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Trends, development, prospects

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2 Natural hedonism

The invention of Caribbean islands as tropical playgrounds

Mimi Sheller

Introduction

Caribbean tourism is vested in the branding and marketing of Paradise. 'It is the fortune, and the misfortune, of the Caribbean,' argues Polly Pattullo, 'to conjure up the idea of "heaven on earth" or "a little bit of Paradise" in the collective European imagination . . . a Garden of Eden before the Fall' (Pattullo 1996: 142). Verdant forests, exotic flora and tropical greenery serve as powerful symbols of the 'Eden' that is imagined before European intrusion. Tobago is a place where you can 'see the islands as Columbus first saw them', for example, while Dominica is described as 'still the primitive garden that Columbus first sighted in 1493. An area of tropical rainforests, flowers of incredible beauty and animals that exist nowhere else in the world'.¹ In this chapter I demonstrate how such imagery picks up on longstanding visual and literary themes in European representations of Caribbean landscapes as microcosms of earthly paradise – including the temptation and corruption that go along with being new Edens. These discursive formations of Caribbean scenery are closely related to the emergence of 'hedonism' as a key set of practices associated with Caribbean tourism. Depictions of Caribbean 'Edenism', I argue, underwrite performances of touristic 'hedonism' by naturalising the region's landscape and its inhabitants as avatars of primitivism, luxuriant corruption, sensual stimulation, ease and availability.²

The tropical island has played a crucial part in the history of European literature, philosophy and arts. Richard Grove has shown, for example, how the idea of tropical islands as Edens influenced Daniel Defoe's setting for *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which is thought to be based on the Caribbean island of Tobago as described in John Poyntz's *The Present Prospect of the Famous and Fertile Islands of Tobago* (1683), and it led to a cult of 'robinsonnades' throughout Europe (Grove 1995: 225–9). From the seventeenth century onwards, Grove argues, 'the tropical environment was increasingly utilised as the symbolic location for the idealised landscapes and aspirations of the Western imagination' (Grove 1995: 3).

This chapter offers a reading of some of the mythic paragons of 'natural' and 'cultivated' scenery in the literature of Caribbean travel over several

centuries, showing how themes of luxury and paradise were connected to particular ways of viewing Caribbean people. First I show how the Enlightenment vision of man-made utilisation of a bountiful Nature through orderly cultivation shifted in the nineteenth century to a more Romantic embrace of the luxuriant profusion of tropical nature, through which adventurous bodily immersion and self-discovery could be played out in wild and remote places.³ Then I analyse how these geographies of risk and desire have become deeply implicated in contemporary practices of touristic hedonism in the region, including sex tourism and the sexual marketing of Caribbean tourism destinations.

Luxury and corruption in island paradise

Early European writing on the Caribbean enshrined the traveller's dream of tropical fecundity and excessive fruitfulness, conjuring up utopian fantasies of sustenance without labour. Such accounts drew on a range of precedents such as the biblical Garden of Eden, the classical garden of the Hesperides and the Renaissance botanic garden. An early seventeenth-century report on St Christopher, for example, emphasised that food was plentiful and required little labour to produce:

A tree like a Pine, beareth a fruit so great as a Muske Melon, which hath alwayes ripe fruit, flowers or greene fruit, which will refresh two or three men, and very comfortable; Plum trees many, the fruit great and yellow, which but strained into water in foure and twenty houres will be very goode drinke; wilde figge trees there are many . . . all things we there plant doe grow exceedingly, so well as Tobacco; the corne, pease, and beanes, cut but away the stalkes, young sprigs will grow, and so bear fruit for many yeeres together, without any more planting. (Smith 1819 [1629]: 273)

Coming from a land of four seasons, Europeans had never seen plants that flowered and fruited throughout the year, carrying green fruit, ripe fruit and flowers all at the same time. In discovering the tropical island, 'Paradise had become a realisable geographical reality' (Grove 1995: 51); it was the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

Europeans were eager to grasp this paradise and make it their own. By the early eighteenth century the predominant theme in descriptions of the West Indian colonies was the beauty of cultivated areas. Sir Richard Dutton said of Barbados in 1681 that the dense population and intensive cultivation made it 'one great City adorned with gardens and a most delightful place' (cited in McFarlane 1994: 128). And the French writer Father Charlevoix burred:

The country of Barbados has a most beautiful appearance, swelling here and there into gentle hills; shining by the cultivation of every

part, by the verdure of the sugar canes, the bloom and fragrance of the number of orange, lemon, lime and citron trees, the guavas, papas, aloes, and a vast multitude of other elegant and useful plants, that rise intermixed with the houses of the gentlemen which are sown thickly on every part of the island.

(Charlevoix 1766: 319)

As I have traced more fully elsewhere (Sheller 2003), such eighteenth-century depictions of the Caribbean lent support to the institution of slavery by celebrating its capacity to make wild lands productive. They are also the foundation for subsequent developments of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1991), which have continued to imbue Caribbean landscapes and scenery with moral meanings.

In describing Antigua, for example, a British traveller in 1804 not only highlights his preference for cultivated scenery, but also comments *negatively* upon the scenes of untouched woods and mountains, 'unrelieved' by human intervention:

the eye traverses a view of one of the fairest and best cultivated tracts of country in the windward islands. It is highly pleasing to a person who has recently come from the woods and mountains of the more southern colonies, to behold so extensive a scene of cleared land. . . . Nothing appears more completely like a garden than the sugar plantation under good cultivation. . . . The green fields of cane . . . were intermixed with provision grounds of yams and eddoes, or the dark and regular parterres of holed land prepared for the reception of the succeeding year's plant-canes. A large windmill on each estate; the planter's dwelling-house and sugar-works, with the negro huts, in their beautiful groves of oranges, plantains, and cocoanut trees, completed a landscape that continually recurred in passing over the island.

(McKinnen 1804: 56–7)

As Mary Louise Pratt suggests in her study of imperial travel writing, the relation of such writers to the landscape is like a viewer to a painting. Gazing through his 'imperial eyes', the landscape is aesthetically composed, attributed with a density of meaning, and fixed by the mastery of the seer over the seen. Such a 'monarch-of-all-I-survey scene', Pratt argues, 'involve[s] particularly explicit interaction between aesthetics and ideology, in what one might call a rhetoric of presence' (Pratt 1992: 204–5). Through the rhetoric of presence the scene is not only recorded, but also ordered and made present to the reader who also masters it.

Yet the European's immersion in the tropical climate and close bodily proximity to slaves carried with it many risks, not only of disease and death, but also of moral corruption and 'tropicalisation'. As Daniel McKinnen observed, 'I am afraid from the mean and disingenuous behaviour of some

of the inferior white inhabitants of the town, that the climate, and perhaps their association with the blacks, have not a little relaxed in them the strength and integrity of the British moral character' (McKinnen 1804: 30–1). This kind of moral judgement can also be seen in William Blake's much reproduced illustration of 'A Surinam Planter in his Morning Dress' for John G. Stedman's 1790 narrative (Stedman 1988 [1790]). Here the planter's indulgence in bodily pleasures are represented through his pipe for smoking tobacco and his alcoholic drink being poured by a young bare-breasted slave, described as a 'quaderoon' (and thus suggestive of sexual intercourse between masters and slaves). Dressed in luxury goods from around the world (silk, beaver, fine chintz), his body given over to dissipation, this figure epitomises the European's vulnerability to 'hybridisation' and 'creolisation'. There was a moral danger inherent in the climate itself and in the proximity of 'different' bodies (Young 1995). In the Tropics, it was suggested, the European's active mastery and moral bearing would give way to torpor, self-indulgence, consumption of luxuries and racial degeneracy.

It was not only male travellers who indulged in the sensual fantasies and bodily risks of the West Indies. In a romantic novel set in the French colony of Saint Domingue, but written shortly after the revolution that brought the richest colony in the world to a sticky end, the North American writer Eleanor Sansay conjured up the white Creole woman's luxuries and pleasures:

I should repose beneath the shade of orange groves; walk on carpets of rose leaves and frenchipone; be fanned to sleep by silent slaves, or have my feet tickled into extacy by the soft hand of a female attendant. Such were the pleasures of the Creole ladies whose time was divided between the bath, the table, the toilette and the lover. What a delightful existence! Thus to pass away life in the arms of voluptuous indolence; to wander over flowery fields of unfading verdure, or through forests of majestic palm-trees, sit by a fountain bursting from a savage rock frequented only by the cooing dove, and indulge in these enchanting solitudes all the reveries of an exalted imagination.

(Sansay 1808: 25)

The luxuriant 'hot-house' of tropical nature, with its 'unfading verdure', casts a moist shadow into this vision of Creole debauchery and self-indulgent luxuriance, a kind of corrupting sink of sin, lethargy and despotism, figured through feminine corruption. In sum, it was through the intertwining tendrils of an Edenic nature, the exercise of mastery, and a proximity to enslaved others that European and North American writers explored the risks and desires of being in the Caribbean. These elements of the imperial gaze have subtly informed the ways in which later tourists came to gaze upon the landscape and experience bodily the pleasures of Caribbean travel.

Entering tropical paradise

In contrast to the eighteenth-century depictions of the Caribbean as a highly cultivated landscape, with a multitude of plantations and horticultural development, in the nineteenth century an emerging artistic appreciation of the sublime allowed for a reinvention of tropical nature in a more romantic genre, particularly in post-emancipation contexts. With the rise of Romanticism, European feeling for certain kinds of landscape began to turn towards a taste for places that appeared to be wild, untamed and untouched by man. A visualisation of primitivism and primal nature increasingly characterise textual constructions of the Caribbean, though this was by no means unique to the Caribbean. As Duncan and Gregory suggest,

Romanticism marked a post-Enlightenment remapping of the space of representation: it dethroned the sovereignty of Reason and glorified unconstrained impulse, individual expression and the creative spirit. . . . Central to romantic travel was a passion for the wildness of nature, cultural difference, and the desire to be immersed in local colour.

(Duncan and Gregory 1999: 6)

With the abolition of slavery and the decline of the sugar plantations in many of the old colonies, a far more romantic vision of wild scenery and adventure through primitive places began to inform European travel writing.

The English novelist Charles Kingsley popularised this style of romantic tropical scenery in books such as *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (1873 [1871]). Kingsley imagines the first discoverers of the West Indies, amongst 'such a climate, such a soil, such vegetation, such fruits' believing themselves 'to have burst into Fairy-land – to be at the gates of the Earthly Paradise' (Kingsley 1873: 26–7). Here engravings such as 'A Tropic Beach' and 'The High Woods' codified a genre of tropical drawing of remote places thick with trees, festooned with epiphytes, lianas, palms and ferns (Kingsley 1873: 143). In the play of light and dark, foreground and distance, his images often contain a small human figure engaged in an adventure activity such as stalking or fishing, and a wild animal such as a tortoise or monkey. The 'armchair tourist' is invited to join in the heavily illustrated adventures, which found a general readership in outlets like the *Illustrated London News*, thus Kingsley's texts are cited by many later tourists and travel writers as having been influential in their viewing of the Caribbean. Tourism became a mode of moving through tropical landscapes and of experiencing bodily what was already known imaginatively through literature and art.

It is crucial to recognise, however, that forms of viewing 'nature' are always ideological (Pratt 1992; Grove 1995; Poole 1998), and hence also encode relations of inequality between the viewer and the viewed. In the

context of the post-emancipation decline of sugar plantations, the myth of the 'natural fertility' of tropical lands became a justification for European and US intervention in the Caribbean. Pulaski Hyatt, the United States Consul in Cuba, adopted the image of natural fertility in order to call for Cuba to be 'seized by an intelligent hand', for example, the United States' occupation of 1898:

On account of her wonderful garden, fruit, and agricultural resources – impossible of appreciation unless seen – which to the visitor from the unwilling soil and freezing winters of the North seem like a rapturous dream, Cuba has been proudly styled 'The Pearl of the Antilles'. Only the most positive indolence and shiftlessness, and the long-applied withering hand of an oppressive government, have prevented Cuba from being, because of these resources alone, one of the most, if not the most, prolific and profitable spots in the world . . . no opportunity is more promising than this, if seized by an intelligent hand.

(Hyatt and Hyatt 1898: 49–50)

This guide for prospective entrepreneurs posits 'the North' as a place of intelligence from which industrious Americans can more effectively take hold of the 'prolific' and 'profitable' nature of a dream-like Cuba. Such primeval forces and 'virgin' soil supposedly demanded American ingenuity (and capital) to take them in hand, a seizure justified by the island's 'shiftless' and 'indolent' inhabitants, incapable of exploiting its opportunities. Visions of nature, in short, are inseparable from moral hierarchies of civilisation and barbarism, modernity and backwardness.

Following in the footsteps of the explorers, the planters and the armed forces, new possibilities for tourism developed in the late nineteenth century, as fast steam shipping lines originally developed for the fruit trade significantly cut journey times. The ships that brought tourists to the West Indies usually spent less than a day in port, but arrangements could be made to spend a few days in one island, and then rejoin the cruise. The traditional inns and guesthouses of the main towns, with their bawdy reputation (many famed as brothels), were now joined by more 'respectable' large hotels built especially for the new tourist trade, such as the Myrtle Bank Hotel in Jamaica. The Caribbean voyage was promoted as a picturesque and healthful escape from winter weather. Now the literature of descriptive travel was joined by a new genre written specifically for the tourist market.

William Agnew Paton wrote an account of his 'Voyage to the Caribbees' by steamer from New York in 1888. Arriving in Antigua, he travelled along the roads of the island to see the scenery:

At intervals along the road we passed darkies of every age, of both sexes, on their way to or from town, carrying baskets of fruits and

vegetables; we heard some of them singing, but as we approached they stepped aside to make way for us, and watched us in silence, always ready and delighted to return our greetings. Close to some of the negro shanties were little gardens planted with potatoes, yams, pea-bushes, arrowroot, and the like.

(Paton 1888: 66)

As in earlier travel literature the scenery is narrated in terms of the author's movement through it. His terminology reflects the everyday racism of the northern United States, while his idea of going 'down the islands' and viewing the friendly 'darkies' suggests a sense of proprietorship and being at home as he moves through this landscape. Contrary to the vast efforts that went into making these Caribbean landscapes hospitable to man, he envisioned Dominica as a natural Eden: 'Food is abundant, living is cheap, the island is not overcrowded; therefore the darkies have an easy time, as no one needs go hungry at any time of the year – no one, at least, who will walk into the woods, where are wild fruits and vegetables to be had at no more trouble to the would-be eater than to put forth his hand and pluck' (Paton 1888: 95). Thus the myth of 'easy' living in the Caribbean arose out of a notion of tropical fecundity, and was accompanied by assumptions that the 'natives' were available to serve tourists, offer friendly greetings, and become part of the scenery.

E.A. Hastings Jay wrote of his 'Four Months Cruising in the West Indies' in 1900 in terms of the scenery's relation to earlier literary representations of the tropics:

Here, for the first time, was the tropical beach! How often, from childhood, I had tried to picture it from Kingsley's vivid descriptions or the histories of the early explorers. There were the cocoa-nut palms, with clusters of green cocoa-nuts growing all along the sea-line out of the soft white sand, with beautiful rainbow colours in the water as it moved lazily backwards and forwards, glittering in the brilliant sunlight.

(Hastings Jay 1900: 34–5)

For such travellers the entire archive of travel writing informed their experience of the Caribbean; 'real' experiences were always just a reflection of the vivid Caribbean in their imaginations. In Trinidad, Jay immersed himself in the storybook forests where he could enjoy an uninterrupted view of the natives from a safe distance:

masses of creepers cover even the tallest trees, climbing the trunks and spreading over the branches, then falling in festoons to the ground. . . . Sitting on a rock at the side of the water, I gazed long upon the scene before me. Some coolies were bathing in a beautiful pool at

the bend of the river, their bronze colouring making a fine contrast to the green of the forest behind them. . . . They chatter to each other in a jargon which is unintelligible . . . there suddenly appears a little band of boys and girls. Some of them have a scanty covering of cloth or cotton, others are as nature made them. They all plunge in just as they are into the cool water . . . I tore myself away at last, eager to explore farther into the heart of the forest.

(Hastings Jay 1900: 84–6)

Here Kingsleyesque landscapes are experienced through viewing ‘bronze’ bodies against the greenery and gazing upon scantily clad children playing in water. The tourist’s eager eyes seek out Caribbean bodies, and especially bared skin. The unintelligible ‘jargon’ allows him to feel a distance from these woodland nymphs, who are naturalised as part of the scenery, and the viewer imagines himself as an explorer discovering the ‘heart’ of the tropical forest.

Susan de Forest Day, another visitor from New York, in 1897, had similar motives of rediscovering a childhood fantasy, though sometimes reality did not live up to expectations:

We longed to see the palm trees and sugar cane, to eat the luscious fruits and to float over summer seas, basking in the warm tropical sun, while the trade wind softly fanned our brows. . . . Without any real reason we at first find St Thomas a trifle disappointing. . . . Perhaps those bare, barren, rugged mountains, whose counterparts we had seen time and again in our own everyday America, did not come up to the ideal we had formed of the wealth and luxuriance of tropical vegetation – an ideal almost unconsciously derived from the old geographies of our childish days in which the picture of a dense jungle, with serpents gracefully festooned from tree to tree and a monkey in one corner, always was the symbol of the torrid zone.

(Day 1899: 8, 28–9)

Thus earlier literary and visual representations of the Caribbean such as Kingsley’s deeply informed the tourist’s desire to visit the Caribbean, mapped in their ‘unconscious’ before ever setting foot there. It is this fantasy ‘torrid zone’ that was unceasingly packaged and sold for northern consumers. One early guidebook describes Jamaica as ‘the New Riviera’: ‘now the mere mention of the island’s name conjures up the vision of a blue sky over a blue sea, in which is set a beautiful island of luxurious vegetation and lovely scenery; fragrant with the odour of spices and flowers, with an atmosphere refreshed by invigorating sea breezes’ (Johnston 1903: 10). Tourists thus entered the Caribbean with a set of preconceptions about the natural scenery and expectations of bodily recreation and pleasure.

Embodiments of the exotic

How, then, was a vision of nature turned into a set of expectations about Caribbean people and the services that could be received from them? In touring ‘through’ the islands, moving from one to another, the ideas of ease, luxury and relaxation were crucial. The tourist immersed his or her body in a tropical experience of sights, scents and tastes in which nature was understood to be more bountiful, more colourful, with more flowers, exotic fruits and leafy greenery. In these Edenic places where others laboured and living would be easy, tourists are encouraged to believe that they can engage guiltlessly in sensuous abandon and bodily pleasures. But just as in the earliest accounts of the Caribbean plantations, those who enter this tropical paradise put their own bodies at risk of moral corruption. Insofar as the familiar imageries of palm-fringed beaches or verdant exotic rainforests used in Caribbean tourism promotion conjure up a fantasy of ‘pleasure islands’, these fantasies of tropical nature are closely allied with transgression of moral codes through gluttony, intoxication and sexual encounters with exotic ‘others’, practices which can be collectively referred to as ‘hedonism’.

With the development of the package holiday and the cruise-ship industry it became increasingly easy for tourists to get to the Caribbean and experience its charms in a pre-packaged form in which fantasy Caribbean landscapes are ineluctably linked to fantasies of encounters with Caribbean people.⁴ Many of the earlier travel writers cited here, through their desires, rhetoric and imagery, shaped the itineraries, perceptions and ‘performances’ of the tourists who followed in their footsteps.⁵ I argue that the ‘naturalisation’ of the social and economic inequalities of the contemporary tourist economy occurs via three steps: the objectification of Caribbean people as part of the natural landscape, the equation of that landscape (and hence those who people it) with sexuality and corruption, and finally the marketing of the Caribbean via imagined geographies of tropical enticement and sexual availability. In these Ur-tropics ‘the inhabitants are identified with the natural world of luxuriant growth and fecundity’ (Root 1998: 62), and the adventure of entering the tropics (for the white tourist) becomes a sexual adventure with ‘dark’ Others.

Again we can begin with Kingsley, whose work served as a travel guide for many who followed in his footsteps. He writes that the ‘general coarseness’ of the young ‘Negro’ women in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, in the 1870s ‘shocks’ the stranger:

It must be remembered that this is a seaport town; and one in which the licence usual in such places on both sides of the Atlantic is aggravated by the superabundant animal vigour and the perfect independence of the younger women. It is a painful subject. I shall touch it in these pages as seldom and as lightly as I can.

(Kingsley 1873: 88)

By attributing the practice of prostitution to the 'animal vigour' of the 'masculine' 'Negro women' of the port city, he subtly links his romantic natural scenery of primal forests and wild shores to an implied primitivism of the inhabitants. Moreover, in skirting around this 'painful' (yet prurient) subject Kingsley effectively entices his readers to read on. His imagery of the Caribbean as a slightly risky and risqué 'Earthly Paradise' informs much subsequent writing on the touristic encounter.

Tourists have long objectified Caribbean men, women and children by viewing their bodies as part of the tropical landscape. In 1932, for example, John van Dyke wrote 'sketches' of Jamaica, in which the people form a crucial part of 'the picture':

Seen along the Jamaica roads, under the broken sunlight filtered through palm and bamboo, the black is decidedly picturesque. He has the fine line and movement of an animal, the dark skin born of a tropical sun, and the female of the species comes in to help out the picture with the glow of bright clothing. Male and female after their kind they belong to the landscape as much as the waving palm or the flowering bougainvillea or the gay hibiscus. They are exotic, tropical, indigenous, and fit in the picture perfectly, keeping their place without the slightest note of discord.

(Van Dyke 1932: 23–4)

Van Dyke's dehumanisation or animalisation of West Indians served a new American imperialism, which was grasping the 'renaturalised' Caribbean islands through both adventure tourism and military ventures.

Objectification of 'naturalised' black bodies became quite explicitly linked to sexual interest in them especially with the spread of sex tourism in the post-World War II period (cf. Enloe 1989 on the connections between bananas, beaches and bases). Travelling on a banana boat from Bristol to Dominica in 1952, for example, James Pope-Hennessy writes of his arrival in St Lucia that 'boys and girls stand about in the streets of Castries, drinking rum when they can afford it, and vaguely offering themselves or their young sisters, or little brothers, to the crews of passing ships' (Pope-Hennessy 1954: 21). The well-known Irish travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor also animalises and sexualises the black male bodies seen on his travels:

The young men are nearly all beautifully built, and look their best when they are working without their shirts, and displaying magnificent shoulders and torsos that taper down to flat stomachs and phenomenally narrow waists. Their bodies have the symmetry and perfection of machines. Muscles and joints melt smoothly into each other under skin which shines like a seal's or an otter's.

(Fermor 1955 [1950]: 15)

It becomes clear in his account, and others, that some of these lithe bodies (including those of children) are available for sexual hire. Both Pope-Hennessy (1954) and Fermor describe the 'Saga-boys' (or 'Swagger-boys') of Trinidad as being involved in prostitution or pimping, linked to the prevalence of US naval ships in the region during the war. Here I want to focus on how this past informs the present.

By the 1950s, cities such as Kingston, Jamaica, and Havana, Cuba, enjoyed reputations as the epitomes of tropical decadence and pleasure. Havana became known as the 'brothel of the Caribbean' (Pattullo 1996: 90) and had up to 10,000 sex workers (Schwartz 1997: 122). This history contributed to the resurrection of sex tourism in Cuba in the 1990s (Rundle 2001), as Fidel Castro reopened the country to the international tourist market, and Havana was resurrected as a travel destination trading on the crumbling colonial past, the 1950s American cars, the macho aura of writer Ernest Hemingway, and the promise of sex. Despite the continuing US embargo against Cuba, the surreal overlay of an economy based on dollars onto a population still living on pesos has produced a marketing dream: the close yet unattainable, the illicit embrace of the taboo island. One typical recent book is illustrated with copious pictures of 'brown' women in skimpy cabaret costumes. The text easily slides from the *belle époque* days when Havana was 'the Paris of the Caribbean' to a tawdry invitation to enjoy Havana's twenty-first-century 'smells of tobacco, rum and lovely girls' (Lechthaler 1997: 75, 92).

The sexualisation of 'exotic' bodies has become a standard tool of Caribbean tourist promotion, and feeds into the development of sex tourism in the region (Clift and Carter 2000; Kempadoo 1999). As Jacqueline Sánchez Taylor has shown, sex tourism packages Caribbean people as 'embodied commodities' by turning the long history of sexual exploitation under colonial rule into a 'lived colonial fantasy' available for the mass tourist consumer. 'A key component of sex tourism', she argues, 'is the objectification of a sexualized, racialized "Other", available at a low price' (Sánchez Taylor 2000: 42). Thus both tourists and travel writers report unflinchingly on prostitution by disguising it as 'holiday romance'. Describing the Dominican Republic, for example, one journalist claims that 'the local economy and the tourists seem to coexist tolerably . . . [with] local girls keen to acquire a big-spending, sun-inflamed lover for a week' (Sweeney 1999: 1). The global economic inequalities, gender inequalities and racial order underlying such transactions are thus 'naturalised', as having a 'lover for a week' becomes part of the promise of the 'all-inclusive' experience (for women tourists as much as for men).

Furthermore, sexualised strategies for entering the extremely competitive international market for tourism are promoted by many Caribbean states, with suggestive marketing slogans such as 'It's better in the Bahamas'. As Jacqui Alexander argues, sexual legislation that polices 'erotic autonomy'

mobilises the Bahamian population as 'loyal sexual citizens to service heterosexuality, tourism, and the nation simultaneously':

The state institutionalization of economic viability through heterosexual sex for pleasure links important economic and psychic elements for both the imperial tourist (the invisible subject of colonial law) and for a presumably 'servile' population whom the state is bent on re-nativizing. . . . The state actively socializes loyal heterosexual citizens into tourism, its primary strategy of economic modernization [,] by sexualizing them and positioning them as commodities.

(Alexander 1997: 67–9, 90)

Thus a loyal citizenry advances the national economic agenda by appearing as cheerful natives, available and ready to service the needs of tourists. The state's orchestration of the pleasurable experience of being in the Bahamas reinforces the sexual hedonism of tourism by making it appear a 'natural' part of Caribbean culture.

For writers who 'continue the imperial narrative', Alexander argues, 'nature figures as raw material for American (European) creative expansiveness, nature is positioned to collude in phantasmic representations of Black people, the very rhetorical strategies that state and private corporations utilise to market Bahamians and the Bahamas to the rest of the world' (Alexander 1997: 93–4). In St Lucia, for example, the sexual nature of the Caribbean is written onto the land itself. Here the former owner of the 'luxury' island of Mustique, Colin Tennant, operates a bar known as 'Bang Between the Pitons', situated in the symbolic 'cleavage' between the two breast-shaped hills (Baker 2000: 15). Resorts in this area specialise in eco-tourism, emphasising the sensual pleasures of waterfalls, hot springs and rainforest immersion, but the beachfront hotels are not far away. Such developments, whatever their 'ecological' credentials, are nevertheless tapping into the currents of 'Edenism' that inform the sex-tourist economy.

Jamaica, too, is described as a 'pleasure island', though occupying an ambivalent place as both a site of enjoyable escapism and the dangerous terrain of drugs, criminals and violence (Aitkenhead 2000). As one British journalist describes it: 'The first time I went to Jamaica, I didn't know much about the place beyond a vague impression of pirates, palm trees, Noël Coward, ganja and beneath that a sense of intensity, a lurking voluptuous danger' (Jenkins 2001: 6). It is this frisson of danger that adds to the allure of the place, and attracts those seeking extreme pleasures at resorts such as the infamous Hedonism II. Hedonistic practices of holiday abandon today serve to mark 'the islands' as places differing from the tourist's point of origin. The West Indies are inscribed as 'resorts' beyond civilisation, utopian/dystopian places where the normal rules of civility can be suspended. The deep layering and reiteration of such representations of the Caribbean has reinforced an imaginary geography in which it becomes

a carnivalistic site for hedonistic consumption of illicit substances (raunchy dancing, sex with 'black' or 'mulatto' others, smoking ganja).

Hints of Oriental luxury, self-indulgence and corruption are also inscribed onto Caribbean landscapes and into the fantasies of tourists.⁶ There is often an explicit 'orientalization' (Said 1991[1978]) of the Caribbean, indicated by Eastern imagery such as Richard Branson's Necker Island, described as a 'Balinese playground in the Caribbean . . . when you own a private island, history, geography and just about everything else are whatever you choose to make them' (Mallalieu 2001: 2). Or Mustique, often described as a 'pleasure island' for the rich and famous, where prospective visitors are instructed, 'Indulge yourself' and enjoy 'a taste for luxury' in the buildings designed by British theatre set designer Oliver Messel, 'built along Japanese lines or in the spirit of Bali, with names like Moongate, Obsidian and Sleeping Dragon' (Pietrasik 2001: 12). Such Orientalist fantasies of excess feed into unequal relations of power between tourists and workers in the service economy.

Expectations of the kinds of services the tourist can expect to receive from local people depend on locating the Caribbean as a 'natural Paradise'. One all-inclusive resort in St Lucia, for example, is described as 'a microcosm, a sanitised parallel universe where going abroad involves no stress because it involves no difficulty, where everyone's pleasant and speaks your language and whatever you desire will be yours' (Heathcote 1999: 4). An article in a British Airways magazine concludes that in Jamaica 'you'll be in the nearest thing we have on earth to the Garden of Eden, and to make it even better, it's after Eve tempted Adam with the apple'. In this new Eden tourists can indulge in the temptations of primal nature and hedonistic abandon to its associated sexual temptations without guilt; the laws and strictures of morality (and self-discipline) are temporarily suspended in this fantasy Jamaica, vested in Hedonism as much as Edenism. The transgression of moral boundaries serves to reinforce the constitution of geographies of difference that define the North as 'civilised' and the Caribbean as 'unreal', like 'going back in time'. These touristic performances reflect a long history of the inscription of corruption onto the landscapes and inhabitants of these 'pleasure islands'.

Notes

- 1 From itinerary of the Noble Caledonian Ltd 'West Indies: Hidden Treasures' 14-night cruise on the *Levant*, 8th to 23rd February, 2002, as advertised in *The Financial Times*.
- 2 This chapter draws in part on *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (Sheller 2003), research for which was funded by the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Board, and the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lancaster University.
- 3 Such shifts in European perception and representation of landscapes have been explored more widely in relation to Northern travellers in Central and South

- America (Manthorne 1989; Poole 1998), but have not yet been tracked in relation to the Caribbean. For a more detailed discussion see Sheller (2003: ch. 2).
- 4 For an interesting discussion of similar tropes of sexual encounter in travel writers' depictions of the indigenous Carib people of Dominica see Hulme (2000).
 - 5 On tourism as a 'performative' practice see Macnaghten and Urry (2001) and Sheller and Urry (forthcoming).
 - 6 See Sheller (2003: ch. 4) for a more detailed discussion of Orientalism in the Caribbean.

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