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# **THE CONFLICTS IN NON PLACES, THE ARTISANS OF FLORIDA STREET.**

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## **Abstract**

The encounter of hosts and guests, from the formulation of Graburn, has been widely studied and investigated in tourism-led literature. It is subject to a great variety of conflicts and problems, which sometimes are not regulated by state. In this occasion, we trace a case study, registered in 2012, where a bunch of vendors and artisans, much of them occupied in the informal sector, struggled with the police to resist the eviction. This essay review explores not only the logic of capitalism by upending the loyalty of people to capital-holders but also unveil a covert face of tourism. What this work discusses is to what extent money has replaced the social relations among citizens. In view of that, the paradox lies in tourists are venerated by their privileged status within the consuming machine, but at the same time they are hosted to negotiate with a stronger state lest remains indifferent to citizens claim.

**Key Words. Conflict, Tourism, Sociology of Modernity, Theory of places.**

## **Introduction**

Although tourism is considered by many policy makers as a conduit to peace and prosperity, under some conditions their outcomes are even the opposite. Tourism may trigger conflicts and serious discrepancies among stakeholders for the monopoly of local resources. In this essay review we explore the struggle of artisan in Florida Street to vindicate their ideals against government, as the expression of how modernity works. In sharp contrast to Auge, we consider that non-places not only are a great fallacy, but also are spaces of great tension and conflict as well.

Florida became in well famous pedestrian way. Located in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this street was during many years the epicenter of tourism and mass-consumption. International tourists walked here to buy souvenirs, clothes, handy-crafts, and other products, at least until the landscape was radically altered. A bunch of artisans who offered their art-work to the visitors struggled with state, and metropolitan police to the occupation of the place. In what in terms of M. Auge was a non-place set the pace to a battle-ground which not only produced identity, but also specific discourses. By exerting the monopoly of violence the government of Buenos Aires pressed the artisans to withdraw or accept being situated in another location. Since these informal artisans do not tribute or pay taxes, a long-simmering conflict between them and formal handy-crafters flourished in parallel with the riots directed to police. At a first glance, this was a problem of terms of competition. Equality of competition conditions was the prerequisite the government proclaimed to justify the eviction.

Beyond the common parlance or the new covered by the media, this was the peak of a much broader issue which we will discuss in the present essay review. To what an extent the concept of “reflexivity” proper of postmodernity influences in the conflict is one of the points to be here discussed. Not only, the global economic order is legitimized on the reason of “extortion”, similarly to the basis of terrorism, but the self presents claims that nobody can meet to validate its own desire. The tactic consists in legitimizing the desire by the impossibilities of the terms how it is formulated. Whenever the law cannot be complied, it generates the opposite goal for what it has been issued. Taking the opportunities to attack the weaker agent is a most efficient mechanism of dissuasion.

Undoubtedly mobility and modernity has been historically intertwined. This is the key factors that gains Marc Augé attention to point out hyper-modernity produces non-places, as spaces of anonymity where the history, biography or tradition of the “Other” is effaced. If the anthropological place defines the identity of self to its past, by default non-places create “non-identities”. In other terms, the non-place not only reconverts the sense of territoriality, but also blurs the boundaries between present and past. It is common to observe in non-places a saturation of present, where hyper-consumption, ego-enhancement, and the lack of interests for others are “good practices”. As a result of this, the social bond

and trust decline (Auge 1996). While the specialized literature emphasizes on the resource handling to protect tourists, this essay review goes on the opposite direction. The thesis is that tourism engenders hot-spots of conflict between state and citizens by introducing autonomy as a form of commitment.

### **The concept of Non places**

Let clarify first that the term non-place was originally coined by Marc Augé in the book *Non-lieux. Introduction a une antropología de la submodernité*, the text was published by first occasion in 1992. Now, it is the fashion to talk of non-places, as spaces of anonymity where the traveler's identity is radically altered. Not only is the meaning of non-place being discussed within social sciences, but also in disciplines as engineering, place management, built-reconstruction or architecture. The French ethnologist defines the place in view of the relational perspective created by history and tradition. Whether any space associated to tradition can be called as place, the non-place exhibits the contrary tendency where there is no tradition. (Auge, 1996: 83). It is difficult to frame the genre where Auge moves because it encompasses a great variety of multi-disciplinary forms. For some readers, he would write on anthropological concerns, whereas others would opt to think in his book as philosophical ones (Auge 2001; 2008).

The concept of non-place, as it has been formulated by Auge, stems from an observation at the airport of Paris. The French ethnologist realized that travelers –modern tourists- are hyper-mobile agents conferred to a veil of anonymity. Until the traveler is checked out by the customs and migratory officers, nobody knows who is the wandering consumer who visits the free-shop of airport (Auge 2008). The names of tourists are only requested whenever the state should validate the identity before the embarking. This suggests that airport are really spaces of anonymity, this means non-places. Placing the antinomy between the remoteness and closeness, Auge explores the origin of anthropology where the other was situated there, in an exotic different place (Auge 2001). Now, rather, the other is like us, live like us. Also, the anthropological boundaries are being blurred. To what an extent, modern ethnologists may study far-away others, is one of main problems of the western social science epistemology (Auge 1996).

In this vein, we can compare Auge with Virilio or even Dean Maccannell. In this section we will situate the non-place's theory under the lens of scrutiny. As symbolic shelters that protect people, the large cities are spaces of distrust and fear for some people. However, through XXth century, they have employed as a fetish. The citizens, interested by the public space set the pace to an objectivized traveler, who is moved by the curiosity to see different cultures, customs and history, but at the same time it is blind to see its own society. The systematization of knowledge avoids the recognition. This happens because the discovery becomes in a structured habit. At the time, we gain further familiarity about space a temporal blindness invades our mind to eradicate the place.

In these times of mediated conformism, the sense of place is understood only through the lens of stereotypes, which are externally standardized according to the production of symbols. By synchronizing the human emotion, the present events upends the time, creating empty spaces. Like Virilio, Auge is convinced that the mega-cities are experiencing a double-process where thousands of tourists are attracted by the production of fabricated landscape, at the time these artificialities serve as mediators among human beings. The alien is not invited as host, echoing the hospitality's principle, nor accepted as other different as us; it is subordinated to the anonymity. This elucidates how the hyper-modernity has accelerated the long simmering crisis of meaning to understand the otherness (Auge 1998a). This emptiness is symbolized in the term non-place.

Criticism on non-place theory was detailed by Maximiliano Korstanje (2006) through his text, *El Viaje una crítica al concepto de no lugares en Marc Augé*. Starting from the premise that hyper-modernity appeals to meta-discourses, it is very though to accept it creates non-places. Any space is symbolized, appropriated, negotiated and fabricated according to the subjectivism of sightseer. Auge seems to lose the sight that the sense of a place may vary from person to person. In Latin American countries, many homeless, vagabonds and people excluded from the consuming logic, dwell the contours of airport, train and bus stations. They inhabit non places. If Auge is correct, then non-places would engender non rights, and of course, non-persons. The theory also may be adopted by elite to legitimate certain practices to people whose rights are being vulnerated in the periphery of paradise of consumption (Korstanje 2006). Besides, the theory has still problems to

understand the role of conflict in the configuration of non-places. The hyper consuming places, Auge delineates as non-places are fraught of tensions, conflicts and problems among the agents living or working there.

In this respect, Dean Maccannell argues that the history witnessed how the sacred-life has set the pace to more secular forms. If totemism, as a system of beliefs, is enrooted in primitive mind, tourism plays an analogous role in modern societies. West has advanced in the trace of technology imposing to the world a new secular view about relation. The sacred-space that characterized the gaze of aborigines, today, has been replaced by a new one more elaborated, secular and fictional sightseeing: *tourism*. What is important to discuss here, seems to be the connection of tourists with social symbolism, which is mediated by money and consumption. Unlike aborigines, the ubiquitous tourists travel to remote destinations in quest of authenticity. The discovery of what is covert in their life is of paramount importance to understand the tourist experience. The social unconsciousness is repressed by the rational order of rules. Tourists need to see in others what they are unable to find inside them. The quest for discovery and sensations is proportionate to the lack of individual introspection. Why do tourists need spectacles to feel special?.

Maccannell acknowledge that the spectacle of suffering is the tenets of capitalism. It is unfortunate that tourism exploits the suffering to draw the attention of consumers. This process only may be reverted if a real concept of ethics is introduced. The sensibility is the only way to put oneself in the place of others. This provides an exchange between actors that gives origin to solidarity. Nonetheless, the problem seems to be that the human sensibility has been transformed in a commodity. As a result of this, the spaces are being substantially altered. Unless otherwise resolved, tourists are condemned to internalize in them and others the power of Empire. The modern tourists would play (if their morality is changed) the same role than explorers in XIXth century legitimizing the dominance between centre and its periphery.

### **The Logic of Capitalism**

As in the early section has been discussed, Maccannell takes the opportunity to respond to Cohen, Bruner and Urry by means of diverse examples. Basically, he was criticized by

presenting tourist as persons obsessed by the authenticity. Since not all tourists look the same, Maccannell acknowledges that the false back region exhibits really the link between the institutions, norms and self. His observations focus on the fact there is an ongoing dissociation between rules and practices. This hole is fulfilled by the heritage. Therefore, staged-authenticity represents not only the emptiness produced by late modernity but also the decline human bonds. This latter point is more than important to understand Maccannell's legacy to tourism fields in an all encompassed way. The boundaries of time and space have been blurred into a new present setting. The ethic now is not part of our life any-longer. After all, the authenticity disappears because the needs of consumption fabricates mediated object between desire and gratifications (Maccannell, 2011). From a sociological view, his stance may be equalled to French philosophers as J. Baudrillard (simulacra), Virilio (Technology) and Auge (non places). This begs a more than interesting question nor Auge neither Maccannell posed, what is the role of conflict in a place supposedly lacked of tradition and identity?.

In the *Manufacturing Consent*, Michael Burawoy (1979) explores the roots of capitalist mind as well as the ideological discourses that produce the monopoly of knowledge. In some respect, the sociology of work has serious problems to understand the role of conflict in the process of production. Defining the "organization-factory" as a harmonic body, the founding parents of sociology considered the conflict only as a pathology, as an error, a disruption of norm. Starting from the premise that organization entails control, conflict was equaled to an anomaly. Rather, Burawoy argues that conflicts between capital owners and workers are not only endemic, as part of the system of production, its own natural logic which confers value to the commodity. This was the reason why functionalism and structuralism, within sociology, were widely adopted by management and managerial literature, while Marxist and post Marxist studies were neglected. These harmony theories not only reject the history which is fraught of wars, conflicts and discrepancies, but also a dichotomy for the workforce to elect between two option, consent or conflict.

Burawoy goes on to say:

*"Conflict and consent are neither latent nor underlying but refer to directly observable activities that must be grasped in terms of the organization of the labor process*

*under capitalism. Conflict and consent are not primordial conditions but products of the organization of the work” (1979: p. 12).*

This above noted excerpt reveals two things. First and foremost, the introduction of sociological literature to explain the worker’s behavior worked as an ideological text undermining the alternatives, or course of actions worker unions may follow. The configuration of conflict as a bad aspect of life led actors to achieve consensus with capital owners. Secondly, capitalism fabricates a world of ideologies, or imaginaries to legitimate the surplus expropriation. In these terms, the history of capitalist production reveals that the production of goods not only entail a network for distributing the produced merchandises, but also creates a specific experience which is enrooted in a “consciousness”. Far from being harmonic, capitalism not only does not produce non-places, but also legitimate their protection of surplus by the introduction of conflict.

Other post-Marxist scholar, Geoffrey Skoll (2014) clarifies better this question. Although one of the merits of Karl Marx was his contributions to the philosophical fields, above all the dialectics of agent and production, he was exploring the economy of capitalism. The crux for this society lies in the production as well as the reproduction of what is produced. This creates a dialectic image of two objects, the original and its copycat. The dialectics in the Marxian tradition, it is safe to say, postulate that capital takes the form of commodities, only whenever it composes the relationships for that production. The reification of capital consists in absorbing any individual worker’s characteristics, into the sublimated form of their labor, the commodity. The ontology of capital adheres not only to the subordination of workforce, but also a clear sign of victimization, where the worker lost their rights to claim a good portion of surplus. The system of wage, Skoll adds, alienates the possibilities of workers to keep the control of consuming-machine.

As Zygmunt Bauman, other senior sociologist explained that modernity sets the pace to a new form of production, more global and decentralized, known as postmodernism. Modern consumption is commoditizing workers and consumers as commodities at the market place. Tenets of capitalism are based on attractiveness of elaborated products that can be sold to a wider net of consumers. For Bauman, secularization involves not only religion but also



politics. In the past, citizens were interested by the public affairs and claims of politicians for solutions to their concerns. Today, market seems to have invaded and replaced the role of the State. Rules of the market have been expanded to public life and determine what is or are not due. We should assume that we live in a society of consumers characterized by a lack of neatness between consumer and good. The advent of trade does not valorize the reason at disposal to decision-making process of subjects. Otherwise, it puts emphasis on the irrationality of emotions and emptiness of imagination. However, in a society governed by consumerism emotions are materialized and circumscribed to private life. It is noteworthy about the materialization of love (Bauman, 2007), is conflict a result of entrepreneurship or only a sign of solipsism fostered by social Darwinism?.

Undoubtedly, capitalism advanced by effacing the social bond by fulfilling the gap with money; but no less truth is for some reason, the current economic maturation of post-industrial societies engendered new and more radical discrepancies among citizens. The conflict seems to be a mediator, in a world where the trust has been declined. At some extent, conflict can be defined as a result of the production system which reified the workforce to solipsism. This is the concern addressed by Richard Hofstadter (1992) who acknowledged that one of the primary aspects that determined by competition and the spirit for entrepreneurs in US were the adoption of social darwinism per the view of authors as Asa Gray, Graham Sumner and Herbert Spencer. This biological theory postulated two significant axioms which reinforced the sentiment of exemptionalism inherited in the founding parents of nation. The first was the “survival of fittest”, the second was the “social determinism”. In a brilliant argument, Hofstadter argues that the legitimacy of law to ensure the equality of all citizens was not sufficient to explain why some actors are success while others falls in ruins. As a supra-organism, the social structure overrides the interpretation of law. To evolve in a better stage, the society should accept the struggle for survival as the primary cultural value. The social advance depends on the wealth heritage one generation can pass to another. In this view, “primitive man, who long ago withdrew from the competitive struggle and ceased to accumulate capital goods, must pay with a backward and unenlightened way of life” (p 58). Millionaires are not resulted from the greed or avarice, but from the evolution of natural selection. They have been selected by

their strengths, tested in their success in business, and abilities to achieve adaptation to environment. Rather, others have been relegated to occupy poor conditions of existence or to disappear. Because of social Darwinism was a doctrine originally adopted by some religious waves, not only Sumner but Gray alarmed on the negative effects of leaving the poor without assistance. At a closer look, Calvinist and other protestant circle emphasized on the hostility of the environment as a proof of faith. This belief suggests that man evolves in a conflictive and dangerous world. Secondly, the archetype of uphill city which holds the selected people exerted considerable influence to delineate the roots of labor. Being success, for Americans, was more than important to ensure one is part of selected by God. At a surface, this is not pretty different in what social Darwinism claims (Hofstadter, 1992).

### **Tourism and Conflict**

The discussion of heritage tourism and sustainability has drawn the attention of many scholars and universities over the last decades. The problem of ethnic discrimination that concerned philosophers and sociologists is a thing of the past. However, a more radical viewpoint is questioning the role played by heritage in this postmodern world of consumers (Bauman, 2007).

Is poverty a reality or a mere pretext for exploiting others?. Arriaga Rodriguez & Romero Mayo (2008) explores the informal work in Mexico, Quintana Roo to be more exact. The informal sector seems not to be a result of fiscal adjustments or radical cost reductions as the specialized literature suggests. The informal sector of economy, encouraged by tourism, depends on the maximization of profits proper of capital owners. Of course, since the practices of informal vendors and artisans alongside tourist resorts are not legally framed by government, many of the workforces can pass to clandestinely without welfare benefits or rights. This logic is fomented as well by the mass-migration coming from neighboring states or counties which reduced the supply of jobs. At the time, the costs are slumped down by the marginal salaries, capital owners of informal economy struggles with legal traders for the monopoly of the market. The former claims that informal vendors not only are exploited, which at bottom represents an excuse, but they do not pay taxes to government. This point exhibits a lack of ethic in the competition, which for officials, and

legal traders should be fixed. The question whether the discourse of poverty is based on the manipulation of informal businessmen to exploit others beyond state control, the law serves a mechanism of subordination to sanitize the illegal or criminal activities covered in informal economies.

Undoubtedly, one of the books that explore the problem of violence and heritage is *Ethnicity Inc*, authored recently by John and Jean Comaroff. Beyond the promises of the globalized world, per the argument readers will find in this text, there is an underlying logic of commoditization and consequent exploitation by which human beings, their cultures and traditions become in business enterprises. Since anthropology as academic discipline emerged as an extreme concern in founding parents to the disappearance of non-western cultures, this sentiment has taken the opposite direction. In our days, aboriginals appeal to reinforce their own differences to be sold to the international segment of travelers and tourists. In perspective, cultural tourism is one of the most growing industries in the world. *Ethnicity*, in this vein, set the pace to a new type of cultural consumption fabricated from outside to regulate emotions. The term “empowerment” as it has been formulated by the specialized literature is defined as strategy followed by local actors to improve economic and social conditions by means of the proactive participation and commitment. At the time, aborigines adopt “empowerment” simply because they know something special can be offered to the international Western consumer, their culture is recycled as a commodity. This new type of identity, though more flexible, objectifies the native to the extent to its needs are enslaved to a fabricated past. Basically, cultural tourism not only evokes a vibrant past which does not exist, but confers to local communities the legal mechanism for launching to self-representation. The value of aboriginal culture is conditioned by those features that legitimate the West supremacy. Aboriginals may say something if this discourse can be commercialized. This represents a much deeper process of alienation where cultures are disclosed from their original roots. In doing so, the culture is sold attending only to the interests of consumers. The enthusiasm and leading role of aborigines as cultural managers blurs the conflictive relations of Fourth World and States, but creating new ones.

In this discussion, two significant ideas arise. On one hand, tourism disposes from cultural protection to re-draw the geography of the world. On another, native constructs their sentiment of belonging in view of what tourists want to hear and see. The merit of this work consists in reminding that this trend not only blurs the boundaries between past and present but also impose new economies based on ethno-merchandise where the production never ends. The classic rules of economy teach us that the rise of demands entails a decline in the production. Needless to say, this does not happen with ethno-merchandise. The much demand for cultural consumption, the better for production; that way, the destination never declines in extractives.

Comaroff & Comaroff explore not only the modern obsession by authenticity but also the proper inconsistencies of ethnicity. Situated in a nuanced argument, this book does not demonize but accept widely the promise of heritage tourism. The empire of market gives considerable autonomy to non-western respecting to their purchasing power, even their capacity to ask for loans beyond the control and hegemony of state's apparatuses. Unlike their ancestors, by the embracing of substitute identities the modern aboriginal reservoirs gained more prosperity and wealth. Their profits are based on their abilities to manage businesses or take the lead in real state speculations. Last but not least, the term "empowerment" as it has been formulated by the specialized literature is defined as strategy followed by local actors to improve economic and social conditions by means of the proactive participation and commitment. At the time, aborigines adopt "empowerment" simply because they know something special can be offered to the international Western consumer, their culture is recycled as a commodity. This new type of identity, though more flexible, objectifies the native to the extent to its needs are enslaved to a fabricated past. Basically, cultural tourism not only evokes a vibrant past which does not exist, but confers to local communities the legal mechanism for launching to self-representation. The value of aboriginal culture is conditioned by those features that legitimate the West supremacy. Aborigines may say something if this discourse can be commercialized. This represents a much deeper process of alienation where cultures are disclosed from their original roots. In doing so, the culture is sold attending only to the interests of consumers. The enthusiasm and leading role of aborigines as cultural managers blurs the conflictive relations of Fourth World and States, but creating new ones.

### **The Study Case: Artisans in Florida.**

The conflict between the artisans of Florida Street and government, anyway, can be explained through the lens of reflexivity. The classic dialectics of middle age was replaced by a postmodern reflexivity determined by aesthetic. This resulted in the decline of social trust and the configuration of places, the power of sign was effaced by the allegory. The configuration of lay-people was given to how they access to the system of experts. Now whenever a person is sick or experience uncertainty, experts confer an explanation that gives security. The hierarchal production of knowledge, monopolized in few hands, has been expanded to the extent to create cyclic forms of interpretations where the lay-people is the producer of information. In the modern society, the process of flexibility not only make more egalitarian forms of contact, but also destroy any type of previous authority lest by the accumulation of capital (Urry & Lash, 1994).

Social agents socialize with others in view of their own interests only. Historically, human groups are associated under the kinship until the advance of modernity. Today, money serves as a mediator among citizens. It changes the two primary aspects of social bond, the legitimacy and reciprocity. The former signals to the individual capacity to pose claims to a third part, in this case the state while the latter refers to the solidarity woven to create expectancies among agents. Any act or action in one sense wakes up a counter-act in the other. In this game, interactions are mediated by the capital's usufruct. Understanding this, we can study the conflictive relationship between artisans and Buenos Aires Mayor, Mauricio Macri. After the financial crisis of 2001 in Argentina, thousands blue collar workers went to informal market to offer their products. This informal sector not only grew in the last years, it avoided to be taxed by the state as the formal sector. Many of these artisans situated along Florida streets to take the opportunity to offer their handy-crafts to an international tourism segment. Beyond governmental control, these relations cemented specific discourses, and ways of dwelling the public space. The higher purchasing power proper of tourists legitimized the informal sector to the extent it defied to others traders which were taxed by government. Artisans accessed to tourists only given their capacity of income, by the capital they held. At a first glance, there were never a genuine encounter

between artisans and tourists. Besides, the handicraft's prices were fixed without any type of regulation, but always underneath the formal sector. This generated a strong interest for tourist to buy souvenirs and products to informal artisans.

As the previous argument given, one might speculate that if the eviction would have been made earlier later the illegal occupation, less resistance. In this vein, time cemented the image of illegal traders as legitimate businessmen. In view of this, Major Mauricio Macri not only violated their labor rights, but lash out against them without any justification. Our interviews reveal that artisans associated the government to corruption and compliance with great business corporation that corrupted the country in 2001. At time of explaining their resistance to be relocated in other spaces, they alluded to the taxes as a capitalist sign of decline and corruption. Artisans rejected the alternative to be situated in other squares because they were not visited by tourists. At the bottom, the access to the capital-holders was the priority they wanted to protect. Finally, the state moved their resources, polices to dislodge the intruders using its right to the monopoly of violence. After days of extreme struggle and violent riots, artisans were finally expelled from Florida Street. Tourism seems to be conducive to create these types of situations, which is based on the "reflexive logic". The following points summarize the observations of the field during the conflict,

- The reflexive logic exerts a strong criticism against the state by citizenship.
- The primacy of capital as a mediator, leads citizens to conflict by their immediacy to capital holders. State vs. artisans struggled by their opportunity to expropriate the income of tourists (surplus).
- The authority of elites, which characterized the life decades before, set the pace to a new form of producing politics, where money plays a crucial role.
- Artisans did not develop specific consciousness, or national identities lest by the access to capital, or consumers.
- The connection between rights and duties has diluted.

- Extortion of workers and artisans against state.

This last point is vital to validate the veracity of our theory. The workforce learned to resist the violence of state embracing the market. The channelization of claims, as a strike, hosts consumers (as capital holders) to dissuade state. The social agents in the late modernity attacked the state through the hostage of consumers, in these cases tourists. This case evinces two important realities. On one hand, tourists upend the lines of authority in societies according to their purchasing power. On another, they are hosted whenever the workforce enters in conflict with state. This double-edge sword determines the productive relationships in modern communities. If artisans were pressed to tribute taxes, they identified in the principle of free transit, the weakness of government. Their resistance to abandon Florida Street was followed by their strategic proximity to international tourists. Rather than Augé's thesis, this suggests that non-places are not spaces of anonymity produced by hypermodernity, but places of conflict where the capitalization of human trust prevails.

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