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Tourism and the Power of otherness: seductions of difference. Ed. by David Picard and Michael A. Di Giovine (2014)

Bristol: Channel View, xii+195 pp., ISBN: 9781845414153, p/bk, £24.95

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In essence, tourism is indeed all about the power of 'otherness', letting ourselves to be seduced by the 'different', which is why we go to explore those other places (i.e. the places of others). However, the classical, perhaps even age-old question in tourism studies remains: what counts as 'tourism': how far do we have to (or need to) go, for how long do we have to stay? Picard's and Di Giovine's edited collection of articles is another, but also a novel take on the questions about Self versus the Other, shedding light on the very core of tourism experience: what exactly does make people voluntarily go from one place to another, what it is that makes tourists tick, so to say? The aim of the book is to look into 'the power of different forms of Otherness to seduce and to disrupt, and eventually also to renew, the social and cosmological orders of "modern" culture and everyday life' (1). The first chapter of the book, a thorough introduction by the editors, gives us a comprehensive and elegant over- view of their position on the question of Self and The Other in tourism, taking us on a journey through history and philosophy, ending in the final (and ultimate) tourist destination, the tropical (hotel) garden of Eden. Otherness, in this book, is seen as a resource – weighed for its political, economic, social and cultural value. In tourism, contact with the Other becomes a lived experience, but it also becomes a commodity and the tension between these two, as well as negotiations to overcome it, are the main subjects explored in the chapters of the book from various angles.

The tourism and leisure sector's main goal is to provide its customers (the consumers, the guests) with a multitude of different experiences – this is how the 'experience economy', as phrased by Pine and Gilmore back in the end of 1990s, works. The tourist experience and practice, as we have seen from the vast body of literature on the topic, varies, as do the motivations that trigger getting them. The experiences are managed by the industry; customers are provided with unique and memorable experiences, something so different from everyday life that they are willing to pay for it. This book seeks to identify some of those seductions of difference that speak to people, the modern,

twenty-first-century tourist, looking for a tailor-made experience; it locates and pinpoints the types and forms of Otherness that the tourists are always looking for, whether it is distant in time or space or 'buried deep inside ourselves' (1).

The book is divided into three parts, each represented by three thematic chapters. Part I, 'Travels into a past golden age', offers us three very interesting empirical examples of the past, sometimes experienced by the tourists as more 'real' than reality itself: we are taken on a tour from the politics in the Catalan Pyrenees (Chapter 2) to hyper-real renderings of Portuguese history and heritage for display (Chapter 3) to imagined Eastern European rural idylls (Chapter 4). The second part, 'Tourism and Others in dialogue', explores contemporary negotiations of hosts and guests, showing how various tourism imaginaries are (re)created, lived and also taught (the last point being exemplified by Salazar's new account of training ('seducating') of the tour guides in Tanzania, a topic that is surprisingly under-discussed in the tourism literature). The third part, 'Travel, Other, and self-revelation', takes a look at searching for oneself and general meaning and engagement with the outside world, via encountering The Other.

Important topics that emerge in this book include nostalgia and poverty. In Chapter 4, Verschaeve and Wadle 'explore the tensions between the tour-istic projections of a technologically and historically "backward" post-socialist space and the aspirations of local populations to be "modern"' (5). In a similar manner, in Chapter 7, Sammells exposes the inner mechanisms of staging places for the tourist gaze in rural Bolivia, while trying 'simultaneously to domesticate and to commodify poverty – to regulate the lives of the poor, while using the markers of poverty to encourage money-making tourism that would supposedly lead to local economic development' (130). In trying to (re)introduce thatched roofs to the village of Tiwanaku, Sammells shows how the country's authorities plan to present the tourists a sanitized picturesque version of the past and how in catering to this supposed ethnographical tourist gaze (while demanding locals to learn how to cook French fries and hamburgers for the tourists) would create new realities and normalities in the village.

The German tourists' nostalgic Sehnsucht for the past as demonstrated by Verschaeve and Wadle represents a desire for the nostalgic rural time and place that will and can never be anymore. For German tourists, 'Masuren and Ostpreussen refer to a highly

poeticised space and time; a product of cultural memory, of German literature' (78); while for the Poles, the same region, Mazury, as it is today, does not signify the same ideas. Wadle describes her inability at times to even discuss with her Polish hosts the visited places since the Polish and German maps bear different place names of the Masuren/Mazury region. This eerily brings to mind China Miéville's novel *The City & the City* (2009) about two cities that, while being situated in the very same geographical space, are considered by its citizens as two completely different places. This aptly highlights the perceived otherness of rurality (and that of Eastern Europe) where nostalgia for the rural picturesque past is combined with the seductions of poverty and pre-modernity.

While the first two parts of the book deal with the seduction of otherness that comes from outside (that is mainly far in time and/or space), the third part of the book deals with the otherness inside the people. Chapter 10 takes a look at the 'journeys to the inner self', analysing the new-age travel practices concentrating on the example of contemporary neo-shamanism. Recent years have seen a rise in spiritual tourism which often combines elements of traditions of various origins, loosely related to new spirituality practices. In spiritual tourism, The Other is searched out in order to reconnect with one's Self which prompts Ghasarian to ask whether it's 'analytically relevant to consider this new dynamic as simply another form of tourism, or should we, rather, understand it as a real search for a better life by people not quite satisfied with what their culture of origin has to offer?' (176). Thus, in spiritual tourism the power of the Other lies in the prospect of exploring one's 'self' while travelling.

Tourism and the Power of Otherness is an insightful book, comprising a range of chapters that offer a very welcome variety both geographically and historically. The book effectively seduces, educates and seducates us into identifying and conceptualizing the various imaginaries and ideas of Otherness related to the fields of tourism, hospitality and mobilities.

References

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