

Bonjour Blanc, a Journey through Haiti: An Allegory of the Tourism Industry in Haiti

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Resumo

Bonjour Blanc, a Journey through Haiti (Thomson, 2004) é considerado por muitos o melhor livro alguma vez escrito sobre o Haiti. Considerando que não existem muitos artigos académicos sobre o Haiti enquanto destino, este artigo vem contribuir para o corpo de metaliteratura.

Começando por uma breve apresentação de Ian Thomson e do seu romance, este artigo adota uma abordagem temática, apresentando sucessivamente a viagem de Ian Thomson em termos de tempo e de espaço. O objetivo do artigo é analisar como as viagens de Ian Thomson podem ser lidas e interpretadas em contexto académico.

Metodologicamente, este artigo assenta na crítica literária académica sobre o Haiti, assim como nos *websites* dedicados a este destino. Como fontes primárias, usamos diretamente *Bonjour Blanc, a Journey through Haiti*. Como esta obra foca, entre outros pormenores, os hotéis nos quais Ian Thomson ficou, os lugares que visitou, a sua relação com os lugares e a imagem do Haiti, ela é particularmente relevante para uma análise da viagem e do turismo. Assim, o que nos interessa é a relação entre anfitriões e visitantes. Este artigo vai, portanto, analisar o setor turístico no Haiti de um ângulo etnológico.

Após a análise realizada, concluímos que o Haiti, em tempos a “Pérola das Caraíbas”, é um destino turístico com um tremendo potencial, todavia, prejudicado pela turbulência política, social e económica. Os resultados têm implicações na estratégia de marketing que adotada pelo atual governo e respetivo Ministério do Turismo.

Palavras-chave: Haiti; turismo; imagem; anfitriões; visitantes.

Abstract

Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti (Thomson, 2004) is considered by many as the best written book about Haiti. Not many academic papers have been written about Haiti as a destination. This article therefore contributes to the body of meta-literature.

Starting with a brief presentation of Ian Thomson and his novel, this article adopts a thematic approach, successively presenting Ian Thomson’s journey both in terms of time and space. The aim of the paper is to explore and analyse how Ian Thomson’s journeys can be read and interpreted within an academic context.

Methodologically, this article builds on the academic critical literature on Haiti as well as on the websites dedicated to the destination. As primary sources, it directly uses *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* itself. As the travel writing focuses among other things on the hotels Ian Thomson stayed in, the places he visited, his relationship with the locals and the image of Haiti, it is therefore particularly relevant for an analysis in terms of travel and tourism. Thus what is of interest in the paper is the relationship between hosts and visitors. This paper is therefore going to analyse the tourism sector in Haiti from an ethnological angle.

From the analysis, Haiti, once the ‘Pearl of the Caribbean’ was found to be a tourist destination with a tremendous potential crippled by political, social and economic turmoil. The

results have implications on the current marketing strategy adopted by the current government and Ministry of Tourism.

Keywords: Haiti; tourism; image; hosts; visitors.

1. Introduction

Haiti was the most popular tourist destination in the Caribbean between 1940 and 1960 (S raphin, 2010: 4-6) and as such attracted an international jet set. Mick Jagger, Charles Addams, Jackie Kennedy, etc. were among those who popularised Haiti (Thomson, 2004). Nowadays, Haiti is mainly known as one of the poorest and dangerous country on earth (Higate & Henry, 2009). It is also now a country with a very low ‘touristicity’ (Th odat, 2004 297-317). When Ian Thomson went to Haiti in 1990, to write *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was about to become the country’s first democratically elected president since Jean-Francois Duvalier (aka Papa Doc) in 1957. Haiti was also in this period the less visited country of the Caribbean mainly due to the high level of insecurity (Charles, 1994). In this paper we argue the fact that, since *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* is the tale of a life experience, it has a witness value and thus it is trustworthy (De Ascaniis & Grecco-Marasso, 2011: 125-137). We also argue the fact that *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* functions as a microcosm about life in Haiti and provides detailed information concerning the tourism sector in the country with a clear emphasis on the hospitality sector. The main hotel described in the travel writing is Hotel Oloffson in Port-au-Prince. A slightly run-down gingerbread mansion today where you are more likely to find journalists, aid workers, military personnel, documentary film-makers, art collectors, and up-market literary travellers, as guests rather than tourists. The richness of symbolic allegorical structure in *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* provides a wealth of different readings and appropriations. *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* can be read for instance as a marketing tool that can be used by the DMO to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the destination. The study of this travel writing may provide the DMO in Haiti important and specific results about the travellers’ expectations, needs and interests. In general, DMOs are using a quantitative approach based on data to improve their products and services, but those data as De Ascaniis & Grecco-Marasso (2011) argue do not tell the whole story about how visitors feel about

the product. Thus, it is not sufficient anymore to look at the destination as a whole; it is worth investigating what is precisely said about it and probably used travel writing as qualitative source of information. Deep understanding of the motivations, behaviour and outcomes relating to tourism is possible using tourists' narrative reports of trips (Woodside & Megehee, 2010: 76). *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* can also be read as an ethnological analysis of the relation between locals and tourists (how the locals perceive visitors, how visitors perceive the locals and how they perceive each other). As mentioned earlier in this introduction, the visitors in Haiti are mainly journalists, aid workers, military personnel, documentary film-makers, art collectors, and up-market literary travellers, etc. Those visitors are often widely perceived as immensely wealthy by the locals. Those visitors may find spending money as difficult as speaking a language they do not know. Their transactions and conversations are subject to confusion and misunderstanding. In its endeavour to develop the tourism sector in Haiti, the DMO could take full advantage of *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* and probably develop a trail around Thomson's adventure using Hebert's model (2001). This paper overall makes a contribution to research dedicated to tourism development in post-conflict destinations. Whilst there is an established literature on tourism in less economically developed countries, almost none of these studies specifically focus on the role of tourism in conflict-affected or post-conflict societies. (Novelli *et al.*, 2012: 1446-1469). This paper is therefore going to focus particularly on the development of tourism in a destination well known for its political instability, namely Haiti. The travel writing *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* is the main source of information for this analysis. The reflections in this travel writing are metaphors representing larger, universal truths and ideas beyond the literal context of the story (Felty, 2011). Also, the words used by Thomson do not have their literal meaning, but are categorised as multi-word expressions that act in the text as units (Alhasnawi, 2007:3). Last but not least, many of the persons, situations, actions, places used or mentioned by Thomson suggest or represent other meanings as well. They are symbols (Perrine, 1974) and more specifically, they are called commemorative symbols, in other words, symbols which add a real event to a memory. According to Fadaee (2010), writers use symbols to convey a message in an implicit and indirect way. Our main objective in this paper is therefore to identify those symbols and also the message that Thomson is implicitly trying to convey. If we agree with Hansen (2002), that an allegory is about the similarities between characters, events and places in a book and the

people, events and places in the real life, we also need to identify to what extent *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* is an allegory of the tourism sector in Haiti. Our article unfolds in four steps. Part I (Haiti: An overview) provide a quick PEST (Political, Economic, Social, and Technological) analysis of Haiti. This marketing environment model is probably the best-know environmental model (Masterson & Pickton, 2010). In the same part we are also going to provide an overview of the tourism sector in Haiti. Part II (*Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti: A good travel writing*) is an overall presentation and analysis of Ian Thomson's travel writing. Part II also draw archetypes, story gist and brand examples developed from the 20 chapters of Thomson's travel writing. Part III (*Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti: A marketing tool*) present other levels of reading of the travel writing.

2. Haiti: An overview

2.1. Environmental overview of Haiti

There are a number of models of marketing environment models that an organisation can use to analyse the environmental data. PEST (Political, Economic, Social, and Technological) is probably the best-know environmental model (Masterson & Pickton, 2010). A quick market environment analysis of Haiti gives the following information: Haiti was once the richest French colony. It was even called the 'Pearl of the Antilles'. But today it is one of the poorest countries in the world. Indicators witness a very poor level of human development: Life expectancy (53 years), infant mortality (80%), maternal mortality (523 per 100000 live births), and adult illiteracy (50%), unemployment among the active population (around 60%), etc. The vulnerability of the Haitian population is very high with 65% of the population living below the poverty threshold (Roc, 2008: 1-7). Haiti, as many states with post-colonial legacy has to face deficient security, law and order institutions, the use of violence by state and non-state actors, the incapacity or the unwillingness of the government to provide basic services to the population and the poor economic environment. Internal factors have not been solely responsible for the state weakness. International interventions have also had negative effects on the state. Haiti had little influence on the design of its own public policies and its economy is largely shaped by outside forces. All the power was in the hand of foreign institutions. In today's global economy, Haiti's main competitive advantages have been its abundance of low-wage, unskilled workers and its proximity

to the USA. Haiti can therefore be classified as a vulnerable state as it is exposed to outside forces, but also as a fragile state as its structure lacks political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations, fails to recognise and honour the social, political and economic pact between society and the state. The Haitian elite who control commerce, strategic imports, hotels, telecommunication and banks have often been accused of being an obstacle to the country's development. The classic role of the elite is usually one of investing in the country and generating economic activity, wealth, jobs and influencing the government to increase trade, promoting productivity, ensuring stability and protecting investments. In Haiti, the elite do not assume this role. Its basic activity is trade, with minor investments in case of crisis in the country. The weak governance and absence of accountability has facilitated the creation of parallel economies and patronage patterns (Moita & Gauthier, 2010). To summarise the situation, the public sector (the government) and the private sector (the elite, local and international companies in Haiti) have hardly done anything to encourage a sustainable development of the economy of the country. Despite being variously branded as an unsecure destination (Higate & Henry, 2009) and as a place where the worse is always likely to happen (Bonnet, 2010), the tourism industry often described as one of the world's largest industries (Cooper & Hall, 2008) is the option that Haiti has chosen for its economic development.

2.2. The tourism sector in Haiti

Between 1800's and 2009, the service sector moved from less than 5% to 60% of the GDP of Haiti. The move from the primary sector as being the main sector of the economy of the country to the service sector is mainly due to a change of activity of a huge part of the population. The service sector in Haiti can be described as follows:

a) A sector mainly orientated toward services to the community (not services to businesses), with a large number of MSEs. In the rear country the service sector includes under its 'umbrella': market sellers, grocers, retailers, etc. Much of the commerce is craftware and sometimes contraband whisky (Thomson, 2004). In general, the individuals involved in this type of businesses don't have any particular qualifications. In cities or towns, the service industry includes restaurants like 'Cafe Napoli' described by Ian Thomson in *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*

(Thomson, 2004: 24), Hotels like the Oloffson (Thomson, 2004: 44) cybercafé, pharmacies, etc.

b) Businesses of the service sector are in general informal or unofficial meaning they do not abide to any law. This illegality is kind of the norm in the sector in Haiti. This is what Hernando Soto designated as the 'extralegal norm' (De Soto, 2003). Because this sector operates in the 'dark', it is very difficult to have specific data.

c) The sector is dominated by microenterprises with a low productivity as the owners of the businesses are in general very poor and uneducated. In Haiti, the move from primary sector to service sector did not come with an increase in the income of the population or with an improvement in their standard of living. Moreover, because the service sector in Haiti is mainly geared toward service to the community and not toward companies, the income generated by this sector is not significant to the economy (Paul *et al.*, 2010). The type of businesses developed by the Haitians in the service sector is only profitable at a microeconomic level and not at a macroeconomic level. The tourism industry, as part of the service sector plays an important role in the economy of Haiti. It is the main source of income of the country (27, 76% of the GDP) just ahead of agriculture (25.09% of the GDP)¹. As mentioned earlier, the whole primary sector does not contribute more than 23% in the GDP, whereas the service sector represented roughly 60% of the GDP in 2009 (Paul *et al.*, 2010). This is what Paul *et al.* (2010) called the 'tertiarization of the Haitian economy' in other words, an irreversible move from the primary sector being a key contributor to the GDP to a role played by the service sector. Within the tourism industry, the hospitality branch is a dynamic sector and probably the way forward for the tourism industry in Haiti. Each year, Digicel organises an event: 'Digicel Entrepreneur of the Year Program' aimed at entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs. The long-term objective of the Year Programme is to build new economic foundations for Haiti by identifying, rewarding and cultivating the new business leaders of the future. In the category 'Education, tourism and culture' of the competition, the only representatives of the tourism sector are entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector. This situation therefore backs up our early statement that hospitality is a dynamic sector and probably the most dynamic sector of the tourism industry in Haiti. Michel (2000) claims tourism can fully benefit a destination, only if the locals are

¹<http://www.ccih.org.ht/haiti/economie.php>

fully involved in the planning and development of the industry. Based on literature, entrepreneurship in tourism seems to be a serious contender to the involvement of the locals in the tourism sector and in some cases to help them to improve their standard of living. In fact, according to Manyara & Jones (2005), micro and small scale enterprises can increase the participation of the poor in the tourism industry. Rogerson (2003) based on his research in South Africa backs up Manyara & Jones (2005) as he argues that it is only through small enterprises that rural people can participate in tourism. Literature not only shows entrepreneurship is a factor for economic development (Schumpeter, 1934), but it can also have a multiplier effect in some cases on local economies. When formal tourism enterprises are owned by locals, there is a high likelihood of purchase of local supplies, meaning other sectors of the local economy are going to benefit from this activity Shah (2000). Wanhill (2000) supports this point of view as he contends that for tourism to be beneficial in terms of income generation, economic growth, poverty reduction, and improving rural livelihoods, it has to be linked to local economies such as agriculture and MSEs. Entrepreneurship in tourism seems to be a possible option to help Haiti in its attempt to develop its tourism industry, reduce the high rate of unemployment and improve the standard of living of the locals. Butler (1980) views entrepreneurial development by local residents as occurring spontaneously in response to growth in tourist demand. Théodat (2004) shows in his research on Haiti and Thomson (2004), in his novel: *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* that this entrepreneurial development mainly happened in the hospitality sector. As a conclusion for part I (Haiti: An overview), we can say that tourism and more specifically, entrepreneurship in the tourism sector can be the driver for economic recovery for destinations like Haiti that have been out of bound for a while (Séraphin, 2012).

3. *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti: A good travel writing*

3.1. Presentation of *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*

In many instances Ian Thomson can be compared to Tintin and his novel to one of the Hergé's stories. Both Tintin and Ian Thomson are reporter/journalist, both travelled in a destination with military dictatorship, both journeys were fraught with problems and accidents and last but not least Hergé and Thomson provided well detailed information about the destination visited in their writings. Tintin, as a global traveller

(Lominé, 2003: 58-73) did not go the Caribbean, never mind Haiti. *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* takes us into different areas of Haiti. Rapidly the journey itself becomes a key topic of the adventure. *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* can be defined by the journey Ian Thomson accomplished. In many respects, Ian Thomson's journey almost illustrates the concepts of adventure tourism. Although he travelled all over Haiti, Ian Thomson rarely visits popular local tourist sites or areas (with probably the exception of Jacmel). However, as an unconventional travel writer would do, he visited many places which appear to have huge potential to become tourist attractions, such as Habitation Madere, Alexandre Dumas' house (Thomson, 2004: 89) or Habitation Bonodo (Thomson, 2004: 89). Ian Thomson spent most of his time interacting with locals who were either Haitian born (Enoch, the guide; Richard Morse, owner of the Hotel Oloffson; etc.) or foreigners who have been living in Haiti for a long time (Aida from Italy and owner of the cafe Napolitan; Eleanor Snear, American born and head of the Haitian-American Institute; etc.). He even befriends with some of them. So, his universe can be described as cosmopolitan. A great percentage of the information mentioned in *Bonjour blanc* is derived from 'interviews' of locals. There are many similarities between *Rasselas prince of Abyssinia* (Johnson, 1759) and *Bonjour blanc*. Both are about the quest of the 'grail'. For Ian Thomson the 'grail' is the true nature of Haiti and for Johnson the grail is the true nature of happiness. Both writings are about the key role of experience in the process of learning which is a common topic in the British literature, and even more importantly, the role played by the 'others' in this process. Both writings can be considered as a 'Grand Tour' and also encourage us to reconsider the role of the tourist who is much more that of a consumer but equally a producer (Hirschman, Holbrook, 1982: 132-140). Overall and based on Woodside & Megehee (2010) we can say that *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* is good travel writing:

a) The book weaves a lot of information - According to the *Observer*, *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* is a 'splendid, exceptionally detailed odyssey through the distressingly unregenerate republic of Haiti [...] Ian Thomson mils the country's terrors and bizarreries to full measure'.

b) It arise the reader emotions and energy and get people rising their feet – For Andy Kershaw: 'it is simply the best book I have read on Haiti... *Bonjour blanc* is more than a travel book'. For the Daily Telegraph, it is 'Hair rising but hugely entertaining'. William Weaver (New York Times Magazine): 'As I closed this book, I felt the

satisfaction of having consumed a full meal, not always appetising but with plenty of nourishment. In the end, Ian Thomson not only made me want to go to Haiti, he made me feel I had actually been there’.

c) The book gives a vivid insight - Andy Kershaw: ‘Ian Thomson takes us into the areas of Haiti that no other modern writer has bothered to explore, a likeable and sympathetic guide...By the last page of *Bonjour blanc* I felt I had a better understanding of the place than I’d got from five visits, dozens of books and a waist-deep pile of newspaper cuttings’.

d) The story in which life is relatively in balance, with terrible disaster, where balance is sometimes restored - In chapter 6: *Marooned to Jacmel*, Ian Thomson experienced being trapped (in Jacmel). He found himself in the situation that many tourists experienced when travelling to Haiti because of the many coups in the country. This time, it was because of a coup against Prosper Avril in 1990. In the following chapter (chapter 7): *Eating coconuts with Alexandre Dumas*, Thomson experienced a better side of being in Haiti.

e) Opposing forces - Thomson expressed many times contradicting or even mixed feelings about and for Haiti and the Haitians. In Chapter 6: *Marooned to Jacmel*, he compares Haitians to uncivilised people when he described their attitude during the coup against Prosper Avril, in the very same chapter, he describe the Haitians as being very welcoming using the example of the arrival of the liner ‘the Berlin’. In Chapter 3: *Paris of the gutter* Haiti is ‘a country of incredible intensity and extremes – one of the most astonishing places on earth’ (Thomson, 2004: 364) but also a ‘comedy’.

f) Deals with fundamental conflicts between subjective expectation and cruel reality or display the struggle between expectation and reality in all its nastiness - The most striking chapter of *Bonjour blanc* is ‘Paris of the gutter’ (Chapter 3), because it offers two visions of Haiti: An Haiti still perceived by the local as the ‘Pearl of the Antilles’ and Haiti perceived by an outsider as a ‘*Paris of the gutter*’. This chapter could have been entitled: ‘The real Haiti versus the imaginary Haiti’ or ‘Nostalgia versus reality’. In fact, this chapter is going back and forth between the past and the present to show how great Haiti was in the past ‘frequented by a gallery of celebrities: Noel Coward, John Gielgud, Malcom Lowry, the New Yorker cartoonist Charles Addams, Mick Jagger even’ (Thomson, 2004:20); The American critic Edmund Wilson (Thomson, 2004: 56), etc. ‘going to Port au Prince was a must’ (Théodat, 1997: 307) and Haiti nowadays, a dilapidated country, ‘the most ridiculous caricature of civilisation in the

world' (Thomson, 2004: 27). In this instance the Haitian population who is still living in a dream of Haiti still being 'the pearl of the Antilles' can be compared to Calderon's character, Sigismond in '*La vida es un sueno*' (1635) and Ian Thomson appears as the 'desengaño'. This opposition 'Paris of the gutter' and 'Pearl of the Antilles' lead to naturally to the topic of formation and characteristics of Haiti's image that will be covered later on in this paper.

f) Looking behind the mask – As mentioned earlier, this journey through Haiti appeared like a quest for the 'Grail'. The 'Grail' for Thomson is the quest of the true nature of Haiti. To find the object of his quest he went all over the country talking to different people as did Rasselas in his quest to the recipe to happiness. At the end Thomson achieved his objective because his book is a remarkable achievement giving wonderful vignettes from Haitian culture and history beyond CNN's reach.

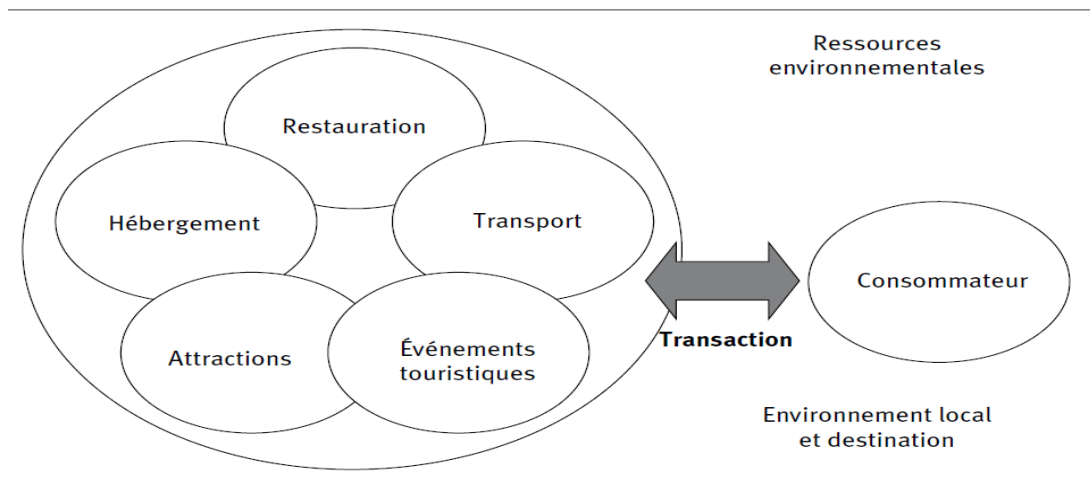
g) Who the principal protagonist is - Who is really Ian Thomson? A tourist? An historian? A pedagogue? A consultant? A journalist? A writer? The multiple personality and skills that he displayed that made *bonjour blanc* hair-rising and hugely entertaining.

h) We can add to the list of Woodside & Megehee (2010) that good travel writing has also to be a useful tool for the DMO.

3.2. Presentation of the tourism sector in Haiti via *Bonjour blanc: a journey through Haiti*

The product is often views as synonymous with the destination, such that the tourism product is an 'amalgam' of destination elements including attractions; supporting services such as accommodation and food and beverage and transportation (Cooper & Hall, 2008).

Figure 1. The tourism product



Source: Cooper *et al.*, 2005

- Accommodation

In *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* Thomson provides a detailed description of the hospitality, transport and attraction sectors. Because the focus of the author is on the hospitality sector, we have decided here to use the following scale to rate the hotels he stayed in.

1= Outstanding; 2=Good; 3= Average; 4= Inappropriate

Figure 2. The hospitality sector in Haiti

Name	Description	Grade
Oloffson	<i>The facade was so riddle with fretwork that it looked as though a thousand termites had been dining (...) The oldest damn place I ever saw (...).</i>	4
Hotel splendide	<i>I took myself to the only possible hotel in Jérémie, a pile of wood by the seafont (...). It was the most verminous hotel I have ever stayed in.</i>	4
Auberge bolivar	<i>The hotel was cheap and rudimentary, my room pungent with the sharp smell ammonia smell of urine and noisy with Marley reggae piped from reception (...). The swimming pool was long since drained of water, dead leaves rustling in the deep end.</i>	4
Hotel Sambo	<i>She took me to my room, lit by a flickering carbide lamp at the back of the yard full of wire chicken coops (...). She wanted to know what I thought of the lodgings. I told her that they were fine, glancing round the shabby room (...)</i>	4
Hotel Relais de l'Empereur	<i>A large hotel in the town of Petit Gôave some forty miles west of Port-au-Prince (...). The room as it turned out had a fan but it didn't work. A giant poster-canopied bed stood beneath the motionless blades, luxurious with linen sheets. The bath, even the bidet, was fitted with gold-plated taps, it was wonderfully indecent to find this ostentation in</i>	3

	<i>Haiti (...)</i>	
Guest House 'chez Margot'	<i>Margot provided a dustier, noisier, more native brand of accommodation. The bathroom was littered with dead cockroaches and for some reason an old valise that I found behind my bed contained a stuffed mongoose. Food was good, although the water was dirty and not to be consumed without sterilization tablets</i>	4
Hotel Rancho	<i>The Rancho was a lavish extravaganza of splashing fountains and Italian marble floors much frequented in the 1950s by the New York crooner Harry Belafonte. It was a little shabby now, with the absence of any tourism. The buffet of Haitian food was carefully adapted to American taste</i>	3
Hotel Carré d'As	<i>The hotel, an handsome clapboard with wooden arcades, stood opposite a shell petrol station on the Rue Christophe (...). My bed was very dusty; the mattress moulded by earlier tenants, and it was difficult to sleep with the electric dynamo of the hotel drumming all night over the skin wail of mosquito wings (...). They all lack of satisfactory convenience, these magnificent old buildings</i>	4
Hotel le Roi Christophe	<i>The one decent hotel in Cap-Haïtien, arcades with heavily scrolled armorial shields of stone, a rambling garden</i>	2

Source: *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*

Reading this table we understand that the hospitality sector is a very problematic sector where quality, training, etc. needs to be addressed not only by the owners but by the DMO as their role is to promote the long term development of a destination by doing a variety of tactical activities which include for instance monitoring service and quality standards (Cooper & Hall, 2008). Hotels described by Thomson appeared as a safe place from the outside world. His excursions always end up 'back' at a hotel. The hospitality sector is not the only problematic sector. Transport and food and beverage are also problematic. The reader is constantly reminded of the discomforts and annoyances that preoccupy guests accustomed to more temperate climates and different standards of public health and civic governance.

- Food and beverage

Figure 3. The hospitality and catering sectors in Haiti

Hotel Carre d'As	<i>No restaurant in Haiti has a very distinguished menu but at least the food here was fresh [...]. Large lobster were hauled from the bay of Saint Marc and served soon after with a pitcher of reasonable wine. The ice was of dubious provenance, however, and on two occasions I found a bluebottle trapped like an insect</i>	(Thomson, 2004: 247)
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	<i>in amber</i>	
Cafe Napoli	<i>'I feigned to inspect the menu: boiled goat, conch shell, guinea hen, dried turkey, Congo-bean stew...Nothing very much appealed'</i>	(Thomson, 2004: 24)

Source: *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*

Food and beverage have always been linked to the hospitality sector (Hoerner, 1993). In Haiti, both sectors are still run at an amateur level and do not meet the requirements of international customers who are very demanding in terms of quality (Theodat, 2008: 297-317).

- Transport

The road is the main way of travelling used by visitors (Hoerner, 1993). The transport sector and public transport more specifically in Haiti do not seem to be organised and appeared to be very dangerous.

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

There is no traffic light. It gives an overall impression of chaos.

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

Many dramas happened in Haiti because of the lack of regulations in transports. For instance, in 1971 and 1986, 2 boats, namely the 'Okelele' and the 'Celie' sank with too many people on board.

Despite the fact that the urban transport is quite disorganised, some aspects of it appear like attractions for visitors like the 'tap tap'.

'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)

- Attractions and events

If there is hardly any particular event mentioned in *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*, there is however, a very detailed list of attractions in the country. *Bonjour blanc* has demonstrated to be a tool that can also promote the destination and

its products. In Rozier and Santos (2010), publicity is defined as an editorial space to promote a product, place or person. According to Rozier and Santos (2010), travel articles are a popular form of publicity. As we have demonstrated earlier, *Bonjour blanc* is a good travel writing. Moreover, it perfectly matches the first part of the definition of 'publicity' since it promote a place, namely Haiti and its attractions (like le Marche de Fer, Citadelle Laferriere, Jeremie, etc.) and even some of the goods produced in the country like rum. The Barbancourt rum is mentioned many times throughout the book as the best in the Caribbean.

- The relationship locals / visitors

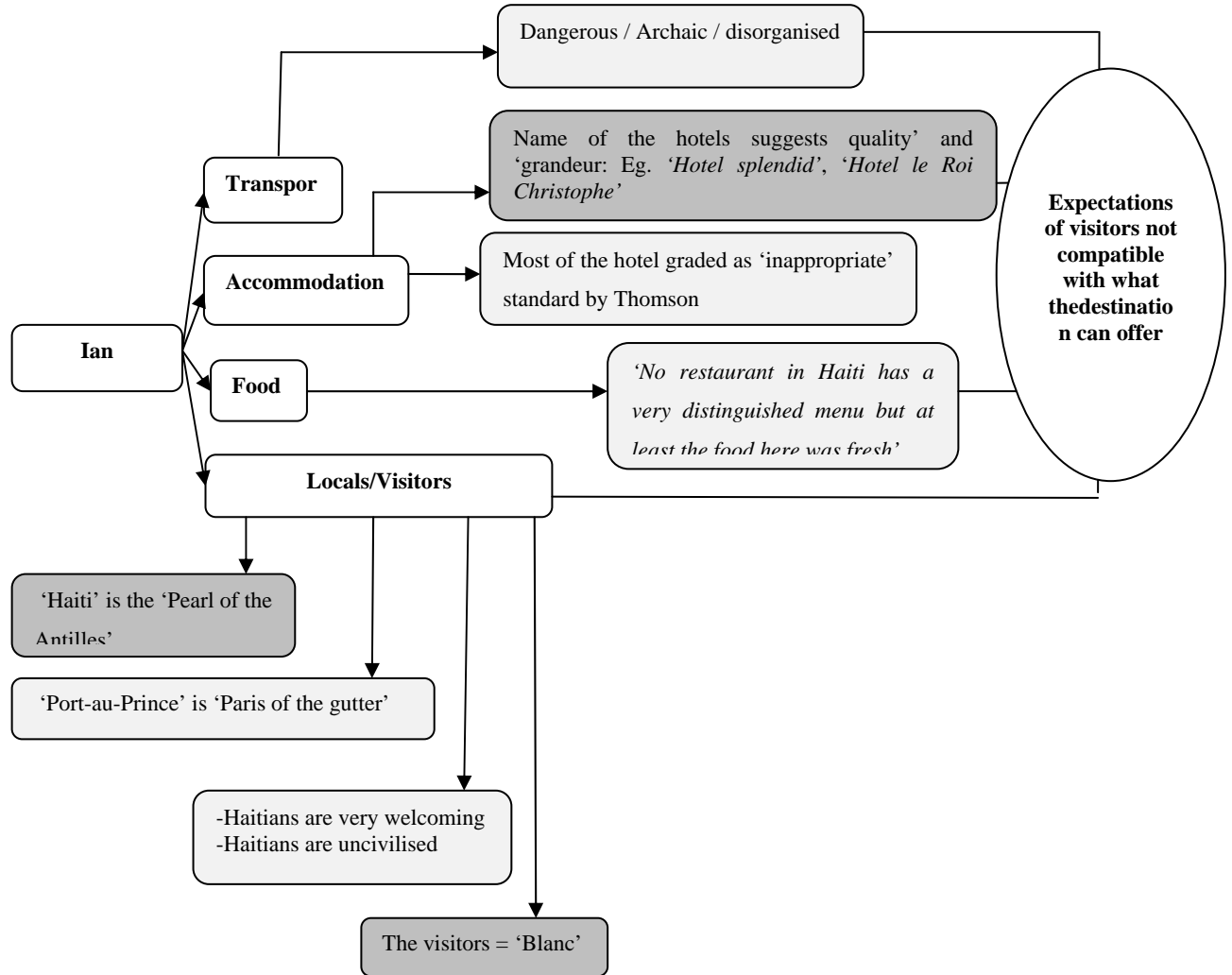
In many instance, Thomson's journey through Haiti remind us Rasselas' 'Grand Tour'. Like Rasselas, Thomson developed his knowledge of Haiti via different encounters and discussions with the locals (Richard Moss, owner of the Oloffson; Enoch the guide, Aida owner of Cafe Napoli, etc.). Thomson learnt a lot from the locals. His journey through Haiti has been quite beneficial. The benefits of the relationship locals/visitors seem to be one way as the locals do not benefit at all from the tourism sector. Many times Thomson had to answer the following question: *Why come to Haiti if you don't spend money like a tourist?* (Thomson, 2004: 50). If we consider the bigger picture, can we consider the journalists, aid workers, military personnel, documentary film-makers, art collectors, and up-market literary travellers, etc. in Haiti as tourists? If we consider the WTO definition of a tourist, the above visitors are not. However, based on the fact that many components of the tourism sector in Haiti has been up and running despite the political situation of the country due to the presence of those journalists, NGO, travel writers, etc. it is difficult to position them. If we adopt Hoerner's (2003) definition of a tourist, all the above visitors are not tourists because they are in Haiti for a professional reason. Having a similar type of consumption as a tourist and be called 'tourista' by the locals (Higate & Henry, 2009) is not enough to be considered as a tourist. Then, according to UNESCO, the tourism industry is supposed to support the exchange between the nations and people (Cunin & Rinaudo, 2009: 1-2), *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* shows that there is no exchange but instead only benefits from the rich countries involved in the tourism industry. The Haitians will only go to France or the USA for instance only to find a job and most of the time they are redirected to Haiti. Moreover, this travel writing shows

how difficult it is to be the host. Not only Thomson constantly reminds the reader his discomfort via the description of the hotels, transport, food etc. but also because more and more the visitors are expecting a high quality of service disregarding the situation of the destination and the visitors are not always very pleasant (Cade, 2008). It is even more difficult to be the host when the relationship visitor/host re-enact some painful event of the history of the hosts, like the colonial period and slavery. The visitor is not just a visitor; he is also the 'Blanc', the one causing grief (Perri, 2004:12). *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* also flags up the fact the relationship visitor/host is not a 'natural' relationship but a fake one. Everything seems to be staged as in chapter 6: 'Marooned in Jacmel'. This chapter describe how everything is mounted and dismantled by the locals to welcome a cruise ship. On the one hand, we have the locals who are 'talking the talk' by staging a welcome for the visitors. This warm welcome is artificial as mainly based on a mercantile relationship. On the other hand, we have the tourists who are 'walking the walk' even if fully aware that everything has been staged by the locals for a commercial purpose but still pretend to be 'guest' even if they know they are not.

3.3. Mapping Ian Thomson's visit to Haiti

We are going to use the information in this part to map Ian Thomson's journey through Haiti as a summary of the situation of the tourism sector in the country.

Figure 4. Expected Vs actual service experiences



Source: Hugues Séraphin

This part provides valuable information for rebuilding an effective destination image for Haiti. Figure 2 highlights the gaps between what is expected by visitors and the actual service experiences provided by Haiti. As Martin (2008) has pointed out, one or two unpleasant surprises can negatively impact the entire experience for some travellers. It is therefore very important for the strategist to make sure that the destination positioning strategy matches with visitors' expectations. In some cases like Haiti, it is very difficult for the destination because of their political, economic, social, technologic development to meet the needs of the visitors. As we are going to see later on in this paper, travel writing can be a valuable marketing tool for a destination. It is therefore very important for the DMO to decipher the codes and symbols.

3.4. Archetypes, and story gist in *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*

In this part, we are going to use Thomson's travel writing to generate a theoretical cognitive sculpture of *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* that is to say an arrangement of symbols to represent people, processes, time periods and outcomes of a story.

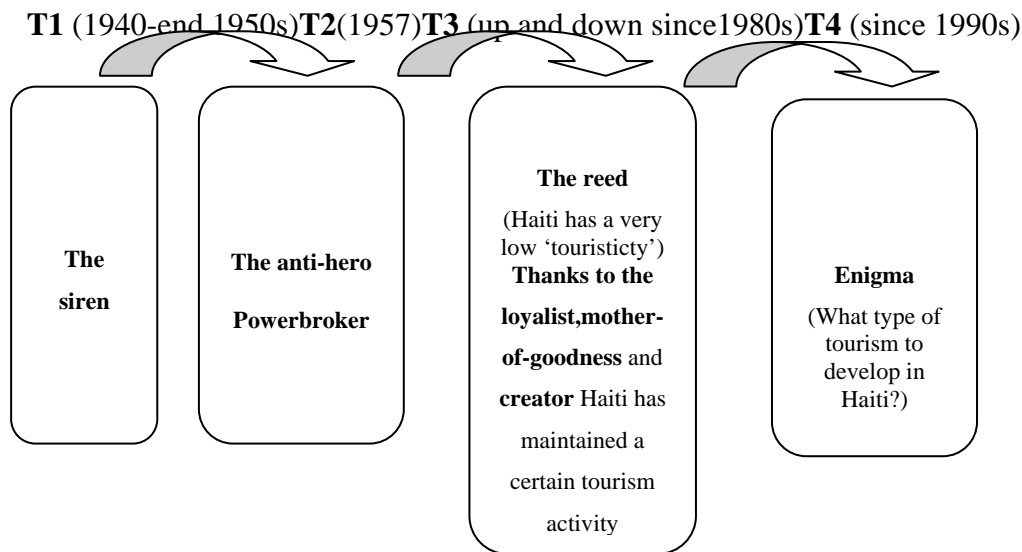
Figure 5. Archetypes, story gists and brand examples of the tourism sector used in *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti*

Archetype	Travel writing gist	Examples
The reed	Strong, flexible, adaptable	The Oloffson (microcosm of the overall tourism sector in Haiti)
The anti-hero	Destruction and attraction of evil	Haitian government
Powerbroker	Authority, influence and domination	The USA, the media, NGO
The mother-of-goodness	Nourishment	The cruise sector (with the resort Labadee)
The enigma	Mystery, suspense and uncertainly	Are they tourists? journalists, aid workers, military personnel, documentary film-makers, art collectors, and up-market literary travellers Tourism sector profitable for the locals?
The loyalist	Trust, loyalty and reassurance	Barbancourt rum Prestige beer
The little trickster	Humour, non-conformity and the element of surprise	The relationship local/visitor
The creator	Creative inspiration	The Haitians
The siren	Power of attraction, linked with the possibility of destruction	Attractions in Haïti (Citadelle la Ferrière, Le Marche de Fer, Jacmel, etc.).

Source: Hugues Séraphin

Using the above symbols developed by Wertime (2002), we can also summarise the history of the tourism industry in Haiti as follow:

Figure 6. The 4 steps of the tourism development in Haiti



Source: Hugues Séraphin

Now we have a better understanding of the development and evolution of the tourism industry in Haiti using the symbols in *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* we are going to focus on a different type of reading of the travel writing.

4. *Bonjour Blanc: A Journey through Haiti: a marketing tool*

4.1. Travel writing: an influencing tool?

So far, what do we know about travel writings and their influence on decision making? We know that good travel writings don't leave readers untouched. We also know that travel writing, because they are tale of experience, tend to be trusted by readers (Woodside & Megehee, 2010: 76; De Ascaniis & Grecco Morasso, 2011: 125-137). The question now is to know whether or not travel writing plays a significant enough role in people's decision making to visit a place. We don't exactly know how many people have been to Haiti after reading *Bonjour blanc*. Therefore we can't say whether or not *Bonjour blanc* is influencing travel writing. However, we can try to identify the determinant of the flows and patterns of contemporary tourism and see how *Bonjour blanc* and travel writing in general fit those determinants. Williams and Zelinsky (1970) have identified several factors that may explain why people decide to go or not to go to a destination:

- Distance
- Absence of international connectivity between the generating destination and the receiving destination
- Factors of attractiveness (climate, etc.)
- The cost of the destination
- The stability and image of the destination in generating areas
- Culture of the receiving destination
- Information fed back to people in the generating country from tourists who have made previous visits to the destination country.

The last point, in some extent recognises that travel writing plays a role in people's decisions to go or not to a destination but does not give any indication on how powerful it is.

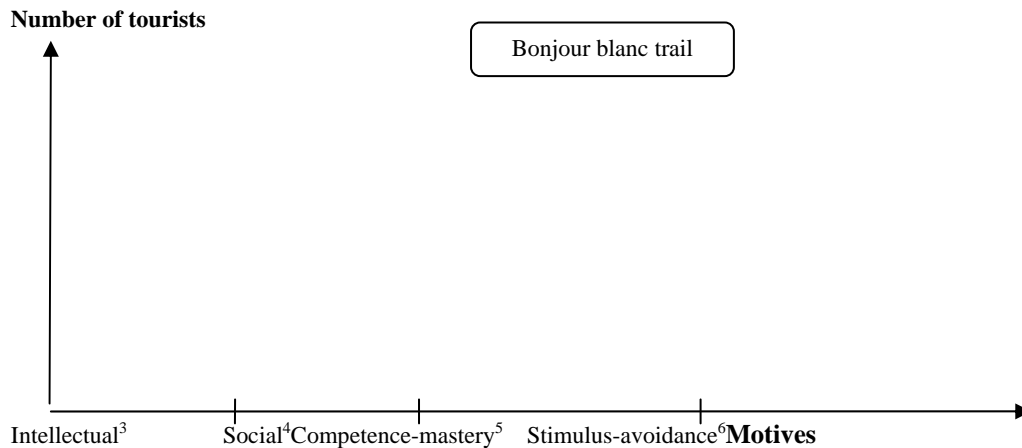
4.2. *Bonjour Blanc*: a Special Interest Tourism (SIT) product

Our main objective in this part is to determine whether or not *Bonjour blanc* (and travel writings in general) is a powerful decision making tool. We have only managed to establish the fact they definitely play a role in decision making but we don't know how powerful it is as a tool. Our suggestion here to determine the influencing power of *Bonjour blanc* is to introduce the topic of literary tourism. Literary tourism is the practice of visiting cities, sites, places associated with poets, novelists, works of fictions, etc². There is a fascination about places associated with writers that has often prompted readers to become pilgrims: to visit a birthplace and contemplate the surrounding of an author's childhood, to see with fresh eyes places inspired poems or books. If we use the principle that a literary places acquire meaning from links with writers and the setting of their novels (Hebert, 2001: 312-333), we believe that the places visited by Thomson in Haiti are literary places. Still according to Hebert (2001), such places attract tourists. Is it the case of the places mentioned in *Bonjour blanc*? As SIT (like literary tourism) occurs when travel motivation and decision-making is primary determined by a particular special interest (Hall, 2005). Therefore, it would have been interesting to find out if there had been an expression of interest of

²www.wisegeek.com

individuals going to Haiti to walk in Thomson’s footsteps or if there had been an increase in the number of visitors in some of the places visited by Ian Thomson. Another way to find out if *Bonjour blanc* can motivate visitors to come to Haiti is to set up a ‘Bonjour blanc trail’ product and see how many people will be willing to pay for this type of product and why (figure 1).

Figure 7. Testing *Bonjour blanc* as a STI product



Source: Hugues Séraphin

The downside of our theory is that literary tourism mainly attracts white collar workers with a cultural capital to appreciate and understand this form of heritage (Herbert, 2001: 312-333). This is the type of tourists that Haiti used to get in the 1940se and 1960se (Theodat, 2004: 297-317; Thomson, 2004). Haiti no longer attracts these type of tourists, but rather military, NGO (Higate & Henry, 2008). However, by and large, research conducted by Campalto (2006) shows that there is an interest from tourists for this type of SIT. People visit Le Bourget (in France) for instance because Lamartine was from this area, it is the same for Shakespeare and Stratford-upon-Avon;

³ Develop the knowledge and interest in literature in one author’s life; experience a new place (immersion inside a story), authenticity (place and reconstruction of characters or author’s life; understand the story and place)

⁴ Be with others and enjoy the same thing; meet new people; share experience with family or friends; increase privileged status of having been there

⁵ Challenge one’s own knowledge; satisfy curiosity and interest

⁶ Get away from routine by discovering a new place; with a new atmosphere; develop own self-esteem; nostalgia (reminder of childhood, of sensations, etc.)

Victor Hugo Notre-Dame has a significant effect on the imagination of visitors to Paris, stimulating the desire to travel and see the cathedral (Busby & Klung, 2001: 316-332), etc. For Compalto (2006) and Busby *et al.* (2011), there is absolutely no doubt that literature influences tourist's decision-making when choosing a destination. Sometimes literature makes them go to a place they would not normally go. Contemporary literature also ensures continued interest by visitors or tourists (Busby *et al.*, 2011:20-37).

5. Concluding remarks

Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti includes some very strong symbols that are either places (i.e. the Hotel Oloffson), chapters (i.e. chapter 6: 'Marooned in Jacmel'), products (i.e.: Barbancourt rum) or people (i.e. Enoch, the tourist guide), etc. All these explain why Thomson's travel writing can be compared to an allegory of the tourism sector in Haiti. *Bonjour blanc, a journey through Haiti* also highlights the fact that there is a discrepancy between the expectations of the tourists and the service provided by the Haitians. Meeting or even exceeding the needs of visitors is key to the success of the tourism sector in Haiti. This travel writing can also be used as a marketing tool by the DMO to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the destination. In terms of image Haiti has a huge deficit that needs to be addressed. It is therefore very important for Haiti to take ownership or control of its image via a marketing strategy, as a strategic management approach for dealing with tourism crises is the key to speedy recovery (Hai & Chick, 2011). The possible recovery of Haiti as a tourist destination might lead sooner or later to a cooperation with the Dominican Republic under the umbrella of 'Hispaniola'. Séraphin (2011) believes that Hispaniola will be the future destination of the Caribbean. Also, there is no doubt that travel writings like *bonjour blanc* influence people's decision making. In its endeavour to develop the tourism sector in Haiti, the DMO could take full advantage of *Bonjour blanc* and develop a trail around Thomson's journey through Haiti using Hebert's model (2001). In a brighter future that might be an option for Haiti to consider. This can lead to further research such as: Development and evaluation of literary tourism project; Potentials in literary tourism; Planning, managing and marketing literary tourism or even impacts of literary tourism.

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