Death Seekers as Diplomats of Thana Capitalism

Consumidores de Tragédias Como Embaixadores do Thana Capitalismo

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ABSTRACT

This essay review is not an applied research, nor ethnography conducted in dark tourism places, rather, it connotes with a conceptual debate respecting to the shifts in holiday-making process suffered recently. This marks the rise and expansion of a new facet of capitalism, Thana Capitalism, with a definite class, death-seekers who are prone to consume events, situations of pain and suffering to reinforce their own supremacy. Beyond the so-called interests or sensibility for the other, dark tourism practices hidden a perverse core which is unveiled in this discussion.

KEYWORDS

Tourism. Death Seekers. Capitalism. Thana Capitalism. Mobilities.

RESUMO

Este ensaio não trata de pesquisa aplicada ou de etnografia em locais de turismo 'dark', mas, sim, encaminha um debate conceitual sobre as mudanças nos processos recentes das viagens. Processos que marcam o surgimento e expansão de uma nova faceta do capitalismo, o Thana Capitalismo, que se caracteriza pela presença de uma classe de consumidores propensos a consumir eventos, locais e situações mórbidas ou situações de dor e sofrimento, para reforçar sua própria supremacia. Além dos interesses ou [in]sensibilidade para com o outro, as práticas obscuras do turismo escondem um núcleo perverso, revelado nesta discussão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Turismo. Consumidores de Tragédias. Capitalismo. Thana Capitalismo. Mobilidades.

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INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, in my fieldworks I have discovered the patterns of holiday-making, which means the ways people enjoy from their vacations changed. While our grand-parents travelled to paradisiacal sites to be in contact with nature and environment, now it mutated to new forms of consumption where death plays a leading role. Destinations of dark tourism as Auschwitz, or areas of total obliteration as New Orleans were preferably chosen by modern first world citizens to visit. Appreciations of this caliber led me to think that the growing of dark tourism as an emergent segment within leisure industries seems to be something more than a fashionable trend. This is the reason why I triggered the discussion on the ethical assumptions behind Dark Tourism.

At a closer look, *scourge of terrorism* conjoined to the attacks of World Trade Centre in 2001, started a new era, where states while devoting their resources to strengthen the homeland security, were unable to protect the integrity of their citizens. The shock, this event produced in Americans, resulted from two combined forces. The first and most important, terrorists used the available technologies in mobilities to perpetrate their attacks against civilian targets. If West considered tourism and mobilities the main expression of freedom, which is necessary for the evolution of a democratic nation, 9/11 showed the opposite. Supposedly, the strengths of America were perverted to be used as real weapons against the weaker citizens. Secondly, after this event the world of probabilities that has historically founded the society of risk, as it was formulated by sociologist as Beck or Giddens, sets the pace to a new facet of capitalism, where nobody feels safe anymore and anytime.

In other times, capitalism mutated in many forms which ranges from mercantilism to scale production. Mercantilism sets the pace to industrialism, and this latter force paved the ways for the rise of modern capitalism. After the accident of Chernobyl, sociologists devoted considerable efforts in criticizing the role played by technology in an ever-changing world. Always under the influence of Durkheim or Weber they envisaged that this new stage was alienatory for social fabric. Quite aside from this, sociology devoted considerable efforts to understand the world of risk as a precondition of social ties decline, even, as the founding parents; social scientists have woefully adopted a pejorative view of modernity which in some conditions affects their diagnosis. The hopes and dreams of Rational Westerners contemplated risks and threats as anomalies produced by the complex interactions of many agents and components within systems that should adapt to environment.

As the previous argument given, the society of risk, which was oriented to protection and risk perception passed to a more complex version of capitalism, where death is the main commodity. Unlike other times, people are not interested in be safe from frightening apocalyptic scenarios but in consuming the suffering of others. We live in times of Thana-Capitalism, which was based on the rise of a new class, *death seekers*. This is the point of entry in this discussion, addressed throughout this short essay review.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

Although disasters have historically captivated to global audience during years, in forms of cultural entertainment or movies (Quarantelli 1960; 1980; Bursma & Picou, 2008), no less true is that the advance of new millennium brought some unexpected problems respecting to terrorism, climate, environment and natural disasters, which were 'commoditized by the media' as a form of spectacle (Baudrillard, 1996; Skoll 2010; Korstanje 2015). In this respect, David Harvey pointed out that the rise of risks in the modern world resulted from the lack of trust, initiated after oil embargo in 1972-1973, a major event that provoked a radical shift in the means and sources of production of western economies (Harvey 1999), while Paul Virilio (2010) focused his attention to *the culture of fear* designed by financial elite to control work-force in democratic societies.

Since our quest for morbid spectacles comes from an unjust World, where capitalism has many responsibilities, it is important not to lose the sight that hopes of the theory of development not only diluted but failed to enhance the quality of life of peripheral nations (Korstanje 2015). This world of global asymmetries and inequalities are ideologically legitimized by many myths, but doubtless the main myth was Noah`s Ark. The story tells that God annoyed by the condition of humankind disposed a great flood to purge 'the evil'. In so doing, God revealed Noah his plans asking him to construct an ark selecting a couple by specie in order for the creation continues. The key factor of this myth is Selection, which was politically manipulated by United States and Capitalism to explain why 'social Darwinism' prevailed as main ideology. Americans, as the sons of wayward puritans, not only embrace 'the up-hill city doctrine', but consider that democracy evolves to a superior ladder if state promotes the necessary climate of 'competence', which leads towards the 'survival of the strongest'. This mind-set sheds light on the organization of labour replicating a culture of narcissism in almost all social institution.

Ideologically speaking, Noah´s story leads to 'a much process of social Darwinism', in which case capitalism was successfully reproduced worldwide. This reflects an asymmetrical system where a privileged group amasses almost 80% of produced wealth while the rest is pressed to live with limited resources. As the previous backdrop, the culture of disaster within modern capitalism aims at disorganizing the social ties. In so doing, the derived narcissism is adopted as the main cultural value of society. The question whether capitalism expanded faster than analysts precluded correspond with two key factors: *the needs of being different and the needs of protection.* The society of risk sets the pace to a new capitalism, [thana-capitalism], where the presence of death allows changes otherwise would not be feasible. In days of Thana Capitalism, the life is seen as a long trace where only one will be the winner. The death of others, which is present in Media, Journalism, TV Programs not only feel us special because we are in trace after all, but also remind how special we are. This is the reason why disasters captivate today to global audience. At the time, they exhibit the disgrace in Others news reinforce the supremacy of West over other cultures. Secondly, leisure practices as classic Sun and Sea tourism is changed to new forms where mass-disaster or mourning spaces are the main attraction. This new segment, known by some specialists as Thana-Tourism or Dark Tourism, recycles spaces of disasters or mass-death to be visually commoditized to international consumers who need to be close to Other´s death.

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EXISTENTIALISM AND THE FEAR TO DEATH

Doubtless, existentialism has made substantial contributions not only to the study of death, but also the rise of angst as an anticipatory force which constitutes the self. Far from what indicated scholastic philosophy, existentialists as F. Nietzsche (2003) or Heidegger (2002) theorized on the role of death as the platform for living. The question whether life and the ideals of aesthetics should be reconsidered was widely discussed in Frederic Nietzsche through his analysis of Penteo King Myth. Nietzsche attempts to show how the encounter between pathos and logos is inevitably inasmuch as the apollonian thinking resides in contradiction with natural order. The sense of tragedy, invested by human mind, corresponds with the sudden and unexpected irruption of pathos over logos.

Although culture and civilization devote considerable resources to construct a biased image of the world with the end of disciplining the individual desire, the dark side of tragedy emerges as a sublimated form of everything humans hate from nature. Rather, Heidegger´s reflections take another direction. He notes a conceptual division between fear and angst. While the former allows the subject to liberate everything what is threatening in its inner-world, angst keeps a diffuse horizon, which seems to be constitutive of self (dasein). At the time the self makes decision to exist, the figure of angst prevails. Heidegger emphasizes on the nature of angst as the neglect of existence, which operates from the individual freedom. While the self launches to unknown, the angst sadly reminds that what has been is no more and never shall be again. The impossibility of life rests in the fact once born we are dying, Heidegger adds.

In Jean Paul Sartre (1985), the problem of death alludes to self-determination, which means that the liberty to choose not only is limited by the alternatives of external world, but also determines the internal angst. Sartre introduces the idea that only those who make decisions are responsible of their acts and elected courses of actions, and therefore they feel angst. As a constant entwined in the possibility of rationalization, angst paradoxically is the lack of any justification while the responsibility for all my acts. To put this in bluntly, Sartre moves in consonance with Heidegger in regards to the intersection of decision and angst. This does not mean angst appears when I decide between chocolate and pudding but it transcends my existence giving me the possibility to select, a right which was philosophically negated to animals.

Following this discussion, in a seminal book entitled Mortality, Christopher Hitchens documents the notes, reflections and emotions of a person who has rejected a chemotherapy abandoning his self to an oesophageal cancer. In this respect, Hitchens said that it is preferably to be forward-looking in our existence respecting to death, than embracing the promises of modern medicine. The cosmology of sickness is radically altered when one make the decision to confront with 'unknown' (Hitchens 2012). After further examination, one might confirm that the interpellations historically conducted by existentialism in US and Europe were resulted from the rise and expansion of 'Darwinism'. Although Darwin has never thought his theory to be applied to human beings, his nephew Sir Francis Galton did it. Indeed, Galton envisaged an all-encompassing model to explain the evolution and restrictions of human races and ethnical groups.

Originally enrooted in US, social Darwinism exhibits the corollary of existentialism in the sense that both neglected the existence of divinity. While existentialists alluded to 'nothingness' to explain the existence of 'humanity', social Darwinists signalled to biologic evolution which offered an alternative to the question of adaptation. Whether some races were backwardly relegated to peripheral positions, others pivoted a set of different institutions and technological breakthroughs that led to a much complex and pungent civilization. In this respect, Darwinism held the polemic thesis that Anglo-Saxons as a superior (more evolved) race over others. Darwinism not only interpelated Catholic Church as interlocutor of God, but paved the ways for the expansion of secularization in all capitalist societies (Korstanje 2016).

THE ROOTS OF DARK TOURISM

Recently, some specialists called the attention to a new practice in tourism field, where death played a vital role as the main criterion of attractiveness. For some voices, dark tourism expresses a sadist nature, exploited by capitalist states to vulnerates the rights of minorities (Koch 2005), whereas for others it represents an anthropological attachment to death, very present in secularized societies (Lennon & Folley, 2000; Miles, 2002). What is clear, dark tourism connoting territories where mass-death or suffering have determined the identity of a community (Poria, 2007; Chauhan & Khanna, 2009). In this token, Stone & Sharpley (2008) warn on the needs of defining dark tourism form other similar issues. The curiosity or fascination of death seems to be one of the aspects that define Thana-Tourism, or dark tourism. But it is important not to lose the sight how these experiences are framed under shared values that tightens the social bondage (Stone & Sharpley, 2008).

Phillip Stone, an authorative voice in the study of dark sites, argues convincingly that the issue can be understood as a human attempt to interpret the proper life through the others`s death (Stone 2012). In respective to this, Raine devoted considerable time to validate Stone´s hypothesis to empirical fieldwork. She contends that the fascination for death may be operationalized in variables which range from lightest to darkest spectrum. Visitors take diverse attitudes to dark tourism sites (Raine, 2013).

Exhibiting a great mourning, these sites are economically exploited to give a spectacle to visitors, which sometimes is far from the real reasons of disaster. This is the main ethical point discussed by detractors of dark tourism, who understand that the intersection of death and media, are conducive to a much deeper logic of exploitation in hands of few capital owners. However, under some circumstances, dark tourism serves as a mechanism of resilience for society to recover in post disaster crises (Korstanje, 2015; Tarlow & Korstanje 2013; Tzanelli 2014a, 2014b).

In earlier approaches, Korstanje & Ivanov (2012) delineated the ethical borders of dark tourism, as a derived institution from natural resilience, which means the capacity of community to overcome disasters and adversity. Any disaster or trauma not only gives a lesson to survivors and their community, but also re-structures the politics of community. The function of dark tourism consists in situating death within the human understanding of past, present and future. Death generates substantial changes in the life of survivors. The

community, which faced disasters or extreme pain, runs serious risk of disintegration, unless a much profound sentiment of pride is developed. To be united, the society alludes to find reasons that explain the disaster. Dark tourism is conducive to that end.

In this token, L. White and E. Frew (2013) edit a book formed by 19 good investigations which are very difficult to discuss in a limited manuscript like this, but all them are aimed at the following axiom. Dark tourism sites are politically designed to express a message to community. Victims and their families not only have diverse ways of negotiating that message but also by appropriating an interpretation of social trauma. Dark tourism alludes to a psychological need of figuring one death by imagining the other´s death. Nonetheless, the myopia of scholars to understand dark tourism rests on two primary aspects. There are no clear boundaries or indicators to mark a unified site of memory which cannot be subject to political struggle. Secondly, starting from the premise heritage depends on the political interests, sometimes the national discourse around dark sites are not accepted one side of community.

In perspective, Sather Wagstaff (2011) presents an original thesis based on her auto-ethnography in the ground-zero of New York. Dark tourism sites wake up sentiment of loss and mourning. The problem rests in the way we define that loss. What is dark tourism? And how it can be defined?. The self mediates between its memory and future by the introduction of reminder. Dark tourism shrine is a form of reminding a paining event. The appearance of death is not only irreversible, but also inevitable. Visitors are needed to feel what other felt, though those emotions are unauthentic. From Hiroshima to World Trade Centre, she acknowledges that disasters should tell a story that helps control the trauma or sense of loss. The solidarity conferred to US by the terrorist attack to New York was a clear example of how people are united in context of uncertainty.

Death has the function to strengthen the social bond. Some peripheral nations which are unfamiliar with the American way conferred their trust to U.S because 9/11 fabricated shared experiences to other states which can experience a similar situation in the future. To what an extent, the discourse never reveals the cause of events, nor its social conjuncture. It is not surprisingly that tourists visit sites without knowing the real history; they are in part alienated by the heritage. By introducing the human suffering, dark tourism breaks the influence of ideology. Rather dark tourism, heritage imposes a one-sided argument created externally to dissuade consumers to adopt governmental policies otherwise would be rejected. Heritage often follows to politics roots. The pain is the only way of understanding the other. It enables our natural capacity toward empathy.

Methodologically speaking, dark tourism research has some caveats, which merits to be discussed. Many of the observations that guided the specialized literature such as 'dark tourism equals to heritage', or even 'dark tourism consumers look to interpret their own lives', come from interviews, questionaries' or other informal insights which obscure more than clarify. This pays little attention to the fact sometimes, we, humans, lie to protect our interests or simply remain unfamiliar with our emotions. It creates a paradoxical situation because fieldworkers ask to visitors taking their answer as the only valid source of truth. The current-used methods in dark tourism fields obscures more than they clarify since they not combined

with other qualitative forms, which obviously leads to misunderstanding and saturated outcomes (Korstanje, 2014a; 2014b). Besides, they are unable to study the metha-narratives or the ideological discourses of issues which are produced by capital owners. Here is the gap this essay review tries to fulfill. Last but not least, one of the main conceptual limitations dark tourism literature ignored was the crystallization of a new capitalism, where consuming-while-visiting dark sites were only an indicator among many others.

THANA-CAPITALISM AND THE RISE OF DEATH SEEKERS

The term *thana-capitalism* comes from thanaptosis that was coined by Willian Cullen Bryant (1948) to describe a state of nostalgia to see life through the eyes of death. It signalled to the needs of recycling life through death and vice-versa. In other terms, we are not born to live, because we are dying while growing. This neologism comes from the word *Thanatos* (Greek) which means death. In this token, modernity and death seems to be inextricably intertwined. In this vein, Phillipe Aries calls the attention to the fact that in Middle Ages peasants were subject to countless dangers and real death was just around the corner. With the expansion of life expectancy, modern citizens expanded their hopes to live but undomesticated the death producing a paradoxical situation. Effects of disaster or mass-death will resonate in modern capitalist society higher than in medieval times (Aries, 2013).

By commoditizing death like poverty corresponds with a political barrier to exclude some groups declared as 'undesired'. Tourists not only are far to be emotionally closer to tragedies, rather they want to reinforce their special aura of superiority to show themselves they live in the best of feasible worlds. Interesting studies evinces how other parallel forms of tourism consumption as slumming keep some commonalities with thana-tourism. If fact, what these new segments look seems to be consuming the Others` pain (Reijinders, 2009; Freire Medeiros, 2014; Tzanelli, 2015; 2016). In fact, as Tzanelli (2016) puts it, Thana-tourism and slum-tourism are inextricably intertwined since both are efforts to re-interpret the pastime according to the needs of financial elite, which do not make responsible for the arbitrariness of colonization process.

The aura of special travellers, very important persons dotted of higher mobility is reinforced to gaze 'others had not the same luck'. It is interesting to discuss to what extent capitalism, even in these modern times, encouraged the mobilities of few, constrained the work-force to immobility. Quite aside from this initial debate, scholars interested in dark tourism issues agree that visitors are aimed at experiencing new sensation, or are in quest of novel experiences, where the 'Death of Others' serves to shed light on their own lives (Seaton 1996; Lennon & Foley, 1999).

Undoubtedly, we witness an intersection of disaster and media consumption, a trend which crystalized after 9/11 and the mythical coverage of CNN. Capitalism signals to the constructions of allegories containing death prompting a radical rupture of self with others. Whenever we see ourselves as special, put others of different condition asunder. In a context of turbulences, the imposition of such a discourse is conducive to the weakening of social fabric. Thematising disasters by dark-tourism consumption patterns, entails higher costs the

disaster repeats in a near future. The political intervention in these sites covers the real reasons behind the event, which are radically altered to protect the interests of status quo.

The political and economic powers erect monuments to symbolize sudden mass-death or trauma-spaces so that society reminds a lesson, which allegory contains a biased or galvanized explanation of what happened. Though at some extent, community needs to produces these allegories to be kept in warning, the likelihoods the same disaster takes hit again seems to be a question of time (Korstanje 2014). As the previous argument given, Thana-Capitalism offers death (of others) as a Spectacle not only revitalizes the daily frustrations, but enhances a harmed ego. Visiting spaces of disasters during holidays, or watching news on terrorist attacks at home, all represents part of the same issue: *the advent of new class death seekers.*

To put this in other terms, we passed from a society that prioritized the collective protection, to a new stage where 'Others` pain' is used as an instrument of self-gratification. The concept of risk as the main value of modern capitalism as it was imagined by Beck sets the pace to death.

As discussed, Death seeker, the new class in Thana-capitalism, encompasses similarly-framed indicators. Though originally interested by heritage they have a superfluous knowledge of the past, without or any real compromise by the Others, as charitable organizations show. Death seekers are visually attracted by suffering always it does not comprise further commitment with pours. Unlike those persons who are involved in real battle against poverty such as social workers, death-seekers use the others to reinforce their sense of superiority. Captivated by what is transmitted in the media, they select the networks according to their individual needs, framing relations according to their desires. Educated to be winners, they feel special or exceptional in many angles and think the life is the place to show their skills. Since their gratification rests on the fact they are the only chosen by God to shed light on how the life should be lived, they do not hesitate to struggle against what is labeled as the evilness.

Death-seekers as in this emergent class was baptized in this essay-review corresponds with a new group more prone to consume death, in many cases through visual and virtual high-technology. If we can detach their psychological profile in relevant points, the following scheme may illustrate,

- Death-seekers are lovely prone to discuss about events that do not involve them directly, as the war in Middle East, or the news in 60 minutes. However, in rare occasions this crystalizes in real help for others.

- Death seekers only embrace heritage to understand this time is the best of the possible realms.

- This group appeals to claim how bad the world is, only to highlight their wellness or their particular situation. News on crimes, disasters, and sad events are used as a pretext to tell others how happy they are.

- They behave in an instrumental way, using people as means for achieving their goals. No genuine commitments with others are found.

- Serious problems to understand the otherness.

- Sites of mass-death, disaster or suffering (Thana-Tourism) are often selected as the primary destinations for visiting in holidays.

- Death seekers support social Darwinism where the survival of strongest is the main cultural value.

- Consuming others suffering they feel special, superior or more important.

- They do not take part of charitable organizations or political militancy, unless by what they visually consumed through TV.

- Although they boast how altruist they are, they follow individual and instrumental ends in their life. It opens the doors to a dislocation between what they say and what they really do.

- Excessive endorsement to democracy which became Western civilization as a superior ladder in the process of evolution.

- Psychologically they feel problems can be solved only speaking. They are not pragmatist persons. Narcissism is enrooted in the psychological trait of death seekers.

- Frightful personalities that think the world is a dangerous place.

- Death seekers entertain witnessing how others struggle. Very open to mythical conflagrations as goodness against evilness, they symbolically associate death to 'condemnation'. For them, the correct persons should not die.

- Pathological problems to understand death.

Though this scheme is not limited to all profiles of visitors in dark tourism shrines, it reflects the main indicators we have found in our empirical fieldworks. In this issue, a much deeper discussion should be placed in next years. Quite aside from this, regardless the political affiliation, this emergent class, embraces 'counterfeits politics or theories of conspiracy' so that their idealized image of their civilization not to be affected. To put this in bluntly, dark seekers often consider 9/11 was no other thing than the support of Bush`s administration to conquest the 'world'. This viewpoint ignores most likely the attack was perpetrated following a concatenation of mistakes or omissions, more prone to negligence or the lack of efficiency than conspirational plots. For death seekers, it is better to feel United States promotes 'terrorism', to assume, 'terrorism turns out of control for all states'. At the bottom, they death seekers are afraid of contingency and death.

Nowadays, the climate of violence imposed by ISIS in Middle East as well as the media coverage on the resulted attacks in central urban cities as Paris, Nice, Orlando, Berlin, and Brussels reveal two important aspects of Thana-capitalism. On one hand, there is a manifest impossibility for state to prevent terrorism even in the soils of central nations, while on another, terrorism provides with the necessary oxygen to perpetuate the cultural background of Thana-Capitalism, a new stage of production where 'witnessing others´ death' situated very well as a form of reputation and distinction.

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In their book *Gazing at Death,* Korstanje and Handayani (2016) discuss to what extent the contemplation of death, as it has been imagined by existentialists, has been replaced by a new more radical form of relation where the others´ disgrace situates the only way one might be happy. Authors understand that the multiplication of dark tourism sites which reminds different events oscillating from natural disasters to concentration camps evinces the changes of relations in a wider sphere. Evidently, the apollonian sense of beautiness that characterized classic experiences in tourist destinations set the pace to more morbid forms. Today, the possibility of gazing at death opened the doors between those who have and have-nots, victims and survivors. Far from being solved, the current debate sparked attention of many cultural analysts and needs further attention in the years to come. Dark tourism should be understood as a 'mechanism' so that society disciplines death in a moment where a radicalized spirit of secularization has tainted all institutions.

CONCLUSION

All these discussed indicators set the pace to a more complex scenario, where economy turns chaotic (unpredictable after financial stock and market crisis in 2008) where the atomized demands become in a competence of all against all (in the Hobbesian terms). The Darwinist allegory of the survival of strongest can be found as the main culture value of Thana-Capitalism in a way that is captivated by cultural entertainment industries and cinema. Films as Hunger Games portray an apocalyptic future where the elite govern with iron rule different colonies. A wealthy capitol which is geographically situated in Rocky Mountain serves as an exemplary centre, a hot-spot of consumption and hedonism where the spectacle prevails. The oppressed colonies are rushed to send their warriors who will struggle with others to death, in a bloody game that keeps people exciting. Although all participants work hard to enhance their skills, only one will reach the glory. The same can be observed in realities as Big Brother, where participants neglect the probabilities to fail simply because they over-valorise their own strongholds. This exactly seems to be what engages citizens to compete with others to survive, to show 'they are worth of survive'. In sum, the *sentiment of exceptionality* triggered by these types of ideological spectacles disorganizes the social trust.

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