Karen Wilkes

Whiteness, Weddings, and Tourism in the Caribbean: Paradise for Sale. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xii + 239 pp. (Cloth US\$100.00)

The goal of *Whiteness, Weddings and Tourism in the Caribbean* is broad and laudable. As its title implies, the book is generally concerned with the destination wedding industry in the Caribbean, particularly in Jamaica. Like many tourism scholars, Karen Wilkes is interested in how tourist desire for tropical locales is constructed through mainstream knowledges, historical and industry representations, and narratives. But her primary focus is on “the interweaving discourses that are employed to construct contemporary representations of the Caribbean as a *white space* to consume luxury” (p. 7, emphasis added). As a consequence, a substantial portion of the book is devoted to analyses of historical discourses and visual representations of tropical locales, the slave trade, enslaved African bodies, white slaveholders and idle white women, and the colonial enterprise, both writ large and as it played out in the Caribbean. Wilkes makes extensive use of black feminist and intersectional theory, critical race theory, whiteness studies, the poststructuralist theories of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, and the postcolonial theories of Edward Said, Gargi Bhat-tacharyya, and, especially, Homi Bhabha.

The book’s first five chapters are given over to such analyses, the intent of which is to provide an understanding “from a ‘nondominant’ perspective” (p. 8) of how the contemporary Caribbean has emerged as a site for white leisure and luxury and black servitude. An introduction in which Wilkes describes the project and how she came to it is followed by a chapter that lays out the theoretical bases of the study, with emphasis on historical constructions of the Caribbean as an object of Western fantasy and desire. The next three detail the historical construction of white masculinity, of white femininity, and of Jamaica as a site for white pleasure, respectively, and demonstrate how visual and discursive representations of black bodies as “naturally” inferior, laboring, and servile, for example, were central to these constructions. Drawing on an assortment of visual and narrative materials and approaches, Wilkes provides a compendium of work on the Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean people as objects of exploration, exploitation, desire, and fantasy. There is a good deal of repetitiveness, and Wilkes’s analytical attention often moves erratically from subject to subject. I attribute this issue with flow and focus to her tendency throughout these chapters to advance her narrative by citing other scholars, with many sentences linking quotes from three or more sources. As a consequence, her voice, vision, and line of thought often get lost in an excess of direct quotes and internal text citations.

Wilkes next turns her attention to the contemporary Jamaican context, and the whiteness and weddings to which the book's title alludes. In Chapter 6 she provides a short review of the white wedding complex and bridal tourism and discusses concepts and images used in marketing Jamaica as a locale for destination weddings. Analyzing the marketing campaigns of two Jamaican resorts, she demonstrates how constructions of whiteness from the plantation and colonial periods are recast in a neoliberal mold, through narratives and images that foreground the specialness of white female bodies, claim heterosexual love as an expectation and right, and promote a subjectivity constructed via consumption and self-commoditization through social media. Although the take-away of this chapter is that "the white female is used to convey the desirability of a destination wedding as romantic and an expression of distinction through the consumption of the vast array of wedding products" (p. 187), there are many other intriguing analytical directions that are signaled, but not fully explored. Happily, one of these is taken up in Chapter 7, which shows how the allure of being catered to by stereotypically servile black subjects figures critically both in marketing Jamaica as a destination for white tourists and in constructing modern white subjects as pampered and privileged. The book ends with a brief concluding chapter.

From the outset Wilkes makes explicit that *Whiteness, Weddings and Tourism in the Caribbean* is not a close study of the Caribbean destination wedding industry, but rather an identification and reading of the discursive threads that interweave in promoting that industry in Jamaica. Particularly in light of the lucidness and originality of Chapters 6 and 7, the rather scant attention paid to the contemporary context is regrettable. While the text may be a resource for scholars interested in postcolonial analyses of the Caribbean, it is less valuable for tourism studies or for use in the classroom.

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