



Touring Trench Town. Commodifying Urban Poverty and Violence in Kingston, Jamaica A.D.
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SUMMARY.

In Trench Town, community life unfolds during sun-stroked days, marred by the social and economic hardships that structure this low-income, high-crime urban area. Amidst the neighbourhood's humdrum – the sounds of conversations between residents, traffic along the main arteries, music emanating from homes, church singing in the distance, the sight of wide, battered pavements and zinc fences, the smells of cooked food, and the heat – a group of tourists wanders the streets. Most tourists who venture to Trench Town, and to the small Culture Yard museum it houses, are drawn in by the area's rich musical heritage. It is the birthplace of reggae, where Bob Marley, who grew up in the neighbourhood and famously sung about it, mingled and jammed with other figureheads of Jamaica's musical scene. The sonic art of Trench Town, along with references to Kingston's downtown 'ghetto life', infuse Jamaican visual and musical culture. While these spark visitors' wish to experience Trench Town and embark on walking tours of the neighbourhood, they also inform tourist imaginaries of ghetto poverty and crime. Local guides, who (for the most part) live in Trench Town, are aware of tourists' desires to experience snippets of life tinted by poverty and violence.

In this dissertation, I analyse tourism patterns in Trench Town to understand how low-income residents participate in encounters predicated on the consumption of inequality. I draw on the case of tourism to address how urban poverty and violence are experienced, sensed and ultimately sold, unpacking the political and economic implications of this form of commodification. This research explores how poverty and violence are transformed into products, and what benefits residents of marginalised – yet destination – neighbourhoods such as Trench Town can derive from selling glimpses of deprivation and conflict. I tie these questions to larger debates in urban studies and anthropology that are concerned with the transformation of places into goods for exchange.

I engage with scholarship on urban spectacles and symbolic economies, two dominant concepts used to analyse the transformation of urban spaces and cultures into products and extend this

work by showing that the production of place for consumption involves economic and political negotiations that take place through the senses. The link between selling and sensing urban poverty and violence lies in what I call the 'sensorial economy', which in the case of 'ghetto' tourism involves transactions in which locals deliberately make visitors feel and apprehend the violence and/or poverty of a place in exchange for economic or social capital. Elucidating this sensorial economy is an important theoretical contribution to debates about the commodification of urban places. In the context of tourism in low-income urban areas, it offers a framework for understanding how residents of these areas negotiate the experience of urban violence, and what they can derive from this. Dealing with the commodification of violence and poverty, and the transformation of their neighbourhood into a tourism destination, guides of Trench Town curate a sensorial product in exchange for capital. In so doing, they highlight how the senses become economically and politically valuable.

Throughout these pages, I develop the concept of the sensorial economy in relation to the ethnographic material it is derived from, whilst weaving other theoretical considerations through the text. Understanding how inequalities structure the place and substance of the tourism encounter, as the poverty and violence that inform Trench Town become a product for tourism consumption, relies on addressing two key features: movement and temporality. I tie tourism encounters, and the sensorial economy, to global, national, and urban mobilities. I analyse the variegated movements of residents of Kingston, and of Trench Town more specifically, contrasting these with the travels of tourists. This highlights how, when touring Trench Town, visitors frame their movements across places as a travel in time. It is this temporal and geographical framework that enables visitors to construct Trench Town, alongside violence and poverty, as an authentic tourism product.

Yet, a discrepancy exists between touristic desires and the reality of the tourism commodity. Tourists who expect to travel to a place they can frame as belonging to the past, or visitors who wish to witness a certain type of spectacular violence reproduced in popular culture, are sensitized to a different experience. When they amble through Trench Town on walking tours brokered by guides, tourists discover the neighbourhood in a multisensorial way. In this curatorial process, guides of Trench Town simultaneously choose to address and disregard different aspects of the neighbourhood. Focused on the entanglements of violence and tourism, this analysis reveals how these guides curate visitors' experiences, in order to sensitize them to different (un)spectacular forms of violence and poverty. I argue that, in so doing, local tour guides productively leverage violence and poverty to denounce and grapple with structural violence and histories of inequality.

This approach to the commodification of place, poverty and violence, coupled with an engagement with sensorial anthropology, offers a new contribution to scholarship on Caribbean cities. Furthermore, through an engagement with assemblage theory, an analytical method that

connects data across scales and times, my research speaks to Caribbeanist work on historical continuities.