"HALF-HEARTED TOKENS OF TRANSPARENT LOVE"? "ETHNIC" POSTCARDS AND THE VISUAL MEDIATION OF HOST–TOURIST COMMUNICATION

CRISPIN THURLOW,* ADAM JAWORSKI,† and VIRPI YLÄNNE-MCEWEN†

*University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA
†Cardiff University, Wales, UK

One negotiation site of heavily mediated, indirect, and usually inadvertent communication between hosts and tourists is the picture postcard rack. As "hegemonically scripted discourses," postcards make important assumptions about the tourist's touristic experience, as well as the image of that experience she/he will want to communicate to others "back home." Of more importance, however, are the assumptions being made in postcards about the people actually represented in them. Certainly, postcard images of local people (locals rather than necessarily hosts) are often designed specifically to communicate their ambassadorial hospitality—their host-like qualities—and to promote the kind of ethnotourism discussed widely in the tourism literature. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the postcard images of local ethnic minority people such as the Zulus in South Africa and the Sámi in Finland. In these two instances of intense exoticization and commodified cultural representation, and in stark contrast to postcard images of the Welsh in Britain, this study was interested in exploring the ways in which both the "represented host" and "consumer tourist" understand and view these visual representations. In this programmatic article, we therefore report our initial analyses of three distinctive sets of postcards as a means for discussing how research might seek to situate and, thereby, complicate assumptions inherent in these "ethnic" postcards about both the traversed, mediatized Other, and the constantly directed tourist gaze.

Key words: Postcards; Ethnic representation; Host–tourist communication; Visual discourse

Situating Postcards as Mediated Communication

As part of a larger program of research into language, discourse, and globalization, our work on tourism has a particular concern for the interactions of hosts and tourists: face-to-face (verbal and nonverbal) communication and other forms of mediated interaction (e.g., Jaworski, Thurlow, Ylänne-McEwen, & Lawson, 2003; Jaworski, Ylänne-McEwen, Thurlow, & Lawson, 2003; Thurlow &

Address correspondence to Crispin Thurlow, University of Washington, Box 353740, Seattle, WA 98195, USA. Tel: (206) 543-2747; Fax: (206) 616-3762; E-mail: Thurlow@u.washington.edu

Jaworski, 2003). These are central areas of tourism that, according to Abbink (2000, p. 1), scholars have otherwise left largely untapped. By the same token, and as we have suggested elsewhere, relatively little is made of social interaction in the burgeoning globalization literature even though so much is said about the role of communication technologies. In many respects, however, host–tourist interactions and identities embody the very essence of globalizing processes because it is precisely at this level of interpersonal encounter that the global and the local (or national) interface is negotiated and resolved (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2004).

It is in communication with each other in every particular instant of contact that hosts and tourists also negotiate the nature of the tourist experience, their relationship to each other, and their own identities. Their interpersonal communication is also invariably mediated at any number of stages of the tourist enterprise (e.g., from reading holiday brochures and watching TV programs to following tour guides and visiting curio shops) and in many different forms (e.g., a hotel-based package or activity holiday to "grassroots" or adventure tours). However fleeting, any face-to-face interaction between hosts and tourists will also vary in duration and quality (e.g., from perfunctory service encounters to more involved exchanges).

Thus, we can imagine the discourse (as both talk and social practice) and interpersonal communication of host–tourist encounters to take place at different levels of involvement versus detachment, mutual understanding versus hostility, directness (immediacy of contact) versus mediation, perceived sameness versus difference, etc. The organizing dimensions of host–tourist communication are numerous and we suggest four here, which most directly inform our own research:

- different modes of communication (e.g., face-to-face, photographic images, hypertext);
- different media contexts (e.g., television holiday programs, picture postcards, and the Internet);
- different socioeconomic/sociohistorical milieu of the tourist sites (e.g., "first world" vs. [post]colonial); and,
- different "host" demographics (e.g., European, African, ethnic minority, ethnic majority).

One potential negotiation site of heavily mediated, indirect, and usually inadvertent communication between hosts and tourists is the picture postcard rack. As "hegemonically-scripted discourses" (Mellinger, 1994, p. 776), postcards make important assumptions about the touristic experience the tourist is having, as well as the image of that experience she/he will want to communicate to others "back home"—as part of the nostalgic (re)construction of the tourist experience we call the "tourist haze" (Jaworski, Thurlow, et al., 2003, p. 24). In this article, we focus on the particular case of "ethnotouristic" postcard representations of three (very different) ethnic minority groups: the Zulus (or *amaZulu*) in South Africa, the Sámi (or *sápmelas* or *Laps*) in Finland, and, albeit to a lesser degree, the Welsh (or *y Cymry*) in Britain. What we would like to do is indicate how these three postcard sets in themselves highlight a number of important themes central to current critical perspectives on tourism and, more specifically, how we might begin to *situate* properly the visual mediation of host–tourist communication.

For now, in this otherwise programmatic article, we offer the "data" (later to be stimulus material) and our initial semiotic analyses or readings of these postcards: what we think is most apparent in, and therefore interesting about, the postcards. In doing so, we want to present a clearer idea of how this kind of academic interest in the visual might proceed, and how more situated (which is to say *emic* rather than *etic*) readings promise to reveal greater interactional texture in the host–tourist communication that underpins the portrayal and purchase of tourist postcards.

"Ethnographic" Postcards and Ethnotourism

In tourism—perhaps more so than elsewhere— the image invariably precedes and, to some extent, precludes, the reality (CF. Urry, 1990). Osborne (2000) goes as far as to argue that "with photography and photographic seeing as prime commodity forms in tourism, the photographic image that promotes it is in many instances the very item consumed—the advertisement has become its own commodity" (p. 84). Unusually for tourist images, however, postcards are one instance when then local people (and/or hosts) come to the fore in terms

of representation—albeit to varying degrees as we shall show. Invariably designed and marketed by the local/national financial and cultural hegemony, these tokens (see below) make important assumptions about the touristic experience the visitor is having, as well as the image of the experience that she or he will want to communicate to others "back home." Stewart (1984) suggests that the act of purchasing and sending a postcard is thus an act of self-affirmation, (re)capturing something of the tourist's experience of a place or people and passing this on to others who thereby validate the experience. As such, the subtextual identity performance in the well-worn postcard adage "Wish you were here" is more accurately one of "Don't you wish you were here!"

Of equal importance, however, are the assumptions being made in postcards about the people actually being represented in them (i.e., the hosts themselves). From what we already know from our own fieldwork encounters, the people being represented are seldom, if ever, actively involved in, or consulted over, this process of representation. For this reason also, what makes postcards even more interesting is the fact that they also throw into question the notion of "host": Who exactly is hosting whom? The makers of postcards or the people depicted in them? Certainly, postcard images of local people (locals rather than hosts?) are often designed specifically to communicate their hospitality—their host-like qualities! Nonetheless, it is precisely for this reason that a term like "host" is inherently problematic and makes assumptions about (a) the relative power status of local people and their motivation to entertain, and (b) the homogeneity of inhabitants who may or may not be native/local and whose role/identities will inevitably vary (see also Jaworski, Ylänne-McEwen et al., 2003).

In writing about touristic postcards, what most writers seem to have in common (probably not unlike ourselves) is a received suspicion towards postcards—a sense of their being, at best, shallow, at worst, offensive. In this sense, the postcards are automatically relegated to the status of "half-hearted tokens of transparent love," which Zimbabwean poet Kizito Muchemwa speaks of in his poem about colonial "tourists" (see the Appendix). From our point of view, however, what remains to be seen is just how "half-hearted" these *tokens* (i.e., reminders or souvenirs) really are in the minds of tourists and,

more importantly, the extent to which those people depicted in postcards regard them as mere *tokenism*—a pretence of commitment to their lives.

There are, of course, any number of different types of postcard (see Phillips, 2000), such as artistic postcards, postcards of landscapes, tourist leisure cards, etc. What interests us, however, is that loosely defined category that we unsophisticatedly refer to as "people postcards," which is to say postcards that depict local people. More specifically, we have narrowed our interest to people postcards geared towards so called "ethnotourism," those quasi- or neoanthropological cards found in concentration at "ethnic" sites such as "heritage sites," "folk museums," and "cultural villages" where, even more so than usual, there is an explicit, more self-conscious, premeditated element of performance (cf. MacCannell, 1973). So, where writers like Edwards (1996), Mellinger (1994), and Phillips (2000) tend to review assorted collections of postcards, we are looking to focus our own analyses on postcards from these site-specific, explicitly performed "frames." Edwards (1996) recommends the value in this kind of "vertical sampling" (p. 198) (i.e., more case-specific collections of postcards), which, she argues, make it more possible to comment on the control of production and issues of self-representation. However, she herself does not pursue this in empirical terms in the way that Kahn (in press) has been doing.

Although true of much tourism, it is the promise of some kind of contact (or at least the essence of contact) with "other cultures" and the search for an easy *authenticity* (authenticity on a plate) that come together so strongly in ethnotourism (see, e.g., MacCannell, 1984). Indeed, the most common index of an otherwise unattainable authenticity is usually an appeal to "traditionality" (Evans-Pritchard, 1989, p. 93)—the perception of, in this case, maximum *Zulu-ness* or *Saami-ness* or *Welsh-ness*. With specific reference to postcards of "ethnographic" subjects, this is what Edwards (1996) frames as "traditional culture as tourist commodity" (p. 197). Perhaps for this very reason, in this particular genre of tourism, photography seems to come into its own—not least thanks to its anthropological legacies (see Price, 2000). By which we mean that it is "photography's double facility for mobilising and being mobilised by fantasy on the one hand and for

an immanent visual realism on the other" that makes it ideal to the task of recording and recalling tourist intercultural encounters (or "realities"), while also accepting that these encounters may well be staged romanticizations (or "fictions") (Osborne, 2000, p. 77).

There is, however, undoubtedly a complex, complicitous relationship between tourists' search for the "primitive," "authentic," and "traditional" and the obligation and/or desire of locals to present themselves in these terms—as Notzke (1998) puts it, to mold themselves in the image of the dominant Other, of the traveler. Locals too are invested in harnessing tourism in order to protect and promote their preferred (and traditional) ways of living, as well as for economic gain. Evidently, relations of culture and heritage are complex and contradictory—what James Clifford (1994, p. 311) refers to as the "entanglements" typical of contemporary cosmopolitanisms, transnational identity formations, and, borrowing an idea of Brecher et al. (2000), of *globalization from below*. Once again, a greater concern for the sociolinguistic and interpersonal in tourism research recommends itself as worthwhile.

The Zulus, The Sámi, and The Welsh

To this end, we are specifically concerned to examine those postcards that appear, or present themselves as, documentary—or, to put it another way, as being somehow ethnographically authentic. As we mention above, our preference is also to draw on postcards available at particular ethnotouristic sites; although at this preliminary stage we begin with a collection of Finnish postcards sold elsewhere across Finland. Nonetheless, our aim is to situate all our readings of these three very different local ethnic minorities at the following ethnotourist locations:

1. *pheZulu*, a cultural village in KwaZulu-Natal that presents the *amaZulu* (or Zulus) of South Africa. (With a population of some 9 million, the Zulus are one of the largest ethnic groupings in South Africa at about 23% of the total population.) Run by its White, non-Zulu owner, this is a self-styled "safari park," offering the following self-categorization:
    > pheZulu (meaning high up) is a traditional Zulu Kraal overlooking the Valley of 1000 Hills. pheZulu captures the life style of the Zulu. A

chance to meet the descendants of Shake, just 30 minutes drive from Durban by Tour Coach or car. Experienced guides await your arrival and will take you on a traditional journey into a day in the life of the Zulu. (www.1000hills. co.za/phezulu.htm)

2. S*t Fagans the Museum of Welsh Life* near Cardiff, which presents *y Cymry* (or the Welsh) of Britain. (With a population of approximately 3 million, Wales is the smallest of the three countries of Britain at about 5% of the total population.) This is a publicly funded "heritage attraction," which uses the following description of itself:
    > A walk around Wales—from Celtic times to the present day: Europe's foremost open air museums, becoming Wales' most popular heritage attraction. The Museum shows how the people of Wales lived, worked and spent their leisure time over the last five hundred years; and over the past fifty years it has inspired generations of visitors with an appreciation of Welsh history and tradition. (www.nmgw.ac.uk/mwl/index.en)

3. *SIIDA, the Sámi Museum in Northern Lapland*, which presents *sápmelas* (or the Sámi) of Finland. (With about 5000 people, the Saami in Finland constitute only 1% of the total population.) This is a self-styled "meeting place and exhibition centre" with the following self-presentation:
    > SIIDA is the home of the Sámi Museum and the Northern Lapland Nature Centre. SIIDA provides the visitor with new experiences and information on Sámi culture and nature of Northern Lapland. . . . The cultural and ecological exhibitions of SIIDA tell about how northern nature and an indigenous people, the Sámi, have adapted to life in extreme conditions. (www.samimuseum.fi/english/en_menu.html)

There is, of course, nothing exceptional in these staged cultural sites [see, e.g., Hitchcock, Stanley, & Siu's (1997) discussion of "folk cultural villages" in East Asia], and the continuum from museum to heritage park to cultural center to cultural village to theme park is widely discussed in the tourism literature and, indeed, the growing field of museum studies (see, e.g., the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at the University of Newcastle; www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/about/icchs/index.htm). The assumption that underpins the study of these sites is, as Abram (1997) suggests, that all these "presentations of histories" (p. 29) (or pasts disguised as

presents) *potentially* expose both tourist identities and host identities—and their aspirations for the future. In fact, what interests us most in the differences between the three sites we have selected is the relationship each establishes with the past and the present, and the historical contextualization and construction of the peoples they represent. For example, it is telling, we think, that in the case of pheZulu's publicity (see above), it is the touristic experience (or "journey") that is rendered traditional rather than the cultural life on display. By contrast, St Fagans explicitly and unambiguously situates itself as historic—as heritage rather than here-and-now.

Given the different self-presentation of the three sites (i.e., as heritage park and cultural village), perhaps it is not wholly surprising that different priorities emerge in their representative people postcards. What makes us curious, however, is that there is little explicit acknowledgement—either in the site or its postcards—of pheZulu being as much a heritage site as St Fagans. The depictions of Zulu (and Sámi) people are similarly past orientated, offering tradition rather than "lived texture," and yet deceptively presented as images of a present-day people. It seems to us, from what we know of contemporary South Africa, that the Zulu cards promote an inaccurate and deliberately confused understanding of "the way they are" as "the way they were."

For us, this is the complication as it were: how are these postcards apparently the same, and how are they apparently different? It is partly for this reason that we have chosen to look also at the Welsh site, since it offers us not only a closer-to-home comparison, but also a contrast of historicity and sociocultural politic. For example, our initial impression has been that, beyond the ethnotourist sites themselves, what makes Finnish and especially South African postcards so striking is that, unlike Welsh postcards, explicit images of people are so much more prevalent. (As we shall also suggest shortly, there appears to be something of a hierarchy of ethnographic objectification and exoticization.)

Interpretive Themes

In this central analytic part of the article, and building on the work of Edwards (1996), Osborne (2000), Mellinger (1994), and others, we sketch the key interpretive themes (or *topoi*) in our data. In doing so,

our main focus has also tended to fall on the Zulu cards, partly because they offer such extreme representations, but also because, as Jamison (1999) suggests, African countries often offer prime examples of the complex impact of tourism on local ethnic relations and diversity. Our interpretive themes are by no means exclusive of each other; instead they represent our reading of a number of overlapping subdiscourses in the postcards examined here. [For color reproductions of some of the postcards under examination here (and referred to as figures in the text), please visit the following website, entering the username "guest" and the password "postcards": http://faculty.washington.edu/thurlow/postcards/. Although not essential to the reading of this article, we have decided to cross-reference these online images in the course of our discussion.]

Landscapes/Cityscapes, Wildlife, Artifacts, and People

All the visual themes in our corpus can be summarized with reference to the categories of landscapes/cityscapes, wildlife, artifacts, and people. [Figures 1, 2, & 3 neatly encapsulate these touristic preoccupations.] Certainly, there is a degree of fuzziness present in all of these labels (e.g., should "wildlife" include postcards of Welsh sheep?), but they summarize conveniently the four typical visual resources in tourist images. Along with the sex-sun-sand-sea ideology/imagery of most recreational mass tourism (substitute "sand" for "snow" in the Sámi postcards), which we are not concerned with here, these postcards appeal to a range of other common touristic goals such as flora and fauna, nature, and "culture." But even if they stray from the typical, hedonistic beach-based image, as if in pursuit of something unfamiliar, these postcards are never threatening, choosing safe, tame, and somewhat polished images of their places of origin. Even across our focused sample, and across otherwise very geographically and culturally distinctive locations, it is striking how pervasive this combination of themes is [again, see Figures 1, 2, & 3].

People as Metonymic of the Country and the Tourist "Scape"

As has been noted above, our primary concern is to home in on the (exclusively) people postcards. As

these postcards are (in most cases) representations of complete strangers to the sender and addressee, the people placed in those images have to be viewed as metonymic of the countries or regions they represent. As such, they become typified and objectified, turned into a "tourist attraction" to be gazed at, scrutinized, and, most probably, othered by the tourist (and the "folks back home"). What is more, however, some countries/locations seem more inclined than others to use people—or particular groups of people—as national hallmarks in this way. There is, it seems, a hierarchy of ethnographic curiosity and objectification at play. Of the three sets of postcards analyzed here, we find in the South African set the greatest tendency for the re-creation of the ethnographic curiosity and objectification typical of the early colonial photography and postcard industry [see, e.g., Figure 4]. What is so striking about the Zulu cards is that they are so crass—unashamedly objectifying, sexualizing and exoticizing Zulu people. This may not be surprising given the White–Black divide between the implied tourists and locals in the South African setting, respectively. The Sámi and Welsh are White, Northern European, and the predominantly White, Western tourists visiting their sites would not be likely to exercise the same degree of postcolonial gaze with the people in the "developing" (or ex-Colonial) world.

While there is an increasing demand by tourists for more complex, sophisticated experiences and, therefore, representations (cf. Edwards, 1996, p. 212), these Zulu images *seem* somehow caught in a time-warp—both politically and temporally speaking. Certainly, just as with Mellinger's (1994) postcards of the 19th century African Americans in the Deep South, the producers of these Zulu images appear largely unconcerned with depicting the texture (the richness and complexity) of the everyday and nowadays lives of these ethnic minorities, regardless of whether they themselves are members of the minorities or not. It is this uncomplicated, unproblematic, decontextualized representation of peoples that is, for us, the main point of concern—which is not to say that single postcards could do it all on a 15-cm by 10-cm surface; they are, after all, produced for a mass market and need to sell.

We now turn to a brief review of the other main themes of the "people postcards," which fall into five clear, though largely overlapping, categories.

Ethnoscapes: People as Scenery

Related to the notion of "national hallmarks," people in postcards, just as in other genres of tourism communication (e.g., newspaper travel writing, cf. Galasinski & Jaworski, 2003) become prototypical bearers of ethnic characteristics of a community. They are stereotyped, tokenistic representatives, devoid of personal histories, individuality, relative status, unknown, and unnamed. (Reverse-side legends for the Zulu postcards also render the players in generic terms like *Zulu maiden*, a *Zulu "belle,"* and *"little warrior."*) Visually, this is emphasized by the averted gaze of some subjects, medium to long shots at side angles, suggesting distant relationships between tourists and hosts. On a par with cityscapes and landscapes, people are commonly seen as "ethnoscapes," or part of local scenery [e.g., Figures 5, 6, & 7]. The ideological significance of this subject positioning of local people is something we have discussed elsewhere in more detail (Jaworski, Thurlow et al., 2003).

Host Roles: Ambassadors and Friends

In keeping with the metonymic function of people standing in for their country/region, their roles are further limited to the typical repertoire of host roles aimed at pleasing and serving the tourist: "ambassadors" and "friends." (For more on host roles see Jaworski, Ylänne-McEwen et al., 2003.) Where some images are construed as indirect, others involve a subject in a direct gaze—what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) call "demand pictures" [e.g., Figures 8 & 9]. In these postcard a false sense of contact, of intimacy, is promoted. Just as Laxson (1991) has commented on the general lack of respect shown by some tourists towards the locals evidenced in their touching, staring, and careless handling of goods, allowing the tourist the direct look into the exposed gaze of people in (some) postcards functions as an oculesic equivalent of a violation of their personal space.

By contrast, the Welsh people of St Fagans are more typically presented as active participants performing "useful" tasks (e.g., baking bread, pottery making, etc.). In the Zulu cards, however, people are more often used as props—draped (sometimes literally) and posed (though see also next section). This is also reminiscent of Silver's (1993, p. 60) ar-

gument that the way locals are generally presented in touristic literature is merely as background to "world-class" amenities—if they are there at all, that is (cf. Dilley, 1986). This is not to say that the Sámi and the Zulu are not shown as involved in such mundane tasks as cooking. However, Edwards (1996) comments on the role of the quotidian (e.g., bread-making, basket-weaving, blanket-sowing) in postcard images as a deceptive, fabricated (or staged) quotidian, these being little more than the romanticized, restrictive projections of (usually Western) yearnings for bygone ways of living—practices and values [e.g., Figures 10, 11, & 12].

Performing Ethnicity: Promoting Heritage

People presented as ethnoscapes, acting out hospitability and friendliness, engaged in mundane activities are therefore typically cast in what Goffman (1986) would regard as a "performance" frame. Despite the received wisdom of the cliché "travel broadens your mind," these cultural performances are seldom promoting cross-cultural awareness in tourists as much as they are presenting them as spectacle. In Osborne's (2000, p. 75) formulation, the world thereby simply becomes an entertainment. The stage is set up and dressed as authentic through seemingly tokenistic references to dance, religion, traditional architecture, and, above all, traditional or stylized ethnic costumes (Silver, 1993) [e.g., Figures 13 & 14]. These are all what Edwards (1996) calls "generalized cultural markers of alterity" (p. 204) and are the primary means by which many tourist sites become theatrical spaces—but especially the kinds of cultural or heritage sites under discussion here.

In fairness, "authenticity" is a problematic concept in all spheres of life, and just like any expression of one's subjectivity authenticity needs to be enacted or performed (Butler, 1990). However, it seems to us that especially in these postcards there is some even more deliberate blurring going on between "authenticity" and "performance," more often than not leading to the projection of the past as present. Again, Edwards (1996) usefully comments on the way culture is "presented as residing in the past, an unchanging past without internal dynamic" (p. 204). In our own data set, for example, chronographic ambiguity is evident in the inconsistency with which some rep-

resentations of Zulu life and culture are framed as "traditional" while others are not. It is also exposed in the grammatical slippage in verb tense from one postcard legend [Figure 13] where the phrase "Zulu Traditions" that anchors the image on the front of the card is expanded on the reverse: "The art of stick fighting is (sic) a skill learnt by Zulu men from a young age." Equally, and like one Sámi postcard [Figure 15] with a snow-mobile parked nonchalantly in front of a traditional sami dwelling and outdoor fire, Edwards also acknowledges the way that the "nontraditional" may be filtered into postcards to depict what she calls the "authenticity of encounter" (p. 212)—a snapshot device to persuade of the immediacy and reality of the scene.

Eroticization: The Voyeuristic (Male) Gaze

Pritchard and Morgan (2000) have commented on the interrelationship between the discourses of tourism and of heterosexual patriarchy—what they see as the dominant, privileged "male gaze." A number of postcards in our collection seem to reproduce this (hetero)sexist imagery by depicting examples of feminized landscapes, untouched and uncontaminated "virgin territory," and more literally the array of bare-breasted, smiling Zulu women in inviting poses [e.g., Figure 16]. The underlying assumption here is that it is the (White) heterosexual man to whom the images of the erotic/exotic nature must appeal (cf. Silver, 1993). The one Finnish equivalent [Figure 17] is fully clothed, although still "draped" in terms of her pose. Given that this is a common trope of tourism research (see Morgan & Pritchard, 1998; Silver, 1993), what is noticeable—and therefore disturbing—is how present-day Zulu postcards resemble the 19th century racist, sexualized images of African American women (Mellinger, 1994). Here, as in the past, "the ethnographic merely becomes a device through which gaze is legitimated, to persuade us that this is knowledge and understanding, not mere voyeurism" (Edwards, 1996, p. 205). Admittedly, some images, such as bare-chested, male Zulu warriors involved in a staged fight [Figure 13] or the muscular backs of Welsh rugby players in a prematch line-up [Figure 18], might be indicative of a more contested gaze, this imagery is by no means as dominant as the (hetero)sexist, male one. Besides, however metonymic and stereotypical, these repre-

sentations of men are typically more activity focused and therefore less immediate in their passivized invitation to gaze.

Tame and Safe: The Young and Powerless

Following on from the many themes discussed so far (the averted gaze of the subjects, the invasive stare into the eyes of some hosts, the "friendly" smiles of the hosts, and the inviting sexual poses), we find the people postcard images typically designed to be safe and unthreatening to the tourist. This is especially clear in the choice subjects: children (especially in the Zulu set of postcards) [e.g., Figures 19 & 20] and women, often elderly women [Figure 21], who are stereotypically associated with innocence and tameness, and, by extension, become iconic significations of the traditional and the natural. As such, these postcards also bear a strong resemblance to Mellinger's (1994) review of 19th century postcards of "pickaninnies" as well as Morgan and Pritchard's (1998) observation of the routine juxtaposition of the exotic with the familiar in travel brochures.

In Search of More Situated Readings

"Because peoples and places are not represented as they would represent themselves but as the West sees them, this in turn influences how peoples are perceived and how they perceive themselves" (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000, p. 901).

There are, of course, many ways of doing tourism, of "touring." Equally, there are many different types and degrees of contact—as Galasinski and Jaworski (2003) express it, there are "varying degrees of understanding, integration and reciprocity (symmetry) of relations." It is for this reason, especially, that one can never be sure just what tourists make of their hosts and vice versa. Not unless one asks, that is.

With exception of Laakso and Östman's (1999, 2001) linguistic/discourse analytic perspective, what little research there is to date comes more from the analytical traditions of cultural studies or the traditional analyses of anthropology (see, e.g., Edwards, 1996; Mellinger, 1994; Osborne, 2000). Although these analyses offer important, critical insights into the nature of postcards and other visual representations in tourism, assumptions ("readings") are often

made about the consumption and production of postcards. While these may be acknowledged, they are more usually relegated in favor of subjective, "external" interpretations. As such, the picture remains incomplete and the readings of these writers largely unsubstantiated. Pritchard and Morgan (quoted above) are not the only writers who assume that, given the chance, local people would choose to represent themselves differently in tourist images and texts (see also Edwards, 1996, p. 203; Silver, 1993). With the exception of someone like Evans-Pritchard (1989), this is an argument that invariably remains at the level of intuition and presupposition. As we have already suggested, locals may well be invested in, and benefit materially from, projecting an image of themselves that satisfies touristic expectations and stereotypes.

Of course, this is no straightforward undertaking. In their review of contemporary tourism research, Franklin and Crang (2001, p. 14) warn of the dangers of eliciting answers that tourists believe they should give—what social scientists call "socially desirable" responses (see Ostrom et al., 1994)—and relying on what they characterize as the "universalized, contained, rational, and self-knowing subject." Furthermore, Evans-Pritchard (1989, p. 91) notes how obscure and inaccessible insiders' references to outsiders may be, just as Abram (1997) comments that, "the layers of reflexivity involved in the interaction between locals and visitors, of whatever type, cannot be simply surmised or summarised" (p. 46). Nonetheless, it is in this way that we are seeking to "complicate the tourist gaze" (cf. Saari Kitalong & Kitalong, 2000), to "give voice to the Other" (i.e., those visited by tourists, cf. Abbink, 2000, p. 2), and to expose something of the complex negotiations of power and the pragmatic decision making of economics that underpin the two. In the case of the Zulu cards, for example, we are likely to tap into broader discourses (as both talk *and* social practice) of Western (tourist) views of Africa and Black people, as well as (local) Zulu concerns about the assertion of ethnic identity and the preservation of cultural heritage in postapartheid South Africa. In this way, we are keen to explore a little further the ways in which "particular identities are consumed and reinforced at the expense of others" (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000, p. 901). As is true more generally of the ways people popularly understand and talk about "culture" and

their cultural identities (see Thurlow, 2001), in much tourism research there continues to be an undue emphasis on "how we see ourselves" as opposed to "how others see us" (Evans-Pritchard, 1989).

Furthermore, by look looking at, to borrow a phrase, both front and back realities, we are also able to examine both naturally occurring discourse and elicited discourse (see, e.g., Ylänne-McEwen & Lawson, in press). In both cases, we are concerned to investigate the "readings" of "real" people—their reasons for buying postcards, their attitudes towards the images and the people they depict, etc. In his recent book, Phillips (2000) talks of the last century as the "postcard century" and yet notes how surprisingly mundane the content of people's postcard messages are—regardless of the image on the other side. The fact remains, however, that is one *opportunity* for tourists to comment on and perhaps even challenge/resist the postcard images. And this is the crux of our research interest. All tourist sites are sites of struggle (cf. Jamison, 1999), but to what extent are the postcards that depict and promote these sites themselves sites of contestation and struggle? How might one start to explore both the visual mediation of host–tourist interactions and lay (or folk) understandings of visual communication in tourism?

It is precisely with this in mind that our own research has been moving towards more in-depth, ethnographic encounters, and "situationally-specific interactions" (Evans-Pritchard, 1989, p. 89), with on-site interview encounters with local people, as well as interviews with postcard manufacturers and visitors. Within a more critical, discursive framework (see, e.g., Fairclough, 2001), we are increasingly concerned also with processes of textual production and reception; as such, we recognize that it is only by addressing some of the following research questions to the three main groups of postcard protagonists that we can establish a more situated, complicated understanding of the host–tourist communication mediated by "ethnic" postcards.

The Purchasers/Senders

Given the selection typically on offer in any rack, are postcards selected and sent with any sense of irony; for example, with an awareness (lay or otherwise) of the kinds of critical perspectives outlined in our thematic analyses above? As Osborne (2000) rightly suggests, "tourists read images, play with the signs, disdain them or are seduced by them, and add a few of their own to the system" (p. 78). Indeed, there is always this potential for tourists to contest images and to resist readings—they are not necessarily passive recipients (e.g., Mellinger, 1994; Silver, 1993). For example, reverse-side messages can contest the preferred readings of front-side images, although the experience of Mellinger (1994) indicates that they seldom do resist the dominant ideology that humorous readings often simply reinforce. It is, of course, not uncommon for tourists to resist and contest—often through humor—performances of ethnicity, and are often aware that such performances are put on specially for their benefit. Certainly, Laxson's (1991) assertion is that tourists' images of local people invariably say more about their own world views and cultural stereotypes than they do about the local people themselves.

The Producers/Sellers

What is the thinking behind the physical production and design of these images by the "representers"? For example, what commercial patterns of consumption are available that might even establish some kind of "news value" hierarchy to explain how some images come to be chosen over others? Perhaps even more so than anything else, it is questions about production values such as these that academic writing on postcards has chosen to exclude (e.g., Edwards, 1996). And yet it is the choices, preferences, and ideologies of photographers, publishers, distributors, and vendors that predominate in the postcard racks. Just as one might arguably draw a line between the ethnographer and the tourist on the basis of the former's concern for historicity, cultural explanation, and relations of power and politics (cf. Abbink, 2000), is it possible that the producers of postcard images (and the authors of the verbal texts that anchor them) are more self-reflexive than we might suppose? Just as we might wonder about a more critical, self-aware tourist gaze, we must surely ask to what extent these other key players are conscious of their apparently simplistic, simplified views of other people's lifestyles. Do they, for example, have any sense of their representations as potentially problematic, rac-

ist, or offensive? Is there any consultation with lo-cal communities in the way that, say, Notzke (1993) discusses? As Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) remind us, discussions about Other are seldom carried out with the involvement of Other.

The Depicted/Locals

Finally, and arguably of greatest importance, to what extent do postcard images satisfy the expectations and aspirations—political, economic, and cultural—of the represented people? How ambivalent are local people towards these images? Do they, for example, reveal the kinds of wry resistance of the Native American participants in Evans-Pritchard's (1989) study? We would certainly be curious to know if there is ever any consent sought/given on the part of, say, the Zulus in the images we discuss here. In asking questions such as these, we are better able to acknowledge the variable rights of people to project images of themselves that are consistent with their own self-image rather than having to pander to the stereotypes of others. Is there, for example, any correspondence between touristic representations and local people's self-narratives (or autostereotypes) (cf. Ballerino Cohen, 1995)—a sense of overlap between tourist discourses and local discourses with regards these (mis)representations?

It is precisely in this way, pursuing questions such as these, that we hope research may extend, elaborate, and empirically substantiate some of the excellent theoretical work already done from the perspective of visual communication research in tourism. This, we believe, ought to be an important agenda in analyses (semiotic or otherwise) of visual communication: more *situated* understandings of readings and representations. This also explains our concern for site-specific collections of particular ethnic groups rather than pursuing stereotypic themes across a more random selection of cards. Each site-specific series speaks not only of the desires of tourists, the commercial drives of the industry, but also of the immediate life-world of the local people and, specifically, the historical–economic relations between "locals," hosts, and tourists. As such, our aim is to explore, in a more explicit manner than is usual for tourism and visual communication research, the two complementary tourist themes "how we see them" and "how

they see us" (cf. Evans-Pritchard, 1989; Laxson, 1991). More particularly, however, and with respect to postcard images of ethnic minority people, we are keen to address the questions: "Is this how they would *like* us to see them?" and "Is this *really* how we see them?"

"Touristic culture is more than the physical travel; it is the preparation of people to see other places as objects of tourism, and the preparation of those people and places to be seen. . . . the touristic gaze and imaginary shape and mediate our knowledge of and desires about the rest of the planet" (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p. 10).

Acknowledgments

Appendix

Tourists by Kizito Muchemwa

They came into the wilderness clichés in suitcases
Talismans they cherished as shields against this
    poisonous madness
Lurking in the dark aggressive landscape of alienness.
Looking for recognition of this my dear land
They saw no familiar hills and heard no familiar songs.
Holding onto their fetishes they defy time and distance
Send lines across oceans to tap the energies
A faceless past economically nourishes wilting roots
Dying on the rocky exposures of understanding
    through fear

They surround themselves with jacarandas and pines,
Build concrete walls around their homes,
I hope next time they will import snow, change
The seasons to humour their eccentric whims.

Already other trinkets hoot their mockery of our lives
Proclaiming the raucous assertiveness of their makers
But this land, this; the spirits dwelling in it
Will not yield to such casual intimidation
Neither will it give out its rich sad secrets
To half-hearted tokens of transparent love.

References

Abbink, J. (2000). Tourism and its discontents: Suri-tourist encounters in southern Ethiopia. *Social Anthropology, 8*(1), 1–17.

Abram, S. (1997). Performing for tourists in rural France. In S. Abram, J. Waldren, & D. V. L. MacCleod (Eds.), *Tourists and tourism: Identifying with people and places* (pp. 29–49). Oxford: Berg.

Ballerino Cohen, C. (1995). Marketing paradise, making nation. *Annals of Tourism Research, 22*(2), 404–421.

Blommaert, J., & Verschueren, J. (1998). *Debating diversity: Analysing the discourse of tolerance.* London: Routledge.

Brecher, J., Costello, T., & Smith, B. (2000). *Globalization from below: The power of solidarity*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York: Routledge.

Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology, 9*, 302–338.

Dilley, R. S. (1986). Tourist brochures and tourist images. *Canadian Geographer, 30*, 59–65.

Edwards, E. (1996). Postcards: Greetings from another world. In T. Selwyn (Ed.), *The tourist image: Myths and myth making in tourism* (pp. 197–221). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Evans-Pritchard, D. (1989). How 'they' see 'us': Native American images of tourist. *Annals of Tourism Research, 16*, 89–105.

Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical discourse analysis as a method of social scientific research. In R. Wodak & M. Myer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 121–138). London: Sage.

Franklin, A., & Crang, M. (2001). The trouble with tourism and travel theory. *Tourist Studies, 1*(1), 5–22.

Galasinski, D., & Jaworski, A. (2003). Representations of hosts in travel writing: The Guardian travel section. *Tourism and Cultural Change, 1*(2), 131–149.

Goffman, E. (1986). *Frame analysis.* Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Hitchcock, M., Stanley, N., & Siu, K. C. (1997). The South-East Asian 'living museum' and its antecedents. In S. Abram, J. Waldren, & D. V. L. MacCleod (Eds.), *Tourists and tourism: Identifying with people and places* (pp. 197–221). Oxford: Berg.

Jamison, D. (1999). Tourism and ethnicity: The brotherhood of coconuts. *Annals of Tourism Research, 26*(1), 944–967.

Jaworski, A., & Thurlow, C. (2004). Language, tourism and globalisation: Mapping new international identities. In S. H. Ng, C-Y. Chiu, & C. Candlin (Eds), *Language matters: Communication, identity, and culture* (pp. 297–321). Hong Kong: City University Press.

Jaworski, A., Thurlow, C., Ylänne-McEwen, V., & Lawson, S. (2003).The uses and representations of local languages in tourist destinations: A view from British television holiday programmes. *Language Awareness, 12*(1), 5–29.

Jaworski, A., Ylänne-McEwen, V., Thurlow, C., & Lawson, S. (2003). Social roles and the negotiation of status in host-tourist interaction: A view from British television holiday programmes. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 7*(2), 135–163.

Kahn, M. (in press). Postcards from Tahiti: Picturing France's colonial agendas, yesterday and today. In N. Morgan & M. Robinson (Eds.), *Cultures through the post: Essays on tourism and postcards*. Clevedon: Channel View.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design.* London: Routledge.

Laakso, V., & Östman, J.-O. (Eds.). (1999). *Postikortti diskurssina [The postcard as discourse].* Hämeenlinna: Korttien Talo.

Laakso, V., & Östman, J.-O. (Eds.). (2001). *Postikortti sosiaalisessa kontekstissa [The postcard in social context].* Hämeenlinna: Korttien Talo.

Laxson, J. D. (1991). How 'we' see 'them': Tourism and Native Americans. *Annals of Tourism Research, 18*, 365–391.

MacCannell, D. (1973). Staged authenticity: Arrangements of social space in tourist settings. *American Journal of Sociology, 79*(3), 589–603.

MacCannell, D. (1984). Reconstructed ethnicity: Tourism and cultural identity in third world communities. *Annals of Tourism Research, 11*, 375–391.

Mellinger, W. M. (1994). Toward a critical analysis of tourism representations. *Annals of Tourism Research, 21*(4), 756–779.

Morgan, N., & Pritchard, A. (1998). Images of 'them' and 'us.' In *Tourism, promotion and power: Creating images, creating identities* (pp. 211–239). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Notzke, C. (1998). Indigenous tourism development in the arctic. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 55–77.

Osborne, P. D. (2000). *Travelling light: Photography, travel and visual culture.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ostrom, T. M., Bond, C. F., et al. (1994). Attitude scales. In S. Shavitt & T. Brock (Eds.), *Persuasion: Psychological insights and perspectives* (pp. 15–42). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Phillips, T. (2000). *The postcard century: 2000 cards and their messages.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Price, D. (2000). Surveyors and surveyed. In L. Wells (Ed.), *Photography: A critical introduction* (pp. 65–118). London: Routledge.

Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2000). Privileging the male gaze: Gendered tourism landscapes. *Annals of Tourism Research, 27*(4), 884–905.

Saari Kitalong, K., & Kitalong, T. (2000). Complicating the tourist gaze: Literacy and the internet as catalysts for articulating a postcolonial Palauan identity. In G. E. Hawisher & C. L. Selfe (Eds.), *Global literacies and the world-wide web* (pp. 95–113). London: Routledge.

Silver, I. (1993). Marketing authenticity in third world countries. *Annals of Tourism Research, 20*, 302–318.

Stewart, S. (1984). *On longing: Narratives of the miniature,*

the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Thurlow, C. (2001). 'I don't have one—it's just normal.' Young teenagers' ideas about 'culture': Critical transcultural communication awareness and the exoticisation of Self. In D. Killick, M. Parry, & A. Phipps (Eds.), *The poetics and praxis of languages and intercultural communication* (pp. 111–125) Glasgow: Glasgow French and German Publications.

Thurlow, C., & Jaworski, A. (2003). Communicating a global reach: Inflight magazines as a globalizing genre in tourism. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 7*(4), 581–608.

Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies.* London: Sage.

Ylänne-McEwen, V., & Lawson, S. (in press). Colleagues as tourists: Analysis of postcards sent to the workplace. In N. Morgan & M. Robinson (Eds.), *Cultures through the post: Essays on tourism and postcards.* Clevedon: Channel View.