed that I was barefoot. While walking north, I looked up and saw the planet Venus. I said, "It must be almost morning" I saw a monkey in a tree. The tree had no leaves. I said "Ah, a monkey. Just look at that. A monkey." (1985, 40-41).

In the above lines Kincaid strives to report on paper the mental associations that she makes. We have the impression that she is walking and thinking about her actions. Although there are modernist elements in these two books, they are generally regarded as postmodernist.

“In the early twentieth century, subjects of the British Empire ceased to rely on a model of centre and periphery in imagining their world and came to view it as an interconnected network of cosmopolitan people and places.” Rather than mapping the decline of Empire, modernist novelists such as Conrad and Woolf celebrated the shared culture of the English language as more important than the waning imperial structures of Britain.

Modernism in this sense consists in the interconnection between the thought of colonized and colonizing countries. It is indeed a new way of thinking. We have also seen that modernism as in Eliot and in Pound consists in the celebration of the cultural specificity of cultures considered before underdeveloped or less developed than Western ones.

John Marx points out that modernism leads to a discovery of vernaculars that were “not *not* English.” With these words John Marx means that it brought to the discovery of “languages shaped by British imperialism that nevertheless represent clear attempts to reject the inside/outside alternatives that organized the peoples, cultures, idioms of the British empire in previous centuries” (2005, 2). In *A Small Place*, we can notice the use of vernacular in the repetitions that reflects the Creole language.

## 9. Characters and Structure

The characters of this 1988 book that we are analyzing can be summarized in two words: Jamaica Kincaid. In fact, there are not really characters in the book but there is a narrating ego, i.e. the author. She talks about the Antiguan inhabitants, who are the object of her work. She also mentions episodes of her life. We can notice that there is not an evolution in the characters of this book because, in fact, there is none. There are rather people that the narrator examines. They are the subject matters. There is a progress in the matters examined. The structure of the book is postmodernist.

### 9.1 Evolution of the Characters

The characters of *A Small Place* can be summarized into two words: Jamaica Kincaid. Her work is autobiographical, as we have seen. Her voice remains questioning and angry throughout her book. The main character of Kincaid's book that we are analyzing is the narrator.<sup>47</sup> The narrator is the I of the book. She does not undergo an evolution, at least from a time perspective (by evolution, I mean a gradual development from one thing to another). Kincaid begins and ends the book as a mature woman of the same age. Although, she goes through many events she is basically offering a short-speech (she is speaking to/addressing a tourist). The book covers a short time-span. There is not an evolution from the perspective of the reader whom she writes for but, as we will see, there

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<sup>47</sup> The characters of the other books (from *Annie John* to *Mrs. Sweet*) are homodiegetic narrators. This is not the case of the book *Mr. Potter*, where we have a heterodiegetic narrator. The person telling the story is someone we can identify with Jamaica Kincaid herself whereas the main protagonist of the book is Mr. Potter.

is a progress in the prospective of the narrator. She is always addressing the same person, the you, the tourist. Kincaid, in fact, asserts in chapter one: "IF YOU GO to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" (1988, 3). In chapter two, she writes: "THE ANTIGUA that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, as tourist, would see now" (1988, 23). In chapter three, Kincaid writes: "AND SO YOU can imagine how I felt when, one day, in Antigua, I asked myself: Is the Antigua I see before me, self-ruled, a worse place than what it was when it was dominated by the bad-minded English" (1988, 41). In chapter four, lastly, the author says: "(and the people who would immediately come to your mind when you think about what Antiguan might be like; I mean supposing you were to think about it) are the descendants of those noble and exalted people, the slaves." (1988, 80-81).

However, there is a progress in the way the protagonist of *A Small Place* examines society. At first, she considers only one person, the tourist. In the second chapter, she takes into consideration the English people. For example, she says: "They don't seem to know that this empire business was all wrong and they should, at least, be wearing sackcloth and ashes in token penitence of the wrongs committed" (1988,23). In this chapter, she also considers her mother and herself: "In the Antigua that I knew, we lived on a street named after an English maritime criminal, Horatio Nelson" (1999, 24). At the end of the second chapter, she includes all Antiguan: "In those days, we Antiguan thought that the people at the Mill reef Club had such bad manners" (1988, 27). In chapter three, Kincaid considers the position of Antiguan in relation to the government: "For the answer on every Antiguan's lips to the question 'What is going on here now' is 'The government is corrupt'" (1988, 41). Then, in chapter three, Kincaid compares and contrasts her generation with the present generation. She says: "What surprised me most

about them [young Antiguan today] wasí how stupid they seemed, how unable they were to answer in a straightforward way, and in their native tongue of English, simple questions about themselvesö (1988, 44). Later, Kincaid mentions more specific Antiguan people: the librarian, her mother, the ministers of the government. Finally, Kincaid ends chapter three considering Antiguanøperception of events in other Caribbean countries. In chapter four, she considers the way Antiguan perceive the Antiguan landscape. She concludes the book by taking into consideration both masters and slaves. She says: öOf course, the whole thing is once you cease to be a masterí you are no longer human rubbishí So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slavesí they are just human beingsö (1988, 81).

Kincaid takes into consideration the different people that live in the island, whether permanently or temporarily, one at a time, and examines their position in Antigua. There is almost a movement from the tourist to all Antiguan and then, to both masters and slaves. Perhaps, Kincaidø final considerations is not intended to apply to Antigua only but, more in general, to all societies, where there have been masters and slaves. This is a progress from one character, the tourist, to many, all Antiguan, the colonizers, neo-colonialist etc (there is also an evolution from a subject matter that applies to Antigua only, to a subject matter that applies to all colonized places in the world).

In *A Small Place* the figure of the mother is not broadly mentioned, but it is important. She and Jamaica Kincaid are the öweö who, in chapter two, lived on a street called after Horatio Nelson (1988, 24ff.). She is the one who used to bring her daughter to see the doctor (1988, 28). She is also the one who lends to her daughter her library card (1988, 45). Finally, she is the one advertising for a political campaign (1988, 50). She is not described physically but her personality comes through. Kincaid writes that she would

advertise with ða great hubbubö (1988, 50). Also, Kincaid's mother personality comes through, indirectly, when Kincaid remembers that her mother said to the Minister of Culture: ðI may be a she, but I am a good she. Not someone who steals stamps from Redondaö (1988, 50). We do not have an evolution in the figures of the mother and daughter in this book. They are substantially meant to provide anecdotes. In comparing Kincaid's work *A Small Place* with her successive works and indeed, her previous work to *A Small Place*, we do not notice an elaboration of these two figures.<sup>48</sup> We do not notice

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<sup>48</sup> In *Annie John*, we have a mother who wants to teach her daughter how to behave and how to live and who wants to be an example for her daughter. We have a daughter who rebels against a colonial education and system and who grows up to be similar to her mother. They are, however, in many ways always the same mother and daughter of *A Small Place*. They equally deal with problems of politics, although the mother in *Annie John* is perhaps more conservative. We have a daughter who does not want to lose her mother's love and who, when she realizes that she has lost it, she rebels and acts against her mother. This is an attempt to break the tie with her, to break off their relationship, to break loose. It seems the story of what we consider an ordinary path to maturity. In reality, Kincaid wants to point out the tragedy and probably the injustice of this rupture, which is neither obvious nor inevitable. In many ways, this is the same story that is told in *A Small Place*, although the dynamics are different. We have a character who retain a strong relationship with her mother throughout her life. In reality, we always have the same two characters, Jamaica Kincaid and her mother, who go from childhood to adulthood and who raises her child and sets an example for her daughter, respectively. In other books, such as in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid analyzes this problematic in a similar fashion.

an evolution in the narrating ego of *A Small Place* if compared with the narrators of other books, either.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> As a narrator, Kincaid is more calm in *My Brother*. She does what I have called "mute considerations", as she is overwhelmed by the pain of her brother's condition. However, this is the same Jamaica Kincaid that we find in *A Small Place*. Perhaps, there is more cynicism in *My Brother*, in her desire to take distances from her mother and in a sense from her brother, than the one we find in *A Small Place*. In the later book, there is cynicism in her depiction of the decadence she sees in Antigua and in the relation she sees the tourist having with native Antiguan. There is not a big evolution in her books, from *Annie John* to *A Small Place* to her latest book *See Now Then*, at least from a thematic point of view. There are changes in terms of age and circumstances but the problems that are dealt with are the same.

Annie John, Lucy, Xuela, Mrs. Sweet all represent the same face of the same medal or the same prism looked from different angles, to use a metaphor that Kincaid uses in *At the Bottom of the River* ("many-sided and transparent, refracting and reflecting light as it reached me, light that could never be destroyed" (1985, 80)). They are the narrating voice of *A Small Place*, alias a Caribbean woman, alias Jamaica Kincaid. They represent an every-woman, we can say a "new" every-woman relatively to the literature of the 1950s. Importantly, from my point of view, they represent also a "new" every-woman, relatively, for example, to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.<sup>1</sup> The woman presented in *A Small Place* is the woman that comes into being with the independence of African and Caribbean countries starting with the 1960s. In contrast, in the Caribbean literature of the 1950s, we have a more male-centered perspective. Certainly, we can observe some differences between the three mentioned books by Kincaid. There is a development in terms of the maturity of the characters: Annie John is a child, Lucy is a young woman, the protagonist of *A Small Place* is a woman and Mrs. Sweet is a woman; Xuela is all three, first a child, then a young person and then a woman.

## 9.2 Postmodern Structure

The question that emerges out of Kincaid's third work is whether the structure can be considered modern, modernist or postmodern or even postmodernist. From my point of view, it is, postmodern. The narrating character of the book is provocatively a postmodern omniscient narrator. She knows everything about the tourist, Antigua and the Caribbean region. For example, Kincaid says about the tourist: "ordinarily, you are a nice person, an attractive person, a person capable of drawing to yourself the affection of other people, a person at home in your own skin" (1988, 15). About Antiguan, Kincaid says: "it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you, that behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness; the physical sight of you does not please them; they do not like the way you speak" (1988, 17).

In addition, Kincaid is a quick narrator. She uses frequently semicolons and commas. She uses the expression "And so". She often uses the adverb "then", sometimes, in connection with the conjunction "and" in the expression "and then", sometimes, in other expressions such as "But then again". For example, she says "And then there was another place, called the Mill Reef Club." (1988, 27). She makes provocative comments, such as

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Through their figures, however, they analyze the same problem: the impact of colonialism on human beings in the Caribbean and the position of women in Antigua. More in general, the problems that these women face are not specific to the Caribbean but they are problems that women and girls everywhere in the world face. Thus, they show how the world is "a small place". Colonialism and globalization make the world smaller and distances shorter.

the one about the possibility of having a Maurice Bishop in Antigua: 'and they imagine that such a man will materialize in Antigua and he'll do Maurice Bishop-like things' (1988, 74). She uses a colloquial language such as 'rubbish' and 'stupid', for example: 'once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being' (1988, 81).

Kincaid could also be considered the parody of a science-fiction narrator who is able to guide a tourist, quickly, flying all over Antigua back and forth in time. She seems to be telling a fictional story but, in fact, she is telling the reality of the situation. In science fiction there is often a contrast between two different realities: one more scientifically fictional than the other. Similarly, Kincaid contrasts the tourist landing in Antigua on a plane, who enjoys the beauty of Antigua, with the poverty and ordinary situation of Antiguan. It seems almost a contrast between the scientifically fictional situation of the tourist with the life of Antiguan. Thus Kincaid probably shows a break with previous more traditional forms of writing. She also indicates the interchange between past and present. She, in fact, starts from the neo-colonialist situation, which is present, today, in Antigua. Then, she talks about the colonialist past. Hence, she moves forward to discuss the post-colonial government, today. She concludes expressing her hopes for the future of Antiguan.

The narration is almost chaotic.<sup>50</sup> There are pauses that separate parts within the chapter. Each part almost starts with a provocation. For example, part one of chapter one

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<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, the structure of *See Now Then* is more postmodernist than that of *A Small Place*. The Sweets of *See Now Then* are postmodernist because they live in a futuristic space overtaken by the world of television and mythical creatures, such as the Lernaean many-headed monsters, Stymphalian Birds, Michael Jordan and the shy Myrmidons, probably, utilized by television

starts: "IF YOU GO to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" (1988, 3). Part two starts: "The thing that you have always suspected about yourself the minute you become a tourist is true: A tourist is an ugly human being" (1988, 14). Similarly, the beginning of part one of chapter two is: "THE ANTIGUA that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, as a tourist, would see now". The beginning of part two of chapter two, instead, is "Have you ever wondered to yourself why it is that all people like me seem to have learned from you is to imprison and murder each other?" (1988, 34).

Kincaid also presents micro-narratives talking about her experience, that of her mother in Antigua, and the point of view of an ordinary Antiguan. Thus she challenges the grand meta-narratives that characterized the narration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen, in a long passage, where Kincaid describes Antiguan perception of tourists. For example, Kincaid says:

"And so, ordinarily, you are a nice person" (1988, 15) "An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist" "the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you" "They do not like you" (1988, 17).<sup>51</sup>

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cartoons and as gadgets by industries for children. The Sweets are the parody of Jamaica Kincaid's family and the space populated by these fantastic animals is almost a parody of the real world in which there is chaos and children are unable to distinguish reality from the fantasy created by television.

<sup>51</sup> This cultural debate is present in other books. For example, *Lucy*, in the homonymous book points out to Mariah and to her family the cultural differences that exist between them. However, despite coming from a very different culture, in *Lucy* the protagonist manages to find herself at ease in the United States, in Lewis and Mariah's house and in their social circle. From this point of view Kincaid seems to presume that the United States is a place that welcomes everyone and

These lines show that there is a fundamental debate/opposition in the book. On the one hand, there is the native Antiguan with his or her culture and traditions. On the other hand, there is the European or North-American with his or her culture and traditions. Although, the perspective of a native on a tourist may seem a secondary matter, Kincaid shows that it is relevant. Kincaid shows the importance and indeed the paramount significance of the experience of people otherwise considered insignificant or not relevant to a traditional historical discourse.

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for everyone, an accepting place where cultural differences are no a barrier to integration because ultimately it is an overarching place.

## 10. Content: Between Modernism and Postmodernism

The narrating voice of *A Small Place* is postmodern. However, there are both modernist and postmodernist themes in this book. The best definition of this work is probably postmodern modernism. Perhaps, the very invention of a style, which has characteristics of both modernism and postmodernism is postmodernist, in itself, but we will consider the two styles separately in the context of the book.

### 10.1 Postmodernist Voice

We can say, therefore, that the narrating voice is postmodernist. In *A Small Place*, we can recognize, in fact, the desperation to say anything at all, which characterizes modernism, but also to say anything meaningful that subverts gender notions and also historical notions, which is present in postmodernism. This type of desperation makes the narrator of this book postmodern more so than modernist, although it does not reach parody.

Modernists like Ezra Pound and Thomas Stern Eliot (T.S. Eliot) challenged the notion that the Western culture is superior to other cultures, in the *Cantos* and in *The Waste Land*, respectively, - through the use of Chinese ideograms and by drawing from the Chinese and Indian culture-. They also pointed out to the crisis of the West. However, theirs were not postcolonial works. Kincaid's books belong to a successive phase, in which the narrator, the speaking voice does not limit herself to challenge notions of imperialism but she seeks to eradicate Western canons from indigenous cultures altogether. She also seeks to re-

appropriate herself of their original and present (mixture of colonial and non-colonial) traditions and meaning.<sup>52</sup>

In *A Small Place*, the narrator situates herself in a world that has to be de-colonized mentally and that challenges patriarchy. Thus, she is postmodernist in the sense that Lyotard gives to this concept, which is incredulity towards grand-narratives.<sup>53</sup> Like indeed the whole of Jamaica Kincaid's work, *A Small Place* shows the problematic nature of grand-narratives and the importance of small ones. She, in fact, shows that mainstream history, the history written by victorious people, the colonizers, in her case, is flawed.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Another example of postmodernism and postcolonialism is Michael Ondaatje's book *In the Skin of the Lion* (1987). In the book, the exemplification of the beginning of a new life for Nicholas Telmeco, an immigrant from Eastern Europe, is the fall of the nun from a bridge that he is constructing along with other workers. This character at this point starts protesting against his working conditions and seeks to regain possession over his culture. We also come to learn about the immigrant community of which his part and their contributions to the building of Canada.

<sup>53</sup> See: Lyotard, 1984

<sup>54</sup> According to me, the following words summarize very-well what postmodernism is: the questioning of "the processes by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves" and the becoming "aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture" (1988, 51). This is what Kincaid expresses in her work *At the Bottom of the River*, where she questions this very process in the short-stories, in a fantastic and poetic way. *See Now Then* is probably the most postmodern of her books. This is because it requires to see Now, which is to say then, what was happening before. The figure of Heracles is very post-modern in his games. Also the figure of Persephone is very postmodern as she is folded by her father in his pocket to keep her for himself and to make her practice singing. The sentence structure of *See Now Then* is very postmodern as the sentences are fantastic and very long, some

To express this aspect of Kincaid's writing using the words of Linda Hutcheon, we can say that Jamaica Kincaid is no longer the inarticulate, silent, alienated creator of the romantic/modernist tradition (Hutcheon,18). This is evident in the angry tone of the narrator in *A Small Place*.

To use Malcolm Bradbury's words, we can also say that Kincaid's style remains linked to modernism in that it is no longer simply a style; it is a form of post-cultural action, a politics, which is what modernism does, according to Bradbury (Bradbury 1979, 35). However, it is a much more mature and developed form of modernism; hence, postcolonialist and postmodernist, which are more developed and mature way of looking at what became of colonized cultures.

According to Steven Connor, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (2004), by the 1990s the term 'postmodernism' had also entered the popular lexicon to signify a loose, sometimes dangerously loose, relativism. Now, its dominant associations were with postcolonialism, multiculturalism and identity politics (2004, 5). Connor points out that the difference between modernism and postmodernism is that:

öWhereas the modernity refused by modernists was the modernity of urban transformation, mass production, and speed of transport and communications, the modernity refused by postmodernists was that of consumer capitalism, in which the world, forcibly wrenched into new material forms by modernity, was being transformed by being immaterialized, transformed into various kinds of spectacle.ö (2004, 6)

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are even sixteen lines long and others even two pages. They signify the hurry of the world in which we live, in which there is no time for anything and also in which things happen before you even realize it and therefore, everyone is trying to keep a grasp of the time.

Kincaid is undoubtedly postcolonial but she does not show a dangerous relativism. Her criticism is sound and well-grounded.

Modernism is certainly to use Linda Hutcheon's words "the historical avant-garde that prepares the way for postmodernism's renegotiation of the different possible relations (of complicity and critique) between high and popular forms of culture" (1988, 27). In Kincaid, there is the contrast between the culture of the colonizer and that of the colonized, and between the culture of the tourist and that of Antiguans. It is a contrast between a high and a popular form of culture.

Umberto Eco defines postmodernism on the basis of Foucault as the awareness, consciousness "that power is not something unitary that exists outside us" (qtd. in Hutcheon 1988, 3). Probably, this is the ultimate message of Kincaid. By criticizing Antigua and colonialism, by speaking her mind, she shows that each of us has the power to bring about change.

To express a similar idea using the words of Linda Hutcheon we can say that Jamaica Kincaid owes to postmodernism the awareness "of the existence and power of systems of representations which do not *reflect* society so much as *grant* meaning and value within a particular society" (1988, 8). In chapter two, this is what the narrator claims when she shows that history reflects the point of view of the colonizer but not of the colonized. This awareness is also present in modernism but in a more latent form.

According to Linda Hutcheon (1988, 14), postmodernism is characterized by "self-referentiality, irony, ambiguity, and parody". Kincaid's work is, in fact, somewhat ironic, although bitterly ironic, and almost a parody, although it does not use ambiguity like other postmodern writers do. In *A Small Place*, the narrator is postmodernist because she uses

parody in the sense proposed by Linda Hutcheon to mock colonialism. She addresses a fictional tourist that visits Antigua who is able to enjoy its beauty, environmental and cultural richness, as well as its material wealth, when the Antiguan population lives in poverty. This is in reality a parody of colonialism and we could call the tourist's experience neo-colonialist.<sup>55</sup>

However, it is important to specify, as Linda Hutcheon does with regard to feminism, that we have to be careful in considering Jamaica Kincaid's work as altogether postmodernist. It is also and, first of all, a postcolonial work. In fact, it shares with postmodernism an attempt to explain the crisis of legitimization that exist in society in terms of the workings of patriarchal ideology and the oppression of women and other minority groups or, I would add other groups in general since the oppressed groups are not always a minority (Creed, 52 in Hutcheon 1988, 149). However, Jamaica Kincaid does

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<sup>55</sup> The choice of words in *See Now Then*, for example, is postmodern. They seem to be part of a musical composition with reads "allegro" or better "veloce", as they run one after the other in an attempt to hurry to the end. We can see in Jamaica Kincaid's fiction, for example in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, postmodernism in the sense that Linda Hutcheon gives to this concept "originally created to define architecture-, which is that postmodern is "where documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody" (1988, 7). We do not have parody in *The Autobiography of My Mother* but we have "formalist self-reflexivity" coupled with "historical actuality". In *At the Bottom of the River* and in *A Small Place* we also have parody, in this sense. *The Autobiography of my Mother* reminds of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Both are at times autobiographies of the authors but written as if by someone else and they pretend to be the autobiography of a third person. This book also reminds of another modernist work, *The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson and Kincaid mentions the racial choices that his father makes.

not reach the fantastical and paradoxical situations of post-modernism. Perhaps, in her book there are almost some paradoxes but she is mostly trying to render less legitimate current history and society by providing an explanation based on colonialism and patriarchy, which is what feminism and post-colonialism do, rather than on a multiplicity of causes, which is what postmodernism tends to do.

Her work, especially as far as her description of the Caribbean region is concerned, seems to be prior to postmodernism and to rely on some traditional themes. This is to say that Kincaid's work *A Small Place* is postmodern but not-only. It is half-way between modernism and post-modernism and it is indeed postcolonial (there are postcolonial, feminism and some Marxist critiques that are postmodern but not all postmodern is postcolonial and vice versa<sup>56</sup>.)

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<sup>56</sup> Postcolonialism and postmodernism are not the same thing. In the interesting article "Is the post in post-modernism the post in post-colonial?" (Appiah 2013) Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that the two "post" are not the same and are not always compatible. Appiah argues that actually they are and should be almost antithetic because postmodernism still promotes the same rationality that is inherent in modernism and that stands in contrast to postcolonialism because the latter seeks to promote cultures that do not share the same rational point of view. Appiah's distinction is important and should be emphasized, one could argue, however, that postmodernism has helped the imagination of postcolonial writers in promoting their cause, for example, Michael Ondaatje, who is considered both a postcolonial and a postmodernist writer. We can add to use Audre Lorde's (qtd. in Covi 2003, 93) words that postcolonialism tries to emphasize the importance of feeling over thinking. Thus, they seek to replace the "Cogito Ergo Sum" with the "I feel, therefore, I am".

We can probably say with Giovanna Covi that Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* is "resistance postmodernism," to convey the rich negotiations among various discourses that Kincaid enacts in her stories (1988, 73).

Certainly, her work is postcolonial. Postcolonialism emphasizes the role of formerly colonized population in history and literature and revises history and literature from their point of view, emphasizing and re-discovering native cultures. Until the 1970s there was no field of specialization in such discipline. The term, however, had been used for some time (from the end of the 1960s). A working definition can be the one proposed by Ato Quayson in his introduction to the book *Postcolonialism, Theory, Practice or Process* (2000). According to this definition postcolonialism:

"involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies as well as at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire" (2000, 2).

This is precisely what Kincaid does.<sup>57</sup>

## 10.2 Postmodern Modernist Themes

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<sup>57</sup> Kincaid's work *A Small Place*, therefore, is postcolonial. Especially interesting in this regard is her non-fiction work, such as *On Seeing England for the First Time* and *A Little Revenge from the Periphery*. Her fiction, including her non-fiction, autobiographical work, *My Brother*, are both modernist in language and postmodernist in content, in some respects. They do not reach the impossibility of situations of other postmodernist authors. Postmodern is her latest novel *See Now Then*. *At the Bottom of the River* is also postmodern, although probably not as postmodern as *See Now Then*. Postcolonial is all her work

According to Laura Marcus, what characterizes the modernist wave of the early twentieth century is: "the gesture that stands for the whole, the concept of a key to the self, the notion of human life as made up of motifs" (Shiach ed. 2007, 96). Similarly, Virginia Woolf in her essay "Modern Fiction" urges the reader to "Look within":

"The Mind receives a myriad impressions. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf, 1951, 189).<sup>58</sup>

This point of view can be said to have influenced Jamaica Kincaid and to be the basis of Kincaid's work, although she belongs to the middle of the 20th century. In fact, in *A Small Place*, Kincaid tries to show that life is made up of a series of circumstances, such as the colonial rule, which we do not control. Also, in this book, she looks at the interiority of Antiguan, their reaction to the tourists. For example, Kincaid says:

"They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live. They envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself" (1988, 19).

She considers life as made up of motifs, in her case colonialist motifs. This point of view is exemplified by the sentence: "Do you ever try to understand why people like me cannot get over the past, cannot forgive and cannot forget [colonialism]?" (1988, 26). There

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<sup>58</sup> Later on, in the same essay, Virginia Woolf says talking about modernist writers, in particular James Joyce: "They attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist" (1951, 190). As we have said, Kincaid uses repetitions, which shows a break with more traditional forms of writing.

is a contrast between the inner being of Antiguans vs. the outward appearance created by colonialism. Antiguans' perceptions of English people as bad-behaved and racist exemplified the inner being of Antiguans (1988, 28-29). The outward appearance created by colonialism is exemplified by the celebration of Queen Victoria's birthday in Antigua, long after her death (1988, 30-31). This a modernist point of view.<sup>59</sup> More specifically, Kincaid shows the limits of modernity, as created by colonialism, from the point of view of a woman and a colonized subject. A discussion around colonialism was beyond the scope of modernism, as intended by Pound, Eliot, Woolf and so on. However, the problem of the exterior vs. the interior in society is a modernist theme, which we find in Eliot and Pound. We can probably call Kincaid's discussion postmodern modernism because of the postmodern aspects of her work, which we have discussed.

We can notice the stress on subjectivity that characterizes this modernism as opposed to the supposed objectivity and rigidity that distinguishes realism, colonial realism. To express the rigidity of colonialism, Kincaid says, for example:

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<sup>59</sup> Modernism characterized the 1920s. Modernist authors are considered T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, among others. We also have Nella Larsen, C.L.R. James, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer (just to mention a few African-American and Caribbean ones). An obvious question is: is the modernism in the Caribbean the same as European and American modernism? Clearly, modernism in the Caribbean and among African-Americans did not manifest itself in the same way as in the Anglo-American tradition. We have more strongly the entrance of traditional cultures into mainstream culture and a return to Africa, in their case. However, we can see similarities among these generations of writers of the 1920s and later, across cultures, as Anna Smith argues in the volume edited by Morag Shiach (2007).

“There they were [the English], strangers in someone else’s home, and then they refused to talk to their hosts [Antiguans] or have anything human, anything intimate, to do with them.” (1988, 27).

In *A Small Place*, we find, too, echoes of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. The narrator and the tourist can be compared to a modern “you and I”: Jamaica Kincaid accompanies the reader on a tour of Antigua in the same way that Prufrock accompanies the reader on a tour of Eliot’s time. We can find a similar contrast between tradition and innovation. In *The Love Song* the question is: “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”. In Kincaid, the question is: “How to account for that?” (1988, 6), or better, “Do you ever wonder?” (1988, 26). The “I” of *The Love Song* shows the limitations of modernity in Eliot’s time. The main character of *A small Place* shows the limits of the modernity created in Antigua by colonialism. A contrast between the supposed objectivity of colonialism and the subjectivity of Antiguans. It is a postmodern modernism.<sup>60</sup>

Kincaid criticizes capitalism. She states, in fact: “Do you know why people like me are shy about being capitalists? Well, it’s because we, for as long as we have known you, were capital and you were the commanding, cruel capitalists.” (1988, 37). Kincaid’s criticism find an equivalent in the definition of modern man made by Erich Fromm. Fromm, who was writing in 1942, in *Fear of Freedom* defines the dilemma of the modern man with the following words, as Christopher Bigsby notes in *Arthur Miller, a Critical Study*:

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<sup>60</sup> I agree with Peter Brooker that “There were, and still are” different ways of being modern, and different ways and times of being modernist “What makes this fiction modernist, across a wide range, is its self-consciousness, in the different senses of these writers’ deliberation on art and the artist, the attempted narrative registration of consciousness, and an awareness of the instabilities shaping and enabling contemporary identities” (Shiach ed. 2007, 44-45).

“We feel we can acquire everything material or immaterial by buying it, and thus things become ours independently of any creative effort of our own in relation to them. In the same way we regard our personal qualities and the result of our efforts as commodities that can be sold for money, prestige, power” (2005, 110-111)

In *A Small Place*, we see that Kincaid shows that this dilemma still persists, today. She criticizes it repeatedly. She promotes a figure of man close to nature and to traditional cultures, who leads a simple life-style, rather than one focused on money (1988, 16-17). We can read such contrast as an indication of Kincaid’s modernism, or of her postmodern modernism.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> There are more strictly modernist books by Kincaid. If we analyze Kincaid’s characters in other books, we can see that we can include her among modernist authors. Kincaid has a creative mind. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela refuses the mechanization of life. She chooses abortion rather than many unwanted pregnancies with a person she does not love. By refusing to have kids, by taking upon herself the task of working as a constructor and by rejecting the superficiality that she sees around her through Xuela, stands in antithesis to the modern man as defined by Fromm, for example, and approaches modernist writers. Xuela is a modernist character because she is very existentialist, too. She interrogates herself about the boundary between life and death. She answers in her own Caribbean terms by making evident that there is a linkage between live and death, which is spiritual. She also cares very much about her subjectivity and this makes her a modernist figure. According to Howard Finn, in fact “The early modernist novel, with its variations on the ‘stream of consciousness’ method attempted to capture the inner life with an immediacy and authenticity that preceding realism had lacked” [í ] “The modernist novel increasingly had to perform, the difficult trick of rendering subjectivity while at the same time distancing and universalizing it” (Shiach ed. 2007, 191). The characters Annie John and Lucy, with their focus on self-consciousness, on the relativism of reality and on self-perception are

In modernist authors, like Ezra Pound, we only find a criticism of usury in canto sixty-six of the *Cantos*. We find, however, a similar contrast between creativity and speculation, specifically between creativity and the charging of high interest rates on money lent.

In general, the discussion around capitalism, feminism, colonialism, neo-colonialism is modern. However, in Kincaid we find modernist and postmodernist aspects.

## 11. Conclusion

As we have seen, in conclusion, *A Small Place* is a postcolonial and feminist book, or it falls within the realm of women's studies. Also, it is modernist and postmodernist. It reflects an African-American aesthetics although it is written by a Caribbean writer. This

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modernist, too. We also find existentialism in Kincaid's short-stories in the book *At the Bottom of the River*, for example, which characterizes modernism. We can see the existentialism present in the following lines:

“Emerging from my pit I step into a room and I see that the lamp is lit. In the light of the lamp, I see some books; I see a chair, I see a table, I see a pen; I see a bowl of ripe fruit a bottle of milk, a flute made of wood, the clothes that I wear. And as I see these things in the light of the lamp, all perishable and transient, how bound up I know I am to all that is human endeavor, to all that is past and to all that shall be, to all that shall be lost and leave no trace” (1985, 81-82).

We can sense from these words the existentialism that characterizes Virginia Woolf's *To the Light House* (1927), or that is present in Robert Frost, for example: the questioning of the relation of human beings with tangible reality and with the passing of time and more in general, with the dimension in which we live. Such questioning is present throughout *Xuela* and reminds of the modernists' focus on the inner being of the characters rather than on the outward appearance and on action, which is present in postmodernism, for example in *See Now Then*.

is so, even though Kincaid rejects the label of 'black writer' or feminist writer and accepts only the label of modernist writer (Vorda 1991).

The main themes that characterize Kincaid's work, are England and colonialism, neo-colonialism, feminism and patriarchy and Caribbean traditions and culture. Important, as we have seen, is the relationship between mother and daughter in this book. The author reflects on this relation, probably, to better understand the relationship she had with her own mother, which was not easy.

England is undoubtedly portrayed as a colonialist power. It incarnates the 'evil'. It is the source of all problems in the Caribbean although it is also necessarily a place that provided education to Antiguans during colonialism. The United States is associated to neo-colonialism and imperialism because it takes advantage of the poorer economies of the Caribbean region as well as of other poor countries- to enrich itself. The United States is also associated to slavery and to injustice based on skin color both in this book and in her essay 'In History'. If, on the one hand, it is a source of exploitation, however, on the other hand the United States is a safe heaven, where to find refuge against poverty and deprivation and where to start a new life as an immigrant. It is also a place where the American dream can come true after many sacrifices, as in the case of Jamaica Kincaid who managed to start there a successful career as a writer and to start a new life removed from poverty. For Antiguans, the United States is a place where dreams can come true and where some of them aspire to emigrate to and that they imitate at home.

We have seen how *A Small Place* is key to Kincaid's writings. In Kincaid's work the world is portrayed 'a small place' because of themes like HIV/Aids, gender imbalances, poverty and colonialism. This means that they are common themes all over the world and

make it "small". Kincaid argues that they have to do with imbalances of power and oppression present all over the world. The world is not only "a small place" in her fictional writings, but it is actually a small place, in reality, where these imbalances actually exist. As Kincaid argues, they have to do with questions of colonialism and neo-colonialism. *A Small Place* is really a key to understand her work. It plays an important place in her complex thought: for example, it shows how North America plays in her imaginary, as well as in the collective imaginary of Antiguan both in positive and in negative terms. According to Kincaid, Antigua and the United States are very different places, although they are gradually becoming more alike, unfortunately, as the natural beauty of the sea and beaches of Antigua is ruined by tourism.

As far as language is concerned, Kincaid's style is characterized by constant repetitions, similar to the style of Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway. Through repetition, authors emphasize the importance of their thought. Kincaid communicates messages, such as anger. She is inspired by the Anglo-American tradition of modernism but, as we have seen, her work is also postmodern. The themes that Kincaid discusses, women, colonialism, Caribbean traditions and North-America are modernist and modern, although she reaches, at times, postmodernism. Her work is postmodern, to an extent, because she shows a more mature and critical awareness of the wrongdoings of colonialism and imperialism than that proposed by modernists. However, she is also linked to modernism as far as language and some aspects of the themes that she discusses, are concerned. We can notice that she questions and challenges the relation of Antiguan with a realist modernity, a modernity created by colonialism, and to this respect, she is modernist, probably a postmodern modernist. Modernism in the Caribbean, as far as Kincaid is concerned, is influenced by the Anglo-American tradition but evolves in its own direction.

In an interview with Kincaid, Allan Vorda notes that Henry Louis Gates Jr. said of Jamaica Kincaid's work that "she never feels the necessity of claiming the existence of a black world or a female sensibility. She assumes them both. I think it's a distinct departure that she's making, and I think that more and more black American writers will assume their world the way she does. So that we can get beyond the large theme of racism and get to the deeper themes of how black people love and cry and live and die. Which, after all is what art is all about." (2013, 51). From my point of view, Kincaid draws a distinction between blacks and whites, man and women, as far as *A Small Place* is concerned. Perhaps, Henry Louis Gates's observation holds more true in other books she has written. For example, in *Lucy* Jamaica Kincaid talks about the friendship between Lucy and Peggy, the one West Indian, the other Irish, without setting barriers between the two and without categorizing them (in this sense the world is perhaps not "a small place" because color barriers do not interfere into their friendship, at least not in North American terms, but it is "a small place" in the sense that people from far away countries can be friends with one another, small in the literal sense, then). On this point, Kincaid says in an interview with *Guernica* magazine "I am not talking about race. I am talking about a description. What I really want to write about is injustice and justice, and the different ways human beings organize the two" (June 17, 2013).

In other words, Kincaid seeks to eliminate a black/white dichotomy. In the same interview with Allen Vorda she says that she wants "to live a long life in which I attempt to be free" (2013, 52). By "free" she means free from having to close herself in the boxes of categorization, among other things. She adds that "it's stupid" to call anyone "black", "Caribbean" or "female" (2013, 53). Thus, Kincaid opens an important venue for African-American and third world literature in general, where blacks and women do not need a

separate and perhaps, secluded, box and a removed universe of their own. Kincaid forces them into the main scene.

In another interview with Vorda of 1993, according to J. Bouson Brooks, Kincaid specifies I am "just this sort of unhappy person struggling to make something, struggling to be free. Yet the freedom isn't a political one or a public one: it's a personal one. It's a struggle that will go on until the day I die" (1993, 1). We can sense from this statement, as we have seen earlier on, that her writings are very personal. She sees writing as a personal struggle. Her work is autobiographical because writing was a strong necessity for her. Because she has so much to say about her life, Kincaid must have felt the need to put herself in her writings, to intermingle her personal story with fiction and to write about it. She says in the interview with Moira Ferguson: "I have written too little" "But it is so much for me; writing is really such an expression of personal growth" "I don't know how else to live" (1994, 169).

To use a word that Giovanna Covi uses in her book *Jamaica Kincaid's Prismatic Subject* (2003), we can say that Jamaica Kincaid has a "transnational" voice. In reading *A Small Place* you seem transported in the beautiful land of Antigua, at first, but you really have to deal with difficult and painful issues such as colonialism. By touching upon themes like gender inequality, economy, history, social injustice and color barriers Kincaid speaks to a wide audience. Finally, we can say that Kincaid like all postcolonial writers revisits ontological questions, for example, she shows that what seems to exist during colonialism stops to exist, suddenly and what did not seem to exist comes into being. Also, she shows the importance of traditional beliefs for the Antiguan inhabitants thus raising epistemological questions concerning how can we acquire knowledge.

I agree with Kincaid's pointing out the similarities between the history of the Caribbean region and that of African-Americans, indeed one single history, one "black Atlantic". I think that the two are mutually interdependent and that it is not possible to understand the one without the other. Her protest against the situation in Antigua can be considered in light of African-Americans' and minority protests against their situation in the United States. They are the outcomes of the same history.

We can conclude this essay by saying that *A Small Place* raises many problems. The idea of history is one of them. As we have said, Kincaid questions on how Antiguan perceive present events and how they perceive the past. She writes, "In a small place, people cultivate small events. The small event is isolated, blown up, turned over and over, and then absorbed into the everyday" (1988, 52). She also writes "Do you ever try to understand why people like me cannot get over the past, cannot forgive and cannot forget?" (1988, 26). It is possible to say about Kincaid's work what J. Michael Dash says about Edouard Glissant's work: "Their history remains to be written" (1989, xxxii).

I have, therefore, answered the initial question "what does North America represent for its surrounding islands some of whom are considered Geo-politically part of North America and more specifically, what does North America represent for Jamaica Kincaid?". I have answered the question how do Antigua and the United States compare and contrasts each other, too. I have considered the significance of the United States for Kincaid. I have also analyzed the main themes discussed in *A Small Place*.

Last, can we say that what Homi K. Bhabha says about another Caribbean writer, Frantz Fanon, applies to Kincaid's writing *A Small Place*? He says that "Remembering Frantz Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation. It is a painful

remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the presentö (2008, xxxv). From my point of view, this assertion does offer an interpretation of Jamaica Kincaid's book. In fact, Kincaid tries to piece together the complicate puzzle of her past to explain the present. It is a book worth reading and reflecting upon.

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