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Bringing the World to Us: Travel Journalism and the Mediation of Others

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Abstract

In the world of lifestyle journalism – a genre that stretches across an ever broadening range of subjects from the arts and DIY to sex and science – travel journalism is one of the most long established forms of non-news journalism. As a highly commercial form of journalism, one subject to the changing winds of globalisation, travel journalism trades in the representation of destinations, cultural mores and practices. Travel journalism *matters* because it tells us something about our cultural understanding of different parts of the world. In understanding travel journalism as a site where the representations of 'home' and 'other' are constantly contested and refigured, this chapter seeks to examine how this dynamic is further complicated by the broad range of travel content we now encounter across multiple media platforms from print journalism to TikTok. It considers the extent to which these different media platforms, built as they are on very different economic models, facilitate different forms of cultural mediation. This chapter finds that whilst stereotypical cultural discourse and the exoticization of 'others' still proliferate, the breadth of travel content across multiple platforms, has impacted on the mediation of cultural difference in some surprising and unexpected ways.

Introduction

A window on the world, a mediator of different cultures, a commentator on a seemingly never ending array of leisure experiences, a form of journalism derided as frivolous and less serious than 'proper' news journalism. Travel journalism is a rich, fast-evolving and contested genre fraught with contradiction and dissonance. Like most areas of lifestyle journalism, the massive technological transformation of the media landscape has meant that more traditional print based forms of travel journalism now compete with professional and user generated content across a range of media platforms.

Closely linked to the tourism industry, travel journalism is a highly commercial form of journalism, premised on promoting the consumption of tourism related activities, experiences

and products. Travel journalism trades in the representation of destinations, cultural mores and practices (Santos, 2006; Duffy, 2019). Academic interest in the topic is relatively new and emerging and has tended to centre on understanding the genre as a significant source of cultural mediation, where the representations of different cultures and cultural difference are constantly contested and refigured (Fursich and Kavoori, 2001).

This chapter seeks to examine how the ways in which travel journalism mediates culture has become further complicated by the breadth of travel content we now encounter across media platforms. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis approach it focuses on a sample of travel journalism content including print journalism and social media sites such as Instagram and TikTok. It considers the extent to which these different media platforms, built as they are on very different economic models, facilitate different forms of cultural mediation. The case study finds that whilst travel journalism's historical 'stock in trade' use of stereotypical cultural discourse and the exoticization of 'others' still proliferate, the breadth of travel content across platforms has impacted on the mediation of cultural difference in some surprising and unexpected ways.

2Historical Perspectives

Along with fashion journalism, travel journalism is one of the oldest and most well established forms of lifestyle journalism (Mee, 2009, p.206-208) and has been a core part of the newspaper content 'package' for well over a hundred years. The origins of travel journalism can be traced back to the mid-1800s, a period in which travel became more accessible and affordable with the aristocratic grand tour seguing into middleclass, more mass-orientated tourism (Sezgin and Yolal, 2012). Modern tourism began to develop in Britain, Western Europe and North America as a form of leisure time – a by-product of the industrial revolution (Coltman, 1989). Newspapers quickly began to attune to the cultural phenomenon of mass tourism. From the 1830s and 1840s onwards newspapers started to include travel features (Haugen, 2018, Seaton, 2005). Such features emerged from a broader travel literature which included monographs, ethnographies, maritime narratives, published diaries, road and aviation writings and memoirs (Youngs, 2013, p.3). In Britain, the repealing of stamp duty on newspapers in 1855 led to a rapid expansion in the numbers of daily papers and periodicals. Steward notes this enabled, "many would-be professional writers to make the

bulk of their living by writing for the weekly and daily papers. Many took advantage of the fluidity of the boundaries between literature and journalism making it easy to move between them" (2005, p. 41). This literary heritage mixed with the genre's intrinsically commercial drive to represent other parts of the world through the use of "extravagant vocabulary and details in order to seduce readers" (Santos, 2006, p.624). Travel journalism played a fundamental role in contributing to the rapid growth of mass tourism and shaping modern leisure activities of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries:

> the world was presented as something to be consumed and it was here that the search for novelty, authenticity and difference was at its most frenetic. The new breed of travel journalists not only constructed their images of their own social and cultural identities but also contributed to the formation of those available to others. (Steward, 2005, p.52)

Critical Issues in Travel Journalism:

Whilst it is clear travel journalism has made a significant contribution to the development of mass tourism, it is also the case that defining what it precisely is and what its relationship to other forms of journalism is remains contest and contradictory. Historically, news journalism has played an important function in western democracies, holding power to account, challenging authority and ultimately enable us to participate as "citizens" in democratic processes (Humphreys, 2023). In some senses today this may not be much more than an ideal given the highly charged commercial environment in which journalism now exists. Nonetheless, this conception of journalism as watchdog which checks and balances political power still lies very much at the heart of the industry's professional identity (Canella, 2023). Travel journalism speaks to its audience differently. In the context of travel journalism we are not addressed as "citizens" with political agency but as "consumers" with economic and cultural capital (Brett, 2023).

There is a further, interrelated problem. In the main, journalism content purports to be 'true'. It purports to cover and report things that have happened in the real world. The public, journalists themselves and academics who study journalism commonly understand journalistic content as portrayals of real world events (McNair, 1998; Lau, 2012). Professional journalists are commonly understood to be our witnesses on the world. Is travel journalism content derived from real experiences of touristic activities? Arguably, in many

respects the answer is yes.. However, it should also be acknowledged that the extent to which travel journalism is true is far less clear cut than other forms of journalism. It is quite common for travel journalists to be given free holidays or free flights or free stays in hotels as part of them reporting upon touristic experiences. This compromises the journalistic integrity of the genre (Hanusch, 2012). Consequently, the industry has often perceived travel journalism as frivolous, advertorial copy, lower in status and of less importance than news and current affairs journalism. (Ashe, 2023).

Compounding these issues, travel journalism content can now be found on all media platforms, many of which actively facilitate users producing their own content. Nowadays it is not always immediately apparent whether we are consuming user-generated or professionally produced content. Should we include this sort of content in trying to define travel journalism? I want to suggest that we should. After all, we can acknowledge that news content on X/Twitter may or may not be true, or produced to the same ethical standards as, for example, television news, there is no doubt that it plays an important role in modern political communication (Wells et al, 2020). That travel content is produced by social media users alongside professional journalists is not a point of delineation for the genre but rather needs to be understood as part of the fast evolving and multifaceted nature of the political economy of travel journalism (Blaer, Frost and Laing, 2020). Travel journalism can be most productively understood as travel-related content produced by both professional journalists and 'produsers', that is in the public domain presented in written, visual and audio forms - typically, the narrative style is first person with the readers/audience being directly appealed to (Cocking, 2020, p.14; Hanusch and Fursich, 2014, p.6-8). Focused on touristic activities and experiences, it is a highly commercial form of journalism, stratified by socio-economic indicators. Travel journalism is fast changing and alive to the new developments in the tourism industry as well as commercial imperatives and stresses. It also influences and is influenced by other media and literary genres.

Current contributions and research: why study travel journalism?
As a relatively emergent area of academic enquiry, a number of justifications for the study of travel journalism have been made. Opening the field of study, Fursich and Kavoori outline five key aspects of the genre that warrant academic consideration (2001, p. 150-154). They point to the huge growth of the tourism industry in the 1980s and 1990s as well as social and cultural roles of tourism and leisure time in society as three important contextual factors in

understanding the significance of travel journalism. As one of the biggest and most prolific industries in the world, tourism continues to be a primary driver of travel content. The industry has been severely impacted by the pandemic, particularly during 2020-2022, tourism still accounts for 7.6% of the global GDP in 2023, an increase of 22% from 2021 (World Travel and Tourism Council, n.d.). Additionally, the World Travel and Tourism Council's research indicates that 22 million new jobs in the tourism industry were created in 2022 (World Travel and Tourism Council, n.d.).

Travel journalism's potential to shape and influence our ideas about tourism is revealing of what Fursich and Kavoori describe as "the ideological dimensions of tourism and transcultural encounters" (2001, p. 150). In the context of social media and user-generated reviews, Pirroli (2018) has written about the ways in which sites like AirBnB use journalistic techniques as a means of creating a travelling lifestyle aura around their products. Further, Fursich and Kavoori also identify the genre as being inherently involved in the mediation of other cultures and as having its own 'special contingencies', in terms of its relationship with advertising and the tourism industry. They note:

> …free trips and other inducements for travel journalists are common – only a
> few publishers are willing to finance the trips of the journalists. This places
> man travel journalists in a difficult position between major interest groups
> (2001, p.154)

In taking stock of the academic study of travel journalism in 2014, Hanusch and Fursich point to four 'dimensions' or developing lines of enquiry, which resonate with and build on Fursich and Kavoori's (2001) earlier work. They too emphasize the significance of travel journalism's symbiotic relationship with the tourism industry, pointing to the consumer-driven market orientation of travel journalism as garnering academic attention (Mansfield, 2017; Rosenkranz, 2016; Hyan Yoo et al, 2009).

A further dimension Hanusch and Fursich propose relates to the ways in which travel journalism plays a role in shaping how tourism is experienced and practiced. Termed the 'motivational aspects of travel journalism'(2014, p.11) this line of enquiry has emerged from the sociological study of tourism. Influenced by seminal works such as those by Boorstin (1961), MacCannell (1973), Cohen (1978, 1988) and Urry (1990), consideration has been

given to how travel journalism influences the social and cultural practices of tourism. Santos (2004, p. 394), for example, explores the ways in which readers interpret and 'socially justify meanings' in American travel journalism on Portugal.

By far the most dominant and productive area of academic research on travel journalism relates to its representation of foreign countries, destinations and cultural practices (see for example, Fursich, 2002; Daye, 2005, Santos, 2006 Cocking, 2009; Good, 2013; Creech, 2017; Pirolli, 2018, Cocking, 2020). This builds on the perception that travel journalism is an important "site where meaning is created and where a collective version of the "Other/We" is negotiated, contested and constantly redefined" (Fursich and Kavoori, 2001, p. 167). In step with the consumer-focused and advertorial aspects of the genre, representations of foreign countries, regions and cultural practices tend to be enthusiastic, entertaining and affirmatory. This is often predicated on an "exoticizing and stereotypical discourse of the Other" (Hanusch and Fursich, 2014: 9). Often framed as light hearted, such representations are nonetheless important discursive indicators of our collective cultural imagination and, arguably, bear a trace of influence on how we practice tourism. Work in this area has addressed the circulation of cultural stereotypes in relation to specific destinations as well as tracing the lineage of such representations discursively, in relation to older, often colonialist discourses. One example includes the echoes of older Orientalist referents from "nineteenth-century European travel writing on the Middle East" in contemporary British travel journalism (Cocking, 2009, p. 65). In playing on the cultural preconceptions of its audience, travel journalism often draws on cultural stereotypes and commonly held assumptions. For example, in examining the representation of Turkey in the travel sections of British broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, Hamid-Turksoy, Kuipers and Van Zoonen (2014) found that representations of Turkish culture and heritage tended to draw on orientalist imagery. As a tourist destination Turkey was:

> Commodified by repacking orientalism, including harmless, aestheticized
> references to Islam: "beautiful mosques", "minarets" and "calling to prayer"
> enter the texts and allow readers to imagine an oriental place with an Ottoman
> and Arabic flavour (Hamid-Turksoy et al., 2014, p. 756)

Scholars see travel journalism as a dynamic receptor of new and historic discourses and in its representations of interactions with locals, often imbalanced and often problematic power

relations (Fowler, 2007). The travel journalist is in effect "on the lookout for scenes that carry an already established interest for a Western audience, thus investing perception itself with the mediating power of cultural difference" (Spurr, 1993, p. 21;).

Analysing travel journalism

In examining differences in representations of cultural mediation this chapter develops a small case study based on travel content drawn from print, blogs and social media sources. This comprises, of articles from the *The Independent* and *The Sun*, a travel blog, *Nomad Revelations*, and a TikTok travel vlog, *#wilderness_addict*. This selection was motivated by several considerations. The content comes from media platforms that are significant producers of travel content – both in terms of quantity and the fact that this content attracts high numbers of viewers. Politically right wing and tabloid in format, 31.1 million people per month read *The Sun* across its print and online platforms (Tobitt, 2023). Centre-left, broadsheet and online only, *The Independent* presents itself as the 'UK's largest quality digital news brand' with a readership of 24.5 million per month (Broughton, 2019). Similarly, several academic studies have sought to draw attention to the significant role travel blogs play in shaping our perceptions of other cultures and places (Gholamhosseinzadeh, Chapuis, and Lehu, 2023; Mainolfi, Lo Presti, Marino and Filieri, 2022). Lastly, Tiktok, has become well known for its use of a powerful AI-based algorithm system to determine 'users' tailored information distributions based on analyzing the content of each video and watching the preference of users to perform an endless and highly attractive video stream' (Ma and Hu, 2021, p. 384). Travel content has quickly grown to be a very popular subcategory with #budgettravel and #luxurytravel attracting 2.8 billion and 2.5 billion views respectively (MarketingWeek, 2024). No attempt has been made at focusing on a specific region or destination or specific characteristics of travel content on a particular medium or platform. Rather, the aim is to explore the underlying textual and visual characteristics that shape representations of different places and other cultures *across* different media forms.

In so doing, this chapter makes use of a critical discourse analysis approach. 'Discourse' is understood as 'language use in speech and writing – as a form of 'social practice... a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)…That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people' (Wodak, 2002, p.7). In the context

of media communication, the analytical practice of CDA aims to 'demystify (problematic) power relations and representations in the content and manner of language and communication practices in their contexts of use' and explore how 'boundaries of difference, uniqueness, and distinctiveness are marked and represented' (KhosraviNik, 2014, p.283). This is particularly pertinent to the focus on the mediation of culture in travel journalism here.

Whilst the origins of critical discourse analysis can be traced to the study of language and linguistics (Wodak and Meyer, 2009), amongst the broad range of analytical practices associated with CDA, a more recent strand of enquiry has sought to adopt a 'multimodal' approach. A 'multimodal' approach seeks to take in the contribution to meaning made by visual imagery; the ways in which visual imagery can support, contradict and create interplays with text. As Okado-Gough notes, this involves consideration of '"ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions" in both the images and texts in order to reveal the kinds of power interests buried in them (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p. 10)' (2017, 62). In this way, the adoption of a multimodal CDA approach helps facilitate consideration of the ways in which cultural mediation is represented in and via the interplay between visual images, captions, layout and positioning in travel journalism content. This enables us to ask: how are different cultures represented in travel journalism? To what extent do different content platforms facilitate different modes of cultural representation? How do representations of different peoples and places function as forms of identity signalling, helping to construct and promote travel identities such as 'digital nomad' or discursive practices such as presenting destinations as embodying 'middle class' aspirations and values?

Tabloid travels

Titled 'Go Sea it: European city where Santa's buried has shorts weather in December and 90p beers', *The Sun*'s feature on Bari in Italy centres on a city break style holiday which brings together season aspects of travel with a typically cheeky reference to beer - an appeal to the leisure time interests and activities the paper presumably associates with its readership. Beyond the opening headline, the most immediately apparent features of this article are the ways in which it brings together very short, typically tabloid-esque sentences with quite contrasting very traditionally Italian images. What is also quite striking and rather unusual is that the text is not written in the first person – this is relatively unusual for the genre of travel journalism where content tends to take the form of a first person account (Hannigan, 2013).

The opening lines of this feature draw us in with a seasonal reference – the cold winter months of the UK are contrasted with the possibilities of being somewhere warm abroad, and there is an immediate attempt to position the readers' day to day experiences of winter in the UK against the possibilities of spending time in abroad. Bari is presented as an appealingly mild destination for a winter city break, with temperatures in December reaching as high as 17 degrees. A further seasonal reference is made in the form of a link to Christmas: Saint Nicholas (Father Christmas) is buried at the Basilica di San Nicola. The novelty of this connection leads into a broader account of some of the historical, cultural and architectural aspects of the city. We learn, of Bari's historical centre "Bari Vecchia is a maze of narrow alleyways, open piazzas, and cobbled side streets" and the 'pasta nonnas' "who make pasta from scratch on a series of wooden tables on Strada Arco Basso" (Brotherton, 2023).

Whilst this text is presented in short paragraphs it feels somewhat at odds with the headline's claims about cheap beer. It seems the tabloid values of the paper clash with more traditional aspects of travel journalism which draw on the genre's literary heritage (travel writing) in order to convey a 'cultural frame' – a frame of reference in which to contextualise the destination for the reader (Pan and Ryan, 2009). The emphasis in the text on the cultural attributes of the city fit well with the images used in the feature which also focus on its architecture, markets squares and traditional aspects of Italian life. In this way, Bari is established as an unchanged and very traditional destination - very few references to globally connected modern life are present. That said, whilst this might meet readers' expectations of Bari and Italy, the city is not portrayed in an overly stereotyped or jingoistic way. This, in combination with the opening references to weather, accentuates the contrast with 'home'. Not only does Bari offer respite from the winter in the UK but also as a destination which 'remains largely untouched by Brit holidaymakers' (Brotherton, 2023).

Beyond addressing the appeal and points of interest in Bari, the article turns to the practicalities of accommodation, food and drink and getting there. Bari is presented as a cheap, relatively low cost city destination that offers great value. It is interesting to read this against the backdrop of a cost of living crisis it in the UK, particularly in terms of how the feature emphasises the good value of food, drink and accommodation in Bari. In many respects, such as the reference to 90 pence beers, Bari is presented as better value than being at home. *The Sun*'s feature on Bari resonates with broader discourses about the cost of living and value for money in the UK. It seeks to appeal to *The Sun*'s readers by bringing together

several different semantic elements: the winter in the UK is contrasted with Bari's warm and sunny climate; its authenticity and value is played off against the expense of home. The fact that Father Christmas (St Nicolas) is buried there serves as a further point of novelty, interest and intrigue, serving as a means of drawing the reader's attention to Bari over other 'winter sun' destinations.

Broadsheet meanderings

Like *The Sun*'s feature on Bari, *The Independent*'s article on Lake Ohrid in North Macedonia – 'Why you should swap Lake Como for North Macedonia - makes use of lots of large images which position us in a point of view perspective. The highly stylised images of Lake Ohrid in *The Independent*'s travel feature focus on traditional and historic scenes such as churches and farm houses convey the impression that this destination has remained unchanged over time. In contrast to *The Sun* the text is much denser, more literary and written in the first person. The emphasis is on the experiential. From the opening line there is a strong appeal to the middle class values of its readership. We are brought into a first-hand account of the journalist's experience:

> Glasses clink and cutlery scrapes the plates at a pavement café by the side of the lake. People drink Aperol and espresso and take bites of pizza, their heads turned towards the peacock-green water and the villa-dappled hills that frame it. The scene wouldn't be out of place in Lake Como – but I'm 1,300 miles away from northern Italy, in a pocket of southwest North Macedonia called Ohrid (pronounced och-rid) (Holt, 2023)

In this way, we are lulled into some recognisably familiar cultural stereotypes about Italy. Drinking Aperol and espresso, eating pizza and taking in 'villa-dappled hills'. The language used is poetic and metaphysical. Here the familiarity of one established holiday destination – Lake Como, Italy – is played on in order to establish a cultural frame of reference in which to understand North Macedonia. Put simply – as the title of the article indeed does – the appeal here is that culturally, geographically and visually this place is like the Lombardy region of Italy. An area well known as an upmarket holiday destination and one readers are – directly in the title of the article - exhorted to consider swapping for Lake Ohrid and North Macedonia. The implication, indeed explicit statement, is that we are, of course, familiar with Lake Como, what it has to offer and what it represents in terms of holiday cultural value.

Once this cultural frame of reference has been established, the article focuses on a series of cultural reference points – ones that are very much in keeping with the narrative broadsheet travel journalism might typically use to promote Lake Como and the Lombardy region to its readers. The theme of being more Italian than the Lombardy region or, more precisely, more Lake Como than Lake Como continues throughout the article. We learn that Lake Ohrid is more than twice the size of Lake Como and older too, with Ohrid town being acknowledged as one of the oldest human settlements in Europe.

In this way, Lake Ohrid is presented as a destination steeped in authenticity, one that is allows the visitor to come into contact with the unchanged past. We learn that Ohrid old town has been on the Unesco world heritage site list since 1997. It is also renowned for its jewellery and precious gem shops. The cultural values of the readership are further appealed to by the accounts of sampling local wine and food. The article ends with a description of eating al fresco and Holt's sense that they could indeed be in Lake Como, concluding though that on reflection Lake Ohrid is so much more than a 'Como lookalike. It's a history-rich, nuance-filled destination in its own right' (Holt, 2023).

The use of Lake Como and Italian culture works as frame of reference in order to establish a familiar context in which to situate Lake Ohrid and North Macedonia. Once this has been established the destination is presented as being imbued with all the cultural elements of Lake Como only more so. This helps present Lake Ohrid as appealingly exclusive; a little known-known, an off the beaten track yet ostensibly mass tourism destination which is very typical of the ways in which destinations are marketed to middle class consumers via what Voase refers to as a 'discourse of the undiscovered' (2006, p. 288).

Travel blogging – it's a life style thing
Nomadic Revelations is an 'adventure' focused travel blog, run by João Leitão. Originally from Portugal, Leitão has been travelling since 1999 and has visited over 145 countries., Leitão's blog is aimed at the aspirant 'digital nomad', a subcultural trend that has emerged out the possibilities facilitated by internet technology and changes in 'employment patterns, particularly in the creative industries where "the idea of a location-independent style of working and living" is increasingly widely desired and commonly practiced' (Müller, 2016: 344; Azariah, 2012). *Nomadic Revelations* claims to offer insights and advice on travelling

off the beaten track, 'to encourage and motivate other travelers to discover exciting and unknown places around the world... Are you ready to think outside the box for your next adventure?' (Leitão, n.d.).

Unlike newspaper- and other print-based travel journalism where advertising revenue, hardcopy sales and subscriptions fund the salaries of professional journalists , typically bloggers are not paid to produce content but rather hope their content will generate income from 'advertising, sponsorship, endorsements, products, subscription, affiliate commission and donations' (Cocking, 2020, p. 60). *Nomadic Revelations* also serves as means of promoting Leitão's own adventure travel agency, containing many blog posts on countries across the continents. This chapter focuses on three blog posts on Morocco – 'Nomads of Morocco – Sahara Desert nomadic life', 'Nomads of Morocco – High Atlas Mountains nomadic life' and 'Sahara Motorcycle Adventure – Morocco'. These were selected not because of the destination but because they are indicative of the content on *Nomadic Revelations*. Following a well-established blog format, *Nomadic Revelations* uses a combination of large photographs accompanied by short paragraphs and, in some places, lists.

In contrast to newspaper-based travel journalism where photographs are often drawn from tourism marketing and publicity content, the photographs included here are taken by Leitão, cementing the notion that these are real journeys personally undertaken by him. We gain an impression of what nomadic Berber life is like living in the Sahara desert and the High Atlas mountains via. photos of, for example, typical meals, the sleeping quarters of a Berber tent, Kasbah architecture and traditional cultural scenes such as the Imilchil camel market. The photographs take centre stage with the text providing supplementary information. Taken in isolation some of these images could be seen as stylistically consistent with the British and European 'orientalist' representational frame, romanticising traditional cultural practices and nomadic way of life. However, viewed holistically these photographs convey a rather different impression. In the photograph of the sleeping quarters we see, for example, a rucksack and a plastic bag and in another photograph a solar panel sits on the desert floor next to a traditional Berber tent. Elements of western capitalist modernity mingle in a seemingly unaffected way. The overall impression is that these blog posts do not (re)produce the clichéd and stereotypical cultural motifs often found in professional travel journalism on desert travel and nomadic ways of life (Cocking, 2009; Fowler, 2007). Rather, there is an

attempt here to show life as it is lived, or perhaps more accurately to document the experience of visiting/staying with nomadic groups in the Sahara and High Atlas mountains. In this way, the content seeks to appeal to the aspirant 'digital nomad'. Newspaper travel journalism often encourages the reader to travel in the footsteps of the journalist, providing an experiential experience Ashe, 2023). Here, the framing of content is more candid and 'fly on the wall', lacking the glossy veneer of tourism marketing content often found in professionally produced travel journalism.

The visual depiction of digital nomad lifestyle is supported by light-hearted and entertaining advice on how to undertake similar journeys. There is an emphasis on fun and madcap adventure in Leitão's posts. For example, a journey across the Sahara opens with: 'What is then peculiar about this trip? Well, *the motorcycle was not really an authentic motorcycle*… It has pedals… and it is called: "Moped".' (emphasis in the original, Leitão, no date). Perhaps there were financial considerations that played a part in choosing mopeds over other more appropriate and reliable forms of transport. Such considerations are not made apparent, though, in Leitão's post. . Whilst the risks associated with using mopeds are acknowledged, this is very much presented as adding a further degree of excitement to the journey. This sense of risk taking and embracing the unexpected characterises much of the content on *Nomadic Revelations*. For example, in a list of fun aspects of the journey, Leitão writes: 'Getting lost – THE FUNNIEST OF IT ALL'… 'Motorcycle malfunction – AFTER PROBLEM FIXED, YES, FUNNY' (Leitão, no date).

Newspaper based travel journalism stories often exoticise and 'other' locations like Morocco, for example framing the architecture and/or cultural practices in ways that resonate with the colonialist modes of representation of 18th and 19th Century European travel writing (Pratt, 2007; Cocking, 2009; Cocking, 2017). Nonchalant but not arrogant, Leitão's emphasis on fun and - at times rash – adventure adds the kind of 'spice' that typifies the digital nomad travel experience. Consequently, the representation of nomadic desert life as it is lived is ultimately a vehicle for encouraging and - such are the economic imperatives of blogs – creating 'buy in' to the consumption of digital nomad inspired travel experiences.

TikTok travel vlogs: image is everything
Tiktok is fast becoming a significant influencer of consumers' inspiration for tourism activities and destinations (Wengel et al 2022). As with the other travel content under

discussion here, *#wilderness_addict* was not selected by destination but for the extent to which it is broadly indicative of TikTok's travel vlog content. *#wilderness_addict* focuses primarily on outdoors adventure, particularly mountainous destinations in winter in Europe, North America and New Zealand. Each vlog posted includes viewing statistics and most also have active chat threads. None of the vlogs have voice-over and all are around 10 seconds long and accompanied by atmospheric music. For these reasons it seems more productive not to focus on one individual vlog post but rather to examine a small range of post on the site. This includes: 'Train through Whoville #Switzerland #imobsessed' (2.6 million views), 'Missing this place #fyp #newzealand #wanderlust #boat #foryou #home' (29.3 million views) and 'Probably my new favourite country #greenland #bucketlist #tiktoktravel #iceburgs #adventurevibes' (16.3k views). The viewing statistics of the vlogs at *#wilderness_addict* tend to be in the 10-20k range with some such as ones on New Zealand and Switzerland attracting significantly higher viewing figures. Destination choice, video footage used, background sounds/music and choice of hashtag are all important factors in the popularity of specific vlogs (Sachs, Wise and Karell, 2021).

What is striking about these vlogs in comparison with other forms of travel content, is the fleeting, almost ephemeral nature of them. The ten second duration pass very quickly and, for those less familiar with TikTok content (such as this author!) some acclimatisation is required in order to tune into this format and its semantic constitution. Whilst with travel blogs images tend to dominate with text performing a more supplementary role, with these TikTok vlogs the moving images entirely dominate. Here the presence of text is limited to the comments threads. Its principle function is social network building through largely affirmatory comments that symbiotically promote the social networks of both the vlogger and the users leaving the comments (Darvin, 2022). For example, in the comments thread on New Zealand one user comments "lets go now flights should be cheap", whilst the vlogger, Caroline Foster replies, "I wish, doesn't look like I'll be making it home for a while" (Foster, 2020). Foster's reply, given that it was posted in 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, perhaps refers to the fact that New Zealand was in 'lock down', not reopening its borders to citizens until February 2022. It is also indicative of the ways in which TikTok facilitates the building of 'travelling' social networks. Representationally and stylistically the tone is very different to travel blogs like *Nomadic Revelations*. Whereas *Nomadic Revelations* sought to document aspects of nomadic life from a digital nomad perspective, here the focus is on conveying the

beauty of the natural world, one enhanced by filters, background music and in which the vlogger is front and centre.

In contrast to the established representational tropes of newspaper travel journalism such as generating appeal and engagement through encouraging the reader to 'walk in the footsteps of the journalist' or tropes of travel blogging where advice is mixed with documenting the digital nomad life, there are few if any depictions of cultural practices in these TikTok vlogs. Rather than representations of how other lives are lived, the emphasis is very much on presenting the vlogger in dramatic, aesthetically beautiful locations. As the hashtag *#wilderness_addict* suggests, the aesthetic of this vlog site centres on 'big nature'. We see dramatic mountain-scapes, snow and ice and wave-crested seas. This is nature rite large and with the application of dark, monochrome filters (sometimes contrasting with brightly coloured items of clothing warm by the vlogger) it is reminiscent of Ansel Adam's photographs, particularly those of American national parks in the 1930s and 1940s.

Very much present in this visual aesthetic is the vlogger. Most of the footage is either point of view (POV) shot or features the vlogger against dramatic natural backdrops. We see, for example, her bright orange hat as she looks out of the train window at the 'Whoville'-sque village in Switzerland, before the camera pans across its snow covered roof tops to the jagged peaks of the mountains beyond. Similarly, in the video on Greenland, amongst the footage of husky puppies, icebergs and whales, we see the Foster paddle boarding, floating in an icey pool and sitting on rocks looking out to sea. In each image the Foster's brightly coloured clothing contrasts with the icy blues and greys of Greenland's shoreline. The music accompanying each vlog is listed next to the video for other users to engage with. Along with filters, music enables vloggers to develop their own unique style; 'extra edits could improve the quality of videos and allow an expression of a positive self' (Du, Liechty, Santos and Park, 2022, p. 3418).

In contrast to newspaper and travel blog content we are not afforded insight into different cultural practices, rather we encounter a series of fast delivered snapshots of aesthetically stunning nature. The day-to-day aspects of travelling life do not feature and we are left to be inspired, wondering what it would be like to visit these locations and perhaps, in the context of the identity signalling combination of the vlogger in dramatic locations, aspiring to live the

travel vlogger life, 'gaining social recognition and building social identity' (Du, Liechty, Santos and Park, 2022, p. 3417).

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how, as a relatively new and emerging field of study, academic interest in travel journalism has mainly focused on four broad lines of enquiry. Travel journalism is founded on and formed by its close reliance on the tourism industry and associated advertising and marketing (Hanusch and Fursich, 2014, p. 9). Related to its characteristically highly commercial nature, is its problematic status as a form of 'non-news' journalism which positions us as 'consumers' rather than 'citizens' (Cocking, 2018, p. 1349). Emerging from the sociological study of tourism, another strand of research centres on travel journalism's role in influencing and shaping the practices of tourism; where tourists go and the activities they engage in (Creech, 2018). By far the largest area of research centres on travel journalism's role as a significant media source of cultural mediation (Good, 2013). Here, the focus has tended to be on the mediation of specific cultures and the representation of specific destinations or regions.

This chapter has sought to draw attention to the ways in which the proliferation of travel journalism across media platforms affords potential for different forms of cultural mediation. For example, in the article from *The Sun*, the Italian city of Bari and representations of Italian culture serve as an appealing foreground for a characteristically tabloid championing of the needs and desires of its readers/consumers. Bari is represented as a seasonal destination offering great value for money – better than being at home. By contrast, *The Independent* feature on North Macedonia calls on the reader's cultural capital and through the well-established literary technique of exhorting the reader to walk in the footsteps of the journalist, constructs North Macedonia as a more culturally rich version of Lake Como and the Lombardy region. The *Nomadic Revelations* blog presented a sense of life as it is lived by Berber nomads in Morocco – through a lens filtered by the subcultural signifiers of the 'digital nomad' lifestyle. Here, the representation of an 'other' culture serves as an adventurous, real and somewhat gritty foundation on which to promote the digital nomad as a travel practice and, ultimately, a lifestyle choice. The format of TikTok's travel vlogs facilitates a strong sense of identity signalling. Here, other landscapes are curated in digitally enhanced (filtered) ways in order for vloggers to establish their own unique travel aesthetic. Central to this is the vlogger whose presence in footage constructs a sense of 'vlog life'

identity – identities that TikTok users are, through the building of social networks, encouraged to affirm or navigate away from.

Whilst this chapter provides a small snapshot of how different media forms with their different technological and economic infrastructure facilitate different forms of cultural mediation, much remains unexplored. Travel journalism is fast evolving and now well established on social media platforms and the cultural and sociological significance of this content is worthy of further academic consideration. This relates specifically to the significance and potential of travel journalism on sites like TikTok in terms of cultural mediation and in terms of its motivational capacity to shape and influence tourism practices.

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