

## EXAMINING THE RISK DISCOURSE IN TERROR MOVIES. Tourism and Risk after WTC attack.

**Korstanje Maximiliano E.**  
*University of Palermo Argentina*

---

*World Trade Centre's attacks not only set precedents respecting to a new way of making terrorism but also paralyzed the mass-transport for more than one day. This generated a serious challenge for tourist industry to the extent of calling the attention of many scholars. On another hand, 11/09 acted as a conduit for the remake of many movies and films based on the vulnerability of American tourists when are out of home. Under such a context, the present research focuses on the analysis of discourse of four famous terror-related movies. The main thesis of this project is that September 11 attacks paved the ways for the advent of a new genre of terror movies based on sadism, ethnocentrism and the construction of a radicalized-otherness.*

---

**Keywords:** *United States, World Trade Center, Terrorism, Terror Movies, Vulnerability.*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

### INTRODUCTION

Over 40 years the risk, a term originally coined by cognitive psychology has expanded its paradigms towards other fields of Science and sub-disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and even geography. Afterwards the attacks to New York in 2001, the theory of risk perception started to be applied on travels and tourism issues (Kelly, 1997; Hall, 2002; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-gray and Thapa, 2003; Qiu-Zhang, 2005; Floyd and Pennington-Gray, 2004; Heggie and Heggie, 2004; Kuto and Groves, 2004; Goldblatt and Hu, 2005; Kozak, Crotts and Law, 2007; Abdel-Azim, 2010). Even though these investigations are illustrative and valuable, to some extent, there is an overabundance of mathematical algorithms and quantitative correlations which do not correspond with the qualitative meaning of risk.



The goals of this research are: a) exploring the connection between terror movies, hospitality and risk perception from a qualitative perspective (analysis of content), b) assessing the impact of 11/9 in these types of movies, and c) to describe the pervasive nature of hospitality. Even though, this study is part of a broader project (a book) where more than 29 terror movies have substantially examined, because of space only the discourse of four movies will be described in details: *the Strangers*, *Texas Chainsaw*, *The hills have eyes* and *Hostel*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

One of other troublesome aspects of risk theory is the conceptual differentiation between what risk and threat mean. The former is currently understood from many perspectives ranging from a probability a threat occurred towards a form of perceiving the dangers. As the previous argument given, N. Luhmann considers risks as cognitive units enrooted in the core of language whose ends are aimed at intellectualizing the uncertainty. Not only risk is often determined by the possibility to be avoided but by a previous decision-making process made top-down by an elite. To put this in brutally, victims who face dangers are not the same who made the decisions. Following this argument, of course, terrorist attacks, a natural disaster, crime or the downfall of a commercial airplane should not be considered risks but threats or dangers (Luhmann, 2006). Assumptions of this caliber contrast with other studies which focus on risk as a probabilities or mere quantitative construes. With this in mind, we recognize that risks and threats are represented in different ways ranging from literature towards horror-movies.

Even though, in the film industry there was antecedents of villains hurting tourists as the case of *Shaw 1, 2, 3* or *Halloween*, *Friday 13*, and *The Wolf Man*, recently the existent horror movies are characterized by an appalling degree of sadism, more violent and explicit, that affected seriously the sensibility of viewers (Zizek, 2009). Our main thesis is that September 11 played a crucial role in shaping the discourse of new terror movies; this event opened a new discourse where deserts, emptied spaces and sparse populated zones emulate the landscape of Arab world.

Undoubtedly, terrorism is one of the staunch enemies of tourism because it represents a serious danger for international tourist-destination image (Mohamed, 2008). This means that the nature of politic relationships between involved social actors seems to be more than important to determine the development of this activity. Although, these

destinations are drawn as safe paradises, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, and political instability appeal to leisure for beating or presenting a claim against Government (Henderson, 2008).

In this conjuncture, Peattie, Clarke and Peattie calls into question respecting two different relevant points that determine the risk research: safety and security at destinations (Peattie, Clarke and Peattie, 2005). In this vein, Domínguez, Burguette and Bernard argue that tourists experience a considerable degree of risk in leisure travels than business (Domínguez, Burguette and Bernard, 2003). Other studies focused on people who reside in rural areas feel less fear and risk than other who dwell on urban mega-cities. Social trust is of paramount important for questions related to security. An empirical investigation conducted by Yuan demonstrated that social bondage and travelling with relative or friends substantially reduce the risk perception (Yuan, 2005).

In addition, Lepp and Gibson argue that travels seem to be circumscribed to two contrasting tendencies, the sensation or novelty seeking and risk aversion. Nationality of tourists as well as type of psychological personality plays a crucial role at time of determining the perception of risk (Lepp and Gibson, 2008). As the previous argument given, Leslie and Wilson consider some segments seek in risk the adrenaline of adventure. For example, backpackers are characterized by travelling of the beaten track looking always for new sensations (Leslie and Wilson, 2006). Unfortunately, these types of tourists are vulnerable targets for criminals and psychotics.

Rather, Chauhan and Khanna, valorize the role of tourism as an ambassador of peace and cross-cultural understanding. Starting from the premise that travels brings person in contact from an educative and pedagogic perspective, authors argue that tourism would be useful to foster understanding among social actors in contexts of ethnic conflicts and war-state (Chauhan and Khanna, 2009). Quite aside from the historical linkage between terrorism and tourism (mobility), in the next section we will examine how the current horror movies nourish an ethnocentric discourse that rests on shaky foundations.

## **ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE**

Movies, films and documental TV Programs not only reflect the gaze of directors and players, but also the mind of a whole society. Social anthropology discovered from many years ago that movies are associated to the construction of narratives and archetypes which exerts considerable influence in public opinion. In addition, the analysis of discourse is a

fruitful instrument of qualitative-research and of course there is no better place to employ it than the movies directed by Eli Roth *Hostel 1* and *Hostel 2*. The synopsis of these movies shows how a bunch of sadist millionaires paid considerable amounts of money to torture with their hands to foreign tourists in Slovakia, an eastern European country. This is the destination of many Western teenagers who are in quest of sex, hedonism and new exciting experiences. Kidnapped and hosted in a cold mansion, the missing tourists are slowly flagellated to death by millionaires who consume a tour-package sold by this criminal organization which operates in the region for long time. The discourse of *Hostel* can be disclosed as follows:

a) An evident over-valorization of American tourists over other tourists (ethnocentrism), b) tourists are being seduced by beautiful women or men at hostel where tourists are lodged. Sex and hedonism play a pivotal role in the previous decision-making that will determine the travel c) tourists are classified in predators (torturers) and preys (victims) who seek new sensations.

Based on true events, other more than interesting film is *The Strangers* starred by Liv Tyler and Scott Speedman. This thriller does not involved directly to tourists but just a couple (Kristen Mckay and James Hoyt) in a crisis who after a wedding reception decide to return a remote summer vacation home owned by James's parents. Once there, the couple is psychologically tormented by three strangers whose faces are masked. To the end of pictures, these strangers get out their mask but their identity remained uncovered. Kristen and James are brutally assassinated with a kitchen knife by these "strangers" who ultimately abandoned the house in a truck. At a first glance, Kristen and James find themselves in a sparsely populated area without any kind of assistance. Most certainly, unlike other similarly films, this does not present females as a vulnerable genre.

It is important to note that the vulnerability of victims is associated to the fact they are not familiar with the surrounding landscapes. What can be here discussed are the vulnerability of guests as well as their lack of protection. The binomial host/guest are not enough to understand how others (precisely who are not indentified, known as the stranger) jeopardized the ontological security of temporary dwellers defying the principle of hospitality.

Similar observations can be found in other films such as *The Texas Chainsaw* (a remake of the original film opened in 1974 (starred this time by Jessica Biel) or *The Hills have Eyes*. In these movies a bunch of youths who were driving towards sparsely populated zones in United States meet with a little town where a family of mutated psychopaths (in

most cases psychically deformed by former nuclear tests conducted by the US Government) exert acts of extreme cruelty against visitors. In general, these movies were set in isolated zones as hills, mountains, or deserts where the involving victims are helpless. One of the most shocking images in the Hills have Eyes is the kidnapping of a baby from the arms of his mother.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the benefits of hindsight, one realizes that horror movies argument is constructed on a discourse centered on: a) a group of friends who launched to visit sparsely populated zones where the presence of State is scant; b) an array of mutated murders who fiercely kills vulnerable tourists with a downright impunity (preferably beautiful women, children or teenagers) and c) mutants are a result of previous government nuclear proofs which maintained occulted by the public opinion. In parallel with terrorism and 11/9 studies, these examined movies emphasize on the value of American tourist as main targets of monsters. Whenever the principle of hospitality cannot be honored, risks becomes in panic. Other important point to mention is the tension between local/global, familiar/unfamiliar, self-hood/otherness in the whole of discourses related to terror movies. By using analysis of discourse or other qualitative method, relevant findings can be followed for the advance of risk-related research.

## **REFERENCES**

- Abdel-Azim, T.S. (2010). The Relationship between the Perception of Risk and The decision Making Process of Travel of French Tourists: The case of Egypt. *Tourismos*, Vol. 5, No.2, pp.29-47.
- Chauhan, V. & Khanna, S. (2009). Tourism: a tool for crafting Peace process in Kashmir, J&K, India. *Tourismos, an international Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, Vol. 4, No.2, pp.69-89.
- Domínguez, P, Burquette, E. & Bernard, A. (2003). Efectos del 11 de Septiembre en la hotelería mexicana: reflexión sobre la mono-dependencia turística. *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*, Vol. 12, No.3-4, pp.335-348.
- Floyd, M. & Pennington-Gray, L. (2004). Profiling Risk: perception of tourist. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 31, No.4, pp.1051-1054.

- Floyd, M., Gibson, H., Pennington-Gray, L. & Thapa, B. (2003). The Effects of Risk Perception on Intention to Travel in the Aftermath of September 11, 2001. In *Safety and Security in Tourism: relationships, Management and Marketing*, (Eds.).
- Goldblatt, J. & Hu, C. (2005). Tourism, terrorism, and the new World for Event Leaders. *E-review of tourism Research*, Vol. 3, No.6, pp.139-144.
- Hall, M. (2002). Travel Safety, terrorism and the media the significance circle of the issue attention cycle. *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 5, No.5, pp.458-466.
- Heggie, T.W. & Heggie, T.M. (2004). International and Domestic Tourist Road Safety in Hawaii, volcanoes national Park. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp.51-58.
- Henderson, J. (2008). The Politics Tourism: a perspective from the Maldives. *Tourismos, an International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*. Vol. 3, No.1, pp.99-115.
- Kelly, I. (1997). Study tours: a model for benign tourism?. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*. Vol. 8, No.1, pp.42-52.
- Kozak, M, Crotts, J. & Law, R. (2007). The Impact of the pereption of risk on international Travellers. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 9, No.4, pp.233-242.
- Kuto, B. & Groves, J. (2004). The Effects of Terrorism: evaluating Kenya´s tourism Crisis. Pero ¿como definir un acto “terrorista?”. *E-review of tourism Research*, Vol. 2, No.4, pp.88-95.
- Leslie, D. & Wilson, J. (2006). The backpage and Sctoland, a market Analysis. *Tourismos, an International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*. Vol. 1, No.2, pp.11-28
- Lepp, A. & Gibson, H. (2008). Sensation Seeking and Tourism: tourist role, perception of risk and Destination Choice. *Tourism Management*. Vol. 29, No.1, pp.740-750.
- Luhmann, N. (2006). *The Sociology of Risk*. Mexico: Editorial Universidad Iberoamericana.
- Mohamed, G.A. (2008). “Egypt’s Image as Tourist destination – a perspective of Foregin Tourists”. *Tourismos, an international multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*. Vol. 3, No.1, pp.36-65
- Qiu-Zhang, H. (2005). Impact of the Tsunami on Chinese outbound Tourism. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality and Management*. Vol. 17, No.5, pp.433-435.

- Yuan, M. (2005). After September 11: determining its Impacts on Rural Canadians travel to U.S. *E-review of tourism Research*, Vol. 3, No.5, pp.103-108.
- Zizek, S. (2009). *Violence*. Buenos Aires, Paidos.

*SUBMITTED: JAN 2011*

*REVISION SUBMITTED: APR 2011*

*ACCEPTED: MAY 2011*

*REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY*

**Korstanje, Maximiliano E.** (maxikorstanje@fibertel.com.ar) is a Lecturer/researcher at University of Palermo, Department of Economics, Av. Dorrego 169 2 Floor, F. Capital Federal, Buenos Aires, Argentina CP 1414.