AFRICA VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF ‘BLUE TRAVEL’: VISUAL TOURISM AND COLONIAL IMAGERY

1. Introduction

J. Urry, in his hyper-quoted *The Tourist Gaze* (1990) called attention to the fundamentally visual nature of the tourism experience. Tourism is focused in gaze. The aestheticization of the “real world”, from what tourism lives off, consists in changing everything – places, people, societies – into simple images for consumption by bringing with it what Gregory (1994) appointed as a new idea of “world-as-exhibition”. The space is reduced to the status of mere landscape – a sight to be consumed and enjoyed – and the diversity of its peoples and cultures presented as if were pure spectacle. That is why the production, circulation and consumption of images are so crucial in the tourism business.

This study addresses that relationship of tourism with images and visual consumption. Various approaches towards this study would be possible. If the concern were the competitiveness of destinations, it would justify that we look into until what point these promotional images weigh in travel options, or how much importance do the promotional supports (tourist brochures, TV travel channels, the internet, etc) have on the construction of the destination images. My point of view, however, is another. As part of a critical theory of tourism, I am more interested in understanding the cultural meanings contained in the destination images and how they reflect