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American Perceptions of Sicily as a Tourist Destination as Experienced Through Film

Puleo, T. J.*
Arizona State University (USA)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways in which residents in the United States perceive Sicily as a tourist destination based on representations of the island encountered through commercial cinema. Twelve participants viewed trailers or clips of twelve feature films and then rated their impressions of the people, places, activities, and moods of each piece. They then responded to an open-ended question about whether what they saw made them want to go to Sicily. Next, I reviewed each participant's responses with them to investigate their perceptions further. I mix the findings of this process with insights gleaned from the literature on film-induced tourism as well as from analyses of the films themselves.

Keywords: Film, Representation, Tourism, Sicily, United States

* E-mail address: tpuleo@asu.edu

Introduction

Do films set in Sicily inspire the people to go there? This is the question I ask and attempt to answer in this article. Its basic aim is to test the idea put forth in the literature on film-induced tourism in a case study that is culturally restricted on both ends: Americans as viewers and potential travellers on one and Sicily as setting and potential destination on the other. The investigation responds to suggestions for more cross-cultural investigations into film-induced tourism (Kim et al., 2013; Kim, 2012c; Kim et al., 2012a; Hudson et al., 2011; Su et al., 2011; Iwashita, 2008).

1. Film and tourism

Although still in its early stage, the discourse on film and tourism has delivered interesting and important insights, not only by providing a fresh approach to understanding contemporary cultural and social dynamics, but also by connecting those insights to the economies of particular places throughout the world. Film is not the first art form to represent place through various techniques, but it is the one that is the most relevant to contemporary society because it has its origins in the same historical mix of processes that gave rise to them. To imagine the development of the past one hundred years without film as both a propeller and a recorder of its many rapid and expansive economic, political, social, cultural and technological transformations is impossible. From the mobilization of public opposition to fascism (eg: *The Great Dictator*, 1940), racism (eg: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1962), sexism (eg: *Thelma and Louise*, 1991), and environmental pollution (*Erin Brockovich*, 2000), film has played a notable role. This is not to say that films could in any way dictate or create cultural, social, political, and economic shifts, just that they have been a part of a mix of influences that have driven these processes for the past several decades.

The more colloquial American term for film – movies – nicely conveys this quality of mobility that is essential to the form and which distinguishes it from other arts and which, although so familiar now as to be invisible, was a characteristic that was as profoundly moving in aesthetic terms as the locomotive, automobile and airplane were in functional ones. These technologies have always featured strongly in the medium, and have had their own impact on visual perception and therefore on visual arts and culture (Cosgrove, 1994; Harvey, 1990). As Giuliana Bruno succinctly observed, film stimulates emotion through motion and motion through emotion (2002).

The connection between film and tourism seems natural now, but the current subdiscipline owes much to its earliest pioneers, such as Riley et al, 1994; Tooke and Baker, 1996; Mordue, 1999; Acland, 1998; Blythe, 1990, to cite just a few of the more influential writers in English who staked out the basic territory of the topic in the 1990s. It did not take long for certain themes to appear within it, however, such as landscape (Escher and Zimmerman, 2001, Hudson et al, 2011, Mordue, 2009; Connell, 2012; Roberts, 2010; Bregent-Heald, 2007), food (Mazumdar, 2011; Kim et al, 2012; Busby et al, 2013), and emotion (Kim, 2012b; Powell et al, 2012; Bruno, 2002). The relation that is central to each of these studies, that a film can inspire a viewer to travel

to the destination that the film depicts, is still not thoroughly understood, given the myriad variables that work singly and in combination to influence tourist behavior (Connell, 2012). The discourse is really still in its infancy and much more work is needed to enable its maturation.

For this study, I test the relation between motion and emotion; that is, between affective response to a film and intention to travel to the place it depicts, by considering the effect that films set in Sicily have on the travel desires of Americans who are regular tourists but who have never visited the island. Blessed with unique and dramatic landscapes and seascapes, millennia of fascinating history, stunningly beautiful and original architecture, ancient and vibrant customs, and inhabitants who bear a mix of many lineages, Sicily has supplied the settings for many distinctive films. The fiery slopes of Mount Etna and the Aeolian Islands, the intricate cathedrals of the Val di Noto, the temples of Agrigento, and the desolate badlands of the west, not to mention the people who inhabit them, all surrounded by a sea that is at turns cursed and majestic, have drawn filmmakers to the island for decades (Nicosia, 2012). But do the films that capture these people and places inspire their viewers to visit the real thing? And if so, what are the specific elements, and the decisive relations, that structure and inform this inspiration? These are the questions that I ask and, I hope, at least partially answer, in this article.

2. Structured interviews

I designed a structured interview to elicit opinions on twelve trailers or clips from movies that use Sicily as a filming location (including in a partial sense, as with *L'Avventura*) and also set their most or all of their story there (with *Il Postino* being the exception), ranging over a period of more than sixty years, from *Stromboli* by Roberto Rossellini (1950) to *Terraferma* by Emanuele Crialese (2011). The ten in between include Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960), Luchino Visconti's *Il Gattopardo* (1963), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), *Kaos* by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (1984), Micheal Radford's *Il Postino* (1995), Giuseppe Tornatore's *Malèna* (2000), *Angela* by Roberta Torre (2002), *Respiro*, also by Crialese (2002), *Nuovomondo*, again by Crialese (2006), and *Viola di Mare* by Donatella Maiorca (2009). The videos that represent each film are either trailers, or selected scenes in cases where there was no trailer available (*Kaos*) or in which the clip allowed me to test a particular feature of the film (*Malèna*). The trailers and clips ranged in length from approximately one minute (*L'Avventura*) to five minutes (*The Godfather*).

The interview participants differed in terms of gender (two thirds female, one third male), age (18-86, but mostly early 20s), racial identity (mostly white, but one black and another biracial), sexual orientation (all but one heterosexual), education (all with some college, some with bachelor or graduate degrees), occupation (a wide range but many college students), status as parents (all but one had no children under age 18), religion (a moderate range including no religion, but mostly Christian whether Protestant or Catholic), and regional location (many from California and Arizona but some representing states in the Midwest and on the East Coast).

I asked participants to watch a trailer or clip from each film and to then give their impressions on five aspects of what they saw: the video overall, the people in it, the place in which it is set, the activity in the scene, and its mood, rating each aspect in terms of its likability, either strongly disagreeing, disagreeing, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, agreeing, or strongly agreeing with a statement on each aspect: (1) Overall, I liked what I saw; (2) I liked the people that I saw; (3) I liked the place that I saw; (4) I liked the activity that I saw; (5) I liked the mood of what I saw; and finally; (6) What I saw makes me want to go to Sicily. I also asked them to enumerate what they liked and disliked specifically about each video, and then reviewed their responses with them, asking them to expand upon assessments and statements that I found to be particularly interesting, passionate or insightful.

In all, twelve people participated the interview, a group too small to allow me to identify any trends based upon demographic differences or to claim statistical significance for the study. Instead, I use the responses, especially those to the open-ended question about specific likes and dislikes, to identify and discuss aspects of the films as they relate to the concept of film-induced tourism, augmenting these responses with insights gleaned from scholarly work on the phenomenon as well as on the films themselves. I discuss responses to each of the films below.

3. Film impressions

Stromboli (1950): In the scene selected, a priest encourages Karin, a Lithuanian war refugee and the movie's protagonist, to remain on the island of Stromboli where she lives with her new husband, Antonio, even though she is very unhappy living there. Although the clip is in black and white, the beauty of the rocky landscape and the sea beyond it is strongly evident. Most interview participants liked the clip overall, rating the people, place, activity, and mood of the piece as highly or nearly as highly, with 83% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing to liking most of the aspects of the clip. Only 50% agreed (the majority opinion) or strongly agreed (the minority opinion) that the clip inspired them to visit Sicily, however.

The participants' individual responses shed light on their ratings. "I appreciated the ocean shores, the rocks, the wind," replied one. Others agreed: "I liked the contrast of the rocks and the sea, and the sense of quiet about the place," and "The ocean was nice." While some respondents commented on the landscape alone, others combined their opinion of the setting with their opinion of Karin, who is played by Ingrid Bergman, an actress known for her beauty as well as for her talent. "The scenery looked gorgeous and I love the ocean. The woman seemed a little dramatic . . .," said one. Another mentioned "the environment and elegant style" as what she liked about the clip. "The beach/background/water - The classic beauty of the woman: hair, clothing, voice," were likable, noted another, indicating that the turbulent beauty of the setting complimented the elegant disquiet of the character. Indeed, Rossellini chose to film on Stromboli, and even gave the film its name, because the story he wanted to tell depended on having the right place in which to set it. The story of Karin either overcoming or escaping from the cultural barrier she faced on the island as a

stranger (the film ends without resolving her fate) was made immeasurably more poignant and dramatic by the desolate volcanic landscape in which the story unfolds (Bruno, 2002: 369). The positive and prominent attention that the participants paid to the place aspect of the clip in their responses supports the finding that films with long and frequent shots of landscape positively correlate to increased tourist activity (Pan and Tsang, 2014).

“It also seems like they have a lot of problems in Sicily,” said one participant, a humorous point that has been made many times about this island, the striking features of which imbue it with a severe and intense quality. This matter-of-fact assessment provides one insight into the marked difference between appreciation for the film and a desire to visit the place where it was made. The drama and trauma that make a film so appealing as a story do not necessarily make it attractive as a tourist destination. Some places are attractive as the setting for a film but unattractive as an imagined destination, so they render the viewer more sympathetic than empathetic. As the participant said ‘. . . *they* (emphasis added) have a lot of problems in Sicily.’ For whatever reason – the alien period and setting of the film (postwar Europe), the nature of the problem faced by the protagonist (a somewhat outdated sense of sexual morality), or a landscape so volatile as to be almost comical (the volcano erupts and sends red hot stones and molten lava raining down on fleeing villagers), the participants did not seem to be able to see themselves in Karin’s place – literally. Although *Stromboli* is a cinematic masterpiece, the participant responses suggest that little about the film inspires, invites or allows the viewer to imaginatively insert themselves into the film and the place in which it is set.

***L’Avventura* (1960):** In this scene, the inimitable Monica Vitti emotes dramatically while watching a gorgeous sunset from inside of a rustic seaside hut and then later emerges quickly into frame from her position on a beach adjacent to a rocky hillside. This scene proved to be just as popular as the clip from *Stromboli*, with 83% of participants again liking or strongly liking most aspects. More notable, however, is that considerably more (58%), strongly agreed (rather than merely agreeing) that it inspired them to visit Sicily.

Again, the individual responses are telling. Respondents liked the mood of the piece very much, not an aspect that was highlighted in the comments on *Stromboli*. “I liked the mood the most about the clip and the activity (staring at the sunrise),” said one. “I love the somewhat desolate places with room for contemplation. That clip certainly made Sicily seem like one,” said another. “I liked the mood of the trailer,” still another simply said. Not much happens in the clip, which accounts for the relatively low scores for ‘activity’ among the responses. Those who did like it, however, commented favorably upon it: “The view from the woman’s window was breath taking. I could spend hours staring at that very view.” Others, as with *Stromboli*, favorably compared the beauty of the actress with that of the landscape: “Like – scenery, imagery, sunset; classic beauty of woman – hair, wind.” Another put it this way: “The scenery was very beautiful and the briefness of the clip made you want to see more. Such as, who is the woman, and who is she looking for?” Another, a male, was less impressed: “This advertisement of *L’Avventura* didn’t appeal to me. I probably wouldn’t want to go see it

by choice. The actress was beautiful and beach was great, but nothing that I couldn't find in California." He was definitely in the minority.

In contrast with responses to *Stromboli*, *L'Avventura* seemed to inspire greater empathy and a capacity and a desire for viewers to put themselves in the place of Claudia, Vitti's character in the film. Perhaps this is because she appears alone in the trailer, whereas Bergman/Karin had to share the scene with another person, in particular a priest with whom viewers seemed to have little sympathy let alone empathy. Also, the natural beauty in *L'Avventura*, while dramatic, is not threatening, as was strongly the case in *Stromboli*. The vast ocean is contained to the small aperture of the window, rendering it almost as passive as a painting hanging on a wall. Furthermore, the distress that Claudia exhibits seems to be one of an inner psychological nature rather than one that manifests itself as interpersonal conflict, a kind of turmoil that is easier to romanticize because it is contained within the self and therefore unique to a single person and constituent to one's particular subjectivity and agency. It is the kind of trouble that enforces one's identity rather than contesting it. Such a scene falls into the category of "emotional places" and "emotional experiences" that audiences find attractive and inspiring, the kind of scene that moves them to become involved with the people and place being depicted (Kim, 2012b).

Il Gattopardo (1963): The trailer for *Il Gattopardo* proved to be even more popular among the participants than the two videos that preceded it. The piece depicts multiple parts of the film, although the elegant interiors representing the estate on which Don Fabrizio and his family reside predominate, especially those of the ballroom, which were filmed the main hall of the Palazzo Gangi in Palermo. The popularity of the film among a group of relatively young participants surprised me. Considering that it is a historical drama set in the 19th century that was made over 50 years ago, I almost did not include it in the study. Over 90% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement: Overall, I liked what I saw, with similar scores for each of the particular aspects. 81% of the participants said that the scene made them want to visit Sicily.

Once again, an examination of the individual comments proves edifying. "I liked the costumes and the setting, not so much the plot of the film," offered one respondent, obviously extrapolating the nature of the whole film from just the trailer. Another echoes this sentiment: "The interiors in this were great, also amazing looking costuming, but I don't know if it has as much impact on my Sicily desires seeing as the people probably don't wear those dresses any longer." "Attractive actors and elegance," said another more succinctly. "Like – The color, the dancing, the clothing, the vineyard, love, the music, the woman in the white dress, fireworks." In fact, several of the respondents mentioned the color of this film which, it should be noted, was the first of the clips in color after two in black and white. Still, the strong appreciation for the elegance of the film, even if it is also a bit formal and antiquated, is abundantly clear.

The woman in the white dress is none other than Claudia Cardinale in the role of Angelica. The trailer promises a film that is indeed marked by elegance, beauty and color, but also one that has a fair amount of trauma as represented by battle scenes

and swift escapes via horse drawn carriage. Because the clip offered a number of attractive characters however, viewers could insert themselves into their place and therefore into the film and therefore into Sicily, albeit Sicily of the 19th century. Burt Lancaster as Don Fabrizio and Alain Delon as Trancredi, in addition to Cardinale, possess a flair, a power and a beauty that makes immersion in the turmoil of a tumultuous period appear romantic and thrilling. Karin exhibits little of this in *Stromboli*, except toward the end, when she is climbing up the side of the volcano among the smoke and mist. I suspect that viewers would have been even more inspired to visit Sicily had I showed them that scene rather than the one shown where she is having an unpleasant conversation with the priest. In the final scene on the volcano, her struggle transforms from one against a stifling society to one against an exploding mountain, therefore from one that is no longer social but rather natural in character. In shifting from the social to the natural domain, Karin's battle becomes grander in scale, and both less personal in that nature is her nemesis and more personal in that she is the only person who can determine her fate. Her fight becomes more existential and therefore more beautiful and inspirational. The same elevation occurs also in *Il Gattopardo*. The sheer elegance of the setting transforms the mundane and intractable nature of the problem (Italian unification) from one of resignation and frustration with the ways of politics to one of movement and exhilaration, as delivered in the form of battle and dance sequences.

The capacity of *Il Gattopardo* to inspire the participants to travel to Sicily attests to the flexibility that viewers exhibit in navigating the various time registers of film, being just as moved by a historical work as a contemporary one (Kim, 2012c; Frost, 2006). The one participant's observation, noted earlier, that present-day Sicilians probably no longer dress as they do in *Il Gattopardo*, is well taken. In spite her own consternation over this insight and her questioning of the effect that it has on her desire to travel to Sicily, however, she still agreed with the statement that the clip did indeed inspire her to visit the island. The dissonance between her positive response to the question and the doubtfulness evident in her comment supports findings that tourists seek out "imaginations of places" when they travel, not necessarily places that will appear as they do on film (Corbin, 2014; Hao et al., 2013; Cordeiro, 2011; Bickford-Smith, 2010). It is the richly imagined place, not the realistically represented one, which inspires travel. Travel to the place in which the film is set would not allow them to see what they saw in the film, but it would allow them to imagine for themselves what they saw in situ.

***The Godfather (1972)*:** Compared to participant reaction to *Il Gattopardo*, that for *The Godfather* was considerably less enthusiastic, with 60% liking or strongly liking the selected scene and only 50% being inspired to visit Sicily after viewing it. The scene in question is the one where Michael and his two bodyguards come upon Apollonia while walking through the countryside outside of Corleone, and then have a tense but ultimately positive encounter with her father who runs a small bar at which they stop for a drink. Interestingly, this is the first clip in the sequence in which respondents expressed negative opinions rather than holding merely neutral or indifferent views of

the clip overall as well as for the people, place, activity and mood of what they saw. 20% disagreed with the statement: "What I saw makes me want to go to Sicily".

Here are some of their specific comments. "I did not like the deal being made between the father and Michael. I did like the scenery and the music," said one. "I did not like the military and the unfriendliness of the people. The landscape was not exceptional and it didn't have a happy mood conducive to tourism," said another. Interestingly, the built environment impressed several respondents. "The buildings really stood out as amazing in this. The mood was that of a slower life, and that is something that appeals to me," said one. "I liked the open space and the café. I liked the relaxed feel of the café, even during the confrontation," stated another. "I liked how the buildings captured the feel of Italy" and "The city built on top of the mountain" (presumably as something that the respondent liked), round out the impressions focused on the place of the film.

I believe two things are happening here. The first is that, compared to the first three films, women have a weak presence in this clip and men are definitely the protagonists. Apollonia, played by Simonetta Stefanelli, is without doubt an intriguing character, but she is only admired as a passing object. The 'deal' that one participant references is that between Michael and the father of Apollonia in which Michael all but arranges for the two of them to be married. Viewed from a contemporary feminist perspective, the scene comes off as offensive rather than courageous. Few women would be able to insert themselves into this scene, or even have the desire to do so. They found Apollonia sympathetic but not empathetic, meaning that they could not or would not want to put themselves in her place, either figuratively as imaginative viewers of a film or physically as mobile tourists. Two commenters read the armed bodyguards as militaristic and objected to their presence, a feature that contributed to the off-putting hostility of the scene. Secondly, finding the people in the scene unattractive, viewer attention turned to the landscape. While the natural environment in the form of dry agricultural fields did little to inspire positive feelings for Sicily, the built environment in the form of the rustically appealing bar (despite the unpleasant characters occupying it) and Corleone (the 'city built on top of the mountain') emerge as redeeming features. The power of landscape lies in its potential for positive intervention. Viewers might have a difficult time imagining a positive interaction with Michael and his bodyguards, but they are intrigued by the possibility of what might happen in the café on a different day, on what might be contained in that city that is so distant, so high and mysterious. Landscapes that allow for such interventions stimulate the touristic imagination to produce places of potential in which "life changing experiences" can happen (Frost, 2010). Claudia's seaside hut in *L'Avventura*, perhaps the seaside without the priest in *Stromboli*, the café without the men and the city on the hill, emerge as such places of promise, places of redemption for both the viewer and the place, at least for some viewers.

Kaos (1984): The clip I chose from *Kaos* was from the second story of the anthology entitled *Mal di Luna*, or Moon Sickness, in which scenes of a troubled and newly-married couple toiling in a remote and desolate countryside are interspersed with

scenes of a man, who would test the fidelity of their marriage, voyaging by boat and on foot (and leading a horse) to meet them. Over it all a vocal group sings a Sicilian song in the plaintive key that characterizes the genre. Half of all respondents liked the clip overall while only 40% found that it inspired a trip to Sicily.

Here is what they said about it. "I really enjoyed the mood, music, and scenery of the film clip. It had a good atmosphere about it." "This was a good clip that showed a simple beauty to Sicily and also showed the hardworking Sicilian spirit. I don't think this showed the most beautiful elements of Sicily but this clip was more about the people rather than the look of the country." "Like – horse, woman 'dancing' as she cleans. Dislike – dryness of land, lack of color, people seem sad." "I thought the film looked strange. Possibly because of a lack of comprehension of Italian, but the music along with the non-verbal communication made me feel strange. It didn't entice me to visit Sicily because it looked like a place where they work hard and have drama."

The 'dancing' woman (Sidora as played by Enrica Maria Modugno) is charming but little about the scene seemed to invite the viewers to enjoy it vicariously, to imagine themselves in the place of one or more of the characters. Sidora and her husband, Batà (Claudio Bigagli), live on a remote patch of land in the dry hinterland, far away from a town or even another house. As referenced by some of the participants' comments, the landscape has a rugged beauty, but the activity being portrayed (working the land with hoes at night) proved to be too alien to the viewers to allow for their insertion into the scene. Because the scene occurs at night, it failed to inspire even a trip to the rural countryside in the mode of agricultural tourism. Sicily as a land of 'drama' is read negatively. 'Drama,' in the colloquial American sense in which participants use it in their comments, refers to psychological and emotional distress that results from interpersonal conflict. The same negative reaction that participants had to the exchange between Karin and the priest in *Stromboli* emerges here in their reaction to the distressed state of relations between Batà and Sidora. Modugno is a strikingly beautiful actress, but she is cast in a role that viewers apparently find unappealing and unworthy of imaginative place-taking, dissimilar to their reaction to Vitti and Cardinale, as well as Lancaster and Delon, in their more elegant performances. As for landscape, there seemed to be little in the scene that marks it as a place of potential, promise or positive transformation, which would move viewers to travel to the place as tourists. The one glimmer of hope lies in the dancing Sidora who cleans the few precious tiles that surround her marital bed by hitching up her skirt and shuffling around rags upon which she carefully steps. Some sharp-eyed viewers caught her act of hopeful place-making, but too many other aspects of the film militated against it being an inspiring clip overall.

Il Postino (1995): This clip fared better than the one for *Kaos* in terms of its likability and in terms of inspiring respondents to go to Sicily. The scene is that in which Pablo Neruda explains to Mario what a metaphor is. The setting is a little house on the top of a hill where the exiled poet lives with his wife, a scene filmed on the island of Salina, which is one of the Aeolian Islands. All respondents liked or strongly liked the clip and it inspired 75% of them to visit the island.

Whereas the comments on the previous films appreciated the appearance of beautiful people immersed in beautiful scenery – Bergman near the ocean, Vitti in the hut, Cardinale, Lancaster and Delon in the ballroom – respondents to this clip appreciated the relation between an activity and a beautiful setting. “Loved the scenery in the background and the discussion of poetry. . . the smell of barbershops makes me sob . . . hmm,” said one, making a reference to Neruda’s *Walking Around*. “I believe that a place where people can sit and talk about things like poetry and meaning are places where people can find peace and clarity. I liked the environment of the conversation, and the conversation itself,” said another. “This film made Sicily seem like a place where you can relax and talk about things like poetry and literature,” “Like – blue sky, talk of poetry/philosophy, demeanor of people/kindness, ocean, flowers, Dislike . . . ,” and “I enjoyed the conversation between the two men over poetry,” reinforce the impression.

Similar to the dynamic apparent in reactions to the clip from *The Godfather*, participants, finding they were unable to relate to the characters directly, diverted their attention to other aspects of the piece, in this case the activity, the place in which it occurs, and to a lesser extent, the mood that the interaction between the activity and the place produces. A similar pairing of place and activity in *The Godfather* did not elicit such positive comments because the viewers assessed the theme of the interaction among the four men to be less desirable. People are inspired to go to places that will make them better people. They want vacations to be restorative and enlightening. They want to discover beauty in a place that allows them the time and space to appreciate and savor it. What they found in *Il Postino* is one such place.

Malèna (2000): The scene I selected for *Malèna* was one in which the protagonist of the film, played by Monica Bellucci, walks along the promenade and excites expressions of lust and admiration from a group of adolescent boys who are sitting on the wall that lines it, a stretch of landscape that lies along the sea in the city of Siracusa. The boys shout and make catcalls as Malèna walks by, but she remains cool and impassive to their attention. Only 55% of respondents found the clip appealing and it inspired only 33% of respondents to go to Sicily. The piece registered unfavorable opinions in all categories, especially those dedicated to activity and people, namely the teenagers who were expressing their sexual excitement in such a frank, open and, at times, crude manner.

“I liked the setting but not the characters,” explained one female respondent. “This clip, if it exemplified behaviors present in Sicily, would present a set of behaviors that would make me very uncomfortable if I experienced them,” said another. Both of these opinions came from female respondents. Comments from male respondents reveal another perspective. “I enjoyed the interaction of the young men discussing the attractive Monica Bellucci very much. I feel like it brings me back to being a kid. The scenery in the surrounding area is beautiful,” from one and “This film boosted the sexual appeal of Sicily,” from another, again male.

Just as several participants found the clip from *The Godfather* to be off-putting on feminist grounds, so too was their reaction to this scene from *Malèna*. It does not seem

to matter that in both cases the women appear to take the attention in stride, reacting impassively in both cases, although in *The Godfather* scene there is not really a great deal for Apollonia to object to. What Americans with a feminist perspective want, particularly women, when they go on vacation is to escape from the depression they feel, that they claim results from daily assaults within a sexist culture. These assaults are not physical as much as they are representational and performative, daily acts of aggression and bias that attack their dignity and sense of self, and limit the range of activities that they feel they can engage in and enjoy safely. Representations of places in which such behavior is well in evidence reduce their desire to visit them. They respect female characters who resist and overcome such a climate of hostility, but they do not want put themselves in a similar position. Apparently, the beauty of Siracusa's *lungomare* was insufficiently evident, or too thoroughly overwhelmed by the roguish behavior of the boys, to emerge as a place of potential, promise and transformation as imagined under different circumstances.

Angela (2002): It is not surprising that reactions to *Angela* were mostly negative. So many films set in Sicily boast strong female protagonists: *Stromboli*, *L'Avventura*, *Malèna*, and certainly this one, in which the eponymous heroine, played by Donatella Finocchiaro, deftly navigates the dangerous underworld of Palermo. Similar to the dynamic noted in the discussion of *Malèna*, potential film tourists may admire characters who extract themselves from dangerous situations using intelligence, courage and guile, but they do not necessarily want to take their place. 55% enjoyed this clip but only 22% would want to go to Sicily because of it. Respondents tended to view the film's mood, activity, place, and people negatively.

"I liked the overall story the film presented, but it seems rather stereotypical of Sicily."
"The movie looked like a good movie, but would not make me want to go to the place it was set. This conveys danger in visiting Sicily." "I think the film reconfirms the American stereotype that all Sicilians are mobsters." "Like – woman in red sheets, Dislike – dirty city, dark vibe, violence."

The desire among tourists to encounter beauty, especially if it is unexpected, appears once again, as it did in *Il Postino*, for example. They want to go to places that have a bad reputation but are in fact more wholesome than they are reputed to be, or that are depicted as unpleasant but seem amenable to a possible intervention and improvement. Furthermore, they want to find the 'real' place beneath the stereotype, even if the stereotype is a positive one. This reality has to be positive, however. American tourists are not looking for the grit under the glitz. And while crime might make an interesting topic for an absorbing movie, it does not make for movies that inspire travel to the places they represent. Again, it is more the malevolence of the people that inhabit a place than the malevolence of the place (the landscape) itself, which reduces its attractiveness as a tourist destination. The psychological distress of a single character is different from social malevolence. Tourists can empathize with a character who suffers from an internal condition because the very act of travel is often motivated by such personal unease. As evident in participant response to the next film,

the fact that a character can work out his or her problems in a particular place enhances its appeal as a tourist destination.

Respiro (2002): If *Angela* dispirited would-be Sicilian tourists, this film bolstered them. All respondents reacted positively to the trailer for this film, and it inspired 77% of them to make a visit. The trailer is packed with images of Valeria Golino, and to a lesser extent other actors such as Vincenzo Amato, engaging in affirmative if at times mysterious activities, all to the tune of Patty Pravo's lively version of *La Bambola*. The scenery is spectacular, marked by a multihued Mediterranean Sea, the underwater shots which Crialese is so adept at filming, and the rustic houses and courtyards of an everyday, contemporary Sicily.

What were the specific reactions to the clip? "This showcased natural environment, and conveyed activities and places I would likely want to engage with were I there. Looked like a nice place to be." "This trailer almost could have been a travel ad, with scenes of adventure, romance, beautiful scenery, a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, and everything beautiful and colorful." "I loved everything about this clip. Beautiful people, beautiful scenery, and a great mood. I have a deep desire to go to Sicily, watching this clip and also I would love to watch this movie." "Like – ocean, young love, swimming, cave bed fort."

Here once again is the successful pairing of a beautiful protagonist with a beautiful place. While Grazia, Golino's character, has her share of troubles (she is apparently manic-depressive and this causes problems at work and home, as well as with the community at large), they are of the kind that inspire empathy, the kind of response that encourages a viewer to put themselves in the place of the character and therefore in the place that the character inhabits. Furthermore, the beautiful scenery has a curative effect on Grazia, particularly when she is hiding away in a cave (the 'cave bed fort' that one commenter mentions). So, as with *Stromboli* and *L'Avventura*, *Respiro* offers a protagonist who overcomes personal difficulty. Viewers can relate to such characters and they are able to generate empathy for them. Perhaps more here than with any other film, participant response to *Respiro* confirms the idea that tourists seek "emotional places" (Kim, 2012b) and the "life changing experiences" that can occur in them (Frost, 2010).

Nuovomondo (2006): The trailer for this movie seemed to dampen spirits a bit. Only 66% of participants liked what they saw, a respectable but unremarkable showing, while only 44% drew inspiration to travel from it. The trailer begins with scenes from an impoverished agricultural village in early 20th century Sicily and quickly progresses to scenes on a boat in which most of the interaction occurs between Lucy, an English woman played by Charlotte Gainsbourg and Salvatore, a Sicilian peasant and immigrant played by Vincenzo Amato.

"It seemed to be a nice story about nice people, but wasn't the point that they were leaving Sicily? They were only in Sicily for the first 10 seconds of the trailer!" "There wasn't much to like or dislike, it seemed like another tale of triumph for the downtrodden immigrant." "Like – inspiring theme."

The muted response to this trailer might be due to fatigue as it appeared toward the end of the videos. It is also well explained by the comments themselves, however. It appears that participants had become so immersed in representations of Sicily that representations of Sicilians, interacting with a foreigner on a ship that was moving away from Sicily, had little appeal. Had I shown another clip from the film, such as the fantastic opening in which Amato's character and his brother climb a steep and misty hill with rocks clenched in their mouths to ask the Madonna for her guidance, I think participants would have reacted more enthusiastically, supporting again the appeal of films that engage historical and rural themes (Mordue, 2009; Frost, 2006).

Viola di Mare (2009): The trailer for this film, the first production effort by Maria Grazia Cucinotta, who gained strong public notice for her role in *Il Postino*, continues the downward trend. 44% of respondents enjoyed it and an equal number drew inspiration from it. The film, a depiction of a real life story of the struggles of two women to carry out a love affair in 19th century Sicily, depicts a fair amount of romance but also an equal amount of violence against them.

"The scenery was beautiful, the violence was less beautiful. The passion of the story was compelling though." "Like – it seemed the father had changed his mind for his daughter, story of love." "I was conflicted about this clip. Seemed like a super interesting story. If I were to spend a substantial amount of time anywhere I would hope for greater LGBTQ acceptance."

The appeal of a film as a story does not always convert to the appeal of its setting as a destination. In fact, it seems that if the characters do not allow for viewer empathy and if the place does not allow for viewer intervention in an imaginative register, it does not inspire desire as a tourist destination. When "audience involvement" in a film is hampered, so too is the longing to travel to the place in which it is set (Kim, 2012b)

Terraferma (2011): The trailer for the final film registered a slight rise in appreciation and inspiration. 66% of respondents liked what they saw and 55% were inspired by it to go to Sicily. The film is unique among the collection for its engagement of a contemporary social and political problem that holds Sicily in its grip, especially Lampedusa, an island located off of its southern shore – illegal immigration, principally from African nations.

"I think the mood affects me most about a clip. Whether people seem to be happy there, or at peace. Some gorgeous images/filming in this clip." "Again, for moments of this clip it could have been a commercial for a cruise ship. The scenery was beautiful, the music was enjoyable, the activity looked fun, it looked like a nice vacation spot." "Another fantastic clip. I loved the people, scenery, and the activity they were doing. All I can say from this clip is that I wanted to see more and understand more of what is going on." "Like – scenery of deep blue ocean. Dislike – upset people, strange tone."

Terraferma is an important film and an enjoyable film. It is even an inspiring film. But, despite the fact that tourism is a major theme of the movie, it does not inspire tourism because it does not excite the tourist imagination. It is far too journalistic in its scope

and mode for it to create a place that could serve in any way as an escape from the problems of the modern world. In fact, it immerses itself and its viewers very much in them. Also, while the cast offers some of the iconic figures one associates with Sicily – the old fisherman and his dark-eyed daughter (Finocchiaro again) – it also reckons with newer inhabitants of the island, new at least in the context of modern times, the African migrants who do not fit into the imaginary of the typical tourist. The appeal of rural nostalgia, both despite and because of its revisionism, is that it presents a version of a place that satisfies the tourist gaze. The power of this gaze and its requisite presence in tourism and the promotion of tourism raise the question of whether tourism as an industry will always carry the ethical hazard of essentialism and exploitation and if films will always contribute to this problem. Is it the nature of tourism or the nature of film that invites the creation of tourist imaginaries that are reductive, damaging and demeaning? Or are such concerns overwrought and just as guilty of creating reductive and demeaning representations of tourism and the people who engage in it, to the peril of the place and people which it is well-positioned to enhance and serve?

Conclusion

This study was small in its number of participants but quite extensive in the range of films it examined. While the principle role of a film is not and should not be to inspire travel to the destination in which it is set, some films do fulfill this role, whether intentionally or not, and some do it better than others. Those that allow and invite viewers to put themselves in the place of the film, often by putting themselves in the place of a character, appear to be the most effective in turning a setting as a potential tourist destination. In particular, it appears that those who present characters for whom viewers have empathy rather than sympathy are the more successful. *L'Avventura*, *Il Gattopardo*, and *Respiro* appeared to be notable in this regard. When characters were not empathetic or even sympathetic, film viewers can still insert themselves into the landscapes that are depicted in a film, reimagining that the union could transform both them and the landscapes, thereby fulfilling the ideal restorative function of a landscape, primarily of the person but also of the place he or she visits. *Stromboli* and *The Godfather* seemed to inspire this response.

Participant responses to the clips and trailers supported the previous finding that historical films can be as inspiring as contemporary ones, perhaps even more so given that historical films require enhanced imagination to view and understand them. The imagination of a filmic place in an historical dimension does not appear to hinder its imagination as a destination in a future dimension; in fact, it might even facilitate it. *Il Gattopardo* appears to exemplify this dynamic. In contrast, films that plunged viewers into the daily realities of contemporary life, such as *Angela* and *Terraferma* tended to be less inspiring.

I offer these findings as only preliminary, however, given the small number of participants in the study. I plan to run a larger study in the near future to improve the representational power of the investigation. To do so, I will have to redesign the survey

to include fewer films and perhaps fewer questions, since in its present form it takes at least a half an hour to complete. Alternatively, I will keep the study the same length and administer it in a more controlled and supportive setting so that a greater percentage of participants will be encouraged to complete the task and provide their most insightful responses.

For all of its shortcomings, however, the investigation did fulfill its intended purpose: to identify themes generated by responses to a Sicily as a tourist destination as encountered through a wide range of feature films that use it both as a film location and as a setting for their stories. Future studies will only enhance and expand these initial insights.

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