

THE CULTURE OF TOURISM: BETWEEN THE OPPORTUNITY OF SELF TRANSGRESSION AND THE ANXIETIES OF IMPERIAL DOMINATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses tourism and its relation to culture within the framework of “self” empowerment and /or disempowerment. It does that by investigating the relationship between the host and the guest as that between the colonizer and the colonized to reveal the complex relationship that ties the two. The relationship between the host and the guest is not only based on the economic “need” but also on some cultural backgrounds that reveal the negotiations and confrontations between the two sides. This paper aims at reflecting the profound complex relationship that ties the two: the host and the guest. It also revisits the concept of tourism and problematizes its cultural activity as an activity that boosts western hegemony over the constructed weak “other”. This complex relationship renders tourism an arena where cultural and coercive encounters emerge and reveal a new era of global and cultural hegemony.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism- Imperial Domination- Sustainability- Dis/ Empowerment- Orientatism

1. Introduction

Tourism is an important activity that reveals the human and the cultural mobility. It is a “cultural practice” (Rojek et Urry 1997) where both culture and tourism interact and overlap. It is an opportunity for “escape” to reach places that invoke the “exotic” and the unfamiliar ways and styles of life; an opportunity of “self” transgression where the individual experiences the hosting culture from a superior position. Through tourism, tourists continue to “indulge in the myth of the other offered by tourism” (Craik 1997).

Tourism is not only this opportunity of “self” transgression and escape from the monotony of life. Rather, it is a sector of employment, empowerment and /or disempowerment. It is also a site where money flows and where capitals make a “shift” especially in such a globalized era. It is an arena where divisions are made between “first” and “third” world; an arena where not only economic and socio-cultural factors operate and interact but also an arena where political struggles and friendships are established.

On the whole, tourism is one of the “principal ways through which our ‘world-views’ are shaped” through different means of representations such as “travel reviews, television programs and documentaries, travel brochures, advertizing and the way in which we exchange our holiday experience” (Mowforth et Munt 1998). It is also a site of sustainable development and mainly for developing countries.

Many critics have tackled issues related to tourism and have focused on tourism as an activity that is either restricted to culture or to its economic dimension. Many critics tackled tourism and the opportunities it offers to the host communities and to diverse individuals in general. However, few who have focused on the relationship between the “host” and the

“guest”. They assume that tourism is only about recreation, pleasure, leisure and economic empowerment or disempowerment.

In fact, the relationship between the guest and the host is important and complex especially in this globalized era where the western wealth penetrate the “third” world and establish new horizons of investments and new hopes for self-transgression among the local communities. This paper focuses on the relationship between the two: the host and the guest as they encounter, as they share one space and as they both hold different expectations, hope, desire and experience.

2. The Power of Tourism: Between the Realms of Self-Transgression and Disempowerment

Most of the time tourism is associated with pleasure and recreation and the heavy focus is put on the cultures that travel with the process of tourism or with its economic benefits for the host community. The economic benefits for those underdeveloped communities and countries are achieved due to the process of globalization that allowed establishing economic relationships and encouraging foreign investments inside those countries.

So, with the rise of globalization consumerism found the appropriate environment to incubate and develop through tourism. Through different western “touristic” institutions constructed in the third worlds, western tourists become invited to experience the exotic. As a result different famous franchises along with a series of restaurants, hotels and resort companies established themselves and started recruiting “natives” to push them towards their sense of self transgression.

Constructing the notion of consumerism lead to the need to establish an economic change with new markets and destinations and where the tourists can cherish their superiority and their dreams. Therefore, liberalizing free trade by the “first” world governments lead to creating businesses that give the local communities an impression of self-development and self-improvement. However, this self-transgression becomes no more than a myth where the “first” world dominates and controls the economy of the “third” world and where western tourists enjoy and consume their own products and services.

The symbolic power of tourism remains in the over manipulation of the hosting underdeveloped countries and where the notion of “sustainability” continues “empowering” individuals at the expense of the state. It is a notion of sustainable development that is linked to globalization and economic dependence on foreign countries that not only push towards “individual” self-transgression but also towards establishing businesses and status apparatuses that fossilize the culture of consumerism and that leads at the end to a kind of dependence and to a kind of global hegemony for western nations.

The diversity of transnational institutions that emerged in the “third” world have contributed to the employment of local populations and also to a kind of economic growth and transformations in different sectors that tend to save the populations from the absolute poverty and from decadence. However, the notion of sustainability is not created only for the sake of populations to continue the improvement of the individual’s income but also to ensure and to “sustain profitability and economic growth through sustainable development” (Mowforth et Munt 1998).

This way, tourism “takes place in the context of great inequality of wealth and power” (Martin et Munt 1998) that finds its roots in the notion of sustainability. Indeed, this notion of tourism as an empowering sector for the local communities and third world in general can remain as just a veneer of reality and as Mowforth and Munt say that:

Sustainability is ideological in the sense that it is largely from the first world that the consciousness and mobilization around global environmental issues have been generated and in the sense that sustainability serves the interest of the first world” (Mowforth et Munt 1998).

So, pushing sustainability in its western format renders the “other” and the hosting communities as no more than consumers of western products and servants maintaining the amelioration and the development of tourism related services. The notion of center/periphery used in the economic policy of tourism industry reveals the lacuna that separates between the two entities the east as opposed to the west and reveals the deficiency and dependence of third world on the western policy of global domination that renders tourism a new form of global neocolonialism. This global economic policy that circulates kills diversity and difference and puts everything in oneness: one world economic policy.

Indeed, tourism reveals the subservience of the third world countries and their dependence on different individual sectors related to tourism. International airline services, tour operators, hotel chains, international banks and many other dynamic and important institutions demonstrate the deficiency of third world economies and their total dependence on such institutions and as Mowforth and Munt mention that:

Tourism in the third world will remain a special form of domination and control, although this is not to argue that there will be no individual success stories (of places and even countries). Rather, it is the global inequality between first world and third world in terms of power that is of such significance as to warrant an analysis of much tourism as ‘a special form of subservience’ (Mowforth et Munt 1998).

Thus, it is clear that despite the flashes of hope that local communities and individuals get from the sector of tourism and sustainability, they remain far away from their illusion of self-transgression to find themselves deeply rooted and ardently entangled in consuming western products and in serving inside companies and institutions that belong to their foreign holders. This way, tourism uncovers a real process of disempowerment where the host contributes to the economic appraisal of their new “masters”.

Besides, the economic dependence becomes more apparent as we investigate the relationship between the “first” and the “third” world tourisms. We can say that the inequality that is constructed in the economy goes in parallel with the western systems of representations where the “other” is marketed and where his deformed image is established in the western imagination.

With the Orientalized process that is constructed through racism and ethnocentrism, the “other” becomes appropriated and subservient depending on the help and the employment of the new masters. The aesthetics of difference makes from tourism an arena where alterity is constructed and where biased racial and cultural discourses are constructed. The western ideologies established the unequal systems of representations through different written and visual mediums that invite western travelers to visit the “exotic lands” and to experience the unfamiliar.

This way, neocolonial relationships become established through “imperial eyes” and through the constructed sharp division between “us” and “them”. This system of polarities reveals asymmetrical relationships between the host and the guest as of that of a “slave and a “master”. The systems of representations created fantasies in the western mindsets and pushed them to experience the exotic while put “third” world countries in a disempowering system that gives the individual a sense of self-transgression and independence.

In fact, the western agenda of tourism has created a notion of what Tresidder calls as “sacred landscapes”. Through diverse discursive productions, foreign territories become “sacred” in the eyes of travelers since they offer them experiences that they can never reach inside their homes. So, the search for such dream opened a process of compulsive consumption where diverse discursive structures emerge and fix the “other” as exotic. Such representations of “heritage, wilderness and rurality create a modern myth” (Tresidder 1999) at the expense of denigrating the humanity and modernity of the “other”.

Overall, it is clear that the western cultural and economic policy towards the “other” reveals an imperialist form of domination as unequal relationships start to emerge between the

“third” and the “first” worlds as between that of the host and the guest. This relationship is complex and problematic since it brings to the fore important issues related to the interaction and/or confrontation between the “self” and the “other” and also between travel, gender and empowerment.

3. Host/Guest relationship: Between Fantasies and Anxieties

The relationship between the host and the guest is an important relationship that requires more attention. Through it we dwell on the different issues that separate between the two and that reveal the asymmetrical relationship between the host and the guest. By standing at such relationship we realize the nature of tourism as a real reminder of the guest’s poverty (Chambers 1997) and where the guests cannot occupy more than the position of the servant. This relationship pushes us far away from the site of economic dominance of the “first” world and the subservience of the “third” world to dwell on tourism as an “extension of colonial opportunity and authority” (Chambers 1997).

The relationship between the host and the guest is important not only because it reveals the relations between travelers and their hosts but also because it brings issues related to the world policy and global hegemony. In fact, the relationship between the host and the guest is no longer the same; the inequality of wealth and power between the east and the west created confusions and blurred the distinction between the host and the guest (Chambers 1997). The balance of power becomes in favor of the western countries that are distinguished as the “first” world. This way, tourists become guests of their own institutions while the hosts become guests _if not servants_ inside their own homes (Chambers 1997).

The relationship between the host and the guest is not only based on the economic need of the host but also on some cultural and historical backgrounds that remind the hosts of their dark history with their “colonial” guests. The return of those tourists becomes a reminder of the domination and the exploitation they and their ancestors have suffered from. In fact, tourism becomes an activity where unbalanced relationships are emerged, an activity where the hosts become “slaves” of their tourist “masters” and where women are doubly oppressed by getting involved in the sector of tourism (Bolles 1997).

Tourism offers tourist “masters” all that they desire through pushing them towards a kind of transcendence and where tourists experience “otherness” and exotic matters. Therefore, their illusion and fantasy of “otherness” becomes at their disposal and at their hands and engages them in the notion of experiencing the “authentic”. This unique and authentic experience allows the tourists to expose their difference and to fix their “servants” to a lower position.

Tourists manage to cherish their superiority over the inferior “hosts” due to the myth constructed by tourism. Through their wealth and sense of racial superiority tourists get the opportunity to enslave their hosts by putting them in a position that cannot exceed serving and abiding orders. This way, the hosts become either agents that serve tourists directly or indirectly through serving inside the western institutions and by doing that they find themselves inevitably surrounded by hegemonic powers that restrict their “self”.

The “imperial eyes” of tourists downgrade the local hosts and exploit doubly the female “hosts”. Female servants unlike their male counterparts find themselves harshly exploited through the jobs and services they offer. Those female hosts suffer from low wages, occupy lower positions and can even be the main target of the tourists. In some cases tourists take the risk and the burden of travel to enjoy sensual and sexual pleasures that they cannot obtain at home. Women in this case become no more than sex objects and where the nature of tourism deviates from its recreational nature to a kind of sex tourism.

Indeed, women suffer from gendered exploitation since they are low paid and since they suffer from low positions in the sector of tourism. Through the sexual division of labor, women find themselves oppressed and almost invisible occupying domestic roles. Therefore, the sexual divisions of labor resulted to a kind of “absence, neglect, and misrepresentation” of women (Bolles 1997).

Women's poverty, lack of skill and illiteracy make of them an easy target for men's economic and sexual exploitation and a site of coercive and discursive misrepresentations. Women occupy domestic jobs that seem to be "natural" for them such as "housekeeping, doing laundry, cooking, serving and so forth" (Bolles 1997). In this case, women find little hope to trespass the boundaries of "subordinate" roles and remain encapsulated to what is considered as women's common jobs.

In parallel with the domestic works, women can also be involved in an informal tourist works such as selling different products "under the boiling sun" (Bolles 1997) either in beaches or in areas closed to the tourist's settings or simply in the streets. In fact, the low wages that those women gain make from them a prey that is open to diverse risks of harassments and/ or temptations for sexual exploitations by the tourists or even by their male counterparts.

This point would lead us to talk about an important and a sensitive issue which is sex tourism. Women hosts remain weak within their socio-economic disempowering situation which makes from them a target for tourists. This is not to say that they are all the time victims of tourists but sometimes they find themselves obliged to lure their "targets" to survive. In this case, native women remain victims not only of western tourists but also of the "first" world economy that controls and dominate the world.

Women as an object of the "tourist gaze" (Craik 1997) become a source of pleasure for tourists who seek sexual encounters with local and native women. Although much focus is put on "third" world countries where poverty is getting enlarged, it has been proved that sex tourism is not restricted to the "third" world but is a global phenomenon. Women's subjugation is not economic or social but extends that to reach a new business which is bodies' trade.

Prostitution along with other forms of "sexual-economic exchange" is among the activities of the informal tourism (Taylor 2006). This type of tourism provides a specific kind of services that quench the desires and the fantasies of the visitors. This way, sexual tourism is indubitably affected by the force of globalization and cultural and economic hegemony which not only help the movement of material, information and finance but also the movement of "bodies across borders" (Wonders and Michalowski 2001). These movements of bodies across borders reveal not only the pressures put on local women but also on poor women who decide to migrate for a better life.

In fact, the economic policies of the "first" world along with the complex relationship between the host and the guest which takes the form of master and slave relationship reveal the deficiency of such policies as well as the oppression and the "enslavement" of the male hosts. Therefore, their female counterparts become doubly oppressed and that is due to the low positions they occupy in the sector of tourism, due to the low wages they earn and due to the sexual-economic relationship that some women can establish with tourists. This does not mean that male "natives" are excluded from such economic-sexual activity but some are also exploited sexually by female tourists who seek the "exotic" and the phantasm.

This endangering face of tourism which becomes circulating all over the world through several factors becomes an activity of exploitation and enslavement where asymmetrical relationships are built and where people and populations are denied "the privilege of entering into the formal tourist economy" and are obliged to survive on "the margins of the informal sector" (Taylor 2006).

It is clear that the unequal political and economic world order shape the relationship between the interlocutors in the sector of tourism and reveal the cultural, political and economic hegemony of global forces over the "underdeveloped" and "third" tourisms in relation to our new era of modernism, globalization and cultural imperialism.

4. Neocolonial Spaces and the Anxieties of Imperial Domination

This section discusses an important issue that is related to the relationship between the host and the guest and their interaction within one space. As an example I take the famous city of Marrakech, the touristic capital of Morocco and where tourists managed to find the pleasures and the “exotic” life they desire. Within the last decade, Marrakech becomes an object of the tourists “gaze”. Its beauty, people’s hospitality and cheapness of life attracted huge masses of tourists from all over the world and mainly from the ex-colonizer country France.

Some of those tourists decide to make short vocations where they enjoy all that they desire and the services they aspire for at low costs while others become fascinated with the city and have migrated to live forever in the city or at least to stay for a long period that sometimes exceeds six months to enjoy the sunny period of the city. However, the problems and clashes between the populations and the new coming tourists become with the issue of buying the Riads¹ or exploiting them for long periods that can exceed in many cases fifty years. Those tourists encouraged their counterparts to buy the surrounding Riads to the extent that they have created their own spaces inside the city of Marrakech.

Through constructing some spaces western tourists get the opportunity to control their surrounding and to denigrate their servants enjoying all the luxuries they wished. This way, different discourses become constructed and different racial segregations start to emerge. So, the visual appropriation of the city becomes accompanied with territorial “occupation” of their own constructed spaces. Such neocolonial space excludes diversity and problematizes the position of the hosts who become at once servants to their guests.

Those western tourists become holders of those Riads and started to create their own sense of “purity” as it is opposed to the native “other”. Their economic dealings along with their buying of Riads, luxurious apartments and even hotels pushed towards the rise of the prizes of such buildings and goods not only in the old town but also in the new city which had a great impact on some of the inhabitants and their mobility.

Thus, tourists contributed to the rise of prices and contributed in a way or in another to the migration of many new families _ who earn low wages_ to other places rather than those zones which become extremely expensive due to touristic activities. Many new families started to look in the surroundings of the city for appropriate and modest spaces with convenient prices that they can afford.

More than that those tourists become annoyed of those “uncivilized” populations and in some occasions have frankly asked them to go and live away. They have extended that in some cases to start complaining about the “Azan” _sound of mosques_ and wanted them to be off or at least reduce them especially in some particular times and in Ramadan. However, despite all their efforts to achieve their aim, they failed in it since it became a mass issue discussed by the populations and in different means of media. The sensitive nature of the issue gleaned the population to refuse and resist such antagonistic attitudes towards them.

5. Conclusion

The problem of Riads as a form of Neocolonialism cannot be solved without the intervention of the state in the sector of tourism. In front of the huge flow of capital, the state should intervene and preserve its cultural heritage by either stopping the selling of those Riads and traditional guest houses or at least by regulating the “selling” of such cultural heritage by selling them only for a specific periods of time such as fifty or a hundred years. This way, after the passing of such specific period the ownership of the Riads returns automatically and directly to the original owner or simply to the state.

¹ A Riad is a traditional Moroccan house or palace with an interior garden. The word Riad or in Arabic "Ryad" refers to garden.

The state should uplift the sector of tourism while keeping the balance between the host and guest on the same stance. It can make so by fighting sex tourism and all the negative aspects that tourism _along with the flow of money _can play on local population. It can also preserve the dignity of the population and especially of the people working in the sector of tourism though establishing laws that preserve the rights of both hosts and guests. So, only through equal treatment and though national programs of preserving the cultural heritage and the cultural identity of people that the “host” and the “guest” can start to discuss and negotiate their positions.

I can say that through tourism many tourists have managed to create a neo-colonial space where they gather and control the “other” who becomes under their surveillance. The host in this case becomes no more than a servant if not a “slave” abiding by the rules of their guests/masters and fulfilling their desires. Overall, tourism becomes an important factor not in getting the flow of money from the “first” to the “third” world but also an important factor in uncovering huge coercive and discursive powers that emerge due to the complex host/guest negotiations, confrontations and encounters.

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