



BEING THERE TOGETHER: DARK FAMILY TOURISM AND THE EMOTIVE EXPERIENCE OF CO-PRESENCE IN THE HOLOCAUST PAST

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Abstract: This study examines the motivations and lived experiences of Israeli descendants of Holocaust survivors who set out on family roots trips to heritage sites and sites of atrocity accompanied by their survivor parents. Post-trip semi-structured interviews disclose the marginalization of historical heritage and post-tourist identity work. Instead, descendants highlight pathos-filled familial sociality. Co-presence in sites of atrocity enables the performance of survivor emotions tacitly present in the home thereby evoking descendant empathy and identification. Emergent “we-relationships” and family “home-making” while away calls for the deconstruction of binaries such as: ordinary/extraordinary, mundane/sacred, and home/away. Findings problematize the mystification of dark tourism and suggest the ‘domestication’ of secular pilgrimages. Finally a re-presencing of the family in mainstream tourism research is called for. **Keywords:** family, roots trips, heritage, dark tourism, emotions, holocaust. © 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Early formulations of tourism research defined its object of study as an examination of the intentional and strategic departure from routine social milieus and familiar environs, highlighting the differentiation between tourism and everyday life (Graburn, 1977; MacCannell, 1999). Dark Tourism is particularly consistent with this binary conceptualized as the sublime, numinous, and/or mystical experience of the extraordinary (Seaton, 1996). In keeping with this dichotomy, research on Holocaust tourism has mystified visits to sites of suffering, interpreted as secular yet no less sacred pilgrimage to another-worldly reality (Feldman, 2008).

Recent scholarship has problematized the above gap between everyday lived experience and both ‘pale’ tourism (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003;

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Larsen, 2008; Obrador, 2011; Uriely, 2005) and dark tourism (Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011; Walter, 2009). Critical scholars call for empirical studies of the way individual and familial mundane everyday relations inform tourist motivations and saturate tourist experiences (Larsen, 2008; Obrador, 2011). Although scholars have examined mundane familial relations in leisure tourism (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Noy, 2007; Obrador 2011) and ‘pale’ heritage tourism (Gouthro & Palmer, 2010), there has been almost no attempt to explore mundane ‘homely feelings’ (Obrador, 2011) and familial we-relationships (Wang, 1999) in dark family tourism.

Seemingly elided by this void in the literature, a growing number of survivors of mass violence are accompanying their children and/or grandchildren on voyages to sites of personal suffering and survival. As these families explore ‘while away’ not only their difficult past but the dissonant roots of their present lived relations, it is all the more germane to decipher this phenomenon as a nexus of ‘extraordinary’ secular-pilgrimage (Cohen, 1992) and ‘ordinary’ familial “sociality on the move” (Larsen, 2008). This study therefore examines the motivations and lived experiences of Israeli adult children of Holocaust survivors (hitherto descendants) who set out on family roots trips to pre-Holocaust family heritage sites and darker sites of parental hiding and atrocity accompanied by their survivor parent.

Heritage Tourism and the Solitary Post-Tourist In Search of a Home

Heritage tourism entails the search for cultural, familial and/or collective legacy. Whether situated in historical knowledge, material objects, architecture or landscapes (Basu, 2004; McCain & Ray, 2003; McIntosh, 1999), heritage tourism seeks out the past as resource for the present (Graham & Howard, 2008). Personal, familial or national heritage is socially constructed, re-presented and performed within the confines of the heritage museum or the more authentic archive, or imagined within distant landscapes where the tourist conjures “ghosts of place” (Bell, 1997). The search for one’s inherited ‘center out there’ (Turner, 1973) is meaningful as it entails the “discovery of connectedness and continuities beyond the self” (Basu, 2004, p. 38).

Recent heritage scholarship has shifted away from explorations of nostalgia to a person-centered approach (Caton & Santos, 2007). This shift may be situated in post modern conceptions of the atomized self in search of a home. As victim of modernity’s global mobility, displacement and familial fragmentation (Giddens, 1991), the ‘post-tourist’ seeks belonging to restore fractured roots and give form and content to voided identities. Although tracing diverse heritage tourist motivations ranging from cultural knowledge, catharsis, to personal growth, the scholarship remains person-centered. Even when seeking national or ethnic identity (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999) or the *communitas* of collective mass touristic (Cohen, 1972) religious or secular pilgrimage, studies gauge individual motives and consumption (Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006). Thus, although the recently outlined diversity of

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