



# Enlightening Tourism.

## A Pathmaking Journal



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## **BOOK REVIEW:**

*Heritage That Hurts, Tourists in the Memoryscapes of September 11*, by Joy Sather-Wagstaff, 2011, Walnut Creek, CA, Left Coast Press. ISBN 978-1-59874-544-3, \$34.95 (Paperpack), 243 pp. 38 illustrations.

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This is a remarkable book, and a very important one. It contains so much of value: It is a personal journey through a difficult and challenging project; it engages with the experience and loss of others in a way that never diminishes their pain or the impact of their stories; it is a vital and contemporary critique of existing literature and above all, it is a compelling and thorough piece of ethnographic research.

The focus of the research is the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. Now, unbelievably it seems, eleven years have passed, and the memory still feels raw, even for those of us not directly involved. The live television images are burnt on our individual and collective memory and, in a sense, we were all there when the towers collapsed. But of course, many people have memories built on closer experiences, of being there, surviving, witnessing, working, losing someone close, or just someone they knew. In this searing emotional maelstrom Sather-Wagstaff began her research. Using in-depth interviews, photographs and even graffiti and souvenirs, her goal was to identify the ways in which tourism, as it is organised and practiced, is central to the performance of

“commemorative heritage and historical sites and the marking of collective and individual historicities and identities” (page 66).

As a study within the field of tourism, or more specifically heritage tourism, the book might be positioned with a small number of others which explore the subject of dark or *thano*-tourism, and this literature is usefully examined by the author. But this is a bigger study than those that have preceded it. Readers might be familiar with Lennon and Foley’s (2000) definitive account, but this one adds a great deal and is marked by the quality of the ethnography. It also expresses the author’s avowed intention of hearing the voices of tourists rather than imputing motives on them and treating them as the willing dupes of those representative practices that define and ‘mark out’ objects as attractions in the sense that MacCannell (1999 [1976]) and others have suggested. Thus, as Sather-Wagstaff points out in her review of previous research, the important departure, following Edward Bruner, is to take tourism ‘seriously’ and to do this by: “Focusing on tourists as subjects, using ethnographic methods [to engender] critical and rich knowledge about the demand side-or rather as I present throughout this work, the construction, performance and consumption sides-of the tourist equation” (page 56).

This is the crux of the contribution made by this book, it animates an area of research methodology that is lacking in other, similar studies and it does so in a way that responds to new theoretical debates about agency, performance and tourists as active in the creation of touristic experience.

Nothing about this book is easy to contemplate, not least the very idea that tourism seemed to take root in the locality of the site fairly quickly after the event took place, and the author charts the obvious unease that was felt at what might be considered inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour. Yet she skilfully challenges such perspectives, making the point that much that has entered the sphere of heritage tourism has its background in acts of violence, warfare and death, and to assume that its only real significance lies beyond the consciousness of those who would visit to experience and commemorate such sites is to misrepresent and to misunderstand the way they are socially and culturally constructed.

Ultimately, the book examines tourist behaviour and response within a constructivist paradigm that the author clearly delineates, that is, one which is focused on the experiential and subjective views of tourists themselves, tourists that is, who are far more than the passive consumers of whatever is directed at them. The

result is a *memoryscape*, that is filled with experiential moments that go way beyond the representational paradigm that is normally associated with tourism and which engage 'performative activities that encompass all the senses, not just vision' (page 118). Places are thus marked in the memory, by acts of being and sensing and doing – leaving things like notes, mementos, flowers and taking photographs. This embodied and affective dimension to the study connects it with all that is new and interesting in the development of theory in heritage tourism, including non-representational theory, performativity, affect. It also recalls the ideas of David Crouch, for example, in locating the meaning of heritage in such encounters, as essentially emergent and constitutive in the agency of tourists themselves, in situ.

I can only hope to give a flavour of the book in a short review, but suffice to say that its importance goes beyond an account even of 9/11 with all its sustained social and cultural significance. Its methodology is convincing and should inspire others. It connects clearly and analytically with the body of relevant scholarship that precedes it, and boldly, with emerging theory in the field.

## References

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