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On Methodology and (Post)Colonialism in Tourism Promotional Language

Crăciunescu, A. [*]
"Ştefan cel Mare"University of Suceava (Romania)

Abstract

The greatest challenge of the present paper is the research paradox that tourism imbeds within its economic and historical realities. Whilst tributary to Western research methodologies, we realized that an impartial analysis of tourism studies, which is essentially postcolonial, presupposes a pertinent review of ''marginal'' state of the art in the field. As scholars argue, tourism has developed a language of its own in order to promote cultural patterns of authenticity. This universal lexicon is largely rooted in myth and otherness, which lead us to the exemplification from a semio-linguistic perspective of a paradisiacal destination –Jamaica – included in the categories of such by the normative Westerner. We also touch upon gender issues on the larger colonialist background that the relation Self-Other, Orient-Occident, Colonizer-Colonized raises even at a methodological level in recent literature.

Keywords: Tourism; Research Methodology; Occident vs. Orient; Advertising; Semiotics

[*] E-mail address: anna_c00@yahoo.com

Introduction

Today's economic and cultural cosmology determines us to reconsider the research methodology in tourism field from a plural perspective, of a multiple Self, situated within the space of *ambivalent enunciation*, *hybrid* or *normative* post-war cultural geographies. In this paper we intend to reestablish within a short review of the main theories of colonialism waves, the place and role of *sign* and *signification* in promotional practices of nowadays tourism. As tourism had known different approaches, being researched in the light of other disciplines, or as a particular one, or as a branch of sociology, or in an interdisciplinary view, tributary thus to Western knowledges, we assist nowadays to a quasi schism at an epistemological level and thus to a new methodological trend. This meta-decolonization of the theoretical frame coincides with the changes produced at the level of economic and cultural realities within the field.

The new perspectives on tourism are transmitted through the voice of researchers emerging from former colonies cultural spaces and whose intrinsic responsibility is to reconsider ethical methodology through scientific decolonization, in order to situate tourism postcolonial theories in a neutral zone of the hegemonic discourse. Thus, the premises of a counter-trend start to shape, in a nexus to what is considered to be an authority in the field, that is the *norm* imposed by cultural, linguistic and tourism theories comporting Eurocentric patterns. What we want to underline within our incursion in the ''marginal'' world of knowledge is that eventually, diachronically reliance to a theory or another is relative within research and at the same time, these theories are historically (factual and discursive) modeling political, economic, ethnic, racial or gender issues, that the contemporaneity pre-fabricates permanently in the methodological laboratory of *knowledge*.

The theoretical debate on the *decolonial theory*, in the first part of the paper, is showcased within an application in the second part, which aims at demonstrating, on one hand, that *tourism developed a linguistic reality of its own, regardless colonial relations, as this lexicon is imbedded in myth and pre-modern knowledges and beliefs.* On the other hand, *semiotic-based methodology detects the presence of colonial intrusions at the level of the general message, which is unavoidable, due to the postcolonial context of tourism in certain destinations*. Thus, the **paradoxes of postmodern tourism** emerge at the level of practice via methodological approach in respect to recent linguistic and behavioral research trends, which recognize, in the case of minor cultures, that an imperial language is the very key of survival and promotion at a global scale. Secondly, in the case of former colonies destinations (that are generally emergent of minor cultures), the paradox depicts the tendency of the postmodern man in consuming *exoticism*, which comes in opposition to previous historical antagonisms or fears concerning *otherness*. The third paradox of tourism involves the fact that Occidental-oriented knowledges are applied for Oriental object of study. Therefore, in the case of former colonies as touristic destinations, we shall see that the voice of *otherness* emerges at an epistemological level, in order to rebalance

the relation between Occidental-based theories and Oriental-based areas of application of these theories in tourism studies.

1. Colonialism and methodology in tourism studies

In the context of cultural-territorial and ethnic-racial dichotomies North/South, Orient/Occident, dominated/dominating culture, the methodological discourse of tourism studies presents various valences, often in connection with the localization of the *subjective ethos* of the researcher in a certain cultural space. A wave of western postcolonial scholars (Caton & Santos, 2008; d'Hauteserre, 2011; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Jacobs, 2010, Phillips, 2008; Tucker, 2010; Tucker & Akama, 2009; Wearing & Wearing, 2006) has been coexisting nearby remarkable names of oriental postcolonialism, who, however, underpin their discourse under the influence of western epistemologies (Edward **Said** – Foucault; Homi **Bhabha** – Lacan and Derrida; Gayatri **Spivak** – Marx and Derrida). In our study, we believe that it is important to highlight the epistemological paradox of producing a meta-(post)(neo)colonial discourse within Occidental space as the methodological norm of a discipline that situates its object of study within the amphitheatre of oriental cosmologies. This paradox attracted the attention of ''marginal'' researchers who, for instance, debate the issue recently enough, in a study entitled *Tourism and decolonization. Locating research and self* (Chambers& Buzinde, 2015).

Different scholars indicate the necessity of a *decolonial theory*, seen as a responsibility for specialists in tourism (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007) who must have a global view and observe traditions from all indigenous cultural areas in the world in order to avoid the dichotomy culture/knowledge. In Chambers and Buzinde's opinion:

''By saying that tourism knowledge is colonial what is meant is that in tourism there is still a privileging of Western epistemologies. The concept of Western epistemologies, simply put, refers to those knowledges which have been produced in, and disseminated by the former colonial powers (predominantly in Europe). These ethnocentric knowledges became universalized through a complex web of exploitative power relationships and systems which were necessary to sustain colonialism. Western epistemologies thus serve to foreground Western culture while concomitantly negating and denying legitimacy to the knowledges and cosmologies of those in and from the South (i.e., the former colonized territories)'' (Chambers& Buzinde, 2015: 3).

At the same time, the authors recognize that the *decolonial theory* does not represent a total schism with western epistemologies or postcolonial theories and the localization of the ethos within a marginal zone on the map of power geographies does not mean an epistemological identification with the behavior of the subaltern/dominated (Grosfoguel, 2007). Actually, Dirlik notes that postcolonialism represents an escape from the real problems of capitalism's crisis and that the researchers or ''the intelligentsia of global capitalism'' who are rallied to this representative trend are the first to benefit from the system (Dirlik, 1994). Yet, in Tucker's opinion, tourism remains essentially a postcolonial discipline, that consolidates through its very nature the relations between the actors of the (post)modern world: ''Tourism therefore both

reinforces and is embedded in postcolonial relationships. Issues of identity, contestation and representation are increasingly recognized as central to the nature of tourism, particularly given recent reflection on the ethical bases of tourism and tourism studies'' (*apud* Tucker, 2004: 2). We realize that a comprehensive and impartial research presupposes the creation of an equilibrium between exclusive Eurocentric and Atlantic theories and the ones emerging from Orient cultures or ''marginal'' groups.

2. Sign, globalisation, tourism. Contemporary reflections

In a global and multidisciplinary approach, in the economic and cultural context of an oppressed/hegemonic Self that enunciates, the semio-linguistic dimension detaches as an *insight structure of power relations.* Articulating cultural identity through the hybridisation of the profound Self, at a discursive level, represents the a-temporal movement through which former colonies reintegrate in the circuit of global capital. This almost disintegrated moment of enunciation coincides with the moment when the Occident succeeds into knowing minor cultures as the mirror fragments of its new global consciousness (Bhabha, 2004: 216, 220). The *third space* (Bhabha) is the metaphor of the acceptation of a non-imperialist enunciating demarche that shapes *meaning* beyond generic-ontological dichotomies of Occident. Recognition through identification with one of the binary opposition element is facilitated by the *tourist's gaze* (Urry, 2011), which eludes the frontiers of a repressed communication through pre-established hegemonic frame. The legacy of this hegemonic frame becomes contested when appears the space that localizes culture in the moment when the Self starts to enunciate, that is, in the discourse-moment.

On the reversed map of global imperialism, the *signifier* and the *signified* – normative universal and irreversible sources – try to explain, to express and to value the intangible capital of tourism as a form of economy. If Matthews described tourism as the new economic plantation, for Crick ''tourism is a form of 'leisure imperialism' and represents 'the hedonistic face of neocolonialism' '' (Tucker, 2004: 5). But this enunciation comporting a *significant* and a *signified* is tributary to articulated language and this aspect is of high interest in postcolonial context, as ''imperial oppression means control over language and text'' (*Idem*, 2004: 6). As ''language itself is an aspect of culture with a spiritual component, targeting valuable landmarks'' (Oprea, 2008: 11), in the case of English language and British Empire's expansion, for instance, Ashcroft explains the impact that English language, as a colonial tool, had both at an utilitarian level as well as an unconscious level through the infiltration of pre-established values and the creation of opposite terms, as antonymous to the dominant culture (Tucker, 2004: 6-7). In this sense, we can also discuss the question of major/minor languages and the imperialist charge that each element of the dichotomy can overtake at a certain moment. If, on one hand, the *decolonial theory* suggests supporting minor languages through the promotion of minor cultural pools as touristic destinations, we realize, on the other hand, that the act of enunciation in an international language represents the only chance of a minor culture to be recognized in the Occident:

''No matter how important local and national knowledge is within a specific spatial   context, unless it is conveyed in English it has little chance to enter the global   marketplace   and   be reproduced and circulated'' (*apud* Chambers& Buzinde, 2015:10).

The dominated and dominant cultures meet within recent postcolonial history in the emerging point of *sign*, as a minimal unity of sense and signification within destinations' marketing. As the state of the art recognizes that beyond any other methodological dilemma of tourism, it is obvious that it has developed its own lexicon (Selwyn, 1993), creating ''the first detailed semiotic analysis of its own language'' (*apud* Echtner, 1999: 53). *We can even assert that the chance of minor cultures to linger is to promote themselves via tourism, as the universal language of the existent authentic or of its artificial creation through semiotic strategies reflected within the promoting product.* The community's self-identification is a form of imperialism that opposes to the one established by the Occident, that is, to the normative-dialectic acts, which delimitate the reality to certain binary oppositions of categories/terms (for instance: savage/civilized, white/black, dominator/dominated, minor/major, etc).

In their analyses on different promotional touristic texts, several authors have arrived to the same conclusion (Cohen 1989, Brown 1992, Selwyn 1993, Cooper 1994, Dann 1996). The profound structure of these texts is constituted through and at the level of sign, completed by the mythical coexistence of non-imperialist categories of knowledge:

''tourism destinations represent specific symbolic experiences. The goal of tourism promotion becomes the portrayal of these symbolic experiences using the appropriate sign systems'' (Echtner, 1999: 52).
This entire collection of research conclusions lead to the idea that ''the 'language' of tourism marketing (communicated both verbally and visually) is viewed as a sign system that creates, codifies and communicates certain mythical tourism experiences'' (*Idem:*53).

We can extract hereof the second paradox of tourism: the ontological essence of the Occident is rooted in the meeting with the Other who provokes fear and fascination at the same time; yet, the '' 'encounter with *the other* have always provided fuel for myth and mythical language' '' (*apud* Tucker, 2004: 8).   A new epistemological and terminological category appears – the *exotic*, as a quantifiable unity: ''for the vast majority of people, otherness is what makes a destination worthy of consumption'' (*Ibid*.)

3. A corpus-based analysis: semio-linguistic approaches

''The industry of difference'' as tourism is also named is the concrete manifestation of the continuation of (Post)Colonizer-(Post)Colonized relation, taking, in some cases, the form of neo-colonialism; its discourse is reflected by the promotional text, which underlines the peculiarity of the concepts ''place'' and ''identity''.

From the perspective of postcolonial theory, Echtner & Prasad (2003) conceived three categories of myth that tourism marketing in developing countries exploit in order to form the *self-image* (Tuker& Akama, 2009: 511):

1. the **myth of the unchanged** – used in order to represent the destination as an a-temporal place, comporting strong roots in the past; in Egypt, India, Thailand and Turkey, the tourist is invited to travel in a world of the immortal civilizations;
2. the **myth of the unstrained** – is associated to ''tropical paradises'' in Fiji, Jamaica and Cuba; in this case, the relation colonizer/colonized takes the form of a master-servant reference, as the locals must contribute to the creation and maintaining of the myth's image through smile, pleasant, submissive and almost servile attitude;
3. the **myth of the untamed** – presents destinations as untouched places, inviting tourists to meet the inhabitants of a virgin nature; it represents the perfect destination for adventure and discovering, offering at the same time the opportunity of meeting the primitive, yet noble savage (areas from Africa, South America and Oceania).

For our practical demonstration, we have chosen a promotional excerpt that subscribes to the series of romanticized portrayals of the exotic seen by the Occident as a paradisiacal space: Jamaica. In addition to this, Walcott suggested that ''Western tourists regard the Caribbean as a ludic playground with an abundance of culture but no knowledge. This representation of the Caribbean interestingly enough is also perpetuated by the Caribbean itself in order to make itself more palatable to the Western gaze'' (Chambers& Buzinde, 2005: 10).

In the following promotional poster, we can notice, at the level of the image, the cutting of the natural frame, hidden by a grayish background, shaping two actants and an object with a double denotative referent (the cocktail recipient and the waterfall fragment) situated on the paradigmatic axe of ''water'' and ''spring''. The act of consuming from a common ''spring'' of both actants establishes a relation that enlightens power issues. The text reiterates the apparent equality between the two actants, suggested at the iconic level between the two global actors (*the tourist* and *the guest*). The first differentiation of signification appears through the intrusion of the term ''exotic'' and the highlight at the graphic level of the syntagms ''exotic new friends'' and ''tropical shirts''. The connotative sense of the clothing element characterized by an adjective from the sphere of geographical typologies is reproduced through association with the zoomorphic actant Colibri, as a landmark for exotic Jamaica. The tourist and his/her ''envisaged friend'' share the same cocktail (symbol of ''vacation'', term that includes on the syntagmatic axe: ''relaxation'', ''pleasure'', ''consumption'') – the tourist's perspective, respectively the same landscape (the waterfall) – the guest's perspective (the inhabitant of the tropical forest – extrapolated, of the touristic destination Jamaica). Yet, the disequilibrium of this egalitarian relation is unveiled at an iconic level, in the *bas-plan* of the poster, by the hand that holds the recipient (that represents both the cocktail and the nature fragment), as a representative gesture of power. Thus, the Colibri Hummingbird as a spokesman of the exotic (that is of the Other) that provokes fascination and fear at the

same time, has been tamed, as well as the natural landscape, which suffered a shift at the level of meaning through the prefabrication of referentiality at the visual level.

Figure1: Print ad 'Waterfall', DraftFCB agency, New York, USA, 2014

In the next promotional poster, constructed on the same techniques, we depict postcolonial intrusions reflected at the level of gender relation, through the exposure of woman's body as a contour that opens the iconic frame over the beach – symbol of liberty and nudity. In the text, the verb ''to lead'' juxtaposed to the referent ''beach'' – tanning, is placed on the paradigmatic axe of power: ''funny where a little sunshine can lead''. The power exerted on femininity is exemplified at a visual level through the explicit suggestion of un-veiling the body, reiterated in the text in a ludic tone, yet sexist. In our opinion, this poster is representative as ''the postcolonial reading of gender issues and representation of women has found substantial resonance in the study of tourism and gender issues, particularly with respect to the sexual exploitation of women and their representation in tourism advertising and promotion'' (Tucker, 2004: 10-11).

Figure2: Print ad 'Bikini', DraftFCB agency, New York, USA, 2014

Conclusion

We feel that we must restate the fact that postcolonialism and postcolonial relations find in-depth structures in *Orientalism*. The latter originates in the actions that the Euro-Atlantic powers developed on Orient before and after the Second World War, rather as an investment strategy into a system of knowledge about the Orient; in Said's words, "continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness [...]" (Said, 2001: 6). We believe that our insight in the deep layers of these phenomena is important in order to have a comprehensive approach of tourism, from a semio-linguistic perspective, as "the evolution and the language's condition are in a direct relation with the anthropologic reality" (Oprea, 2008: 7), but also historical, political or economic. The complexity of tourism – postcolonial in its very nature and the relations it develops (mentioning the cultural-ethnic and gender components comported within), lead in the recent state of the art to a reconsideration of power relations at the level of scientific research. We assert that research must remain under the sign of neutrality in front of all the actors of old and new empires, regardless the cultural localization of the subjective ethos.

In this paper we have also observed that tourism remains in its own turn neutral, as it produces and preserves a language of its own, articulated, though, in an international language. Yet, concerning power relations reflected on the analyzed corpus, the semiotic approach helped us find intrusions of colonialism at the level of the promotional message. At the same time, following Urry's concept from a foucauldian perspective applied within a *genderized* perspective, we realized that "it is through the process of surveillance that the gaze becomes embodied and tourism, with its emphasis on mobility and the flow of people, provides multiple sites for the embodiment of sight as the most natural form of surveillance" (*apud* Aitchison, 2009: 640). Actually, "the 'embodied turn' in tourism studies has developed in response to the writing out of the body in earlier research where there was a failure to recognize (Other) bodies and tourism studies" (*Ibid.*).

All in all, the complexity of tourism advertising in particular, as well as the complexity of tourism in general, in a postcolonial context, can generate further multidisciplinary approaches, starting from the anthropological aspects of indigenous cultures as an *a priori* discourse engendering common share of universal human values, transposed in a dialectic of semiotics, as an empirical creation and method of investigation of promotional discursive strategies that should generate economic profits at a large scale. Thus, in our opinion, semiotics can become an important methodological landmark for an interdisciplinary approach in tourism advertising that aims at connecting humanities and economics in a common research demarche.

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