

# Everybody Hates a Tourist: World-Traveling, Epistemic Labor, and Local Citizenship

*Todos odian a un turista: viajes por el mundo, trabajo epistémico y ciudadanía local*

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**ABSTRACT:** Prior to the pandemic of 2020, global tourism accounted for over ten percent of global GDP, for a total of \$9.6 trillion USD; one in every four jobs created that year, across the globe, was in the travel and tourism sector.<sup>2</sup> And yet the figure of the international tourist is often regarded with an attitude ranging from bemusement to outright contempt so much so that a series of books exists to guide tourists on how to avoid looking or acting like tourists.<sup>3</sup> Why, though, is the figure of the tourist—especially the international tourist—so disreputable? Given the sheer number of such tourists (over 1.4 billion, in 2018 alone) it seems odd to think that there is something shameful or problematic about tourism as a practice. What accounts for our seeming disdain for the tourist, even as so many of us engage in tourism ourselves? There are, of course, many obvious answers to this question. The tourist—especially the international tourist—is often a figure of some wealth and privilege; that tourist is likely to be clumsy, at best, in his or her navigating of a foreign society; and he or she is often likely to be less careful in her caretaking of the physical and social spaces into which she travels, given the fact that she is as it were on vacation.<sup>4</sup> These facts may be enough to engender some antipathy towards the tourist

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<sup>2</sup> These figures are available from the World Travel and Tourism Council, at <https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>

<sup>3</sup> The series *Don’t Be a Tourist* was developed by Vanessa Grail; see, for instance, *Don’t Be a Tourist in Paris* (Roads Publishing, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Hence, the antipathy felt by many local Hawaiians for the wasteful habits of tourists to

especially one who, as Jarvis Cocker noted thirty years ago, regards the local inhabitants as somehow amusing.<sup>5</sup> Tourists are likely to be—as the British aphorism had it about American GIs—oversexed, overpaid, and over here. In this paper, though, I want to suggest a slightly different story for our ethical disquiet with the figure of the tourist. I will argue that the practice of international tourism raises two distinct sorts of ethical worries—both of which reflect the fact that international tourism requires a local industry in which cultural difference is curated and made consumable by the foreign tourist—. This fact may lead to ethical disquiet, I argue, because it can represent a site at which there is a maldistribution of the benefits and burdens of intercultural conversation; the local who works in the tourism industry must become adept at performing his or her culture for the outsider, while that outsider gains the benefits of intercultural conversation without bearing a similar burden of epistemic labor.<sup>6</sup> A second reason for concern, however, stems from the ways in which this demand for epistemic labor can end up deforming and destabilizing local forms of citizenship and political agency. Those who spend their days performing a debased and simplified version of their cultural identity for outsiders may be, I believe, marked by that effort and their own ability to engage in political conversations with fellow local members may be made more difficult as a result. International tourism, in short, may be a site from which both distributive and political injustices might emerge. These concerns, I should note, may exacerbate already objectionable relationships reflecting colonial legacies of oppression; but they may exist even in the absence of any history of colonialism. The mere fact of a market in the curated experience of cultural difference may be enough to raise these worries; and international tourism, I believe, often involves exactly this form of market.

**Keywords:** Tourist, International Tourism, Citizenship, World-Traveling.

**RESUMEN:** Antes de la pandemia de 2020 el turismo mundial representaba más del 10% del PIB mundial, por un total de 9.6 billones de dólares estadounidenses; uno de cada cuatro puestos de trabajo creados ese año, en todo el mundo, pertenecía al sector de los viajes y el turismo. Y sin embargo, la figura del turista internacional se contempla a menudo con una actitud que oscila entre la perplejidad y el desprecio absoluto, hasta el punto de que existe una serie de libros para orientar a los turistas sobre cómo evitar parecer o actuar como turistas. ¿Por qué, pues, la figura del turista—especialmente la del turista internacio-

Hawaii; tourists are more likely, report such locals, to abandon water bottles on the beach, drive unnecessarily large cars, and engage in similarly careless forms of disrespect for the natural environment in which they find themselves. See Mzezewa, Tariro (2020, February 4). Hawaii is a Paradise, but Whose? *The New York Times*.

<sup>5</sup> See Pulp, “Common People”, from *Different Class* (Island Records, 1995): “Everybody hates a tourist /especially one who thinks it’s all such a laugh”.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I do not distinguish between forms of international travel; it is, however, entirely true that distinct forms of international travel likely raise distinct forms of ethical worry. I am grateful to several participants at the discussion seminar for urging me to make this clear—which is, in the present context, really all I can do about that fact.

nal— está tan desprestigiada? Dado el ingente número de estos turistas (más de 1,400 millones, sólo en 2018), parece extraño pensar que hay algo vergonzoso o problemático en el turismo como práctica. ¿A qué se debe nuestro aparente desdén por el turista, incluso cuando muchos de nosotros hacemos turismo? Más allá de las respuestas obvias a esta pregunta, en este artículo quiero sugerir una historia ligeramente diferente sobre nuestra inquietud ética por la figura del turista. Así, sostendré que la práctica del turismo internacional suscita dos tipos distintos de preocupaciones éticas —ambas reflejan el hecho de que el turismo internacional requiere una industria local en la que la diferencia cultural se preserve y se haga consumible por el turista extranjero—. Un hecho que puede generar preocupaciones éticas. En síntesis, el turismo internacional puede ser un lugar del que pueden surgir injusticias tanto distributivas como políticas. Estas preocupaciones pueden exacerbar relaciones ya objetables que reflejan legados coloniales de opresión, aunque pueden existir incluso en ausencia de cualquier historia de colonialismo. El mero hecho de que exista un mercado en la experiencia de las diferencias culturales puede ser suficiente para suscitar estas preocupaciones, y el turismo internacional, creo, a menudo implica, exactamente, esta forma de mercado.

**Palabras clave:** turista, turismo internacional, ciudadanía, world-traveling.

**CONTENT:** I. *World-Traveling and Global Tourism*. II. *Ethics, Tourism, and World-Traveling*. III. *Conclusions*. IV. *References*.

This drizzle that falls now is American rain, stitching stars in the sand. My own corpuscles are changing as fast. I fear what the migrant envies: the starry pattern they make—the flag on the post office—the quality of the dirt, the fealty changing under my foot.

Derek Walcott, *Midsummer XXVII*

## I. WORLD-TRAVELING AND GLOBAL TOURISM

I will try to make this case in three sections. The first will discuss the concept, borrowed from María Lugones, of world-traveling-understood, here, not as literal global travel but (with Lugones) as the social process of entering into and participating in the lived reality of those who are unlike ourselves. Lugones emphasizes the ways in which world-traveling can be both playful and loving; but I want here to emphasize that such world-traveling also involves epistemic labor, and that such labor can be distributed in an unequal and exploitative way. The second section of this paper will understand global tourism as potentially a site of such inequality; the activities

of the tourist bring with them presumptively unjust demands for world-travel on the part of the one who labors for the tourist. This section of the paper will also discuss the ways in which such epistemic demands can give rise to deformations of self-understanding, and hence deformations of local citizenship, for the one who participates in servicing the foreign tourist. I will conclude, in the final section, with some thoughts about what might be done to render international tourism less objectionable and the limits on those proposals made so far in furtherance of such a goal.

María Lugones's concept of world-traveling differentiates two distinct ways of perceiving, and learning from, the lived experience of the other. The first, which —following Nancy Frye— is called arrogant perception, takes the world of the other as being uninteresting or interesting only through the uses to which it can be put; it is the form of perception which embodies the disrespectful focus to which women of color are subjected to by white perceivers:

I am particularly interested here in those many cases in which White/Anglo women do one or more of the following to women of color: they ignore us, ostracize us, render us invisible, stereotype us, leave us completely alone, interpret us as crazy. All of this while we are in their midst (Lugones, 1987, pp. 3-19).

In arrogant perception, the world of the other is not entered into with an eye towards participation and play; it is, instead, simply assumed away. The colonial gaze involves arrogant perception; so, too, does the one who knows the other only through what is immediately comprehensible to her own frame of reference as, for Lugones, Aristotle takes the slave as knowable only through the interests and thoughts of the master.

The alternative mode of knowing the other entails the willingness to be transformed by the encounter. The willingness to leave one's own frame of reference and the self constructed within that frame is the source of a distinct, more respectful, mode of entering into the world of the other. This mode of world-traveling entails, for Lugones, the playful willingness to become other than what one already is —to risk appearing, or being, foolish— in the service of learning what one might be in that other world, for that other person. This is a skill that has been learned, of necessity, by women of color in a white supremacist society —it is, says Lugones, a "matter of necessity and of survival" for such women. It is, however, also a source of joy and of self-building, insofar as it allows such women to build more complex, more plural, selves. It is also a form of love, insofar as the playful entry into the world of another is also a playing with that other, in a mutual process of self-discovery:

[T]here are worlds that we can travel to lovingly and travelling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that travelling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their "world" we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have travelled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other.

Lugones understands world-traveling as a metaphoric process—one can, and should, world-travel even within one's own closest geographic relations—but it can also be applied to the more literal process of world travel and global tourism. The notion of arrogant perception, and potentially of world-traveling, match up in a powerful way to the epistemic attitudes that might be displayed by those who travel across national and cultural boundaries, in search of an authentic—and authentically foreign—experience.

Imagine, to see this, the "traditional" welcome to Hawaii offered to tourists from Japan; they are offered a floral lei upon arrival a garland traditionally used to mark out relationships of kinship and authority, but which is now transformed into a symbolic initiation into the culture of aloha. The tourist will be guided through a luau, generally featuring roasted pork—a dish less important in Native Hawaiian culture than ulu (breadfruit), and treated to performances by women dancing the hula in grass skirts (which were themselves introduced by Europeans in the 19th century, as a modest substitute for traditional Hawaiian garb.). Visitors are, in the words of tourism consultant Kainoa Horcajo, "spoon-fed what outsiders thought they wanted" (Murphy, 2021). This performance of cultural difference is, on Lugones's vision, a form of arrogant perception. It is arrogant, not in ignoring or obscuring the fact of Native Hawaiian culture's being distinct from that of the rest of the United States, but in insisting upon a particular, curated and often morally simplified vision of that cultural distinctness. It does not erase the difference between the Native Hawaiian and the tourist; indeed, it is that difference which is largely what is sought out by the tourist. It does, however, preclude genuine world-traveling on the part of that tourist; the tourist is not presented with another world into which he or she may genuinely enter, but with a simulacrum of a genuine and complex world. The arrogance of this perception consists precisely in the tourist's seeking out and being provided with a replication of a social world, one intended precisely to offer that form of world-traveling most amenable to the experience—but not reality—of understanding the culture and the history of the Hawaiian people.

If the tourist participates in arrogant perception, then the one whose employment is to service that tourist must of necessity participate in a cer-

tain sort of playful world-traveling if only to understand the world of the tourist, so as to understand what that tourist is seeking. The one who works in tourism must, in virtue of their participation both in the local culture and in the simulacrum of that culture, be capable of traveling between worlds —between the truth of the local, and the culture of the tourist to whom a simulation of that culture is directed. Those who are in the business of making tourists happy must, that is, understand enough about such tourists and their frames of reference to make them happy; the laborer must journey to and to be understood within those frames of reference. World-traveling, for Lugones, is a survival skill, for those whose realities are obscured or ignored by racist norms within the United States. It is also, in a distinct but equally literal way, a survival skill for those whose profession requires them to mediate between tourists and the local realities they seek; they must learn how to be present both within the local culture and history, and within the reality of the tourist, so as to present some denatured version of the former to the latter. The history may be presented in a mechanical and repetitive mode —a script, repeated to each newcomer to the site on which tourism is undertaken. Even this, however, may require world-traveling; scripts must be updated, as tourist demands shift, and even what is mechanically repeated might eventually leave traces upon the one who repeats the words.

Why, though, is any of this relevant from the standpoint of ethics? It becomes relevant, I think, in the recognition that world-traveling, for Lugones, has at least two faces. It is, in the first instance, a form of loving perception of the other; the one who travels to the world of another is open to being transformed by that other, and so engages in a form of loving perception with that other. But such world-traveling is to put things most simply hard work. To enter into the reality of another requires the exercise of demanding capacities of identification and comprehension. We must identify with the lived experience of the one with whom we are engaged in conversation; we must seek to understand how that world is understood by them, and how we ourselves might be understood from within that world. This is, indeed, a form of loving perception. But it requires the exertion of enormous amounts of labor - both epistemic and emotional. One must be willing to learn about the other, and this requires the capacity to think of one's self through the eyes of another. One must also be willing to forego one's emotional responses, when one is misperceived or misunderstood in the eyes of that other. These are not trivial exertions of energy; managing one's own emotional reactions to the clumsiness of one's interlocutor is sometimes a source of enormous stress, and often

involves a significant exertion of will.<sup>7</sup> The tourist, to put things most simply, gets the enjoyable experience of world-traveling, without becoming subjected to the forms of labor required to genuinely experience the world of the other; the one servicing that tourist performs that labor, but does so in the interests of —and with an eye towards the cognitive limits of— that tourist.<sup>8</sup>

## II. ETHICS, TOURISM, AND WORLD-TRAVELING

The initial response to these facts might be to respond that there is no injustice here, any more than there is an injustice in the one who bakes bread performing more labor than the one who purchases that bread. The tourist, after all, is spending money to experience the simulacrum of the culture in question; the worker who provides an experience to that tourist receives wages for his or her labor. Is this response adequate, to overcome the perceived inequality here?

This response is not wholly wrong; certainly, the centrality of tourism to such places as Hawaii would seem to demonstrate that the practices of tourism are not, at the very least, inherently worthy of abolition. But there is nonetheless something here that ought to lead us to feel disquieted. There are forms of labor which are ethically worrisome, simply in virtue of the ways in which the nature of that labor, and the wages for that labor, are incommensurable in their value. The sale of sexual services, for instance, are sometimes felt to be morally problematic, simply because they require those who sell them to take a particular perspective towards their own sexual bodies; the commodification of one's sexual self may, we think, often be such a wrenching experience that it is a mistake to think of such work as morally akin to more standard forms of waged labor (Radin, 1998).<sup>9</sup> Something similar, though, might also be true in the space of international tourism. Where the tourist industry exists primarily to provide a particular vision of curated and carefully presented cul-

<sup>7</sup> See, on this subject, Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> It is not, of course, the only activity that requires such travel, nor even the only activity that might create cultural flattening; social media, for one, may produce a similar sort of cultural travel, with a similar exertion of will on the part of those who undertake to participate in the norms and practices of the globally dominant. I argue that intercultural tourism may have malignant effects upon domestic politics, but I am in no way suggesting it is the only institution that might do so. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for urging me to be explicit on this point.

<sup>9</sup> Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)

tural distinctiveness, then those who labor to present that vision might be required to alienate and commodify aspects of their particular heritage which they might otherwise want to refrain from seeing through the lens of money and commodity value. If there is nothing inherently pernicious in the sale of labor power—and I do not think all waged labor is exploitative—then we might nonetheless think that there is something wrongful about the sale of cultural labor, as found within many forms of international tourism. The one who purchases an experience in international tourism may be purchasing something that we should not ask the laborer in question to sell.

This, then, is perhaps the first source of our ethical disquiet with the phenomenon of global tourism. If everyone hates a tourist, it might be because the tourist is—under many circumstances—a consumer of a false and simplified form of cultural identity, which requires a difficult and alienating form of world-traveling on the part of the one providing those tourist services. More, however, might be said to explain our disquiet here; and some of this might emerge from the needs and requirements of local democratic discourse, within the community in which tourist services are sought.

To see this, examine the epigraph to this paper from Derek Walcott. Walcott was born in Saint Lucia, a Caribbean nation for which tourism represented an ever-increasing source of revenue; at present, over sixty percent of Saint Lucia's GDP is derived from tourism, with travelers from the United States representing more than half of the tourists voyaging to Saint Lucia. Walcott's poem speaks of the anxiety of finding one's own country being transformed into the image of the United States—not in any literal or Constitutional sense, to be sure, but simply in virtue of the importance to Saint Lucia of those American tourists and their wishes. Walcott's fear is, as he notes, the inverse of the emigrant's desire; the emigrant to the United States seeks out the United States, to become a resident or citizen of the United States. Walcott, in contrast, expresses the fear that his country is learning too much about how to make those Americans happy—and that such an education exerts a pressure to make Saint Lucia itself American in disposition and habits.

More than this, however, Walcott is frightened of his own transformation, his own corpuscles, as he says, becoming transformed as his nation is transformed. This, I think, reflects two distinct ways in which international travel and the distinctive epistemic burdens of world-traveling, in response to the phenomenon of global tourism can represent a site of democratic deformation. The first is the simple fact of economic domination, and the deformation of democratic discourse that may be occasioned by such



domination. When sixty percent of any given nation's GDP is derived from the habits of making outsiders happy, through catering to their particular wishes and interests about the experiences they will have while present within that nation, then those outsiders will have a significant —indeed, outsized— influence in that nation's politics. The process is similar to that described by Dambisa Moyo, among others, as a pathology of foreign development assistance; the state whose GDP is determined by foreign development aid has a structural incentive to keep its donors happy — even at the cost of its own citizens' happiness (Moyo, 2009). The nation that is beholden to the curated and distorted history sold through tourism has a structural incentive to preserve that history, and to present it to the world as the truth —even against the interests, or will, of its own citizens. If citizenship entails genuine power to speak and to be heard, then the voices of the local citizens are inevitably muted by the outsized power of those foreigners whose wealth grounds Saint Lucia's economy.

The second way in which international tourism might undermine citizenship, however, is slightly more difficult to describe. It involves the ways in which the phenomenon of world-traveling can leave, as it were, residue upon the character of the one who travels. In one sense, this is not regrettable; Lugones herself takes the process of loving and playful world-traveling to be transformative, and such transformation to be one of the benefits of such travel. But where the world-traveling is done —as it is with the workers in the tourist industry— on behalf of another, for money, then it is entirely possible that the residue that is brought back is not beneficial, but instead potentially a source of political loss. If Will Kymlicka is correct that all politics is, in his terms, politics in the vernacular, then the question of which vernacular is to be used —which particular set of concepts, cultural references, and historical touchstones will form the backdrop to political negotiation— becomes vitally important. Spending one's days working in a vocabulary designed to assist the comprehension of outsiders, however, may have the effect of transforming one's own vocabulary into that alternative form of speaking-taking the distinct form of discourse developed in response to the local community, and replacing it with the words and concepts used to converse with wealthy outsiders.

One example of this might be found in the writings of Hawaiian scholar Kamanamaikalani Beamer, who notes the ways in which the distinctively Hawaiian measures of distance —the ahupua'a and 'Ila— have been replaced, in Hawaiian political discourse, with the more globally comprehensible measures of miles and feet. The ahupua'a and the 'Ila reflect a particular vision of what is important, in orienting one's self in Hawaiian space; they refer to particular forms of watershed, and to the space be-

tween the mountains and the sea. Associated with these terms is a particular vision of place, in which one's origin story —the place from which one is said to be from— reflects not the jurisdictional vision of European cartography, but a more complex form of identification with particular islands or particular ahupua'a. Beamer notes that his generation, unlike that of his parents, has a tendency to use European cartography in situating themselves —to use the names of towns and cities, and to use miles to situate distances from those towns and cities. For Beamer, this is a loss which is reflective of a wider loss of culture. The precise contours of the Hawaiian construction of place encoded an exceptional amount of particular information —much of which is now in the process of being lost.

One need only open a Hawaiian language dictionary to the page that lists the English word *wind* to see how this generic term fails to capture the complexity and intimacy of air currents when they connect to specific places or seasons. For that one English word over three hundred options are available in Hawaiian... For a people to be able to give such detailed descriptions for different states of *'aina* [land or that which feeds], the ancestors also must have had extensive knowledge of place and the boundaries that gave each its unique identity. The boundaries did not necessarily manifest as lines on a map, but *palena* [place boundaries] associated distinctive characteristics with each place. Many ahupua'a and 'ili have distinct rain names. For instance, a rain name associated almost exclusively with Mānoa is Tuahine, whereas its neighboring valley Pālolo is famous for its Lilīehua rain. Knowledge of *palena* would enable a person to know which of the two rains one was experiencing (Beamer, 2019). It would be an overstatement to ascribe such losses solely to tourism. Much of this loss would also have to be laid at the feet of broader processes of colonialism and imperialism —although it is instructive to note that Beamer associates this loss with the generation coming of age after the beginning of widespread tourism to Hawaii, in the 1960s. It seems true, to say the very least, that there is some likely pressure placed upon local citizenship from the world-traveling undertaken by those who work with international tourists. The pressures upon the local political community, given the outsized influence of those tourists —and the pressure upon the local cultural and linguistic heritage, given the flattening effect of the needs of communicating with those tourists— would seem of necessity to have some negative effects upon the forms of vernacular in which local political issues are understood and debated. Tourism, in short, may have some role in making citizenship less situated and more generic for the local citizen; those who travel between states, in the search of authentic experiences, may end up making the discourse less local and responsive for those who themselves remain situated in place.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

At this point, it would seem useful to ask what—if anything—can be done about these issues. The problems associated with tourism are not like, say, the problems associated with child labor; we can comfortably hope for an end to child labor, however difficult such a goal might prove to be in practice. The elimination of tourism, however, seems less plausible as a theoretical goal against which policy might be judged. The same importance which lends it an outsized effect upon political discourse also tells against any simple insistence that tourism should be eliminated - or that the tourist is necessarily a participant in injustice.

We might therefore seek some principles by which the practices of international tourism are moderated, rather than eliminated. Some organizations have, in recent years, sought to introduce some principles for ethical tourist practices; the World Tourist Organization, in 2019, issued recommendations on ethical tourism in Indigenous communities, which includes such suggestions as an insistence upon partnership between “indigenous communities, governments, tourism destinations, the private sector and the civil society”.<sup>10</sup> Such suggestions are useful, in that they may help stave off some of the worst excesses of exploitative forms of international and intercultural tourism; they might remind those who create institutions and sites of tourism to avoid those particular practices which have historically proven most damaging to the local community. On the logic I have presented here, however, it nonetheless seems likely that such appeals are adequate, taken as a response to the distinctive ethical problems created by tourism across cultural and national boundaries. If what I have said is correct, then the ethical difficulties created by such tourism are structural, and are unlikely to be corrected by any particular coalition between the tourist and the local community; the latter has entirely too much incentive to be changed, in a manner inimical to democratic practice, by its encounter with the former. The most adequate response to these worries, I think, may require an increased willingness of the tourist to be aware of his or her participation in—and responsibility for—the cultural and political effects of that tourism. Even here, the willingness to forego selfish pleasure is likely to be relatively weak, in favor of the distinctive pleasures offered by traditional forms of tourism. Increasing such will, however, may be one of the only levers available to us, in the search for methods by which the economic benefits of international tourism might be preserved while its social and political harms are mitigated. Our tools, in re-

<sup>10</sup> World Tourism Organization, Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism.

sponse to the distinctive harms of tourism, might be imperfect and partial, at best; but such tools might nonetheless be the only ones with which the work of remaking tourism might begin.

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