

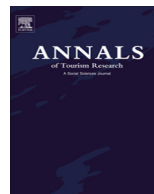


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The death drive in tourism studies



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ABSTRACT

The psychoanalytical concept of the death drive postulated by Freud and Lacan refers to a constant force at the junction between life and death, which is not understood in a biological sense of physical demise of the body, nor in opposition to life. Tourist experiences in conflict zones can be more critically understood through the lens of the death drive. Empirical data for this project draws on individual and group interviews undertaken with tourists and tourism industry representatives in Jordan. Findings suggest that by traveling in a conflict area some tourists negotiate embedded family memories and archaic traumas. Accessing the death drive, tourists also assert and disrupt binaries such as fun/fear and life/death.

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Introduction

This article introduces the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive in tourism studies. I argue that tourist experiences in areas of socio-political conflict can be more critically explored by unpacking the uncanny juxtaposition of tourism with the death drive. Introducing the concept in tourism studies contributes to the scarce and “belated dialogue between critical tourism research and psychoanalytic approaches” (Kingsbury & Brunn, 2003, p. 40). Understandings of the death drive within the context of critical tourism research should not be regarded as clinical but conceptual. The death drive is not an essentialist and organicist concept. There is no innate, inborn death drive, rather we humans as cultural and social beings are afflicted with the death drive. In proposing this psychoanalytic concept in tourism studies I mainly turn to Ragland-Sullivan’s (1987, 1992, 1995) and Boothby’s (1991) readings of Freud’s and Lacan’s theories on the death drive. My goal, however, like Kingsbury

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(2005), is not to merely superimpose the death drive on tourism studies, but to call for a genuine engagement with this concept so as to examine and understand, more critically, tourist experiences.

Ragland-Sullivan (1995) in her analysis of Lacan's concept of the death drive asks "why would humans be motivated by death and not life?" (p. 85). In her attempt to answer this seemingly paradoxical question I might find the answer to my own query: how and in what ways is the death drive brought about and accessed, if at all, when travelling in areas of socio-political conflicts? The death drive is not understood in a biological sense of physical demise of the body. It is not in opposition to life. It is at the junction between life and death, as an interrelated compound, at the very heart of life phenomena (Lacan, trans. 1977a). Freud posed the death instinct as a biological reality that served to account for clinical and theoretical observations (Boothby, 1991). Lacan reworked Freud's death instinct as a primordial drive aimed towards the unity of the ego, rather than being aimed against the persistence of the biological organism (Boothby, 1991, p. 71). Employing the death drive, I claim, tourist experiences in conflict zones can be more critically examined.

Data for this project was gathered from 25 international tourists who, like myself, travelled to Jordan in 2010, and from 24 Jordanian tourism industry representatives such as guides, travel company managers and owners. With all participants ethnographic methods of data collection, such as in-depth, semi-structured, individual and group interviews were used, an aspect discussed in more detail in the methods section. Throughout this article 'conflict zone' is used to refer to Jordan not as a country at war, especially considering that it signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, but as a sensitive place where the conflicts from neighbouring countries spill over and affect tourism along with other aspects of daily life. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is an Arab country in the southwestern part of Asia, bordered by Syria and Lebanon in the north, Iraq in the east, Saudi Arabia to the southeast, Egypt to the southwest, West Bank and Israel in the west.

The location of Jordan is of strategic importance. Historically it has been at the crossroads between the Arabian Peninsula and Syria. Nowadays, Jordan tries to maintain its stability in a region scarred by conflicts for more than six decades. In the last decade Jordan witnessed the Palestinian uprising in 2000–2001; the war in Afghanistan in 2001; in Iraq in 2003; the suicide bombings on three five-star hotels in the capital Amman in 2005; the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war in Lebanon; rocket attacks and gunfire exchanges in October 2009 and August 2010 between Lebanon and Israel; and more minor rocket attacks in April and August 2010 in Jordan. More recently, in 2011 and 2012 Jordan was also part of the Arab Spring, a wave of demonstrations and protests that started in Tunisia in December 2010 when a man burned himself in protest at his treatment by police. The revolts spread into Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya.

In spite of the conflicts, tourist arrivals increased in 2005 by an estimated 8% (UNWTO, 2006). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation describes the Middle East as "one of the tourism success stories of the decade so far and leads the growth ranking of arrivals in 2007, with an estimated 16% rise to almost 48 million tourists" (UNWTO, 2008, p. 9). Jordan itself has experienced a steady increase in tourist arrivals from 2,383,400 in 2002 to 3,298,900 in 2007 (Jordan Tourism Board., 2009). In 2011 international tourist arrivals in the Middle East region decreased by 5%, but in 2012 Jordan rebounded with an increase of 5% (UNWTO, 2012). Jordan, therefore, offered a good position to analyse tourist experiences in an area of socio-political conflicts.

In-depth and critical understandings of such tourist experiences can be offered through the psychoanalytical concept of the death drive, as I argue in this article. First, I present theoretical considerations regarding interconnections between tourism, psychoanalysis and the death drive. The qualitative methodological approach used to obtain data relevant to the discussion on psychoanalytical connections in tourism is, afterwards, described. The analysis of the data, then, leads me to argue that when travelling in a conflict area, some tourists may access the death drive while negotiating family memories and archaic traumas. I also consider the ways in which binaries such as fun/fear and life/death are asserted and disrupted in Jordanian tourist spaces.

Introducing the death drive in tourism studies

By and large, tourism studies have left aside psychoanalysis as a form of knowledge to understand and interpret various tourist experiences, especially those involving fantasy, desires, drives and the

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