
Book Review

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Writing the Dark Side of Travel

by: Jonathan Skinner (Ed.)

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In the recent decades, new type of industry offer destinations where death or disasters are the main attraction. Although, the curiosity for these types of events is not new, dark-tourism or than-a-tourism gained attention from scholarship. This book entitled, *Writing the Dark Side of Travel* contains nine polished-written chapters where death and other's suffering gives a message to survivors. This uncanny fascination which is not observed in other animals, serves as reminder of our own death. Since dark tourism sites have been historically intertwined to pilgrimage as a sign of respect for the other's death, some studies suggests it corresponds to a mechanism to discipline death. However, here some preliminary comments are needed.

Methodologically, one of the problems tourism-related research consists in the homogenisation of a great variety of sub-themes. Researchers should put on the same place issues such as battlefield commemorations, genocides, and disasters.

As the previous argument given, specialists in this book discussed to what extent dark tourism works as a mechanism which mediates between the humans and the kingdom of the dead. These types of spectacles, quite aside from the morbidity, confer to people a lesson respecting to outstanding events that were out of their control. The other's suffering reconfigures their proper being in this world. What would be more interesting to debate is to what extent, some sites may be typified as dark tourism, while others are not. What factors determine the genesis of these types of macabre exhibitions? Is human curiosity for death, or simply a sadist experience?

Some specialists have widely suggested that late-modernity paved the ways for the upsurge of a hedonist way of experience the other's life to reinforce the own egoism. The otherness is portrayed according to a need to create a fetish-object, manipulated by the own desire. The happiness for other's death entails the neglect of own death. The post Marxist sociologists argue convincingly that spaces are commoditised to be sold and consumed by an international demand. In this token, it is important not to loose the sight that dark tourism may be politically manipulated for politicians to gain further legitimacy or impose policies in other conditions would be neglected. Since the pain and suffering are personal feelings, any extrapolation of such sentiments are endeavours to reconstruct a lost past with present eyes.

Genocide museums not only remember a moral tragedy but disseminate a code enrooted in politics. The role of ethnologist consists in deciphering that code by writing and describing the context. The written word (text) is of paramount importance to understand the allegory of dark tourism sites. The discrepancies among authors who conform this book respecting to the archetype of death represents a serious problems to arrive to a all-embracing theory which allows expanding the current understanding of the issue. Editor J. Skinner warns that chapters included in this project do not examine the death but how it is interpreted by local cultures or story tellers. These tales are embedded in the text, not in history.

Although this book exhibits a strong sensibility in the role played by the ethnography to unearth covered voices, some limitations and doubts arise. Skinner and his collaborators start from the premise of Lennon, Foley, Seaton or Sharpley who posit an exaggerated trust in the perception, emotions and opinion of visitors or tourists. This point begs two interesting questions, how can we know interviewees are not lying or simply they are not familiar with the psychological laws of their behaviour?

As a personal anecdote, I remember in one of my fieldwork in the Cromañón sanctuary, a teenager came to me one day to explain me further on the problem I was investigating. I accepted his invitation assuming he had much to say. The interview lasted roughly 5 hours and was tape-recorded. The information I obtained from this young was very important for me at a preliminary stage. Nonetheless, with the passing of months I have advanced my ethnography comparing the collated information by what I can hear and see. Not only I realised that the original interview was completely false, because the involved key-informant wanted to attract attention and exaggerated his stories, but he felt the needs to tell something to me. The importance of this story was not determined by its credibility. He had not lost anyone in the disaster of Cromañón, though developed a strange attachment for the event, for the other's disgrace. This empathy led him to alter his sense of reality. Paradoxically, although this interview was a fake, it underpinned the main hypotheses in my research opening the doors to new cosmologies and opportunities to be empirically validated. This story though false shed light on my investigation.

Because of complex issues, it is unfortunate that tourism fields, from positivism to hermeneutics, give too much attention to the perception of tourist. This epistemology has brought descriptive studies which are not articulated in an encompassing framework. Last but not least, what many scholars ignore is that the term 'thanaptosis' was originally coined by the American poet, Bryant (1817). As formulated by the author, thanaptosis alludes to a new alternative manner to understand death, anticipating other's death. In earlier studies, we have showed that dark tourism should not be understood beyond the politics, economy and demography, and this is a great error. To my experience in fields of disasters, not all spaces where there was a trauma become in dark tourism sites. Furthermore, under some conditions, families of victims reject tourism because it is considered an evil activity, based on money and corruption.

Some families conceive dark tourism as a commercial activity that offends the memory of deads. Therefore, it is questionable to argue that dark tourism helps visitor to understand its own death. Rather, religiosity plays the role of giving understanding about own death. The psychological resiliency consists in moving the resources to overcome situation of pain. As part of the process of resilience, dark tourism often provides reasons to live but covering the cause of trauma (Korstanje and Ivanov, 2012; Korstanje, 2010, 2011). Any disaster, trauma or lost is counter-balanced by the belief survivors have

outstanding characteristics because they have been protected by gods. Without this cosmology, the community would never start the process of recovery, or mourning. In context of mass-death or disasters, survivors believe they are stronger, more virtuous, or smarter than other groups. If this climate of omnipotence is not regulated, expressions of chauvinism and nationalism may surface. Dark tourism shrines are common at this stage. In view of that, dark tourism signals to one of the mechanisms of resilience of society to overcome post disaster situations – among others else. Real causes of disasters are covered in dark tourism sites because they are very complex to be digested by lay-people or for avoiding the political costs to the current government. Starting from the premise that the remind obscures the causes of event, we are doomed to repeat the same disaster some later day (Korstanje, 2013).

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