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Korstanje, M.

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Book Reviews

Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism. Jacqueline Z. Wilson. (2008) Peter Lang Publishing, New York. Pp. 247, Hb. ISBN 978-14331-0279-0

Jacqueline Wilson has published an excellent book arising from her doctoral thesis entitled *Prison: Cultural memory and Dark Tourism*. The main argument throughout this work is that mass-media plays a pivotal role in shaping an all-encompassed image of the history that engenders a specific narrative. This discourse appeals to an elaborated historicity which not always coincides with real facts. Based on the case of prison museums in Australia, she contends that dark tourism is a form of merging past, present and future into a one-sided discourse. This was the case of Australia, a nation seen as a site of prisoners and convicts who were in disagreement with Victorian norms in England. The narratives of inmates have been mingled with other narratives giving a countless variety of other sources. She goes on to say

‘...my interest in the prisons as psychical entities, the study is not confined in its analytical scope to the sites themselves; nor it is any taxonomic sense a report on the content or modes of representation at the sites, although there is of course some reportage of that kind. Intrinsic to my over-all argument is an examination of certain broad historical and cultural aspects of the popular narratives that informs sites interpretations and which in turn influence tourist and general public perceptions of prison population in general, contemporary and historical’ (p. 3).

Anthropological questions of identity are debated jointly to theories of self derived from the phenomenology of Goffman and Bruner. By combining the auto-biography of self that characterizes the Bruner’s project with Goffmanian dramaturgical model, Wilson argues that ethnography and qualitative methods are efficient instruments to research these types of issues because they captivate the deep-seated meaning of events. Unless otherwise resolved, ethnography allows understanding the complex relationship between the world of ideas and practices as well as it provides with a clear diagnosis of the phenomena. Based on the idea that ethnography visualizes the gap between people say and often do, Wilson considers that the institutionalized history weaved several connections which only qualitative approaches can surely unravel.

From Auschwitz to Alcatraz, prisons have wakened up the admiration and attention of social imaginary in west. The reason why former prisons in Australia attracts international tourists seems to be related to the stories narrated surrounding such sites. These places alternate two relevant aspects: a) emotions enrooted in the need of fleeting encounter and b) the opportunity to digest trauma and disgusting events.

As the previous backdrop given, this work synthesizes a set of commotional personal narratives linked to the history of Australia as a land of prisons indentifying the social and psychological factors which determined to what a extent the prison is an consumable good for tourism and hospitality. International visitors have the ability to select, alternate and reject those narratives which do not match with their own psychological and cognitive profile. What in one point is permitted in other is hidden. It is important not to lose sight that

‘...a study of social history of a former prison necessarily takes in the interwoven complex of personal experiences that comprise the collective memory of the institutions. This network of individual memories is in large part of a function of the relations between all the various stakeholders of the site – those, that is, with some interest in shaping the stories told by, about and within the historical prison’ (p. 17).

The prison system is drawn to give an absolute sense of security breaking out the boundaries with environment. Wilson discovered that in some extent, prisons prioritize the routine as a form of creating certain hegemony over inmates, but at the same time they represent an esoteric object of consumption that is present in Mass-media, movies and the culture of entertainment as a whole. Two important dimensions are found by Wilson. Firstly, ‘The Architecture of detention’ refers to permanent elements as walls, corridors, and cells aimed to feature the prison as a violence-driven institution. Secondly, textual self expression as graffiti negotiates and speaks of the expectations and frustrations of inmates. The main findings of her research reveal that even if tourists are unfamiliar with the graffiti (uncharted site) it seems to be a practice which very well can be studied by sociology to expand the understanding how the day-to-day life in these places was. Following this, Wilson recognizes that methodologically she had serious limitations in her study because as woman there are some things that interviewees (ex prison officers) did not want to say.

Ultimately, the book presents a series of well-described chapters wherein Wilson delve into the interpretative response to question relating to thanatourism or dark tourism. This valuable investigation is recommended not only for sociologists and anthropologists concerned about black-tourism issues but also give insight view in respect to the convergence between security or need of protection and curiosity. Wilson brilliantly describes how the realm of inmates and officers is outlined in sharp contrast to the civility beyond the walls of prisons. As previously explained, societies can be understood whereby their taboos which are no other thing than aspects of life that are strongly repressed. For example, if we dwell on the hierarchy of inmates we will realize how people who had committed a crime against the weaker, are placed on the bottom of the hierarchy while the crimes against the stronger as the State or Police are overtly over-valorized. Starting from the premise that in ordinary life

stronger hunters eat the weaker prey, we find that in prison the weaker prey are protected. Should we understand the message in another direction?

Quite aside, this intriguing point suggests that social and cultural values in prisons bolster a dialogue in opposition to civility. What in one world is allowed in the other is forbidden and vice-versa. Understanding the life of prisons is an alternative but much profound way to understand our own world. Wilson does not clarify to what extent dark tourism as a commoditized form of consumption which helps seeing crime and prisons as something else than an industry of entertainment. Perhaps, this is the primary question that Wilson does not clearly focus with further detail on but implicitly invites to continue.

Reviewed by Maximiliano E. Korstanje, Department of Economics,
University of Palermo Argentina.

The Conquest of Holidays. Short History of tourism in Argentina. Elisa Pastoriza. (2011) Buenos Aires, Edhasa. P. 293, Hb. ISBN 978-987-628-115-7.

Arguably, there is no better way to understand tourism than by exploring its history and this is what made *The Conquest of Holidays* by Argentine historian Elisa Pastoriza, a promising read. The book is structured in seven chapters, where the idea of democratization is persistent everywhere. On the introductory chapters, one and two respectively, Pastoriza examines the evolution of seaside towns as well as the socio-economic changes that resulted in the adoption of tourism as primary economy. She calls the attention around the uncanny tension between familiarity and curiosity in the first summer resorts throughout the nineteenth century. Tourists, even in the inception of activity, experienced a strange fascination of risks but at the same time needed a secure infrastructure familiar enough not to feel vulnerable. These conditions were certainly adjusted and combined with other socio-economic forces which resulted in mass tourism, and a new belief in the therapeutic effects of the sea.

According to Pastoriza, this required a new way of thinking that replaced a widespread fear of the sea with a more benign view that equated hygienism as a cure for certain illnesses. She contends that Mar Del Plata was the epicentre that received thousands of travellers coming from other cities in quest of health, and that this in turn owed a lot to the outbreak of yellow fever in Buenos Aires and other important cities in nineteenth century. This outbreak pushed many porteños (Buenos Aires inhabitants) to peripheral zones in quest of protection and health and helped popularise the idea of the therapeutic effects of the sea. In turn this gave rise to inter-class conflict. Since in Argentina the beaches were a site for the higher classes, mass culture threatened that status and the established distinction between aristocracy and the working class.

The conquest of holidays was facilitated by means of technological advances as well as the creation of new legal frames which were actively promoted by trades unions in France. The process of democratization that brought significant benefits to working class, improved the infrastructural conditions for accessing to leisure and other practices across the world. To some extent, these policies engendered serious problems in the encounter between guests and hosts. While the classical rules of distinction that created the aristocratic identity were at stake, the new visitors adapted to the sites by emulating the customs of privileged groups.

Following this reasoning, the main thesis of this book seems to be that Argentina faced in all spheres of society a radical change that accelerated a long simmering process of democratization of leisure whose most important consequences facilitated the emergence of mass-tourism. The democratization transformed the holidays of higher-class in a widespread phenomenon practiced by other classes that we know as tourism.

Pastoriza also examines other secondary forms of tourism, beyond the beach and sun, to determine that trade unions were one of the most powerful actors that facilitated peoples' access to holidays. The historic evolution of how tourism developed in Argentina showed that the legitimacy of holidays stems from a situation where democracy and politics converged to create a new sense of entitlement to cultural entertainment. For Pastoriza, this seems to be one of the aspects other historians have ignored. She realizes that tourism not only is inextricably intertwined to leisure, but also takes different shapes and roots depending on socio-cultural context which organizes the territory and how agents internalize the narrative of their institutions.

This valuable book however, has some conceptual problems that need to be addressed. First and foremost, it is hard to accept tourism emerged just as a result of hygienism, and that prior to this, there was widespread cultural aversion to the sea. For example chronicles and testimonies compiled by Caius Suetonius demonstrated that wealthy Romans would practice what was in effect, a form of seaside tourism (Paoli 2007). Leisure and mobility have historically worked as mechanism to regulate the glitches created by the system, and there are many different forms of tourism.

It is also unfortunate that the book gives no further details about the idea of democratization, for to put in bluntly, democracy does not suppose an extension of rights, and easier access to certain goods or benefits may contribute to mass-consumption but in itself has nothing to do with democracy. We are not in conditions where we can refer to the democratization of tourism, rather what we see is the standardization of tourism.

As Dos Santos (2008) argues tourism was created as a prophylactic mechanism to prevent alcoholism and other social pathologies in England and not as a form of

entertainment. As a rite of passage, tourism seems to related to evasion and recreation.

Last but not least, there are some disputes among specialists concerning the yellow fever triggered south-to-north migration in Buenos Aires. Some newspapers of the period show that journalists focused on yellow fever as the primary reason for thousands of porteños abandon their homes, yet this was a myth. What generated the movement can be explained by gentrification theory and real-estate development. Sometimes, Pastoriza seems to over-valorise the role played by Mar Del Plata as a holiday city and the political process of Peronism in the evolution of tourism, while others assert that tourism corresponds with a more deep rooted practices that are present in all human groups. Aside from this, *The Conquest of Holidays* invites the reader to stimulating debate not only on the nature of tourism but also its connection with politics.

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