

## Reseña de Publicaciones

Miles, Tiya (2015). *Tales from the haunted South*.  
The University of North Carolina Press: Chappel Hill.

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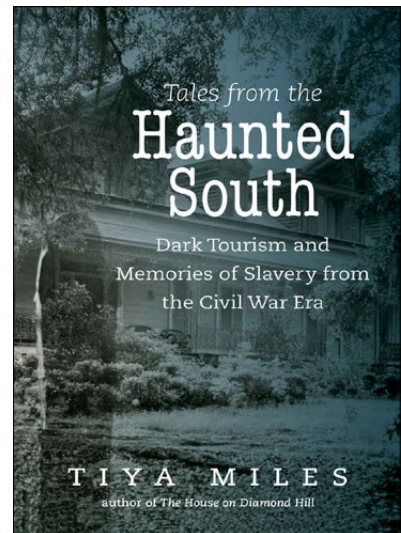
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In earlier studies, we have alerted on the lifestyle changes towards a new society. The risk society as it was imagined by postmodern sociologists sets the pace to a new stage of production and capitalism, where death is commoditized to revitalize the psychological frustrations daily happened in working places. The others' death acts as a catalyst giving to a global audience a sentiment of happiness, which is structured in performed rituals. This tendency, which is not limited to tourism industry, can be observed in journalism, press, cultural entertainment and so forth. In a Darwinist world where only the strongest super hero survives, death is conceived as a sign of weakness. This suggests that *Thana-capitalism* rests on two main pillars, the needs of being special and the prone to be protected. Capitalism structures by the articulation of an extensive exploitation climate where few monopolizes the produced wealth, while the rest lives with nothing. At the time, this untrammled exploitation expands wasting bodies should be casted as a spectacle to reinforce the center-periphery dependence (Korstanje 2016). What capitalism destroys is commoditized and exchanged in an economy of impotence where the material asymmetries between have and have-nots notably increased.

In this context, *Tales from the haunted South* is a provoking and intriguing book, published a couple of years ago by the University of North Carolina Press. In only 149 pages, the author, Tiya Miles narrates how the imagined South and the bloody past of slavery converge in our days. Precisely, when the majority of studies and book in dark tourism fields are certainly adopted an economic-centric perspective, this book goes in the opposite direction. Not only this is the type of books I love reading, but she engages slowly the reader with captivating argument.

As the previous backdrop, Miles examines the allegorical construction of the darkness as an absence, which is conducive to capitalist exploitation. Based on the tours author took, she writes as an ethnographer, offering an all-encompassing model to understand dark consumption.



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*“Nearly a decade before when I had begun my research on southern slavery, black history has been all but ignored at historic home and plantation sites. The people who have mattered in these tours were slaveholding high society families, not their chattel slaves. African American bondsmen and bondswomen had been transformed into virtual ghosts, absent and yet eerily present in historical tours as invisible laboring bodies that made their owners` fortune shine”* (Preface, p. xxi)

The tours were organized to show the landscapes of a haunted south, where the alterity was historically enslaved, and subject to a climate of oppression and cruelty. The voodoo practices, many of them strongly associated to slaves seems to be the symbolic touchstone of these tours. Visitors not only are interperated by the tragedy of slavery but it is accompanied by personal histories and biographies characterized by human sacrifices and black magic. Limited in only three chapters, but elegantly written this text evinces not only the sociological nature of dark tourism but also draws the borders of Afro-American Midwestern life. The main thesis of this work rests on the axiom that dark tourism is sociologically adjusted to a heritage, which is politically manipulated to serve as spectacle to visitors. In so doing, the historical tours cover the alterity of those who suffered the oppression of colonial rule, distorting the historical facts similarly to culture museums. While tours amply give a message to visitors, they are framed within the practice of social history, which is defined as a new emergent academic approach that focuses on day-to-day practices (of lay-peoples) with ethnic studies. One of the aspects that delineate the border of such a paradigm is the needs of consuming further realism, as opposed to the life of male, white elite through nineteen century. Today`s tourists articulate individual performances to expand their interpretative symbolic frames. This inaugurates a lot of new studies which focuses on dark tourism as a neglect of past colonial violence. As R. Tzanelli puts (2016) it, the cinematic representations of dark tourism are organized and externally designed to be enjoyed by first class tourists, many of them coming from sophisticated urban cities. Though the human suffering is the main attraction in the peripheral south, there is no genuine remorse by the actions and responsibilities of their respective states during slavery and colonial rule. Tzanelli`s insight seems to be in consonance with what Korstanje dubbed as the rise and expansion of Thana-Capitalism. Beyond the aura of empathy, tourists who select these types of products are selfishly interested to reaffirm status as a privilege class (named as death-seekers). They often, though never accepted, contrast their lives with the pour South, which was historically deprived from the benefits of rationale, whiteness, progress and democracy. As a mirror-like, dark tourism offers to spectatorship an ideological narrative which leads toward ethnocentrism. Far from being concerned by the otherness, dark tourists look to develop the narcissist idea they are outstanding, special respecting to others who have faced terrible events. This creates a vicious circle where the alterity is needed only as a reminder of the own exclusivity. This is, doubtless, a society where the main commodity is death and of course the reason why, global consuming audience are captivated by watching the others` suffering. Miles` book poses as an interesting and provoking work, which should be recommended to those sociologists, anthropologists and historians concerned by the intersection of consumption and macabre dark sites.

## References

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