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Destination Place-making through the Sensuous Stories of Travel Books

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Introduction

Literary places – destinations that attract tourists because of some connection to literature – are no longer accidents in history but social constructions, created, amplified, and promoted to attract visitors (Herbert, 2001). Past research has concentrated on fiction travel literature and/or travel writing (Bandyopadhyay *et al* 2008; Conrad-Gothrie, 2016; D’Hautesserre, 2011; Fawcett & Cormack, 2001; Jenkins, 2003; Lang, 2010; Osagie & Buzinde, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Squire, 1994; Towner, 1987; Reijnders, 2011; Yan & Santos, 2009) with some attention on non-fiction texts (e.g. Enoch & Grossman, 2010; Laing & Frost, 2012; Wilson *et al* (2009). Despite an awareness that literature influences tourism, the examination of travel-centred texts still awaits serious critical interest (Osagie & Buzinde, 2011; Ryan *et al*, 2009). Non-fiction travel texts, part memoir, autobiography and quest romance (Dann, 1999) have yet to be analyzed in terms of their contribution to destination place-making. Researchers should take into account the complex interactions between narrative characteristics, feelings of belonging and the experiences of place (Reijnders, 2011); autobiographical narratives have the ability to act as place-making tools (Rickly-Boyd, 2010). Both residents and tourists through their own stories co-create their tourist experience as well as contribute to place-making (Carter, Butler & Alderman, 2014; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2014). Tourists are active in place-making as co-producers and co-performers and impressions by outsiders play a vital role in shaping perceptions of place (Bachin, 2015; Everett, 2012). However, less is known about the individual and collective role of storytelling on place making through the sensuous geographies of travel books. Thus, this study examines the sensuous stories in travel books about Italy as one component of the destination place-making process.

Place-making through Sensuous Geographies

Place-making approaches are more organic, bottom-up community initiatives usually undertaken in an incremental manner often created through community members, volunteers, not-for-profit organizations and through tourists’ personal experiences (Lew, 2017). *Placemaking* describes government sponsored efforts to enliven the economic and cultural character of destinations; are deliberate and purposeful approaches that see themselves as benefitting tourists as well as locals (Lew, 2017). Scholars have explored various forms of tourism and of experience as place-making and placemaking (e.g. Alderman, Benjamin & Schneider, 2012, Bachin, 2015; Everett, 2012; Lew, 2017; Pink, 2008) but the examination of travel books as is worthy of more attention.

Place making is closely associated with ‘sense of place’ (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976). Our senses relate to one’s feelings of belonging and emotional and intimate connections to the physical environment (insiders) or more fleeting aesthetic appreciations of place (outsiders) (Relph, 1976). Our sensuous geographies are how we see, hear, smell, taste and touch the world through the mediation, the filter or lens, of our social milieu, the context within which we have become socialized, educated and familiarized (Rodaway, 1994). Hence, the analysis of travel writers’ stories of place through their travel books is both an individually and collectively shared experience of a destination. Tourists’ performative nature involves creating place stories (Rickly-Boyd, 2010) thereby travel writers act like ethnographers seeking to understand place while also making place at the same time (Everett, 2012). While stories and narratives have been acknowledged in the past to be important contributors to place making (Lou, 2010; Ruston, 2010; Stokes, Bauman & Bar, 2017), less attention has been paid to the non-fiction travel book.

Method

Twenty contemporary travel books about Italy (published after 1990) were selected as a purposeful sample representative of the authorship, style of writing, content, form and destinations visited in Italy. An interpretive paradigm was applied which is “sensitive to context” and achieves an empathetic understanding

of feelings and world views (Neuman, 2000). Hermeneutics is applied here as it pays more attention to qualitative approaches that go beyond the comfort and inheritances of positivism focusing on the value and place of 'messy texts' and 'locality/local knowledges' (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001). Hermeneutics draws upon two central tenets of qualitative research strategy: an emphasis on the point of view of the author of the text and sensitivity to context (Bryman, 2001). A researcher conducts "a reading" to discover meaning embedded in the text (Neuman, 2000). Qualitative latent content analysis acted as a passport to listening to the words of the text, and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words; it is an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data and a search for themes and concepts (Berg, 2008).

Results and Discussion

While some of the authors of these books have since become lifestyle migrants who travel to Italy for extended periods and may have purchased a second home (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; e.g. Mayes, 1996, Newby, 1994; Tucker, 2007), others would be defined as tourists (e.g. Cusk, 2009; Esposito, 2008; Gentile, 2007; Paolicelli, 2000). However, authors as lifestyle migrants often began their narratives while still considered tourists or in the initial stages of their first travel experiences in Italy (e.g. Doran, 2005; Mayes, 1006; Rogers & Gibb, 2009). Many of the narratives included descriptions of struggles with language, government bureaucracy, and Italian cultural norms (e.g. Gentile, 2007; Hawes, 2001; Mayes, 1996; Park, 2013). Feelings of insider/outsiderness connected travel writers to their perception of an authentic place, because they experienced challenges akin to being a local. Everyday struggles manifest as feelings of Outsiderness, but making it through these experiences made authors feel a deeper connection to Italy and thus more like an Insider (Relph, 1976). Richards (2017) argued that tourists want to 'live like a local' and also live the local creative life, learning about the ways in which communities deal creatively with the challenges they face.

Travel writers in this study described at length their sensuous experiences in place whether it was a rural landscape in Umbria or Tuscany or the hustle and bustle of streets in Naples or Rome (e.g. Doran, 2005; Mate, 2008; Paolicelli, 2000). Sensory knowledge is developed through the sociality of food practices, which are produced through the sharing of tastes, smells and embodied culinary practices (Walmsley, 2005). Travel writers' descriptions of food related to their sensuous geographies (Rodaway, 1994) through passionately described diatribes of the simplicity of ingredients and the naturalness and locality of the food and of sharing the experience with others (e.g. Esposito, 2008; Gilbert, 2006; Mayes, 1996; Rogers & Gibb, 2009; Shalleck & Munoz; 2007).

Travel writers also craved a desire to feel at home and to feel like they belong (e.g. Criswell, 2012; Mayes, 1996, Newby, 1994; Vannucci, 2012). Tuan (1977) explained that a sense of place is an emotional connection and belonging to a place but that rootedness implies longevity, having spent a lot of time there. Many travel writers, especially those with familial ties, also felt a deep sense of belonging and of home even if it was their first time traveling to Italy or they were only there for a short period of time (e.g. Cusk, 2009; Tucker, 2007; Vanucci, 2012).

Conclusion

Through latent content analysis and a hermeneutical approach, this study examined sensuous stories through travel books about Italy for their contribution to destination place-making. The tourist as travel writer embodies the role of a reflexive ethnographer in tune with place (Pink, 2008); the reader experiencing place alongside the writer co-creating the tourist experience. There is strong evidence for how we need to be more in tune with organic approaches to place making (e.g. Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Lew, 2017). However, destinations are often represented as idiosyncratic and extraordinary so as to make them attractive (Chen & Chen, 2017). Through the examination of these travel books, memorable experiences centre on the sensuous, mundane, and every day; those that acknowledge sense of place as being comprised

of notions of insiderness, outsidership, moments of intimate emotional connections, and at times challenges and struggle. Tourists and travel writers are active in place-making as co-producers and co-performers in a cyclical process of 'productive consumption' (Everett, 2012).

Tourists experiencing greater pleasure show an increased level of satisfaction and in turn more favourable behavioural intentions (Bigne & Andreu, 2004). As we read these narratives about sensuous connections with self, belonging and place in Italy, we want to have these experiences too. Authors of these travel books stressed pleasurable feelings not associated with being a tourist, per se, but of experiencing Italy like a local (Richards, 2017). Because of their deeply intimate stories, sensuous connections with place, detailed descriptions of tourist experiences, the travel book becomes a place-making and place marketing text. Acting like an extensively explained word of mouth recommendation, travel books are intrinsic and authentic to the traveler and are worthy of further interpretation by tourism practitioners. Friedman (2010) argues for place-making that focuses on spaces for encountering and gathering and making places that become everyone's job not just central government or tourism managers. Travel books, therefore, are an untapped tourism place-making resource for understanding tourists' sensuous stories and how places connect us with our senses instilling in us memorable experiences that remain deeply ingrained in our sense of Being (Heidegger, 1996).

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