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RETHINKING MOBILITIES: IS TOURISM DYING?¹

REPENSAR MOVILIDADES: ¿ESTÁ MURIENDO EL TURISMO?

Resumen

El presente ensayo-reseña explora las limitaciones conceptuales de la movilidad como una teoría que todo lo abarca, lo que explica

por qué miles de ciudadanos son incapaces de hacer turismo en todo el mundo. Imaginar el turismo como una industria de masas se basa en una gran falacia e ignora los efectos de las últimas crisis financieras de las economías mundiales. Solo menos del 1 % de la población total del mundo tiene los recursos necesarios para pasar vacaciones en el extranjero. Tenemos que repensar las movibilidades en términos de las grandes asimetrías causadas por el capitalismo, en el que el comportamiento ideológico de unos pocos se presentó como valores rectores por seguir. Al igual que la caballería en la Edad Media, la movilidad y el turismo son los privilegios de la élite mundial.

Palabras clave: Movilidades, crítica, turismo, ansiedades, consumismo.

Abstract

The present essay-review explores the conceptual limitations of mobility as an all encompassing theory, which explains why thousand of citizens are unable to make tourism worldwide. Imagining tourism as a mass-industry not only rests on a great fallacy but also ignores the effects of last financial crisis in global economies. Only less 1% of total population in the world has the necessary resources to vacation abroad. We need to rethink mobilities in terms of the great asymmetries caused by capitalism, where behaviour of few ones is ideologically presented as the guiding values to follow. Like chivalry in Middle Age, mobility and tourism are privileges for global mobile elite alone.

Keywords: Mobilities, criticism, tourism, anxieties, consuming.

The metaphor of mobility has been widely studied and explained by scholarships over the last 20 years. One of the pioneers, who have devoted his entire life in doing so, was John Urry. Per his viewpoint, late-capitalism has changed the means of production, alluding

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to sign as a mediator between goods and peoples. In this context, the tourist-gaze reformulates a new type of being in this world, where spaces are visually expropriated. In Urry's account, tourism would have never surfaced in other times because it is associated to the aesthetical values of modernity. As social activity, tourism not only depends on the geographical displacement through the territory, but appeals to a change, to a temporal rupture with rules of daily life. This leads Urry to recognize that being tourist means the convergence between two contrasting logics, leisure and labour. Unlike other authors, Urry is convinced that tourism is a modern phenomenon. The tourist-gaze expropriates the presence of others respecting to specific forms of socialization, creating signs and ways of interpreting them. The technological advance in the fields of transport created a new mobile world, where, Urry adds, almost 600 millions arrivals are annually counted at international airports. Based on the primacy of mobility by subordinating aesthetic values, he argues that workers are trained not only to work, but also to evade by alluding visual curiosity for landscapes or anything what turns unfamiliar to them. At some extent, one of the aspects that define tourism besides the mobility seems to be the curiosity for the other. Tourist gaze not only organizes geographical spaces, but also persons and forms of expectances in a timeframe. Its primary function is associated to give the necessary resources in order for the economy of signs endures (Urry, 2002; 2007; Lash & Urry, 1993; Sheller & Urry, 2004; Urry & Larsen 2011; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006).

The theory of tourist gaze has been revisited by many scholars. Much time earlier Urry, M. Foucault theorized on the gaze as a disciplinary mechanism that organizes and determines the social behavior. The power conferred to gaze is based on a social discourse that legitimates the practice. Although Urry has not innovated too much in this approach, his

legacy has widely recognized by applied research in the sociology of tourism (Germann Molz, 2014).

Frederick Buell places the problem of mobility and globalization under the lens of scrutiny. Beyond his criticism, he advocates for a new theory of globalization that understands the pervasive position of culture in the threshold of time. West not only colonized the peripheral world by introducing the idea of white superiority, but also the beliefs of "commonalities" in heterogeneous aboriginal landscape. As it has been formulated by colonial powers, culture serves for two diverse purposes. On one hand, it appealed to forge a sentiment of "we" against "they", who were portrayed as "inferior". On another, the process of decolonization post wwii created the inverse stage. However, the meaning of culture never was questioned. Today, culture is sold by tourism and global industries. The merits in Duell's work consisted in discussing critically the belief that late-modernity commoditizes cultures. To put this in bluntly, culture as an invention of colonial West expanded globalization to worldwide (Buell, 1994). The concept of tourist-gaze as well as the idea of a mobile world appeals to the old colonial stereotypes; Buell acknowledges that the efficacy of capitalism consisted not only in transcending the market, introducing the concept of cultures through post-war period, but creating a hierarchy of the world (three worlds) where first one was in the superior ladder than the other two. The third world represented the sign of deficiency but was morally authentic. The "inauthentic" west, which was characterized by greed, anomie and conflict, should help under-developing countries to reach modernization and rationality.

Culturally, there is still stronger tendency toward hierarchy in the three world's theory. This cultural hierarchy, however, has proven as brittle as is has been tenacious. Thanks to a vigorous survival of cultural attitudes

from Euro-colonial Past, the first World sees itself and is seen as the source of high modern culture and scientific rationality, of universalism and universal literary and artistic genius. (Buell, 1998, p. 23).

In this token, Dean MacCannell argued that Urry made an incorrect diagnosis of the problem, since the tourist destinations are built irrespective of the subjective gaze, which is culturally systematized or structured by the society. In his view, the sightseeing corresponds with a social structure which is associated to economic production (MacCannell, 1999). Other more subtle critique studies focused on the idea tourists are the only one who can gaze others, even sometimes tourists become in objects of others (Gillespie, 2006; Germann Molz, 2014). In other case, tourism appeals to exploit not only the sight, but also other senses (Dann & Jacobsen, 2003). Despite this abundant criticism, less has been said about the theory of mobilities. At some extent, sociologists agree we live in a hyper mobile world. Somehow, this doctrine has never questioned.

This means, to what extent in Third World, even first ones, may we affirm citizens are mobile?

The first point in this debate relates to Johan Huizinga, who some years ago, developed an interesting model to understand the role of “chivalry” in Middle Age. Europe was subject not only to cruelty, pestilence, wars and a lot of human privations, but also their authorities showed indifference respecting to populace’s suffering. More interested in their private issues than the daily life, kings and nobility governed behind the back of their peoples. In order for the medieval society not to collapse, Catholic Church invented the “archetype of chivalry”, which served not only to clean the monarchy’s image, but also by controlling the surfacing discontents in serfs. The question whether chivalry emulated values associated

to “cooperation”, protection of weaker serfs and justice was oriented to hidden the reality, ameliorating the degree of cruelty, servants were subject in these times (Huizinga, 1999). In this notes of research, we propose that the same applies for the global concept of mobility. The real-world shows not only we are not mobile citizens, but also it produces an ideological effect in popular opinion, which strengthens the sentiment of belonging. As Zygmunt Bauman put it, the modern world offers two types of mobilities, while some are legally encouraged to travel worldwide, others are impeded to pass the national borders. Thousand millions of workers that are pauperized by the existent capitalist-machine are unable to travel (Bauman, 1998a; 1998b), as Urry precludes. Even in Argentina, like many other Latin American countries, workers are soliciting credits to bank to finance their holidays. Whether decades ago, annual leave was the price at the end of the year of work, nowadays the Work-force not only has lost much of employment-related benefits but the influence of workers unions declined. Since professionals are only contracted by a specific period of time, one of the most common modern fears associates to the uncertainty for the next one. The job insecurities are one of the worries of lay people today (Sennett, 2011; Castel, 2000; Korstanje, 2014). It is logic to think that if the conditions of labour have been precarized, the same applies for mobilities. It is interesting to discuss how risk and mobilities are inextricably intertwined. The late modernity has brought more vulnerability to workers.

Last but not least, M. Korstanje has argued convincingly that it is difficult to acknowledge sedentary societies, as modern ones, are mobile. At a first glance, the concept of risk, which is related to private property, is applied on sedentary cultures, which are characterized by lower degree of mobilities. Secondly, our travels are unreal similarly-minded to “the traditional carousel where the point of de-

parture and arrival are the same (turn-around trips). This is the exact difference between tourists and migrants. While the former will come back to the illusion of home, the latter one goes in one-way direction (Korstanje, 2011a; 2011b). Our thesis is that mobility serves as an ideological discourse to keep the declining workforce under control, in the same way, chivalry was for medieval peasant. In the next lines, we will discuss in depth the empirical indicators that validate our belief.

At a first glance, the World Bank would offer ciphers that validate the hypothesis of mobility. Proponents of mobility embrace numbers, which apparently are impressive, but neglect others perspectives. The evolution of trends is prioritized than direct percentage in the relation flux of tourist/total population. Let setting the following example, how much important is tourism for nations? In 1995 almost 3.839.927.091 tourists visited the world using diverse means of transport, while it rose to 7.513.041.898 in 2012². However, this amount represents a marginal portion of whole population. Starting from the premise we are 6 billion persons, the global tourist flux represents less than 1% (0.001%). Although the rise of tourism, from its outset, is unquestionable, no less truth is that only few people are able to travel. Secondly, tourism-led statistics often are manipulated or interpreted depending on the source, and or the agency which financed the research. It creates a serious problem to make a coherent diagnosis.

The financial crisis that hit US in 2008, has accelerated the unemployment, and the outsourcing, which led to the labor precarization in central and peripheral economies. Per statistics given by International Labor Organization, there is a gap between central and peripheral economies respecting to people who can reach a job. While European Union register a rate of unemployment of 10.6% of

total workforce, in African countries as Lesotho, Mauritania, Mozambique the rate goes from 30% to 60% respectively. Even, many policy-makers are really concerned on the state of labor in Europe today. Far from being subjective, Spain and Greece has a rate of 25% of unemployment, followed by Portugal 15%, Croatia 17.6%, and Ireland 11%. This reality contrasts sharply with central economies as US (5.8%), UK (6.0%), Germany (5.1%).

The Spanish anthropologist Ivan Parro (2010) has conducted an excellent ethnography where documents how “los parados” [unemployed citizens] has reduced their horizon of planning and expectatives, many of them has sacrificed their holidays because of survival purposes. To this tragedy, once might speculate many others are working beyond the legal system, deprived from all social and health benefits workers have. Most likely, one of the paradoxes of global capitalism is that many families are not able to go in holidays because of budgetary cut-offs, few ones spend more resources and money annually. In Spain, recent investigations reveal that only 36% of families vacationed while almost 64% opted to stay home. As a product of financial crisis whips Europe a couple of years, these families had not financial resources assigned for tourism purposes³. Analysts were surprised when realized that the “tourist spending” increased for more than 1.000 euros per capita (6.4% in three years). Undoubtedly, the current crisis has affected local economies declining the possibilities of ordinary people to vacation. Nonetheless, far from being a mass-industry as the specialized literature accepts, tourism was a common practice of global elites; a tendency which was accelerated after the crisis in 1972/1973 produced by Arab-Israeli war.

2 Statistics of World Bank. International Tourism, number of Arrivals. 1995-2012.

3 Source. Saving. ABC. ES. Maps of tourist expenditure in Spain. “Este es el mapa de lo que gastan las familias españolas en vacaciones”. <http://www.abc.es/familia-ahorro/20140804/abci-gasto-familias-vacaciones-201407161326.html>

It is clear how tourism has posed as a growing industry, but this privilege is not for all. Why tourism moves in a world of contrasts?

If this is not substantial evidence, we may present the story of Roger and Mary which is self-explanatory. This story was collected in a personal ethnography in Bragado city, Buenos Aires, Argentina, as a part of a wider project. Defying the existent theory of mobility, this is the story of an elderly couple subject to immobility for many years. Roger and his wife spent almost 15 years without traveling anywhere for holidays or leisure. They simply had no money to do that. Except with the assistance of their daughters, they would not have been able to meet their basic needs. Nonetheless, one day, Mary received an inheritance that allowed her to buy a small car, a model C3 Citroen. Mary and Roger not only were very happy because with their car there was the possibility to move toward the destination they wanted. This freedom, deprived to Mary for a long time, paved the way for renewed contacts with relatives, or to plan for holidays to other Argentine cities. Once they realize the dream of having a car, one day (pressed by the media news) they visited an insurance company they were told about all options and clauses so they feel safe. They went ahead by contracting a set of coverages which ranged from accidents to robbery. At the time, Roger and Mary did not calculate how to pay the costs of maintenance and coverage. They became indebted to a bank. Finally, they had to sell the vehicle to meet their basic needs. The Argentine economy soon went into recession the global crash starting in the United States. Two of their daughters lost their jobs, and their husbands became unemployed.

The late capitalism operates by maximizing the profits, which are concentrated in hands of international elite (capital owners). At some extent, risks correct the asymmetries produced by liberal mobility, which is a dis-

course aimed to controlling the workforce by what they may consume. In the fields of ideology, the capitalism has success because the produced wealth is concentrated in few pockets, expanding the belief that elite's practices are the common to whole population. In doing so, we believe that tourism is a basic right of all citizens, when the empirical research shows the opposite. Much people are deprived for leisure practices and travels worldwide. Korstanje, Tzanelli and Clayton (2014) observed recently that social Darwinism, introduced by capitalism not only forged an extreme competition among workers, but also fabricated a doom to grant its disciplinary mechanism of exploitation. The capitalist mind is alike Big Brother, a reality show where participants compete to win the first prize. Although competitors are many, only one will be the winner. This logic is held by "social Darwinism", which promoted the survival of fittest. Basically, Bauman is not wrong when acknowledges Big Brother emulates the dialectics between workers and capital owners, where the profits of elite are granted to the ruin of the whole. As British anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011) put it, tourism exhibits a double hermeneutics, where workers are pressed to direct their saving to be paradoxically sanitized. The dichotomy leisure/work was recently coined by industrial mind to legitimate a new way of social control over workforce. Leisure consumption prevents rank-and-file workers to gain further profits. To put this in bluntly, they concede to elite the marginal capital obtained by their wages. The old practices that banned the workers' leisure set the pace to new subtle but not for that less oppressive ways of domination. Far from being an agent of democratization, modern tourism reinforced the asymmetry among classes. Whatever the case may be, tourism serves as ideal so that the society does not disintegrate (MacCannell, 1999); and what this essay review wants to contribute is in questioning the roots of mobility-related theories. Ancient

historians and archeologists understand that tourism is the maiden of empires. On one hand, it allows the connectivity of regions by imposing the belief in the exemplary centre, a much deep seated idea of mobility, where the centre exerts gravitation over the periphery. But at the same time, subordinated serfs are limited in the places they can visit (Skoll, 2011; Korstanje y Skoll, 2013). It is clear though the means of transport and technology have substantially been changed over the recent decades, the disciplinary mechanisms of control endure. In other words, we want to hear only the voices of winners, while losers of the system are hidden.

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