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Tourism and decolonisation: Locating research and self

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically explores decolonial theory and its relevance for tourism studies. We suggest that while postcolonial and related critical theoretical perspectives furthered understandings of the consequences of colonisation, such critical theorising has not provided an epistemological perspective of tourism which legitimises the cosmologies of, and actively empowers, traditionally marginalised groupings. We review published tourism research which adopts critical and postcolonial perspectives, and argue that while these have been valuable in terms of exposing the existence and effects of dominant discourses and practices in tourism, their emancipatory objectives are limited because tourism knowledge is still predominantly colonial. Epistemological decolonisation is thus presented as a more radical project which can provide an 'other' way of thinking, being and knowing about tourism.

Introduction

It can hardly be denied that over the past few decades we have witnessed significant advances in the development of our knowledge about tourism. Recent articles in *Annals of Tourism Research* point to transformations in our understanding of the sociology of tourism through the application of novel theoretical approaches such as the mobilities paradigm and the concept of performativity and actor

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network theory (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). We have been encouraged as tourism researchers to seek to apply new developments in psychology to issues in tourism such as motivation, memory, satisfaction and personal growth (Pearce & Packer, 2013). We have also been urged to break through disciplinary 'straightjackets' to embrace interdisciplinary perspectives which could, for example, provide a more interpretive understanding of the relationship between tourism and oil that goes beyond economics (Becken, 2011).

Earlier in 2006, Coles and Hall in an interesting treatise have sought to promote the value of post-disciplinarity in studies of tourism, which they argued could lead to an "abandoning of the shackles of disciplinary policing" (2006, p. 312). They went on to indicate that a "post-disciplinary outlook. . .encourages more flexible modes of knowledge production and consumption that are able to deal with" the complexity of contemporary tourism related issues (Coles & Hall, 2006, p. 313). It is also increasingly acknowledged within the tourism academy that our existing knowledge about tourism is Eurocentric and therefore ignores and negates those knowledges which emanate from other cultures and from traditionally marginalised groups (Hollinshead, 1992, 2013; Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013; Teo & Leong, 2006; Tribe, 2006, 2007; Whittaker, 1999). Of note within this context is what has been deemed the recent *critical turn* in tourism studies, which seeks to disrupt the dominance of Western ways of thinking, knowing and being to argue for the privileging of indigenous knowledges.

The main architects of this *critical turn* in tourism have devised a new concept known as *hopeful tourism* defined as a "values-led humanist approach based on partnership, reciprocity and ethics which aims for co-created learning and which recognises the power of sacred and indigenous knowledge and passionate scholarship" (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011, p. 949). Thirteen key tenets were outlined for hopeful tourism, which include self-reflexivity, emancipation and transformation. It would be difficult to argue with an approach to tourism research and scholarship that has such venerable and worthwhile aims. However there have been some critiques of this critical turn from tourism researchers including Chambers (2007), Bianchi (2009) and Higgins-Desbiolles and Powys Whyte (2013). Chambers (2007), in reflecting on the philosophical underpinnings of critical tourism studies discerned a tension between its apparent ontological relativism and its methodological aim of emancipation. According to Chambers (2007) critical tourism researchers appeared hesitant to embrace "the political underpinnings and normative values inherent in a critical realist perspective" (2007, p. 116) and she surmised that an expressly political agenda might be 'unfashionable' in the context of a tourism academy, which had seemingly embraced ontological relativism.

Bianchi (2009) has argued that the critical turn in tourism through its focus on the "discursive, symbolic and cultural realms" (p. 487) has neglected to engage with structural analyses of power and inequality in tourism which are inherent to global and neo-liberal capitalist structures. Bianchi takes a neo-Marxist approach and in his discussion suggests that through redirecting attention to "historical materialist methods of enquiry" (p. 487), the critical turn in tourism can therefore move beyond being merely an *academy of hope* to a "project that is emancipatory in substance" (p. 498). This apparent absence of an activist agenda in critical tourism studies is further taken up by Higgins-Desbiolles and Powys Whyte (2013) who indicate that hopeful tourism has failed to engage with the problematic nature of researching oppressed and marginalised communities from a position of privilege. They also question how (in a practical sense) the hopeful tourism agenda can be achieved. Some of the other pressing questions they ask about hopeful tourism are: "Where is the activism in tourism academia? How many of the self-declared critical tourism scholars come from communities of colour?" (2013, p. 431–432).

We have noted, somewhat worryingly, that the critical tourism voices emanate primarily from Western scholars and it is not yet readily apparent that there is engagement with indigenous and local peoples and epistemologies in the co-creation of tourism knowledge. Indeed does hopeful tourism as a philosophical approach and as a course of action for tourism research and scholarship actually emerge from a dialogue with indigenous or traditionally negated subjects? Whose 'hopefulness' is it? Perhaps as Alcoff has claimed rather contentiously "speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate" (1991, p. 6) and according to Spivak (1988, p. 280) it results in "epistemic violence". We would like at this point to include a rather lengthy quotation from Brazilian writer Paulo Freire in his seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that was first published in Portuguese in 1968 but which we