


# Tap-Tap', a Journey through Haiti, and an Original Form of Destination Narrative

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## Chapter

# ***‘Tap-Tap’*, a Journey through Haiti, and an Original Form of Destination Narrative**

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## Abstract

The hypothesis of this study is that the tap-tap expresses the narrative of the destination and naturally the research question is a follows: Can tap-tap be considered as tourism tool? Discourse analysis is increasingly concerned with images (visual documents) as texts. This approach is all the more relevant to this study as much of tourism is about image. This book chapter analyses the messages written on tap-tap which can be considered as travel writing due to the fact that it conveys some (unsettling and contradicting) information about the destination. Tap-tap does not meet all the criteria (ethos, logos and pathos) for good travel writing, but meet at least one of them, namely logos. The main limitation of tap-taps as travel writing is based on the fact that the messages are not understood by visitors, which also means that tap-taps are not influencing tool. The findings of this study reinforce the idea

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that there is a need to educate visitors about destinations at pre-visit, and visit stages. This is all the more for post-colonial, post-conflict, and post-disaster destinations, such as Haiti.

**Keywords:** Haiti, tap-tap, travel writing, heritage, art

## 1. Introduction

Over the recent years, some voices have called attention to the importance of culture in the revitalization or decline of **global tourist destinations**. The notion of **authenticity**, which is introduced by American sociologist **Dean MacCannell** (1976) in his seminal book *The Tourist: a new theory of leisure class*, laid the foundations towards a new understanding of culture and of course its impact on tourism consumption. Tourists often look to gaze at authentic landscapes and **experiences** but paradoxically this situation leads to a cultural degradation. As Shepherd puts it, tourism may be very well internationalised, standardised or even demonised but no less true is the fact that the industry evidences a cultural imprint. Methodologically speaking, professional researchers, who desire to arrive in the tourism fields, should deal with three clear questions: the **individual motivation of visitors**, the winners and losers of the activity and the cultural impact on society (Shepherd, 2002). Echoing this point, culture provides the place with a specific sense not only to be commercialised but also to enhance communal social cohesion. The tourist experience activates a synergy between the space (which is culturally transformed as a place) and culture (Smith 2015).

To understand the evolution and nature of a tourist destination, it is important to have a profound insight into the culture of such a destination (Park, 2014), which includes the food; music; movies; rites and rituals; etc. (Andrews & Leopold, 2013). These elements not only contribute to foster a sense of belonging amongst members of a community (Huang, Haller & Ramshaw, 2013; Huang, Hung & Chen, 2018; Huang, Ramshaw & Norman, 2016; Hung, Xiao & Yang, 2013) but are also telling the narrative of a destination (Thomson, 2004). In this respect, destinations offer not only a narrative but also a semiotic message to visitors. Place marketing plays a leading role in the formation of **destination narratives** (Meethan, 1996). As an emerging discipline, place marketing has widely approached the complex nature of places and brands. Destinations serve as cultural products which are fabricated, designed and consumed through the tourist experience (Ashworth & Voogd, 1988). However, far from being monolithic places denotes a high degree of fragmentation. As political entities enmeshed in a

complex relation of individuals, narratives and biographies, places are structured according to *an open system* of multiple stakeholders. One of the limitations of applied research to understand narrative destination are given by the multiplicity of actors, cleavages, negotiation and the countless stakeholders in question. In other cases, the narrative is unilaterally shaped and imposed by a tourist-delivering society relegating the locals to a peripheral position. Having said this, narratives should be reckoned as units of consumption that helps to understand the destination branding process. The figure of language is of paramount importance to frame tourist experiences, as well as the exchanged narrative models which give marketing experts new fresh insight into the competitive opportunities of the destination. In this way, narrative acts as a potential toolkit towards a new interpretation of place branding and place meaning (Lichrou, O'Malley & Patterson, 2010). As Jacques Derrida notes, *language* marks the *frontier* of those who speak like us or those who are unfamiliar with our shared signs. Any translation emulates a symbolic bridge between the guests' world and their hosts (Derrida 2000). To wit, Tussyadiah, Park & Fesenmaier (2011) acknowledge that the interest of social scientists for consumer narrative coincides with the digital technology breakthrough that characterised the globalization process. Social media –so to speak Internet- not only flattened the world but expanded the *geographical borders* of nations transforming businesses and tourism marketing as never before. The significance of narratives, i.e., story-telling, is mainly related to the experiential nature of tourism consumption. The content and experience of tourists say much about the destination branding process. What is more important, narrative marketing shapes and optimizes specific decision-making processes whilst prioritizing consumers' interests. Authors distinguish narrative processing and narrative reasoning as two key factors of branding destination. Whilst narrative reasoning signals to the imaginative –always enrooted in the future-process from where operates the experience, narrative processing refers to a much deeper process oriented to capture available information in a story. In the same way, narrative connection alludes to those features that make understandable the narrative (Tussyadiah, Park & Fesenmaier, 2011). Taking the example of *Haiti*, Thomson (2004) evinces that the narrative of a destination can be told through its leaders; its people; its architecture; transport; accommodation; food; etc. With this in mind, messages written on the tap-taps can be considered as a narrative of *Haiti*. Although some existing research has investigated Haitian tap-tap, none of them is offering an analysis of the messages as a narrative of a destination.

The objective of this study is to provide an original way of studying the narrative of the destination, namely through its local public transport. That said, this study is also arguing that this is possible only when the destination has an indigenous type of public transport. It is the case of *tap-tap* in **Haiti**. Indeed, *tap-tap* is local colourful buses, covered with different types of messages, which are most of the time psalms from the bible. Thompson (1996: 36) describes the *tap-tap* as follow: ‘they heighten Haiti with their rainbow colours. Equally amazing are their names and mottoes’. Thompson (1996: 36), also compares *tap-tap* with ‘art captures the speed, art capture transport’. This local method of transport which plays a significant role in the life of locals (among these are market merchants), mainly has three competitors which are donkeys, horses (Williams, 1994), and moto-taxis (Carlos, 2019). The research question of this study is as follow: Can *tap-tap* be considered as a tourism tool? To address this research question, this study based on qualitative research is to some extent providing content analysis of the messages on *tap-tap*.

From a structural point of view, the study is articulated around two main sections. The first section provides a background presentation of the destination, and key concepts facilitating this. As for the second part of the study, it is based on the analysis of messages on *tap-tap*, and the conclusion is then drawn.

## 2. Literature Review

A travel writing is a narrative about a destination, that is often based on metaphors (Alhasnawi, 2007; Felty, 2011; Perrine, 1974) to convey a message about the selected destination (Fadaee, 2010). Travel writing is also presented as a tale about a personal experience (Woodside & Megehee, 2010; De Ascaniis & Grecco Morasso, 2011), which often conveys the **emotions** of the author about the place visited (Mansfield, Shepherd & Wassler, 2021). As a result of the nature of travel writings, they tend to be trusted by readers (Woodside & Megehee, 2010; De Ascaniis & Grecco Morasso, 2011). Travel writing –as a literary genre- emerges in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries to describe the adventures and stories of settlers in the new continent (Mills, 1993; Buzard, 2011). The European nations disposed to index new territories and economies to strengthen their means of production. In so doing, they launched to colonize new overseas economies. Travel writing derives from an uncanny curiosity for these new far-away

cultures which stimulated a set of cultural entertainment industries throughout Europe. The “Non-Western Other” inspired countless novels situating as one of the leading literary genres of the Victorian epoch (Frawley, 1991). Travel writing has historically evolved as a result of complex combined factors such as the technological revolution in the field of transport, the discovery of the Americas, as well as the colonial process of expansion initiated by some European powers (Mills 1993; Hutcheon, 1995). It is important not to lose sight of the fact that travel writing derives from an old literary genre known as **captivity writing** which told the stories of those settlers who have been seized by the natives (Voigt, 2009). **Travel writing** not only toyed with the emotion of a global European audience but also replicated the ideological stereotypes of the colonial order in the Americas. Travellers were seen as heroes, or ambassadors of the civilised order whose goal was oriented to repopulate the civilised law in a new hostile continent (Spurr 1993). Given this, travel writing gradually evolves into a profitable cultural entertainment industry situating as the predecessor of the modern tourism industry. As Marie L. Pratt (2007) puts it, the emotionality of travel writing was given to the urgency to catalogue (rationalize) the external world. European lords not only embodied the Western rationality which dissociated the reason from **emotions** but also gave certain objectivity to everything that they finally gazed at. Travellers were the eyes of Science in a new hostile continent whilst leaving the local voices to a marginal role. European travellers, who embodied the archetype **of civilization**, were the authoritative voice to document every what they sensed and gazed at during their expeditions. Organised in form of novels, travel writing not only domesticated the native offering an externally-created image of its nature but also reinforced the so-called superiority of **European lifestyle** over the “**Non-Western Other**.” The local native not only was disposed from their lands but also its biography and history were fabricated according to the European ideals. To some extent, literature and scientific knowledge are inextricably intertwined. In a nutshell, emotions have taken the lead in the configuration of re-affirmed European sensibilities over other forms of organizations, and in so doing, literature cemented the authority of **nation-state** in the Americas and beyond –in the overseas territories- (Pratt, 2007). As it is said, personal **emotions** and metaphors are not the only characteristics of travel writings. As a genre, travel writings can be rooted in reality, as they also report on historical facts (Mansfield et al., 2021), or be fictional, whilst still allowing readers to learn about a destination (Busby, Korstanje & Mansfield, 2011). Travel writing mediates between the two spheres of life, imagination and

reality some of them even interrogating landscapes that remain inexpugnable to the human eye- Any travel supposes a radical fracture between the home **security** and the unknown landscape to discover. In this vein, travellers bring often a type of unique experiential baggage that resonates with them in different levels and dimensions. This traveller's imagination connects directly to significant and **less-significant "Others"** who are constructed through novels, movies and cultural industries. Once the travel ends, the experience – though it is not happening as they remind- accompanies travellers as long as their entire lives (Lean, Staiff & Watterton, 2016). In his book, *Researching **Literary Tourism*** Professor Charlie Mansfield (2015) explains that three main events cement the rise of travel writing and novels: the mechanization of book production which accelerated the publishing process and the times the books see the light of publicity, the story-telling as main cultural tradition adopted by the **European Enlightenment** and the advances of technologies applied to the **European transport system**. **Travel Writing**, today, describes the interconnection between the semiotics of post-modernity and literary-induced tourism. At a closer look, as Mansfield accepts, **travel writing** creates a powerful catalyst platform for the production of sacred pilgrimage sites. Furthermore, the text gives a fertile ground to show the influence and efficacy of discursive practices in the modern world. One of the quintessential features of **literary tourism** – if not travel writing- resides in the conceptualization of **authenticity** which is culturally reproduced by the tourist gaze. By the literary imagination, tourists symbolically expropriate the spaces by recreating subjective experiences through structural history (Mansfield, 2015; Urry 2002; Korstanje 2017; Cresswell, 2019). At a more practical level, Mansfield (2017) explains that **travel writings**, which are quite appreciated by readers, are contributing to enhancing the image potential visitors may have of a **destination**, as a result, he assimilates them to branding tools. Mansfield (2017) also goes as far as saying that travel writers are influencers. Based on the preceded information, travel writings could be said to be **ambidextrous** by nature, in other words, combining simultaneously opposites (Vo-Thanh, Séraphin, Okumus & Koseoglu, 2020), namely reality and **fictions**. This is further supported by Mansfield (2017: 5), who argues that: 'The starting points for stories need to be unearthed, too, so that they can be dramatised and set in the places as part of **place-making**. However, Mansfield (2018) does not use the term 'ambidextrous' but instead, 'binary'. Based on the nature of travel writings, and their branding and convincing potentials (Busby et al., 2011; Mansfield, 2017; Mansfield, 2018; Mansfield et al., 2021), they are tools that should not

be ignored by Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs). They should be embraced by DMOs.

Based on the fact that **travel writing** is a tool used to convey a message about a selected destination (Fadaee, 2010), whether fictional or rooted in reality, or rooted in both world (Mansfield, 2017), this study is arguing that travel writing does not need to be conventional, namely books such as '*Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*' (Thomson, 2004), or articles in newspapers (Mansfield, 2017). Any material that meets the above criteria could be considered as travel writings, including *tap-tap*.

### 3. Conceptual Framework

#### 3.1. Travel Writing

Woodside and Megehee (2010), and Séraphin (2014), have identified seven key characteristics for good travel writing. Among these are the ability to:

1. Convey information about the destination
2. Trigger some **emotions**
3. Give some specific insights about some particular aspects of the destination
4. Tell about some unsettling times and contradicting forces
5. Go beyond appearance
6. Shed light on a specific character who can be assimilated to a hero
7. Be of use for Destination Marketing organisation

#### 3.2. Convincing Message to Potential Visitors

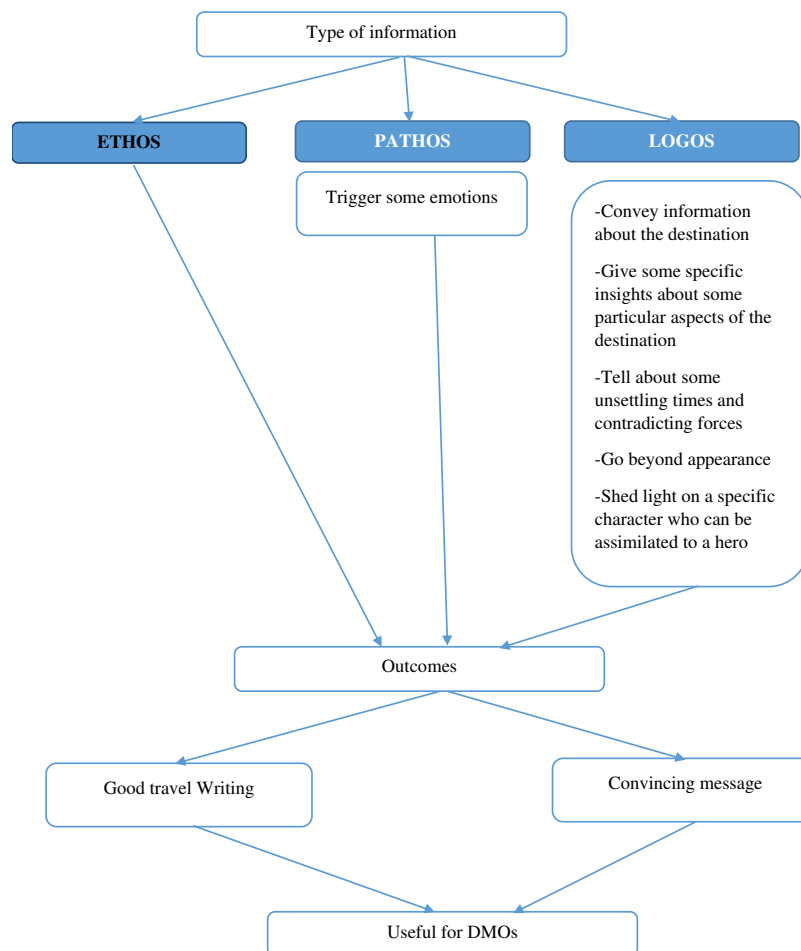
Séraphin, Ambaye, Capatina and Dosquet (2018), explain that a convincing message to potential visitors needs to include information related to:

1. 'Ethos' – Which are about the credibility of the source, and how trusted it can be
2. 'Pathos' – Which is about the appeal of the message in terms of conveying **emotions**
3. 'Logos' – Which is about the ability of the message to inform



### 3.3. Framework of the Study

The model developed by Séraphin et al. (2018) on the key features of a convincing message to visitors, and the model on what can be considered as good travel writing (Woodside & Megehee, 2010; Séraphin, 2014), have many crossovers, among these are The need to inform; and to convey emotions. As a result, the framework used in this study to analyse (1) how far tap-tap could be considered as travel writings (2) how effective they are as transport/communication tools, could be done by combining both models as follow (Figure 1):



Source: The authors.

**Figure 1.** Framework for the study.

## 4. Contextual Framework

### 4.1. Haiti as a Destination

The history of the tourism industry could be articulated around three main periods. Each period is mainly marked by different technological revolution above all in the fields of transport and the market (Towner & Wall, 1991). The inter-war period which ranges from 1930 to 1945 was characterised by the low demand for international travels and tourism. Domestic tourism operates in Europe as the only valid form of travel. The WWII end started a new period of expansion where the tourism industry notably increased to unparalleled levels. Since the local was not seen as an interlocutor, the bubble model prevailed as the only ways in host-guest relations (MacCannell 2002; Walton 2005). The bubble model segregated the local stakeholders from the economic benefits of mass tourism. These negative effects of mass-tourism were particularly affected the destination image of the Caribbean and Mediterranean islands (Papatheodorou 2004). The start of the 1970s decade witnessed a new more sustainable form of tourism where marketing and management targeted to segment the demand. Sustainable tourism was not only a buzzword but also engulfed the syllabuses and content of countless publications and books. The bubble model which was indifferent to the local problems created by mass-tourism -as the rise of delinquency, unemployment, inflation, geographical ghettoization or simply real estate speculation, sets the pace to the green paradigm which epitomised in the form of sustainable consumption (Swarbroke 1999; Hunter 1994). At a closer look, the bubble model was moved to develop tourism consumption through the imposition of the needs of relaxation. Rather, the green paradigm is given by the priority to protect local environmental areas or the non-renewable resource for generations to come. Having said this, centralised planning was crucial to coordinate efforts to foster more sustainable tourist destinations (Bramwell, 2011). The turn of the century changed the academic paradigm introducing governance as the main dominant discourse. Not only political stability but the economy played a leading role to keep the destination working (Hall 2011). The idea of governance alluded to the

coordinating efforts to keep the social conflict out whilst salvaging the economy in under-developing countries. For some authors, the theory of governance continues with the tradition originally forged by the sustainable development theory (Bramwell & Lane 2011; Dredge & Wihthford, 2010). Of course, the same applies very well to **Haiti**. First, between 1939-1960, the destination was known as a cultural destination and was also one of the most visited islands of the Caribbean. This period was known as the golden age of the **tourism industry** in Haiti. The second period goes from 1960 to 2010. This period pretty much put an end to the **tourism industry**, due to the political instability which led to the American embargo. Last but not least, the period 2010-2016, witnessed a rebirth of the industry, with the opening of an international chain of hotels. The relative political stability contributed to this rebirth (S raphin, 2018).

#### 4.2. 'Bonjour Blanc: A Journey through Haiti'

The **travel writing** authored by Ian Thomson in 2004, provides a good insight into Haiti, which only locals know. Hence one of the reasons why S raphin (2014) argued that '**Bonjour Blanc: A journey through Haiti**' is good travel writing. This travel writing offers a critical approach to the different sectors of the **tourism industry** in Haiti (Figure 2):

- A transport sector is presented as archaic, disorganised and dangerous
- The hospitality (hotels and restaurants) sector is not of a good standard for international tourism arrival
- As for visitors, they can get a mix of experience (positive and negative) depending on where they go, and who they meet.

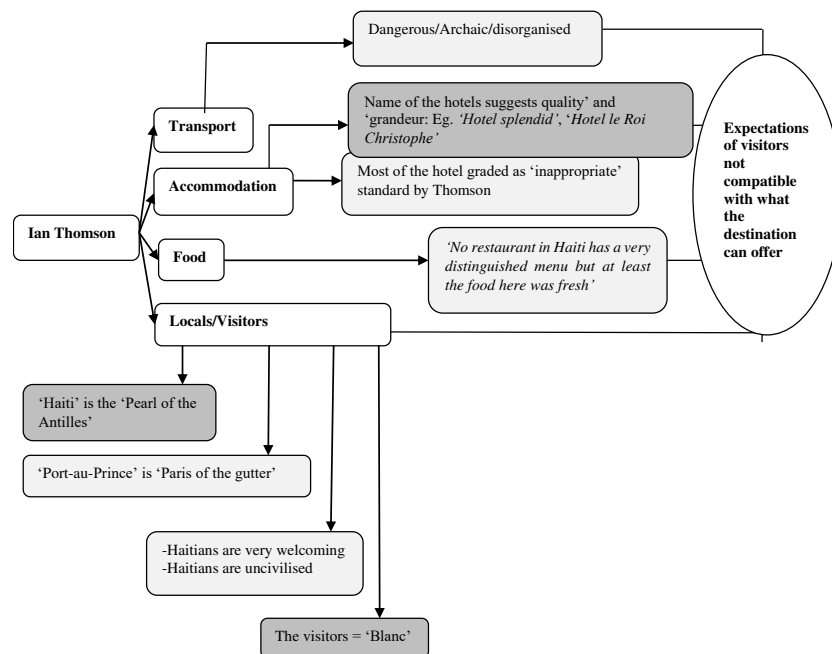
This study is exclusively focusing on the transport sector, which is a very important component of the **tourism industry** (Hoerner, 1993). More specifically, the study is focusing on buses, also known in Haiti as *tap-tap*. In '*Bonjour Blanc: A journey through Haiti*', they are presented as follow:

'Many buses are decorated with quotations from the Old Testament (...). A tap-taps is Haiti in miniature, surreal as a canvas by Dali' (Thomson, 2004: 33)

As for the roads, they are also presented as very dangerous:

The road to Port-au-Prince was dimly lit: The only light came from the inside of houses' (Thomson, 2004:18)

'Vehicle careering towards us on the same side of the road swerved across our bows, klaxons blaring' (Thomson, 2004: 18)



Source: Séraphin (2014) adapted from Thomson (2004).

Figure 2. The tourism industry in Haiti.

## 5. Methods

### 5.1. Data Collection

Data were collected from observation of buses (tap-tap) in Port-au-Prince bus station (capital of Haiti). The destinations of these tap-tap are the following cities: Croix-des-Bouquets, Tabarre, Carrefour. The data collected were messages, more precisely taglines written on the side (either one or

more than one side) of 89 tap-tap. It is worth highlighting that direct observation is a valid form of research. It is also one of the very first method of research (Jersild & Meigs, 1939). For this study, data collected are entered in an excel spreadsheet under different headings: bus station; tagline on the *tap-tap*; language; and positioning of the tagline.

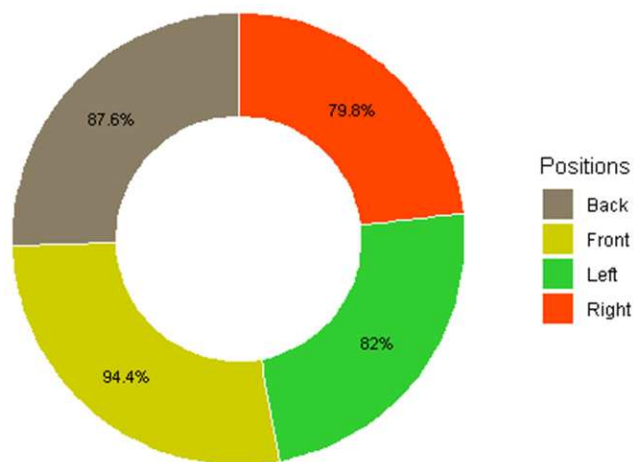
### 5.2. Data Analysis

The statistical programming language R is used to analyse the data (Silge & Robinson, 2016) Since, the variable of interest is the list of the taglines, a text mining approach are used to analyse them (frequency of words in the taglines). This is a commonly used approach (Feldman & Sanger, 2006; Silge & Robinson, 2016). Word clouds are also designed for the same purpose (Heimerl, Lohmann, Lange & Ertl, 2014).

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Positioning of Taglines

The results show that the preferred positions to write the messages/taglines are respectively the front (94.4%) and the back sides (87.6%) of the tap-tap. Most of the times, when there is a message on the left side, there is also one on the right side (Figure 3).

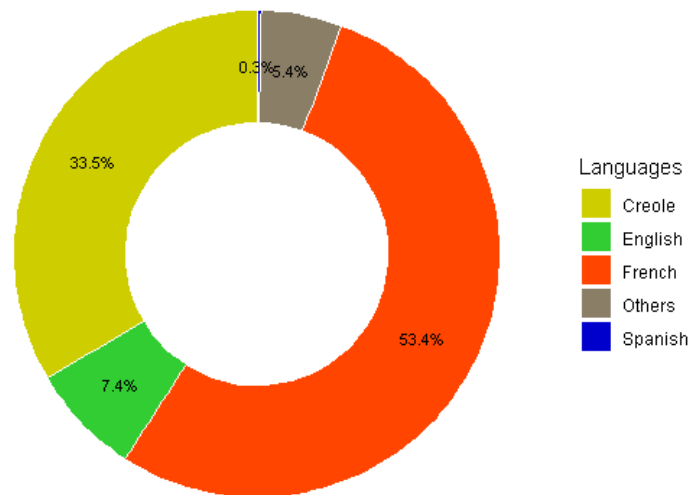


Source: The authors.

**Figure 3.** Positioning of the messages on the tap-tap.

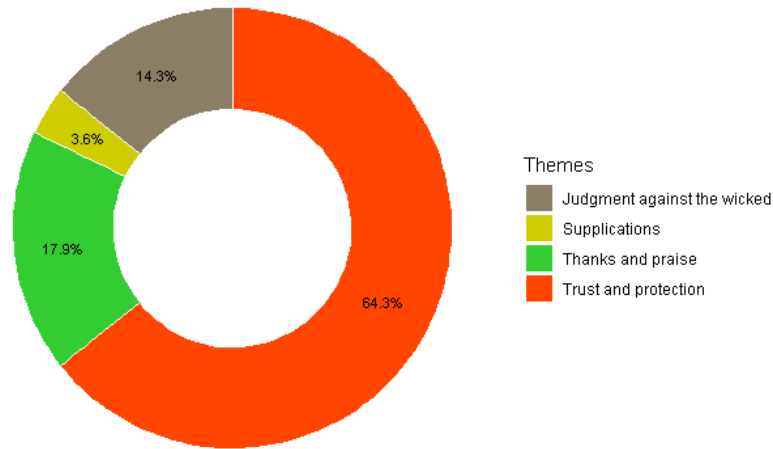
## 6.2. Language of the Taglines

Although creole is the most spoken language in Haiti (Descardes, 1999), most of the messages are written in French (Figure 4).



Source: The authors.

**Figure 4.** Language of the messages on the tap-taps.



Source: The authors.

**Figure 5.** Themes related to the Psalms used as taglines on the tap-taps.

### 6.3. Word Frequency and Their Nature

The table below (Table 1) summarises the most frequently used words on *tap-tap*. Most of those words are quotes from the holly bible. “God” is the most frequently used word, followed by “Psalms.”

**Table 1. Most recurring words**

Words	Language	Translation	Recurrence
Dieu	French	God	55
Psaumes	French	Psalms	28
Bondye	Creole	God	26
Love	English	Love	20
Boss	Creole	Boss	14
Merci	French	Thanks	13
Jesus	French	Jesus	12
L’eternel	French	Eternal	12
Lavi	Creole	Life	11
Amour	French	Love	10
Succes	French	Success	10

Source: The authors.

Most of the taglines are related to trust and protection (Table 2)

**Table 2. Psalms cited in the messages**

Psalms	Type	Frequency
Psalm 91	Trust and protection	7
Psalm 23	Trust and protection	4
Psalm 121	Trust and protection	4
Psalm 24	Thanks and praise	2
Psalm 34	Trust and protection	2
Psalm 37	Judgment against the wicked	2
Psalm 124	Thanks and praise	2
Psalm 28	Supplications	1
Psalm 40	Judgment against the wicked	1
Psalm 46	Trust and protection	1
Psalm 94	Judgment against the wicked	1
Psalm 103	Thanks and praise	1

Source: The authors.

## 7. Unsettling and Contradicting Information on Haiti

Based on the framework developed in this study (figure 1), it could be said that Haiti as a destination has been, and is still influence by external governments. Although voodoo is perceived as being the principal religion in Haiti, the results of the study reveal the strong presence of Christian belief in this country Séraphin, 2014.

### 7.1. The American Influence vs the French Influence

It is safe to say that English has become in a global lingua-franca. However, English enters in conflict with a lot of local languages. In some former colonial context, the access to foreign languages marks serious material asymmetries between poor and richer classes (Haugen, 2012). For the uneducated part of the Haitian population, the USA is the place to be (Thomson, 2004), this is due to the long term political relationship between both countries, which actually started in 1915 with the American occupation, and ended in 1934 (Girault, 2010; Kidder, 1934). The USA is still doing business in Haiti via Caracole industrial zone, and also investigating in the education of locals via institutions such as l'Institut Haitiano-Américain (Descardes, 1999). This American influence translates in the tourism by the



fact that most visitors in Haiti are Americans; English is also understood and spoken by many locals; and the American dollar is used for many transactions (Martin & Davies, 2006).

If the relationship Haiti/USA is based on trust, the relationship Haiti/France is mainly based on mistrust (S  raphin, 2014). This negative relationship started with the betrayal of Toussaint Louverture by Napoleon (Thomson, 2004). Before this event, in 1820, France also requested payment from Haiti to make up the financial loss related to the independence (Kidder, 2010). Because of this negative relationship, despite the fact French is the official language, it is losing ground to the benefits of English and creole (Descardes, 1999).

The above analysis explains the different languages used in messages on *tap-tap* (Figure 4 & Table 1). Equally important, the findings of the study and the analysis are reiterating the binary or ambidextrous nature of travel writings (Mansfield, 2018).

## 7.2. Religions in Haiti

Catholicism is the main religion in Haiti. However, Voodoo remains the non-official religion of most Haitians (S  raphin & Nolan, 2014). Voodoo is part of the African heritage of Haitians, which help them to cope with the horror of slavery (Damoison & Dalembert 2003; Saint-Louis 2000). To break the cohesion of the slave, they were forced to convert to Christianity (Damoison & Dalembert 2003; Saint-Louis 2000). Christianity was further anchored in Haiti, when the pope visited the island in 1983, which led to the opening of more churches across the island (Damoison & Dalembert 2003; Saint-Louis 2000; S  raphin & Nolan, 2014). This section supports the results showed in Tables 1 and 2.

## Conclusion

*Tap-tap* can be considered as travel writing because it conveys some (unsettling and contradicting) information about the destination. *Tap-tap* does not meet all the criteria (ethos, logos and pathos) for good travel writing, but meet at least one of them, namely logos, and more specifically: Conveying information about the destination; giving some specific insights about some particular aspects of the destination, and telling about some

unsettling times and contradicting forces. The main limitations of *tap-taps* as travel writing are based on the fact that the messages are not understood by visitors, which also mean that *tap-taps* are not an influencing tool. The findings of this study reinforce the idea that there is a need to educate visitors about destinations at pre-visit, and visit stages. This is all the more for post-colonial, **post-conflict**, and post-disaster destinations, such as Haiti.

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