

## **Starting from Within: Memory Work as Critical Tourism Pedagogy**

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Abstract:

This paper outlines our collective analyses of our personal travel memories in order to make a broader argument about the merit of using memory-work for critical tourism pedagogy.

Following Small's groundbreaking paper (1999) we chose this qualitative approach because it centres the discussion and critical inquiry within the context of meaningful, personal experiences. Further, it provides an opportunity to add to what Wilson (2010) has modeled with regard to critical tourism pedagogy. One graduate student and one professor engaged in a critical evaluation of past memories of travel experiences. To prepare, we each wrote a story about: (a) a travel experience that involved personal growth and (b) a travel experience that led to disappointment. We then met to discuss these memories and to engage in a dialogue about how these memories and experiences were constructed and how they might be used to open up our critical reflections of tourism more broadly. While memory-work has grown in influence in tourism studies (Johnston 2001; Onyx & Small 2001; Small 1999; Small, Ateljevic, Harris & Wilson 2007; Tung & Ritchie, 2011), we argue that this can also be a useful pedagogical tool for teaching tourism in the classroom; not just for engendering discussion about key concepts in our field but also for deepening our understanding of ourselves and one another as learners and travelers.

## **Introduction**

When we teach and think about tourism experiences, our training as tourism scholars invites a reflexive, critical assessment. However, might additional insight come from an effort to use our own, personal travel experiences and memories as a way to light that critical candle? As Wilson (2010) and others have argued, igniting the critical spirit through critically-reflective practice in our teaching is a daunting yet important task; scholars such as Sharpe (2011) have argued for leading by example and her effort to outline her own process of *conscientization* for her students is instructive.

This paper has four sections. In the first section, we present a very brief review of relevant literature and look in particular at: (1) the growing area of tourism pedagogy and (2) the landscape of memory-work research as it pertains to tourism studies. As the purpose of our project was to develop a sort of pilot approach to inject our tourism teaching with critical-reflexivity through memory-work, these are vital components for our discussion. Next, we outline the approach we took and why. Third, we present a discussion of the key thematic findings and add depth to the findings by including excerpts from the memories we wrote. Last, we build on the findings, and this small study, to identify opportunities to use this memory-work pedagogy in the tourism classroom. We note that while the discussion of the memories can provide a personal grounding in, and critical reflection of, key concepts relevant to the study of tourism, we may also have the opportunity for transformation through enhanced self-awareness and mutual understanding.

## **Review of literature**

### *Tourism pedagogy and critically-reflective practice*

Long-underscoring the discussion of tourism pedagogy is the debate regarding its 'instrumental' (or vocational) role in training students to meet the needs of industry, as

compared to the broader 'educational' role of tourism studies (see for example, Airey & Tribe 2005; Stergiou, Airey & Riley 2008; Tribe 2002). Tribe is key among those leading the way in provoking a discussion about the nature of tourism education. As he made clear in 2002:

It may be thought that the purposes of a vocational curriculum are self-evidently to equip graduates to operate in their chosen career. But this overlooks an important feature of big industries like tourism. In addition to generating consumer satisfaction, employment, and wealth, these industries leave their imprint on the world in other ways, by forging a distinctive industrial landscape and causing profound change in patterns of social and economic relationships. Thus, a special burden is placed on education, because as economic prosperity and consumer satisfaction are generated from the development of tourism, changes to people and place also occur (p. 339).

Even more provocatively, Ayikoru, Tribe and Airey (2009) challenged not only the instrumental tone of much tourism education but shed light on the ideological (and market) forces shaping the development of tourism curriculum, at least in the English context. Given the tensions surrounding the nature of tourism curriculum, education and pedagogy, as well as the role of tourism development as a predominant social, ecological, economic and political force, critically-reflexive approaches to tourism pedagogy are warranted. Yet, and as Wilson (2010, p.4) asks: how do we translate critical pedagogy and theory into the classroom? The next section provides a brief introduction to memory-work, the methodological approach we used in a small effort to be part of the broader response to this vital question.

### *Memory-work*

Memory-work has gained considerable attention as an appropriate method to study the socially-constructed and culturally-embedded nature of phenomena (Thomsen & Hansen 2009).

As Tung and Ritchie (2011) argued, this collaborative, qualitative approach emphasizes the active participation of the individuals, minimizes the barriers between the researcher and the researched, and has the potential to eliminate the hierarchy between researcher and participant. Therefore, the researcher becomes a member of the research group and participants come to be co-researchers. The result is a collective reflection, examination, and interpretation of memories (Crawford et al. 1992). In their work on memory and pedagogy, Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell and Pillay (2012, p. 1) argue the potential of memory-work is immense:

Memory-work is underpinned by the premise that memories play a fundamental role in current individual and collective patterns of thought and action and that we can consciously work with memory to become aware of and intervene creatively in these patterns (Pithouse 2007). In particular, memory-work is aimed at revealing and gaining insight into the social meanings of and influences on memory.

Despite the merits of memory-work, some scholars have expressed concerns about its shortcomings. While admittedly not a concern shared by most qualitative researchers, there are nonetheless limits to generalizability since participant memories are constructed within a specific social context (Small 1999). The procedure of memory-work requires a considerable amount of time and commitment on the part of participants as they are required to write about their memories over-and-above a simple, basic description and then elaborate on them (Small 1999). Despite these criticisms, and as is shown below, memory-work has the potential to play an important role in helping to bring to light complex issues important to tourism research (and development) and to ground the experience of learning about tourism in the learners' experiences and critical reflections.

Memory-work grew out of feminism and has long been recognised as a way to honour and privilege the voices and experiences of women. Indeed, Small's first ground-breaking use of memory-work in tourism (1999) was developed with this primary goal in mind. However, as

feminism is not wholly limited to the study of women, memory-work, with its focus on social justice, also offers a methodological approach that can encourage an assessment of issues of power including patriarchy, as well as class, sexuality, and race. Feminist researchers, including those who use memory-work, are committed to challenging power and oppression and have led the way in terms of studying the issues of power and authority in research processes (Hesse-Biber 2007). Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell and Pillay (2012, p. 1) are useful here again:

Hence, the fundamental purpose of memory-work is to facilitate a heightened consciousness of how social forces and practices, such as gender, race and class, affect human experiences and understandings and of how individuals and groups can take action in response to these social forces and practices in ways that can make a qualitative difference to the present and the future.

## **Methodology & Data Analysis**

Given the need for a broader array of critical approaches to teaching and studying tourism (Pritchard & Morgan 2007), and the potential of memory-work as a method for critical pedagogy, one doctoral student and one professor decided to develop a small, short, 'pilot' project. McLaren (1997) defined critical pedagogy as "a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation state" (p.1). Following the 'traditional' memory-work approach, we agreed to each craft two, detailed personal memory stories about: (a) a travel experience that involved personal growth and (b) a travel experience that led to disappointment. We each wrote in as much detail as possible and used pseudonyms, at least during the writing process, to discourage interpretation during the writing. We then met a first time to read our stories aloud and to begin the process of discussion. During this first meeting, we identified what we thought were key themes that were both relevant to the study of tourism and to our stories, if for different

reasons. At that time, we considered knowledge, expectations, power, and authenticity. This session was audio-taped and re-played independently in order to develop additional insights.

We decided to meet again to deepen our discussion and critical-reflection. This second meeting focused initially on the opportunity to discuss how the memories we had shared gave both a personal flavour and key insights into what we realized was an overarching theme of expectations, but which had dimensions related to mindfulness, authenticity, and trust. However and perhaps more importantly, this second discussion also served to alert us to the challenges and opportunities presented when using memory-work in this context. We realized that the cultural foundations shaping both the nature of the experiences as well as the expectations shaping those experiences, needed to be explored more deeply in order to have the memory 'make sense' to both parties. Further, while we are both women and about 12 years apart in age our life trajectories and cultural upbringing have been very different. [First author] is a non-white Iranian student and [second author] is a white Canadian professor. Thus, we came to realize that our assumptions about the nature of the memories (i.e., why was there personal growth in this context? What was the nature of the disappointment?) needed much more attention. In particular, issues of ethnicity, language and especially cultural background came to light. What we ultimately realized, as is discussed in more depth below, is the underlying cultural context of the travel memories required more critical reflection in order to be tools for the collective study of tourism.

## **Discussion**

In order to draw attention to both elements of the findings that came from this pilot exercise, the discussion that follows first illustrates the extent to which sharing our memories allowed for a deeper and more personal engagement with key issues relevant to the study of tourism (i.e., expectations). We then briefly discuss the 'other' kinds of insights gleaned from

this exercise as we speak directly to the extent to which we were able to gain a fuller understanding of ourselves and one another as socially-constructed learners and travelers.

### Expectations

As Akama and Kieti (2003) suggested, tourist expectations might be influenced by the following: tourism advertisements, commercials, brochures, mass media and information from third parties such as tour operators, family and friends who have told tourists stories about their experiences at the destination. Expectations were key elements of each of the four stories we shared. For example, for [First Author], a chance to visit Tajikistan with a professor brought on a variety of thoughts and concerns about a trip into the unknown.

*She was thinking to herself whether it was a wise decision to go on this trip...She was going to be the youngest amongst all and being a second year undergraduate student, she did not have much to add to the negotiation to finalize the student exchange program between ATU and Dushanbe University! That was one of her professor's suggestions since she helped him with one of his projects. She thought it was nice of him but she did not want to go. However, it was probably too late to think about it! They were already on the airplane waiting to fly to Tajikistan!*

In [Second author]'s story all the preparation and planning for her trip to East Africa created a sense of what the experience would be like and her own role in constructing that experience:

*"We did it" she thought to herself. All the planning and arranging, taking a leave from school, arguing with her mother about the dangers, giving up her room in the house with her best friends, buying an open-ended ticket to Nairobi... "We did it" she thought again. She told people she was going "to Africa" and here she*

*was. The monstrous, bright blue overland truck was filled with 10 other bodies – most of them loud Australians who seemed unconcerned about their surroundings but she didn't care. She'd studied African Political Economy, dreamed of becoming a development worker and now here she was. She felt pride in her own accomplishments and bravery.*

As we continued to reflect on this notion of expectations, we realised that at least for us through the memories we chose to share, the broader theme of expectations had a number of important dimensions, namely, a sense of mindfulness, authenticity and trust. We discuss each briefly below.

*i. Mindfulness*

As Langer (1993) argued, mindfulness is “a state of mind that results from drawing novel distinctions, examining information from new perspectives, and being sensitive to context...[recognizing] that there is not a single optimal perspective, but many possible perspectives on the same situation” (p.44). Mindfulness gives individuals power over their behaviours especially in situations where they feel there is an opportunity to learn (Langer & Piper 1988). Moscardo (1997) built on the idea of mindfulness in her effort to broaden tourism education and to encourage students learning to be managers to challenge their preconceived ideas tourism and tourists (see also Tribe 2002). For our memories, we each described an attempt to engage in this kind of mindfulness, often in spite of those around us.

In her story of the trip to Tajikistan, [First Author] described trying to prepare and to be mindful during travel despite the false information she received in the airport prior to her trip.

*She remembered her conversation with the Ambassador's wife in the waiting lounge...after asking [First author] too many questions about why the group is*

*interested in visiting Tajikistan; she looked around cautiously, and whispered in her ear: "They are poor people that do not have great values....I mean they don't mind stealing from you! Just thought you should know! Be very careful during your stay!"*

*As soon as the plane took off, [First author] started to feel insecure not knowing where she was heading to. She did her best to find useful travel information but she could not find any reliable sources. On the other hand, she was excited and curious to visit a country that once was a part of the Soviet Union, a country that experienced civil war for five years after its independence.*

## *ii. Authenticity*

The quest towards understanding authentic experiences started with Boorstin (1964). He first discussed the ongoing loss of 'real' travel due to the growth of mass tourism and tourists' desires for pseudo-events. Later, MacCannell (1973) argued that tourists cannot be easily satisfied with pseudo-events but they are rather a "search for authenticity of experiences" (p. 589). Cohen (1979) took a different approach to study the tourism experience using a phenomenological perspective and explained that travel motivations do not fully describe the experience-seeking behaviours of tourists. He defined a tourism experience as the relationship between tourists and their world-view, which is dependent on the destination and the broader culture. Wang (1999) argued further that tourist experiences are not based on objects, but rather on the personal feelings involved in activities. This conceptualization shifted the study of authenticity from toured objects to authenticity as a function of the self (Kim & Jamal 2007).

As we shared our stories, we found a strong theme of authenticity as a function of the self or at least a sense of the authentic as it shaped our own expectations. Perhaps not surprisingly, this is particularly true for the stories we shared about disappointment. For

example, [Second author] remembered being disappointed and even annoyed, at least initially, at the behaviour of her co-travellers on the trip in East Africa; feeling they weren't as interested as she in experiencing the 'authentic' Africa.

*The truck rambled along outside of Nairobi for a while but [Second author] quickly got used to the jolts to her spine from the uneven, pot-holed-filled road when something else jarred her senses. Loud blaring music from cheap speakers – guitars and drums...“what is that?” she looked around in annoyance. “That’s Cold Chisel ...” said Billy, the young Australian male who was sitting beside her. I brought all their tapes!” [Second author] couldn’t believe it – what was this? This wasn’t right. How could people on this truck think it was OK to drive down the road blaring what – Australian rock music? In Kenya? She tried to shut out the sound by focusing her attention on the scenery out the window.*

[First author]’s memory of travel to Tajikistan also contains a sense of wanting to engage in an authentic encounter:

*She enjoyed dealing with Tajik people. They were welcoming people and were even more welcoming when they realized the group was coming from Iran. She heard the sentence “Iran is our big brother” from a lot of people during her stay. She loved to go to daily bazaars in between or after University meetings. She found the food to be tasty and the fruits to be organic. She was thinking about the Ambassador’s wife’s comments all throughout the trip. None of them were true!*

### *iii. Trust*

Trust is a belief or an intention that another party can be trusted (Chen & Barnes 2007). Trust plays a crucial role in decreasing social uncertainty and complexity (Sztompka, 1999) and

facilitates the social interactions (Eitzinger & Wiedemann 2008). Further, and this was an important component to the stories we shared, a tourist's perceived trust in the tour guide is important because as Moorman et al. point out, trust is, "the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman, Deshpande', & Zaltman, 1993 p. 82). If tourists perceive that the tour guide's performance is of high quality, they are more likely to have a higher degree of trust in the tour guide. [First author] shared a memory of how she and her school friends lost trust in their tour guide (also a school friend) during a trip to Turkey. In this excerpt, she recounts a conversation she had with her friend about the tour guide and their experience at a restaurant:

*"He took us to a restaurant that he claimed is his friend's. It was sixteen of us.... Hmmmm no! Fifteen of us since you were not there. But we only ordered eight meals because not everyone was hungry. The food was awful and the service was so disappointing! When we asked for the bill and wanted to pay, we realized he is not in the restaurant. He did not answer his cellphone either! Shawn looked around for him and finally found him in another restaurant a couple of blocks down the road!" [First author] sighed.*

Trust was also a vital dimension of expectations underlying [second author]'s story. After an exciting trip to Ireland with her mother, [second author] learned that the trusting and deep connection she thought she'd shared with the tour guide may not have been real at all. In this excerpt, [Second author] recounts a conversation with her mom about Leo, their tour guide:

*"Hi Mom" said [Second author], picking up the phone. "I just have to tell you." Her mom started, "It's about Leo" she said. She and her mom had been back from their trip to Ireland for a few weeks and Leo had been their tour guide. [Second author]*

*was curious, “oh yeah, what about him?” she asked. “Well, I just spoke with Nancy and she was on a tour with BACKSTAGE TOURS last week and she heard about Leo from her tour guide and I just have to tell you.” “Yes, tell me what?” She asked. “Well, it turns out he’s a real ladies man and he’s already left that lovely Canadian woman we met and he isn’t at all who he says he is. He’s not even from Northern Ireland.”*

During our discussion of these memories, we reflected not just on the vast literature surrounding the notion of expectations but also the very personal and culturally-determined ways we felt we’d had our expectations confronted and even changed, particularly in terms of mindfulness, authenticity and trust. We asked ourselves ‘why did I expect this?’ and found the answers to be intriguing not just in terms of relating to the relevant literature but also to one another. The next section describes this ‘finding’ briefly.

#### Transformative Learning (about the self and one another)

As noted above, along with the broad-ranging thematic discussion we shared, this small study about the use of the memory-work methodology allowed for some additional, critical insights about what shapes tourism experiences, memories and expectations. Further, and building on McLaren’s (1997) definition of critical pedagogy provided above, these new insights have begun to transform what was initially a rather traditional professor/student relationship as through this process, we have learned more about each other, shared ourselves and our vulnerabilities and are continuing to develop a better understanding of the influence of our very different cultural backgrounds.

For instance, during our second meeting, [First author] challenged [Second author] to really reflect on what she had shared about her trip to Tajikistan and to appreciate more deeply

the political and cultural elements of the relationship that existed between Iran and Tajikistan, as they shaped both her desire to travel to this country but also her concern about being a mindful traveler given what the Ambassador's wife had told her before their departure. [Second author] realized how at first she felt reluctance about sharing the stories about her trips to East Africa and Ireland, as it revealed how naïve she had been (e.g., a nice white Canadian girl who just wants to save the poor Africans and a student of tourism who had been ultimately 'duped' by the Irish tour guide). This exercise forced her to move out from behind the 'professor-knows-everything' disguise and to show her vulnerability. Further, it was during this second discussion that we realized not just how potent this memory-work methodology could be for teaching and learning about something so ultimately intimate as travel but also that it needs to be utilized thoughtfully and carefully and that participants need to feel they can share their thoughts, concerns and vulnerabilities in a supportive environment.

### **Conclusion & Opportunities for the Future**

One of the primary motivations for using the memory-work methodology is to draw attention to (and to challenge) the way social relations shape our thoughts and actions. As tourism, replete with enormous social, political, economic and environmental impacts, is one of the most forceful factors shaping our world, this methodology has undoubted potential. This paper has briefly recounted one small attempt to 'pilot' memory-work as a way for students of tourism to at least begin to unveil the way their expectations of the tourism experience are socially-constructed. Giving students the tools to think not just about tourism in an abstract, formalized way but to engage in a reflection on their own behaviours and to see that 'the instructor' or 'the professor' is also not immune may be a way to help us all develop our sense of ethics in the tourism context – as researchers, teachers and travelers.

In 2002, Tribe asked, “by what principles should the vocational tourism curriculum be ordered?” (p. 339). Our small project has suggested that students, if given a chance to ‘start from within’, may lead the way in terms of identifying upon which elements of tourism we can bring a critically-reflexive approach to bear. The results leave much food for thought and hint at the potential of this approach in the future.

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