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TOURISM IMAGINARIES: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Noel B. Salazar
University of Leuven, Belgium

Abstract: It is hard to imagine tourism without the creative use of seductive as well as restrictive imaginaries about peoples and places. This article presents a conceptual framework for the study of tourism imaginaries and their diffusion. Where do such imaginaries originate, how and why are they circulated across the globe, and what kind of impact do they have on people's lives? I discuss the multiple links between tourism and imagination, illustrating the overlapping but conflicting ways in which imaginings and fantasies drive tourists and tourism service providers alike. By applying this conceptual approach to international tourism in developing countries, I illustrate how the critical analysis of imaginaries offers a powerful deconstruction device of ideological, political, and sociocultural stereotypes and clichés.
Keywords: imaginary, imagination, fantasy, tourism mobility, circulation of ideas, transdisciplinary theory.

INTRODUCTION

> ''He that travels in theory has no inconveniences; he has shade and sunshine at his disposal, and wherever he alights finds tables of plenty and looks of gaiety. These ideas are indulged till the day of departure arrives, the chaise is called, and the progress of happiness begins. A few miles teach him *the fallacies of imagination*. The road is dusty, the air is sultry, the horses are sluggish, and the postilion brutal. He longs for the time of dinner that he may eat and rest. The inn is crowded, his orders are neglected, and nothing remains but that he devour in haste what the cook has spoiled, and drive on in quest of better entertainment. He finds at night a more commodious house, but *the best is always worse than he expected*.''
> Samuel Johnson (1963 [1759], p. 181; emphasis added)

The historical quote above includes a critical reflection on the imaginative qualities of a ''dream holiday''. As with many other activities—reading novels, playing games, watching movies, telling stories,

Noel B. Salazar is Research Fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders at the University of Leuven (Cultural Mobilities Research, Parkstraat 45, bus 3615, BE-3000 Leuven, Belgium. Email <noel.salazar@soc.kuleuven.be>). His research interests include anthropologies of mobility and travel, the local–global nexus, discourses and imaginaries of Otherness, heritage interpretation, culture contacts and cosmopolitanism. He is the author of *Envisioning Eden: Mobilizing Imaginaries in Tourism and Beyond* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010).

daydreaming, et cetera—planning a vacation and going on holidays involve the human capacity to imagine or to enter into the imaginings of others. Some even argue that ''to remake the world imaginatively'' is ''our most specifically human mission'' (Brann, 1991, p. 774). The vernacular imaginings people rely on, from the most spectacular fantasies to the most mundane reveries, are usually not expressed in theoretical terms but in images and discourses. Imaginaries exist ''by virtue of representation or implicit understandings, even when they acquire immense institutional force; and they are the means by which individuals understand their identities and their place in the world'' (Gaonkar, 2002, p. 4). Shared imaginaries can be ''about other people, as with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European imagining of African peoples as cannibals. They can be about other places, as with the British colonial idea of 'the tropics' as steaming hot year round, disease ridden, and somewhat dangerous'' (J. Adams, 2004, p. 295).

Scholars from a wide array of disciplines have given attention to the imagination (Brann, 1991; Kearney, 1998; Strauss, 2006). The imaginary has been conceptualized, for instance, as a culture's ethos or a society's shared, unifying core conceptions (Castoriadis, 1987), a fantasy or illusion created in response to a psychological need (Lacan, 1977) and a cultural model or widely shared implicit cognitive schema (Anderson, 1991; Taylor, 2004). Most conceptualizations have been developed in the fields of continental philosophy (the phenomenological and hermeneutic legacies of Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Heidegger), psychoanalysis (including archetypal and transpersonal psychology), poststructuralism (especially Deleuze), the social sciences (Latour and the literature on enchantment), visual studies (Mitchell), analytical philosophy (the philosophy of mind and of aesthetics), and, increasingly, the intersection of these various approaches and the neurosciences (Roth, 2007). I conceptualize imaginaries as socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices. The imaginary is both a function of producing meanings and the product of this function (Ricoeur, 1994). Many imaginaries are structured by dichotomies, sometimes difficult to discern in practice, that represent the world in paradigmatically linked binominals: nature–culture, here–there, male–female, inside–outside, and local–global (cf. Barthes, 1972 and his concept of ''mythologies''; Durand, 1999).

Imaginaries are ''complex systems of presumption—patterns of forgetfulness and attentiveness—that enter subjective experience as the expectation that things will make sense generally (i.e., in terms not wholly idiosyncratic)'' (Vogler, 2002, p. 625). Although culturally shaped imaginaries influence collective behavior, they are not necessarily an acknowledged part of public discourse or coterminous with implicit or covert culture. They are unspoken schemas of interpretation, rather than explicit ideologies, building ''upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices'' (Gaonkar, 2002, p. 4). While imaginaries are alienating when they take on an institutional(ized) life of their own (e.g. in religion or politics),