Media's Mapping Impulse

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Love in the Time of Cartography: Reimagining Media Narratives of Magic, Mobility and Danger in Colombian Tourism

Colombia has figured prominently in spatial imaginaries of danger, conflict and passion. Often used as a shorthand for the direct (and indirect) perils of the drug trade—with this image fuelled more recently via the critically acclaimed US 2015 Netflix series, *Narcos*—the country has struggled with spatial stereotypes that paint its social and physical landscapes with sweeping brushstrokes that fail to engage with its social and cultural diversity. In conjunction with representations of violence and conflict, Colombia has also become interwoven with depictions of emotional geographies, for example, stories of love, passion and fear. These stories have produced, reinforced and challenged undulating and turbulent landscapes, particularly in the context of related media images. In this paper I examine these media/mediated geographies in order to analyse the ways in which narratives of love, danger, and mobility are interwoven with magical realism to inform quite specific mapping impulses in the context of Colombian tourism.

Magical realism provides a form of storytelling and perspective that acts as a negotiation of the not-quite-believable landscapes of shock and surprise. Most famously associated with Latin American fictional literature, its roots in the everyday and fantastical provide an ethereal grounding for Colombian media geographies. For

this paper, magical realism provides a framework for understanding the desire to map, explore and engage with Colombian spaces. To begin, I briefly outline the ways in which magical realism in itself produces and responds to certain mapping impulses and taps into particular geographical imaginaries. Built on unfixed—and unfixable—landscapes, magical realism provides an important tool for unearthing and understanding dreamlike and mythical cartographies of place.

Running parallel to magical realism, tourism related media also provide a range of mythical and dreamlike destinations. Tourism is embedded in media maps of escape, holiday romance, and adventure that tell partial and, at times disorienting stories. Tourism media campaigns provide an entryway into a myriad of emotions, places, inequalities, and decision-making practices that invite and exclude divergent audiences. Providing a direct focus on the fantastical while indirectly implicating the banal, tourism provides an opportunity to explore and analyse selective media mapping representations and practices.

I develop these ideas further through the use of two specific case studies. First, I analyse the widely broadcast tourism promotion campaign launched in 2008 by the Colombian government, focused around the slogan, "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay." Directly laying claim to "the elephant in the room:" rather than ignoring popular representations of violence in the country, this campaign actively seeks to engage with problematic depictions of Colombia's geographies of danger. The advertisements, and associated media discussions, promote the idea that never wanting to leave the country will be a bigger risk than that of not being able to as a

result of violence. This advertising campaign provides a useful example of how images of danger and mobility can be reinforced, reproduced and subverted through media campaigns that are seen as both self-aware, adventurous and contradictory. It emphasises the importance of emotional geographies—of "falling in love" with people and places—and (apparently) widening our cultural mobilities through this process.

The second case study explores the explicit use of magical realism in a more recent 2013 tourism campaign, "Colombia, Magical Realism." Focusing on the concept of travel to Colombia as a transformative (and dreamlike) process, both in terms of perception and places experienced, the campaign builds on previous slogans in order to highlight the country's uniqueness and diversity. Interconnecting with co-existing tourism media cartographies, the magical realism commercials use a range of narrative and technological innovations (including QR codes, video testimonies, and additional media formats) to "awaken" the tourists' "senses," while offering intriguing possibilities for understanding the strategies, possibilities, contradictions and conflicts around the promotion of risk, danger, magic and escape.