‘BEEN THERE - DONE THAT’

IDENTITY AND THE OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE OF
YOUNG PAKEHA NEW ZEALANDERS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has become, in recent decades, a pertinent, though contentious area of social scientific inquiry. Anthropological and sociological studies have tended to favour an impact analysis approach, choosing ‘Third World’ ‘host’ communities as research sites. This study asserts that tourism research must also consider tourists. It calls for analysis of tourists’ practices from the perspectives of tourists. Specifically, it suggests that in examining tourists’ practices, researchers must consider the socio-cultural and historical contexts from which these practices are constructed.

The particular tourist practice with which this thesis is concerned is the Overseas Experience of young Pakeha New Zealanders. Interviews with a research cohort of twenty participants who undertook an Overseas Experience during the time from the late 1950s to the mid-1990s form the primary data. Interpretive analysis has been based on situating this data in the context of the literature of the anthropology and sociology of tourism, pilgrimage and ritual.

The thesis explores issues associated with identity and establishes in what sense Overseas Experience participants can be conceived as ‘tourists’. Rejecting approaches which attempt to define tourists and their practices according to type, this study favours the application of rite of passage in understanding the meaning of an Overseas Experience for Pakeha New Zealanders. Rite of passage lends a processual approach, which when complemented by an emic perspective, allows for a more holistic analysis of this tourist practice.

Drawing on the specificities of each participant’s Overseas Experience has enabled a detailed examination of what I have termed the ‘liminoid’ episodes of this tourist practice. While the participants recalled that they had ‘out of the ordinary’ experiences as part of their Overseas Experiences, the study concludes that an Overseas Experience for Pakeha New Zealanders is strongly connected to concerns associated with the home context. Tourists’ practices are shaped by perceptions about personal, cultural and national identity.

KEYWORDS: IDENTITY; OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE; PILGRIMAGE; RITE OF PASSAGE; TOURISM; TOURIST; TOURIST PRACTICES; TRAVELLER; TRAVEL.
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