Creating a Culture of Perpetual Fear and Crisis Through Mandatory Consumption

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Museum of Barbarism displays the bloody clothes and photos of displaced teeth of a Turkish family murdered in Cyprus in 1963. In-depth interviews show the Museum heightens tensions and sense of crisis between Turkish/Cypriots and Greek/Cypriots. Culture of fear and crisis is institutionalized through schools by way of mandatory consumption. Ethnic and national tensions exist amongst many people groups, whether it is the Chinese Nanjing population’s enduring aversion to the Japanese after the pillage of Nanjing in World War II (He 2007); the UK Independence Party’s distaste for immigrants entering the UK (Mason 2014), or the racial and religious tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East (Nasr 2006). However, the notion that these tensions are exacerbated by marketing and communication tools to create a culture of perpetual fear and crisis amongst a people group is not well understood in the marketing, consumption and tourism literatures.

In this research we look at the way in which the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC henceforth) purposefully target young citizens to socially engineer a culture of perpetual fear and loathing of non-Turkish Cypriots. We focus on way in which the TRNC forces Turkish Cypriot schoolchildren to visit the Museum of Barbarism and consume the dark heritage site. Dark tourism production exists in a variety of social, cultural, geographical, and political contexts (e.g. Veresiu 2012). This Museum acts as a tool for social engineering by creating, perpetuating and marketing a culture of separation, fear and crisis. We show that the Museum of Barbarism, as a site of early intervention, works to heighten national tensions and an enduring sense of crisis between people groups in Cyprus, hindering any efforts that may relieve tensions between the Turkish and non-Turkish Cypriot populations.

Fear as Heritage and the Marketing of War as a Fearful Idea

Fear lies between worry and dread, and terror and panic (Scrutton, 1986) and is embedded in a number of related concepts such as threat, danger, vulnerability, risk and violence (ibid). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, p.7) describes heritage as “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past,” as a specific way of interpreting and utilizing bygone times that links individuals with a larger collective. Furthermore, the idea of a war is promoted constantly as an event that must be prevented at all costs, which the status quo can purportedly achieve: War is linked to fear and the consent is manufactured (Herman and Chomsky 2010) through promoting the idea of “preventing future wars” by using the imagery of war daily. The twice daily broadcasting of army band songs, visuals from the war, and heavy featuring of the Cyprus conflict in the news on national television, in line with literature on how media images socially construct reality (e.g. Gamson et al. 1992), serves this purpose. Overall, the holders of political power use marketing to tell a particular story.

Museum as Vehicle for Governmentality

We argue, based on the informants’ accounts, that it is the quality of fear marketed as heritage that contributes to the museum’s position as a tool for governmentality. Bennett (1990) argues that the trajectory in museum’s development is the opposite of the emergence of the prison, the asylum, and the clinic: while the latter spaces look to divide and sequestre, the museum’s original aim was to mix and intermingle publics. We argue that here, this particular kind of dark museum’s disciplinary power and its status as a site of control does not arise from its ability to mix and intermingle, but from its ability to create a culture of perpetual crisis through facilitating the mandatory consumption of fear, and therefore, it divides and hinders the peace process on the macro level. This is sustained by way of the marketing of war through the media. We observe an institutionalized culture of crisis - the one that the USA and Europe is moving towards as exemplified by recent issues such as the Ebola outbreak, debates on measles vaccinations, and anticipation of terror attacks. Here, the culture of crisis is institutionalized through the marketing and mandatory consumption of the Museum of Barbarism.

Findings

The informants’ accounts focused on irrational fear, contested temple of truth, becoming desensitized to macabre imagery, avoiding museums, and feeling abused. Cultivating irrational fear through imagery and the positioning of the museum as the imposed holy grail of historical truth serve the purpose of governmentality, echoing Foucault (1991). This is achieved through active marketing of fear and fear of war. These, in turn, contribute to the cultivation of a culture of perpetual crisis. This governmentality is made possible by imposing the consumption of the Museum of Barbarism as a mandatory visit site of dark heritage and through marketing the idea of a war in conjunction. One informant explains:

“I went. Tiny shoes soaked in blood...I say no more...Not to a particular person, but I have developed a conscious-ness of danger that any human being can ordinarily con-tain because of that museum” (Derya, 40, news editor).

Having mandatorily seen the museum and having been subject to the marketing of fear and war, people develop certain preferences in their future consumption:

“I don’t like museums. If it is a museum about ancient things then ok or Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam was nice but when I think of museums I always remember the blood. I will not go out of my way to visit a museum.” (Yel-iz, 34, biologist)

Referring to BRTK, the national TV/ratio channel in the north of Cyprus which used to be one of the only 3 broadcasted channels until late 1990s, an informant suggests the consumables such as thrillers (movies or books) have no added value as such:

“why pay to see or read thrillers, we have seen it all on BRT. Guns, mass shootings, murders, it is all here” (Aren, 32, NGO)

Thus having mandatorily consumed the Museum of Barbarism figures in future consumption of objects/experiences featuring dark and macabre, and of museums. The next stage of this research will collect data from those few who have not visited the museum so as to further examine the differences in belief systems that might be attributable to the propaganda imposed by the political and the social system. Future interviews will further probe how the early manda-
tory consumption affect the students’ later consumption practices, especially of museums and other artefacts such as movies and books on conflicts.

REFERENCES