
Part VI. Maximiliano E. Korstanje's Contribution to the Understanding of Tourism, Coloniality, and Postcolonialism

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Abstract

This paper examines Maximiliano E. Korstanje's contribution to understanding tourism through the perspectives of coloniality and postcolonial theory. By moving beyond conventional interpretations of tourism as an economic activity or a form of cultural exchange, Korstanje conceptualizes tourism as a social institution embedded within historical relations of power, capitalism, globalization, and unequal mobility. The paper explores how his work reveals the persistence of colonial patterns in contemporary tourism through the commodification of cultural difference, the construction of the tourist gaze, the unequal distribution of mobility, and the transformation of local identities into marketable experiences. Particular attention is given to his analyses of hospitality, tourism development, dark tourism, and the politics of representation, which demonstrate how tourism can simultaneously promote intercultural encounters while reproducing historical inequalities. Although Korstanje does not formulate a systematic decolonial theory of tourism, his interdisciplinary approach contributes to postcolonial and critical tourism studies by questioning Eurocentric assumptions and emphasizing the need to examine who controls tourism narratives, resources, and forms of mobility. The paper argues that Korstanje's scholarship expands tourism epistemology by positioning travel as a reflection of colonial legacies and contemporary struggles over power, identity, and global inequality.

Key words: Inequality, Colonialism, global South, tourism, Othering.

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Introduction

The relationship between tourism and coloniality has become one of the most important areas of debate within contemporary critical tourism studies. While tourism is often presented as a practice of cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and global connection, postcolonial scholars have demonstrated that tourism is also embedded within historical structures of domination, inequality, and representation inherited from colonialism. Tourism does not simply occur in neutral spaces; it frequently takes place within territories, cultures, and economies shaped by colonial histories.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje has made an important contribution to this debate by examining tourism as a social phenomenon deeply connected with modernity, capitalism, power relations, and historical processes of exclusion. Although his work does not always employ the terminology of *coloniality* in the same manner as Latin American decolonial theorists such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, or María Lugones, Korstanje's analysis intersects significantly with postcolonial and decolonial concerns. His scholarship explores how tourism reproduces historical inequalities, transforms cultural difference into economic value, and continues patterns of domination through representations of the "exotic," the "primitive," and the "authentic." Through his studies of tourism sociology, hospitality, globalization, dark tourism, and capitalism, Korstanje contributes to a critical understanding of tourism as a continuation of broader historical processes in which mobility, knowledge production, and economic exchange are shaped by unequal relations between the Global North and Global South.

Tourism as a Product of Colonial Modernity

One of Korstanje's central contributions is his argument that tourism cannot be separated from the historical development of modern capitalism. Modern tourism emerged alongside industrialization, imperial expansion, colonial exploration, and the development of transportation networks that allowed European powers to extend their political and economic influence across the world. Following critical theorists of modernity, Korstanje argues that tourism developed within a social order characterized by unequal relations between those who possess the economic and technological

capacity to travel and those who become objects of observation, consumption, and representation.

The colonial origins of tourism are visible in nineteenth-century European practices of exploration, scientific expeditions, and elite travel. Colonial subjects and territories were frequently represented as places of adventure, discovery, and difference. These representations created narratives in which European travelers appeared as active explorers, while colonized populations were positioned as passive objects of knowledge. Korstanje's work contributes to understanding tourism as part of this historical genealogy. Tourism inherits many of the symbolic structures of colonial travel: the search for difference, the consumption of cultural otherness, and the transformation of distant places into spaces of experience.

The Tourist Gaze and the Construction of the Other

Korstanje's analysis engages with the influential concept of the **tourist gaze** developed by John Urry (1990, 2011). Urry argued that tourism depends upon socially constructed ways of seeing, where destinations become meaningful because societies teach individuals what is worth observing. Korstanje extends this argument by emphasizing that the tourist gaze is not politically neutral. What tourists see, value, photograph, and consume is shaped by historical relations of power. The colonial dimension of tourism appears through the construction of the "Other." Many destinations are marketed through images of cultural difference, timeless traditions, untouched landscapes, and exotic lifestyles. These representations frequently freeze communities in idealized images that ignore historical change, political struggles, and economic inequalities. From Korstanje's perspective, tourism often transforms cultural difference into a consumable product. Local traditions, indigenous identities, landscapes, and historical memories become resources within global tourism markets.

This process creates a paradox: tourism celebrates diversity while simultaneously simplifying and commodifying it.

Tourism, Coloniality of Knowledge, and Representation

A major contribution of Korstanje's work is his critique of how tourism knowledge itself is produced. Tourism studies have historically been dominated by perspectives originating in Europe, North America, and international institutions connected to global capitalism. This reflects what decolonial scholars describe as the **coloniality of knowledge**: the persistence of intellectual hierarchies established during colonial modernity, where certain forms of knowledge are considered universal while others are marginalized.

Korstanje challenges this hierarchy by emphasizing the importance of Latin American perspectives in tourism research. Coming from Argentina, his scholarship frequently questions assumptions produced by dominant tourism theories developed in wealthy countries. His work argues that tourism experiences cannot be understood through universal models because tourism operates differently according to historical, cultural, and political contexts. For example, tourism development in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia cannot be separated from histories of colonial exploitation, dependency, unequal trade relationships, and international economic structures. By introducing sociological and historical perspectives into tourism studies, Korstanje contributes to a more plural understanding of tourism knowledge.

Tourism and the Colonial Economy of Development

Another important area of Korstanje's contribution concerns tourism development. Since the second half of the twentieth century, tourism has often been promoted by international organizations as a pathway toward economic modernization for countries in the Global South. However, critical scholars have questioned whether tourism development reproduces colonial patterns by creating dependent economies organized around serving visitors from wealthier countries. Korstanje examines this contradiction by arguing that tourism frequently operates within unequal global relationships. Destinations in developing countries often depend on foreign investment, international corporations, and external markets. Local communities may provide cultural experiences and labor while receiving only a limited share of tourism revenues.

This dynamic resembles colonial economic structures in which peripheral regions produce resources consumed by dominant external actors. Tourism therefore becomes both an opportunity and a continuation of dependency. Korstanje's perspective does not reject tourism development but calls attention to the structural conditions under which tourism occurs. He argues that researchers must examine who controls tourism resources, who benefits economically, and whose cultural narratives dominate destination representation.

Hospitality, Coloniality, and the Politics of the Stranger

Korstanje's analysis of hospitality also contributes significantly to postcolonial discussions. Hospitality involves relationships between hosts and strangers, and these relationships are historically shaped by power. Drawing on philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss, Korstanje argues that hospitality has always involved tension between openness and control. The host welcomes the stranger but also maintains authority over the conditions of welcome.

In colonial contexts, this relationship became deeply unequal. Colonial powers represented themselves as hosts bringing civilization, knowledge, and development while simultaneously controlling indigenous populations and territories. Korstanje's work reveals how contemporary tourism continues to reproduce similar tensions. Tourists are welcomed because they bring economic value, but local communities often have limited control over how their cultures and spaces are represented. The tourism encounter therefore contains both hospitality and hierarchy. This insight connects Korstanje's work with postcolonial critiques of tourism that examine how tourism relationships are shaped by historical inequalities.

Dark Tourism, Colonial Violence, and Memory

Korstanje's research on dark tourism provides another important contribution to understanding coloniality. Dark tourism involves visits to sites associated with death, suffering, conflict, and historical trauma.

Many dark tourism destinations are connected to colonial violence, indigenous displacement, slavery, war, and imperial domination. These sites raise important questions about whose memories are preserved and whose histories are forgotten.

Korstanje argues that tourism transforms collective trauma into cultural and economic resources. Memorial sites can educate visitors and preserve historical memory, but they can also become part of commercial systems that package suffering as an experience. This tension is especially significant in postcolonial contexts, where societies continue negotiating the legacy of colonial violence. Tourism may provide opportunities for recognition and historical justice, but it may also reproduce unequal representations if local voices are excluded from the interpretation of heritage.

Coloniality, Mobility, and Global Inequality

A central theme connecting Korstanje's work with postcolonial theory is the unequal distribution of mobility. Tourism celebrates global movement, yet mobility is not equally available to everyone. Citizens of wealthy countries often enjoy relatively unrestricted international travel, while populations from poorer regions face visa restrictions, border controls, and migration barriers. This contradiction reflects what scholars of coloniality identify as a hierarchy of mobility. Korstanje's analysis of borders, hospitality, and security demonstrates that contemporary tourism operates within systems that distinguish between desirable and undesirable forms of movement. The tourist is welcomed as a consumer, while migrants and refugees are frequently treated as security concerns. Thus, tourism reveals broader inequalities embedded within globalization.

Decolonizing Tourism Studies

Although Korstanje does not present a systematic "decolonial tourism theory," his work contributes to the project of decolonizing tourism studies in several ways.

First, he challenges Eurocentric assumptions by emphasizing alternative theoretical perspectives, particularly from Latin America. Second, he rejects purely economic interpretations of tourism and highlights historical and political dimensions. Third, he examines how tourism reproduces symbolic inequalities through representations, consumption, and mobility. Fourth, he encourages scholars to analyze tourism within broader histories of capitalism, colonialism, and globalization. His contribution is therefore epistemological as much as empirical: he changes the questions researchers ask about tourism.

Instead of asking only:

- How can destinations attract more visitors?
- How can tourism generate economic growth?

Korstanje encourages scholars to ask:

- Who defines what is attractive?
- Whose culture becomes a commodity?
- Who controls tourism narratives?
- How do colonial histories shape contemporary mobility?

Conclusion

Maximiliano E. Korstanje's contribution to understanding tourism through the perspectives of coloniality and postcolonialism lies in his effort to situate tourism within broader historical structures of power, capitalism, and inequality. His work demonstrates that tourism is not simply a peaceful exchange between cultures but a social practice shaped by colonial histories, unequal mobilities, and systems of representation. By analysing tourism as a social institution connected with hospitality, globalization, risk, memory, and capitalism, Korstanje provides important theoretical tools for understanding how colonial patterns continue to influence contemporary travel. His critiques of commodified culture, unequal mobility, and tourism development resonate strongly with postcolonial and decolonial approaches. Although his work differs from classical decolonial theorists, it contributes to a growing effort to rethink

tourism beyond Eurocentric and market-oriented frameworks. Korstanje's legacy is the argument that tourism must be understood not only as movement across space but also as a reflection of historical relations of power that determine who travels, who welcomes, who is represented, and who benefits from global mobility.

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