

Decay, dirt and backwardness: interpretations of the socialist heritage in Hungary by first and later generation Australian-Hungarians

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to contrast the ways in which first and later generation Australian-Hungarians respond to dirt and decay in the physical environment of Hungary during their journeys there. Given the growing trend of diaspora tourism, it is now more important than ever to consider tourism at the level of tourist subjectivity.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The material stems from multi-sited ethnographic research in two distinct periods.*

Findings – *In particular, the paper argues that, while the first generation relies on images internalized in the diaspora and the youngsters rely heavily on a popular Western backpacker discourse, they both share an orientalist view of Hungary.*

Originality/value – *This paper aims to energize greater discussion about, and debate over, the connectivity between diasporas and tourism. In attempting to merge the two disciplines, the meta-narratives that have influenced the different generations' perceptions are analyzed.*

Keywords *Orientalism, Eastern-Europe, Diaspora-tourism, Dirt, Second-generation migrants*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

The aim of the article is to energize greater discussion about, and debate over, the connectivity between diasporas and tourism. Given the growing trend of diaspora tourism, it is now more important than ever to consider tourism at the level of tourist subjectivity. In attempting to merge the two disciplines, in this comparative cross-generational case-study analysis, I look at the journeys of first and later generation Australian-Hungarians to Hungary. Following [Algan et al. \(2010\)](#) I define first-generation immigrants as individuals who were born abroad and whose parents were also born abroad and from the same country of origin. Second-generation immigrants are individuals who are born in Australia or immigrated at a very early age and whose parents are both born abroad. In particular, I compare the ways in which they respond to dirt and decay in the physical environment of Hungary during their stays there.

Although each individual has her/his own unique travel experience in Hungary and perceives it to be uniquely personal, individual travel narratives are embedded in and influenced by a number of historically, socially and culturally founded discourses, and made sense of within the social and political frameworks provided by each context. By identifying and unpacking their reaction toward the dirt, I attempt to investigate, which

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broader narrative structures underlie the accounts of their travel adventures. In particular, I compare the ways in which the older and younger generations interweave local public encounters with discourses of national belonging and various ideological positioning. While, based on the emerged data, I characterize first generation Australian-Hungarians as returnees; I refer to the younger generations as “diaspora backpackers” to indicate that their journeys are influenced by both diaspora life and contemporary youth culture.

While dirt has been a popular topic in cultural history (Stroud, 2003; Montgomery, 2012), in public health studies (Curtis, 2007), geography (Campkin and Cox, 2007; Cameron, 2010; Plummer and Tonts, 2013) and urban studies (Watt, 2007), however, in research on tourism the focus on dirt is scarce (see exception Wengel *et al.*, 2018). In this paper, I argue that various perceptions of dirt have theoretical power not only beyond being simply their own unique stories. Following Mary Douglas (1966), I suggest considering filth as a specific cultural repertoire, which is open for appropriation and re-signification in various ways and for various purposes. Douglas (1966, p. 2) suggests that dirt and decay are not simply bodily sensations experienced in a vacuum. Rather, they acquire a potent symbolic weight that is understood in relation to hopes, expectations, and disappointments that are situated within particular nationalist imaginaries, political projects, ideological prisms and cultural topoi. Participants’ comments about sensations of filth are revelatory in relation to their positioning apropos a “sanitized West” and a “filthy communist legacy.” As I argue in the discussion, for the first generation, filth is interpreted through prisms of communism and Eastern colonization. Following a period of exile, the older generation has journeyed “home” and been confronted with challenges to its expectations and hopes of what freedom and democracy should have brought to the homeland. Filth came to be a metaphor for their disenchantment. For the younger generations, who grew up in Australia and traveled freely to Hungary, filth rather stands for quintessential Easternness and authenticity. I also look at the ways in which their different response enables the younger generation to separate off from the attitudes and experiences of their elders.

Theoretical underpinnings

At the macro level, migration and tourism are similar as both involve movement of people among geographical areas, although with different duration and intention (Li *et al.*, 2019; Huang *et al.*, 2016; Huang *et al.*, 2018; Williams and Hall, 2000; Coles and Timothy, 2004, p. 2). At the same time, as Pelliccia (2018) notes the notion of diaspora has to do necessarily with flows of movement and forms of tourism related to the countries of origin and cultural roots, as well as concepts such as global communities (Appadurai, 1991), identity and ethnic diasporas (Shukla, 2001) and deterritorialized and nomadic mobility (Urry, 2002). Indeed, for contemporary diasporas, the longing for “home” may not necessarily be a permanent return to the homeland, but as a form of tourism. According to Coles and Timothy, diaspora tourism refers to “tourism primarily produced, consumed and experienced by diasporic communities” (2004, p. 1).

Finally, a growing number of studies have explored first generation diaspora tourism (Etemaddar *et al.*, 2016; Iarmolenko, 2015; Iorio and Corsale, 2013; Tie *et al.*, 2015; Harper, 2017; Laoire, 2016). Diaspora’s experiences with the homeland are predominantly discussed in relation to nostalgia and an idealized remembering of the past (Agnew, 2005; Sturken, 1997). When members of the diaspora visit the homeland, experiences of disappointment are often discussed in relation to change, to the fact that things are no longer the way they have been remembered. Disappointment emerges from the disjuncture between expectations and experience. In this paper, I point to the manner in which disappointment can also be understood to result from unmet expectations in favor of the change. Returnees’ narrations of their experiences prove that it is not only inevitable transformations that may alienate them but also an absence of what they consider to be a desirable change that they encounter during later visits. In such a case, dirt and decay

stand emblematically for the persistence of the disdained past of the Communist dictatorship, which they fled and hoped never to confront again.

Ever since the 2000s research on second-generation is also becoming more prominent (Graf, 2017; Huang *et al.*, 2016; Pelliccia, 2017, 2018; Lulle *et al.*, 2019; Séraphin, 2019). The tourist-destination relation in second- or third-generation diaspora tourism is potentially more complex, as while diaspora members typically have emotional, familial, cultural and social ties to the particular destination they are visiting (Duval, 2004, p. 51), they may lack direct past experiences of it. They may know family stories or be familiar with cultural traditions related to the homeland but they generally have weaker links with specific locales and do not have their own individual memories from past times. At the same time, they may feel a loyalty to their parents' homeland based on an inherited emotional attachment or sense of obligation (Huang *et al.*, 2015, p. 2).

In this comparative analysis, I wish to provide a rigorous analysis of what exactly the relationship is between tourist activities and discourses and these diasporic return trips and by so doing contribute to the disentanglement of the theoretical relationships between the two disciplines.

Hungarians in Australia

At the time of the national census in 2016, the Australian-Hungarian diaspora comprised a multi-generational total of approximately 69,159 people claiming Hungarian ancestry and cultural heritage, of whom 19,089 were born in Hungary (ABS, 2016). The vast majority of the first generation arrived in several migratory waves during or immediately before the communist dictatorship in Hungary. Individuals in each of these immigrant waves were officially labeled "political refugees" in Australia. In Hungary during the 1950s and early 1960s, communist propaganda labeled refugees as fascist criminals, class enemies and work-shy rabble and deprived them of their Hungarian citizenship (Kunz, 1985, p. 102). After the amnesty in 1963, return visits for the "good émigrés" to Hungary were possible though not unproblematic (Borbándi, 2006, p. 273). Satzewich (2003) documents that for many émigrés the urge for freedom from communism and Soviet hegemony led to external political mobilization against Soviet domination of their homelands. Further, Eastern European immigrant groups felt that in many ways their authentic language, culture and traditions were preserved only in exile.

After decades of structural segregation and exclusion, the democratic transformation in 1989 opened up a strong discourse of belonging, inclusion and connectedness in the Hungarian-Australian diaspora (author). The same reorientation was tangible in Hungary, which implied a new official policy toward Hungarians residing outside the republic. Most significantly, the reinstatement of Hungarian citizenship enabled émigrés to move back to Hungary or engage in frequent border-crossings.

Satzewich (2003, p. 11) notes that after decades of separation, the detente between Eastern European diasporas and their homelands often had unintended and negative consequences, such as further feelings of alienation and estrangement instead of renewed connectivity. The Hungarian diaspora's symbolic return to the nation after 1989 offered the possibility of reconciliation, reintegration and healing of the scars of the past, but at the same time, it also gave rise to new tensions. For example, émigré believed that, for Hungary to again become a "homeland," it needed to be purged of "Eastern pollution," transformed and restored, which did not eventuate.

Methodology

My aspiration to provide a comprehensive account of diaspora members' experiences during their journeys to Hungary called for an in-depth qualitative study. I chose qualitative

methods of data collection, primarily participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews because of their appropriateness for understanding the dynamic and unstable nature of the phenomena being studied. My material stems from multi-sited research in two distinct periods. Between 2003 and 2007 I was involved in a broader project on Hungarian migrants in Australia. That research took place in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. Here, I interviewed 50 first and 12 later generation Hungarian-Australians who had undertaken homeland visits to Hungary at various times after 1989. To gain a more nuanced picture on how the different travel narratives inform us about the ways in which the Hungarian diaspora in Australia has been relating to Hungary's immediate past, the present, I found it imperative to conduct the same research also at the actual research site, namely, Hungary. During the summer months between 2011 and 2018, I conducted research in various locations in Hungary, traveling to villages and cities and staying with 28 first and later generational research participants in each place for short periods of time. Several of the participants were already familiar to me from my long-term fieldwork in the community; the rest were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. This sampling has allowed for better identification of respondents and, at the same time, for a conscious selection of individuals from which to obtain useful data and insights. Moreover, it has helped to reduce the time of the execution phase and has allowed for the removal of many obstacles in creating a climate of confidence, socialization and mutual understanding. My first inquiry related to reflections on travel memories; the second related to actual experiences, as they were unfolding for the participants.

In-depth semi-structured interviews ranging from 1 to 3.5h enabled me to probe the complexities and ambiguities of the participants' experiences. Having established trust with members of the Australian-Hungarian community through earlier participant observation, I was able to conduct relatively open-ended interviews with participants rather than a prescribed, formal list of set questions. The conversational interviews conducted were intended to put people at ease and thereby increase the possibility of obtaining information that may more readily indicate underlying feelings, assumptions and beliefs. All interviews were conducted face to face in Hungarian, by the author who is a native Hungarian speaker although participants sometimes shifted to English. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed and translated to English by the author.

While the interviews and extended conversations constitute the tangible substance of the fieldwork material, these are supplemented by ethnographic data, collected both in Australia and in Hungary, which provides context and enabled me to check narratives' "weight" and soundness. Ethnography, as a subject-oriented method, bring the "native" voice and point of view into the research and, in turn, serves as a platform for building a theory that is grounded in the informants' understandings of the context. Dense (Geertz, 1987), comprehensive and microscopic (Velasco and Dias de Rada, 1997, p. 48) ethnographic descriptions are able to interpret cultural meanings, discover the structural orders and capture the multiple meanings of social reality such as dirt. The observations in both sites focused upon the ways individuals behaved and involved noting down overheard conversations and moments of reflection. Ethnography in Hungary involved both closed-field context, where the researcher and the subjects being studied "conjointly exist within a discrete, temporal, and spatial setting as co-actors in a drama" (Seaton, 2002, p. 311), such as meals, walks and visiting friends and relatives and open-field context, where the researcher and the researched are not mutually confined within a spatial and temporal boundary (Tie and Seaton, 2013), for instance spending time at the lake side on the public beach, parties and social occasions involving more people.

Given the wealth of data generated, it is not possible to detail all observations or includes examples from every interview; thus, what follows is necessarily a selective representation of the key themes and issues. All materials were stored at secure premises at the author's office. Pseudonyms have been used in the presentation of findings. The collected data was

coded manually. The strategy for analyzing the discussions was devised to enable the researcher to reconstruct patterns of common-sense thinking by searching for underlying themes in the generated data (Billig, 1992).

All the second- and third-generation individuals interviewed were between 18 and 27 years of age; all except two were born in Australia. The two born in Hungary migrated at a very early age (two and two and half, respectively) and have no memories of their places of birth. In total, 10 individuals belonged to the second- and 10 to the third-generation of Hungarians in Australia. All came from endogamous Hungarian families. Importantly, second- and third-generation research participants seem to show very similar observations during their trips, no significant difference could be detected.

Discussion

Dirt as a socialist remnant

Romanticized sensations of homelands are typical tropes in nationalist imaginaries. Indeed, many first generation returnees speak of their expectations in terms of re-experiencing pleasant sights, sounds and smells, sensations that have and can only exist in the homeland. However, they rather find themselves in that impossible in-between position where desired memories are no longer retrievable, but disdained ones still linger. Neglect, dirt and decay are symptomatic examples of the latter.

What is interesting for us is that dirt and decay are not simply defined relatively but are abstracted to national and political discourses as their meaning is located in specific historical contexts. The returnee rhetoric of filth gains its power from various powerful discourses. The first is the established historical narrative on the nexus between civilization and cleanliness. Since the eighteenth century, cleanliness, more than most other traits and practices, has played a central role in the capacity of hygiene to be a signifier of civilization (Hirsch, 2015, p. 304; Schülting, 2016; Walther, 2017). While hygiene was associated with civilization and the West, the East at hand was depicted as unhygienic and uncivilized. For example, in her research on Albanians and Bulgarians working in Greece, Hantzaroula (2016) finds that narratives of Europeanization mobilized around dirt and cleanliness. Kristeva, (Bjelić, 2008) in the name of French cleanliness, French “taste” and French “cosmopolitanism” denigrates the Balkans as the filth of Europe. She divides European nations into those like France, which have an aesthetic of the public sphere, and those, such as Bulgaria, which do not. Such orientalist connotations were strengthened and multiplied after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Zarycki, 2014; Ivasiuc, 2017; Buchowski, 2006) further dramatizing conflicting “moral geographies” of post-socialist nations. This othering is performed by means of reductive categorization and entails a need to push these countries upwards on the civilizational slope (Melegh, 2006).

The returnee dynamic is no less orientaling in its essence. It is, however, more complex than the usual “Europeanization” canons, which could be evoked by any tourist passing by in Hungary, as it is connected to other national and diasporic narratives. The importance of dirt and decay for the first generation returnees is also rooted in the powerful narrative of an unfinished Hungarian transformation. The Hungarian transition of the 1989-1990s proceeded smoothly, without political annihilation or chaos. Economist Éva Voszka (1993) called it “the unbearable lightness of non-cathartic transition.” The state party peacefully handed over power after negotiating and accepting a compromise solution. However, pre-transition pacts and understandings between the outgoing and the incoming political elites yielded ambiguous political and socio-economic outcomes. While these initial agreements made well-crafted provisions for Hungary’s institutional transition from a one-party communist system to parliamentary democracy, priorities around such volatile matters as political justice and societal consensus on post-communist policy, especially resource allocation, were left in abeyance (Tóké and Rudolf, 1996). Hungary’s post-communist

institutions were built on unexamined foundations whereby new and revamped political institutions could be created with the stroke of a pen. What my interlocutors would call an “unfinished transformation” is a particularly neuralgic point for the diaspora. Dirt on the streets, decay and pollution in Hungary are all seen by first generation returnees as symbols of the trauma of this partial transformation. During their visits, a great majority of older returnees complained about the irreversibility of the haunting “communist legacy” in Hungary. They concluded that Hungary and Hungarians could still not overcome the Communist tradition of improper language, littering and negligence. This inability to reject mental habits acquired under the Soviet system informs the complex of individual and societal behaviors encapsulated by the notion of the legendary *homo sovieticus* (Sztompka, 2000, 2004; Buchowski, 2006, p. 469) as my informant Endre explained:

The garbage bins are full, people spit on the streets, dogs shit everywhere [...] it is still the old soviet primitive mentality.

For these returnees, dirt was not just seen as a sign of the incapacity of individuals to leave behind ingrained habits. Rather, it was interpreted as a sign of corruption and misuse of power above and a widespread disregard of laws and administrative rules below, creating a symbiotic whole of moral decay and diminished civic competence.

Also, radically different from the common Orientalist narratives here is the idea that dirt is an alien entity, forced on Hungary by Soviet colonization, which needs to be cleansed from the cultural body of the country (from streets, maps and language) and from social body. Elvira explains:

This beautiful country is a tragic country. It is always under foreign occupation and cannot flourish, cannot resurrect. Look at that packed garbage bin over there. It is the Soviet legacy. Hungarians are not Balkan people, but it is very difficult to purge the country of this Soviet filth.

Importantly, in the quote above, although usually referring to different phenomena, Soviet and Balkan are used interchangeably indicating the alien, the foreign and the destructive in Hungary’s “tragic” history.

Dirt as Eastern European authenticity

Evidence collected demonstrates that the younger generation diaspora-backpackers have a radically different view of dirt in Hungary than their parents and grandparents. First, these youngsters’ relationship with Hungary differs greatly from that of their parents’. While the first generation has a tangible, both joyful and often traumatic experience of Hungary, from which nostalgic memories have emerged and flourished during the long years of exile, later generations spent their entire life in Australia. Although youngsters might also be emotionally connected to the country and anticipate its positive future, their emotional investment is considerably lower in the fate of Hungary. Further, while the first generation refers to the journey to Hungary as “going home,” for the later-generations the trip is to their country of ethnic origin. Even though their perception is different from that of their elders, they draw on the same or similar global and diasporic discourses when interpreting filth in Hungary.

Although it was obvious from my interviews and fieldwork that beyond a certain point and after a certain period of time, the encounter with dirt is burdensome and unpleasant for the youngsters, on superficial level dirt was nonetheless viewed in a positive fashion.

Experiencing decay and dirt, in the youngsters’ narratives, was connected to several classic backpacker tropes. One of them was the importance of immersion in the mundane reality of everyday life in Hungary (Pearce and Zare, 2019; Cao, 2013; Conran, 2006; O’Regan, 2018; Maoz, 2006; Muzaini, 2006; Noy and Cohen, 2012). It seemed that abandonment and shabbiness were not only tolerated but also actively pursued. Walking

on the “dirty streets,” traveling on old and used buses and shopping at downtrodden markets were some of the ways in which diaspora youngsters tried selectively to achieve an authentic integration and at the same time disassociate themselves from those older returnees who are desperately searching for the past and not willing to keep up with the present. For instance Zsuzsi, like several others to whom I spoke, believed that such actions would bring her closer to everyday reality and provide her with the greatest sense of adventure:

I do not mind that it is shabby and dirty. This is how people live here and therefore, this is what I also want to experience.

The intimacy young people seek in this way is also essential to defining themselves as real travelers. [Lozanski \(2013 2010, p. 758\)](#) writes that Western travelers mark the difference between themselves and the “tourist other” through physical geographies, the chaos of cities or backwardness of rural villages being exemplars ([Korpela, 2017](#)). However, from Misi’s words below, it becomes clear that these youngsters’ positive claims about dirt not only mimic the simple backpacker-tourist hierarchical slope but also deeply rooted in their diasporic lives:

I travel on second class shitty trains on purpose. How else would I discover how real people live? Older returnees are blinded by their nostalgic lies, I think. They are incapable of accepting that Hungary is how it is now. The country doesn’t live in the past. They do! Therefore, it is impossible for them to forge meaningful connections with the locals.

Misi and others were quick to explain that, unlike older diaspora members, they looked at dirt and underdevelopment with non-judgmental eyes, as these phenomena are indeed essential parts of contemporary reality. Here it becomes obvious that while the first generation perceives dirt and filth as a haunting remnant of the past, youngsters see it as a vital part of the present.

Another paramount difference that is obvious in the two generations’ perception is that older returnees perceive dirt as an alien parasite entity on the national body of the country, brought about by a foreign colonizing power. Here, symbolically, “dirt” also stands for unethical and not true. [Douglas \(1966\)](#) defines it as “matter out of place,” meaning that dirt, by appearing in the wrong place disrupts a sense of order in the world. Youngsters saw dirt in a radically opposite way. For them, dirt and decay, as “routine aspects of mundane quotidian existence” ([Huxley, 2004, p. 43](#)), were perceived as a quintessentially authentic feature of Eastern Europe. Recent scholarship claims that although many independent travelers considered themselves to be more culturally responsible and sensitive than other tourists, Orientalist fantasies and tropes are deeply ingrained in the travel imagination even of backpackers ([Sun and Xie, 2019](#); [O’Reilly, 2006, p. 1004](#); [Lozanski, 2010, p. 746](#); [Sobocinska, 2014](#); [Korpela, 2017](#)). Kinga and Vera, two friends with whom I spent some time in Hungary, told me:

Kinga: You know when I arrived, I have to admit, that the full garbage bins and the dirty streets disturbed me. I was so used to that narrow, and kind of square Australian order and cleanliness. But very soon I discovered the wildness of it, I felt this place is so much more alive.

Vera: Yes, I feel the same. I feel I came to understand this place exactly because I am open-minded and did not close myself in front of unpleasant sight and sensations [...] like those Kinga mentioned Kinga: Exactly! You can’t understand the place by just looking at the beauty of it. You have to go deeper.

Like backpackers in general, Kinga and Vera, along with other young diaspora members, aestheticize and exoticize filth and associate it with authenticity. Dirt and decay become images that are positioned as more truthful and realistic than the artifice of tourist sites. There is a second possible meaning, namely, the notion that poverty and hardship are more

“real” and “true” than contemporary urban middle-class culture. These young diaspora backpackers pride themselves on their sensitivity to details and claim to be penetrating genuine Hungary, while others only glimpse the superficial. Thus, although, most first generation returnees would see dirt and decay as in their faces, that same dirt and decay symbolize for their grandchildren the “unknown” side of the place, “not something people would usually seek to embrace”.

We have seen so far how dirt is connected both to mundane everyday reality in Hungary and at the same time to orientalist ideas of backwardness and Easternness. Diaspora-backpackers feel secure about their views and their contrasting attitude toward dirt becomes a *locus* for the expression of their belief in the superiority of their perception *vis-à-vis* the older generation. Interestingly, we face a situation in which, as Douglas (1966, p. 4) asserts, “pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status” becomes contrary to the original meaning. Nonetheless, when the dirt is being linked to the past socialist regime of the country, this emblematic issue seems to trigger confusion and unease in several youngsters. Most young informants respect the Australian-Hungarian narrative about the horrors of the dictatorship and even those who challenge its totality accept its basic premise. In our conversations, they all assured me that they are aware of the brutality of the dictatorship and the scars it left on the country. Still, the visual heritage of socialism, which they associated with dirty and rundown industrial cities and districts, served for many as geographic sites of authentic Hungarianness. Some of these excerpts from interviews with Adri and Thomas echo the complicated moral baggage youngsters felt when associating dirt with the past:

I know what has happened there, but I wanted to embrace the whole picture. And yes, those ugly socialist buildings are part of it. (Adri) It was crazy to think about that the country was destroyed by the regime and at the same time I really enjoyed seeing the rundown train stations and things like this (Thomas).

As I have shown in this section aestheticizing and exoticizing filth serves more than just positioning it as a truthful and realistic side of Hungary. Their different response enables the younger generation to separate off from the attitudes and experiences of their elders and claim a unique experience in Hungary.

Conclusion

By offering this comparative cross-generational case-study analysis of the perception of dirt, I have sought to demonstrate the connections between diasporas and tourism, and thus, stimulate discussion and debate around that theme. I have investigated the ways in which dirt and decay in Hungary can be refuted or celebrated, through comparisons of the tourist gaze of first and later generation Australian-Hungarians. As the discussion has demonstrated, litter on the streets of Budapest is not simply interpreted as an oversight or indicator of neglect of the local municipality but rather is extrapolated in a variety of ways: as a legacy of the socialist dictatorship that pervades Hungarian “mentality” on the one hand or a sign of contemporariness and authenticity on the other. For the first generation, experiencing dirt from year to year during their return visits further emphasizes that the abyss that was created by their emigration and which they hoped would be bridged after 1990 is still there. At the same time, embracing dirt and filth is construed as a meaningful travel practice by the younger generations, one that might enhance and enrich their experience of being Hungarian.

While their perceptions of dirt are radically different, what unites the views of the two groups is their unwillingness to accept that filth and decay, as they had witnessed in Hungary, is also a feature of Australia or broadly Western society. Instead, they can go to great lengths to differentiate the two spaces; rather than finding commonality between the Western and

the post-socialist worlds, diaspora members often emphasize difference and maintain a dichotomy between the two.

By identifying and unpacking the tropes that persist in the travel narratives of these two groups, I have attempted to demonstrate the multiplicity of broader narrative structures that underlie the accounts of their travel adventures. I have highlighted the importance of understanding the ways in which diaspora members interweave local public encounters with discourses of national belonging and ideological positioning in their perceptions of dirt. Both returnee and diaspora-backpacker comments about dirt and cleanliness offer meaningful insights into social mechanisms and highlight the importance of sensory experience in the comprehension of selfhood, culture and social relations. Thus, my participants' comments about sensations of filth are revelatory in relation to their positioning apropos a "sanitized West" and a "filthy communist legacy".

This article contributes to the growing literature on diaspora tourism by considering tourism at the level of tourist subjectivity. Further, comparative studies on diaspora tourism are rather rare, this one being one of the few along with few exceptions. In addition, by engaging in multi-sited ethnography, this research also succeeded to avoid the problems often faced by anthropological studies on tourism, namely, the issue of impromptu social interaction within a group of erratic compositions with unceasing extensive changeover of individuals (O'Gorman *et al.*, 2014).

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