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Paradise Lost: Effects of Tourism on Poor Populations of Small, Developing Tropical Nations

Abstract

By some measures tourism is the largest industry in the world, and many small developing nations are economically dependent upon revenue generated by international tourism. Literature on tourism is varied and extensive, but the distribution of gains from tourism within developing countries in understudied. Research has shown that tourism development exacerbates income inequality, leads to foreign exchange leakage and perpetuates cultural subjugation which draws parallels to the colonial era. This paper traces the development of tourism in small, developing tropical states through the lens of comparative politics, and investigates the circumstances which lead to various outcomes for the poor in these countries. It therefore argues that tourism can be a source of inclusive, poverty-alleviating economic growth, but achieving such development is contingent upon several key decisions made by the state, which must manage the influence of multilateral organizations and multinational corporations.

I. Introduction

To fly into Ambergris Caye, Belize, is to witness the most pristine Caribbean postcard manifest. The island has garnered a host of travel site accolades in recent years, including TripAdvisor's "World's Best Island" in 2013 and 2014. This distinction is a credit to its outstanding beaches, excellent access to the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, relaxed atmosphere and wide choice of resorts. To any visitor, it appears a classic case of prosperity begot by popularity, a tourist's paradise in the easily accessible and relatively stable Central American country of Belize. In broad terms, this is certainly true; GDP and GNI per capita have both risen sharply since the small nation's independence from Britain in 1981, when its economy became more open to foreign investment and visitation. Unfortunately, the luxury resorts and sparkling water hide a more complex and less optimistic story.

During an eight-week summer internship spent addressing food insecurity and disaster vulnerability in San Pedro, the island's only town, it became clear that the benefits of the tourism boom are unequally distributed. This disparity between perception and reality was underscored by my interactions with local Belizeans, many of whom remember a time before the island was overrun by visitors from the world's wealthiest countries. A charter school principal named Linda lamented the lack of opportunity available to the sadly few students who graduate high school in San Pedro, a problem borne of the monopoly on capital ownership held by foreign investors. Twice, single mothers came to the food bank in tears, worried they would be unable to feed their children earning the pittance available to unskilled women as maids, cashiers and waitresses in the seasonal tourist economy. Seasonality and low wages leave many of the local Belizeans vulnerable, and this burden is disproportionately shouldered by women. Men don't fare much better; a friendly Rastafarian named Zion told me as much when I stopped to browse his collection of trinkets for sale. He was homeless at the time, making a few dollars a day selling tourist-trap souvenirs in between construction jobs. One week he would be outside our apartment, and gone the next two, drifting between islands searching for new resorts in need of temporary construction labor.

The stories of Zion and the mothers painted a picture of false opportunity, of an economic miracle they never had a chance to claim a portion of. This trap is not unique to San Pedro, as the dependency and cycle of low human capital development perpetuated by the tourism industry seem an unavoidable sacrifice to the poor tropical nations in question. This paper seeks to trace the evolution of tourism development in poor tropical nations, demonstrating the variable outcomes tourism development can generate. At its most effective, tourism creates lasting employment, economic growth, provides funds for conservation and involves small, peripheral nations in the global community. Conversely, poor distribution of rents, and susceptibility to exploitative practices by governments and foreigners alike can exacerbate income inequality, create social divisions, and subject cultures to irreversible change at the whims of more powerful, wealthy entities. Tourism can and should serve as a rapid, adaptable method for achieving economic growth and empowerment in otherwise resource-poor areas, but difficult measures must be taken to ensure local populations benefit from the industry. Governments must encourage grassroots, locally-cooperative inclusive development, and the involvement of foreign investment must be carefully controlled. Failure to insulate a burgeoning tourist industry from the substantial influence of wealthy, tourist-generating nations can spell degradation and dependence for small nations, restricting the freedoms of locals and extracting rents from their natural and cultural resources without adequate remittance.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section II draws on the existing literature to establish relationships between tourism and various facets of development, including the state, the economy, foreign actors and the environment. Moral implications are found in Section 2c concerning tourism and neo-colonialism, and Section IV. Section III contains case studies of Barbados and Fiji. Section V enumerates policy recommendations. Section VI suggests directions for further research and the need for improved data.

II. Tourism and Development

As evidenced by the United Nations' designation of 2017 as the Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, this topic holds significant contemporary importance. The existing literature on tourism and development is substantial, with a recent focus on sustainability, both environmental and economic. Economists and anthropologists have acknowledged a need to study further the effects of tourism on population subsets since the mid-20th century, but most suffice by making the same few broad claims without delving deeper. The existing literature lacks focus on intra-country distribution of benefits in favor of nationwide indicators, which generally laud tourism as an overwhelming positive (Wilson 2008:3). To understand the state of the tourism industry and its effects on the poor, this section traces its evolution through various facets of development.

2a. Tourism and the Economy

Tourism is generally posited as a profitable avenue for small nations to achieve economic growth. A key aspect of this is the attraction of foreign exchange; tourists bring and spend foreign currency (usually desirable currency such as USD or the British pound), which is earned by local operators and spent several times over in the local economy. Ideally, tourism is integrated into all aspects of the local economy, creating direct and indirect employment and maximizing opportunities for locals to earn and spend tourist money. But as Liu and Wall characterize it, “tourism often appears to be attractive as one of a limited number of economic options, at the same time it is frequently alleged that local inhabitants fall prey to tourism. Local residents are frequently under-represented in the tourism development, both as investors and decision makers” (Liu 2004:159). As the quote suggests, tourism is often seen as one of the only viable options to achieve economic growth, which creates challenges for local poor.

The need for speedy development of tourist areas necessitates a level of investment rarely possible for local individuals, companies or even governments; this requires the assistance of international finance, but doing so has consequences. The first, and least favorable for inclusive, sustainable tourism development is the invitation for development by multinational and transnational corporations. These enormous companies leverage economies of scale unachievable by host countries and build large resorts and attractions, the quintessential all-inclusive resorts where booking, travel, accommodation, excursions and food are all provided and administrated by the same company and its affiliates. This means a huge portion of profits (essentially all which isn’t earned by local employees) are either reinvested in the input costs of running the resort (food and drink imports, equipment, materials), most of which are foreign, or simply returned to the home country of the MNC. This development path is often achieved in coordination with a local elite, either public or private who stand to benefit from heavy foreign involvement. Their relative benefit often serves to entrench the already-wealthy, exacerbating income gaps and concentrating the power of economic determination within a small, non-representative coalition. This coalition facilitates “the dominance of external, often foreign, capital” (Liu 2004:159), and restricts the agency of the local, poor majority.

Another problematic option is borrowing to develop tourism sectors, which indebts small countries or local governments to large organizations. These can include regional banks, investors in wealthy countries, multilateral organizations like the World Bank or other governments. Each option creates a relationship in which the poor country is in a weak bargaining position, especially when the lenders are the same experts advising the development of tourism and the same countries sending the tourists. Loans hopefully mean local ownership of facilities, but this only marginally reduces the dangers mentioned above. The level of economic dependence upon wealthy nations introduces another issue beyond foreign domination of capital and indebtedness: vulnerability to exogenous shock. For example, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an event politically unrelated to the Caribbean, tourist arrivals from the US, Canada and Europe fell an average of 14.2% over the subsequent four months (Momsen 2004:282). For economies reliant on consistent inflow of currency from those sources, a shock such as 9/11 is devastating, more pronounced than if the economy was based on a less interconnected industry. Shock susceptibility can only be hedged by diversifying revenue sources, an option rarely available to small, tropical nations. Additionally, endogenous shock also presents a challenge in relation to tourism, as these countries are typically at a high risk for natural disaster. Hurricanes and tsunamis can devastate local infrastructure, and damage the short-term reputation of a tourist destination. I remember Facebook friends from Belize imploring their friends online to not cancel vacations to Ambergris after Hurricane Matthew, as a loss of tourism revenue intensifies the harm done by the disaster.

Economic growth is reliant on a strong multiplier effect, the economic name for how many times a new dollar is spent once introduced to the economy. Ideally, tourists inject large sums of foreign money into local tourist-hosting economies, which is earned by locals and saved or spent several times within the local economy. When a country is heavily indebted or overrun by MNCs however, that multiplier is depressed by foreign exchange leakage, defined as, “the failure of tourist spending to remain in the destination economy” (Sandbrook 2008:125). Foreign ownership of revenue-generating facilities is the main driver of leakage and repatriation, with high levels of foreign investment corresponding with reduced benefit to local populations. In extreme cases like Mauritius, as much as 90% of foreign exchange spent in the tourism sector leaks back out of the economy (Crick 1989:315).

This leakage is intensified by the nature of job availability in the tourism sectors of small, developing countries. These nations suffer a chronic shortage of trained, skilled labor, a function of a previously isolated and basic economy, which leads to the attraction of outside senior personnel. Often, large hotels or tour companies hire expatriates to fill managerial positions, blocking off upper-level, well paid work from locals who have yet to develop the requisite skills. This leaves only the unskilled labor, low-paying jobs made less appealing by seasonality, minimal skill development, and direct subservience to both foreign managers and foreign tourists (Echtner 1995:121). The low wages of a day laborer are insufficient to generate a reasonable multiplier, as the bulk of revenue generated by the employer is lost to the company. The company, rather than spending earnings in the local community, uses the revenue to pay salaries saved overseas, to import the types of food and beverages preferred by visitors, and to maintain the facility or develop elsewhere, none of which does much to bolster the local economy.

Finally, leakage is increased by high levels of import propensity, especially for SIDS (small island developing states). Import propensity is the rate at which a country imports various goods and services, so it is unsurprising that many tropical nations require significant imports. This is not exclusively a consequence of tourism, given small countries’ relatively limited ability to produce food and other consumables at a sufficient rate and level of quality. But tourism is uniquely guilty of perpetuating high import propensity, not because the necessary consumables cannot be generated locally, but due to visitor tastes and preferences. The success of a tourism industry is contingent upon attractiveness to metropolitan countries, which often includes providing food, drinks and other goods and services that are recognizable and "trustworthy" (Crick 1989:320). The damage of high import propensity is twofold. For a country like the Bahamas, which imports 72% of tourism-related content, the revenue generated by tourism is lost to pay for imports, sometimes returning directly to the countries it came from (Wyllie 2000:57). Secondarily, high import propensity drives inflation, as tourists demand higher quality and more expensive items. This can raise the average price of food and other essentials, mitigating economic gains spurred by greater employment by reducing local purchasing power.

The economics of tourism development, if left to the forces of the free market, often overwhelm local communities, who are unused to high competition and lack the requisite experience and human capital to effectively leverage the potential benefits of tourism. The scope of economic effects is not fully understood however, due to analytical shortcomings within economics and poor data availability. This did not stop multilateral organizations from publishing glowing economic analysis of the benefits of tourism development however, which failed to consider the ramifications for the poor when encouraging development in peripheral nations.

2b. Tourism and Foreign Actors

One word that comes up repeatedly in studies of tourism development is "panacea". Its use was a product of optimistic economic analysts after World War II, when the wealthy countries of the world became enamored with the economic conditions of regions on the global periphery, namely Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. Tourism was heralded as a panacea in the mid-1900s, a comprehensive solution to the puzzle of development for otherwise resource-poor countries, and their governments faced significant pressure to develop tourism sectors. Organizations and powerful governments were so invested in the promotion of tourism in tropical nations that the United Nations established a subsidiary World Tourism Organization, along with other tourism-focused initiatives. By 1980, the WTO produced 1600 tourism development plans in partnership with UN members, many for the developing world (Liu 2004:160). These plans espoused appealing goals, including cultural exchange, poverty alleviation, global integration and economic growth, championing “the almost limitless growth potential in attracting foreign currency” (Gmelch 2003:7). These grandiose proclamations however, masked a counterproductive flaw.

The preferred measure of tourism development was total number of visitors over a given period, and its use as the most prominent measure of tourism development continued well in the 1970s (Duval 2004:61). Intuitively, this makes sense, as more visitors indicates increased tourism volume and consequently greater revenue generation. In terms of inclusive, equitable growth however, this practice created a perverse incentive for governments. Increasing visitor volume privileges rapid development, and rewards developers who keep costs down. These incentives are directly detrimental to the poor; rapid development, as discussed in Section 2a, requires foreign capital, and subsequently foreign control of the tourism sector. The short time frame is insufficient to develop a human capital base amongst locals, and is sometimes neglected entirely in favor of outside hiring for more secure, lucrative positions, relegating locals to the worst occupations. Furthermore, the incentive to keep costs down can mean insufficient worker and income protections, as appeasing the developers who drive tourism volume leads to more visitors and more revenue.

This situation, while heavily intertwined with the role of the state, highlights the liability of organizations like the UNWTO, whose use of optimistic, politically uncontroversial language drew developing nations in with the false promise of a development panacea. They compounded this error by creating development incentives harmful to the tourist-hosting poor by virtue of its preferred statistic, encouraging quick scaling over the development of a sufficient stock of human capital necessary to facilitate locally-dominated tourism sectors. Finally, these same organizations, most prominently regional development banks and the World Bank, made a series of loans to tropical nations explicitly for tourism development in the mid-20th century; Hawkins and Mann highlight the World Bank as, “a critical interlocutor because it lends to and advises governments directly, thereby empowering their capacity to manipulate development” (Hawkins 2006:350). Between 1966 and 1979, 37 countries received a total of $1.1 billion for the development of tourism-related industries, many with specific provisions for the use of the funds (Hawkins 2006:354). This dictation, coupled with the promise of rapid economic growth left these countries with little choice but to submit to foreign domination facing pressure to stimulate growth.

Certainly not all of these loans created problems; some were instrumental in launching the world’s most popular tourist sites, like Mexico, Bali and Tunisia. But a problem arises when a development strategy pushed upon emerging nations has unintended consequences, disproportionately affecting the local poor. The organizations, economists and advisors guilty of perpetuating such optimism are culpable for the failures of tourism development.

2c. Tourism and Neo-Colonialism

To some thinkers, development is not the economic and social progress to be sought by all nations and peoples like the UNWTO touted, but a creation of Western powers which served as a subtler means to achieve similar ends to colonialism. Development can be viewed as a new method of subjugation of poorer nations and the entrenchment of the global economic and political order. Wealthy nations profit from the resources and labor of poor countries, extracting both cheaply and holding those countries in relative poverty.

Escobar described the intent of the United States and others after World War II to remake the “less-economically accomplished world” in the image of the emergent powers, and their creation of the language that delineated successful and unsuccessful countries. The United Nations called for newly-minted “underdeveloped” nations to rid themselves of the primitive, unproductive ideologies and to mold their social institutions as to facilitate pursuit of a comfortable life through neoliberal reform. This process supposedly called for paying a full price for economic progress that few were willing to make independently, and thus required the guidance of established powers (Escobar 1995:4).

Unsurprisingly, the end of World War II also sparked the worldwide tourism boom, particularly the dramatic popularity of the Caribbean amongst its many former colonial powers. This was caused both by a proliferation of travel options like jets, as well as higher incomes and more leisure time in wealthy nations (Duval 2005:10). As the world’s leaders and economists turned their attention to the plight (or so-called plight if Escobar is to be taken seriously), the citizens of former colonial powers were drawn to the Eden-like paradises of the tropics, drawing on romantic and reductionist descriptions of the Caribbean that litter exploratory writing from the colonial era (Sheller 2005:23). The demand for escapism to the tropics for sand, sun, sex and sea drove massive tourist development in the mid-20th century. As referenced in Section 2a, this required substantial outreach for foreign investment, as the speed with which demand required building and the desire to remain or become competitive required economic resources not found in such small, peripheral nations.

In many small, tropical nations, this outreach resulted in a collaboration between local elites and foreign investors, pairing a small country desperate for economic activity and rent-seeking Western actors who sought to create an outlet for wealthy travelers. This foreign control, and the nature of tourism itself dictate a harsh set of realities to nations who wish to host tourists, which may be powerful enough to alter social and cultural structures in these small communities. Tourism demands that a portion of these countries be cordoned off for the use of visitors, and the provision of a wide array of services. Maintaining the image of a safe, relaxing tropical paradise, a playground for the West, is both economically challenging and culturally dangerous. Not only do tourists prefer the foods and drinks that must be imported, leaking earned foreign exchange back out of the local economy, but it forces locals into painfully familiar positions of servitude (Crick 1989:320). To an outside observer, the parallels to a colonial plantation are uncanny; a mass of local, dark-skinned people wash dishes, cook, change linens and maintain grounds to please wealthy Westerners (Duval 2005:62). The product is different, but the means are similar, especially when working as a laborer in tourism is often the only choice for locals. Their options are to become poorly-compensated servants of insensitive foreigners, take up an informal occupation related to tourism or leave in search of work elsewhere, an unrealistic option for poor people. Remaining and taking a service job still typically bars local poor from experiencing the fruits of development, as many resorts and tourist areas discourage or forbid entry to locals (Wilson 2008:14).

The second option presents more problems, as the growth of tourism has been linked to rising levels of crime, begging and prostitution. The image of the Caribbean and other tourist destination islands as centers of sexuality, where tourists expect to “engage guiltlessly” in acts of pleasure, is borne from characterization by colonial explorers (Sheller 2005:23). At one point, Cuba was known as “The Brothel of the Caribbean”, said to have more than 10,000 sex workers to serve the influx of foreign visitors (Schwartz 1997:122). Sexual servitude can erode social structures, as well as place women and children in direct danger of sexual violence, disease and other abuses. This submission to the demands of tourists may be a necessity to the women involved, but it undermines their ability to earn a stable, safe living and morphs entire populations into repositories of servant labor, suffering from unfreedoms and stripped of their agency.

Finally, neo-colonialist tourism perpetuates a phenomenon known as the demonstration effect, defined as the visible flaunting of foreign wealth through conspicuous consumption, which breeds resentment and jealousy amongst locals stuck at the service of the wealthy (Wilson 2008:9). This effect underscores the relative deprivation of local poor, reinforcing a sense of cultural and economic inferiority. That feeling of inferiority can lead to abandonment of tradition and culture, in favor of imitation of Western mannerisms and behaviors. Inferiority is further enforced by the commodification of cultures, evident in how tourism can put locals in a figurative fishbowl, relegating rich history and culture to a spectacle for tourists to gawk and call quaint. Though this phenomenon is tied to increased cross-cultural visibility resulting from technological advancements and globalization, tourism is especially guilty of causing a demonstration effect. This is due to the very nature of tourism, particularly tourism in the tropics. For Westerners, beach vacations are a self-rewarding escape, marked by indulgent behavior usually atypical of a normal lifestyle. But for poor locals whose only personal interactions with the wealthy world are in the context of tourism, ostentatious displays of privilege and carefree, wasteful behavior are the norm (Crick 1989:317). The results can amount to a socioeconomic apartheid, where the need to maintain the luxurious image of a relaxing paradise marginalizes local poor, accentuates relative socioeconomic deprivation and cultivates deep resentment directed at tourists and government (Pattullo 1999:83).

2d. Tourism and the State

The state plays an integral role in the development of tourism, but the content of that role varies between regime type, economic ideology and resource availability. For our purposes, assume two primary types of government, one authoritarian and the other democratic. Both provide advantages and disadvantages, and ultimately shape the involvement of government in tourism. This distinction hinges on a key point, that, "there are many conflicts and problems related to the development of tourism which can only be resolved by government, particularly when private sector interests have to be evaluated against the interests of the community and country as a whole" (Jenkins 1982:501). Essentially, different government types are beholden to different interest groups, and are most responsive to the needs of those groups. In an authoritarian government, power is achieved and maintained through force, and economic development is often equated with national security and international prominence, naturally prioritizing rapid development. Atul Kohli frames such governments as "cohesive capitalist states", featuring competent bureaucracy, a narrow alliance between political and economic elites, and repressive politics predicated on the use of ideological mobilization to create support for policy (Kohli 2004:11). These countries are responsive to the needs of the elite, encouraging high levels of foreign investment to facilitate expedited growth. The benefits to the economic elite are substantial, especially in the early stages of development. Alam and Paramati, in a survey of 49 developing economies between 1991 and 2012, found a significant positive relationship between income inequality, measured with the Gini Index, and tourism revenue (Alam 2016:124). As explored above, this contributes to the marginalization of the poor, but since the government doesn't require the approval of the common people to retain power, it is less obligated to service their needs.

A democracy conversely, legitimizes political power through the input of citizens, and thus the government is beholden to the desires of its constituents. Though evidence worldwide alludes to imperfections of democracy which can still privilege wealthy elites, fundamentally democracies are more responsive to the needs of common people. This means more favorable development policy, better human capital development or higher levels of worker protection and industrial nurturing. On the other hand, giving everyone a voice necessarily complicates policymaking, and the increasing agency of citizens in democracies creates more legitimate interests, and slows the process of mobilization. Cohesive-capitalist authoritarian states wield more direct control over their labor force and over policy implementation, meaning goals are accomplished more efficiently, setting aside that authoritarianism constitutes a restriction on the freedoms of citizens. Corruption presents another complication to the role of government in tourism development, but a nuanced discussion of its pervasiveness and implications is beyond the scope of this paper.

To return to government intervention in the tourism industry, the literature agrees that some level of intervention is necessary to foster a functioning tourism sector. The typical Washington Consensus development prescription rarely holds for the sort of small countries that rely heavily on tourism, as preconditions for the effective functioning of the free market are not met. Governments therefore must balance the necessity of foreign capital inflow with support of local development, which walks a fine line between foreign dominance and protectionism, both of which are counterproductive to the empowerment of poor locals (Jenkins 1982:509). Ultimately, tourism development requires that governments make a series of important choices. The first is the degree to which policy will incentivize foreign investment. As established, some amount is an inevitable cost of tourism development in small countries, but methods of implementation differ. An authoritarian government might provide attractive tax cuts to entice investment, or pledge resources to infrastructural development. This leads to fast growth, but can divert resources away from serving local populations, and promote the oft-discussed restriction of employment opportunities for locals. A democracy will still pursue foreign investment, but may be more cautious in regulating inflows, at the cost of investment volume and development speed.

This ties into the second key decision, the degree to which local human capital development is prioritized. Baum and Svizas claim, “There is a well-established argument that, in developing countries, without strong governmental support and guidance, human resource development in the tourism sector will be limited” (Baum 2007:789). Local skill development is perhaps the most important factor in determining the effect of tourism on the poor, as skill level dictates employment opportunities. Most small tropical nations feature a substantial workforce, but one lacking technical skills, management experience and knowledge of how to participate in a service economy. Some governments faced with this dilemma privilege speed over local ownership and autonomy, leading to importation of senior personnel from abroad, relegating locals to the least desirable occupations with limited upward mobility (Echtner 1995:121). Reliance on foreign management can be prevalent enough to permit governments to neglect or completely ignore investment in local human capital development, further entrenching socioeconomic distinctions and exacerbating income inequality. Conversely, continued commitment to the substitution of foreign personnel with locals, combined with training or opportunities to receive training abroad can empower local participants and increase economic agency amongst the poor. Oman enacted such a plan in 1991, creating training programs designed to acquaint Omanis with English and acclimate them to cultural differences that might cause friction with visitors, and channeling young people into tourism sector professions (Liu 2004:161). Training programs are also effective when implemented in tandem with foreign development; once trainees become appropriately skilled, they can be phased into management roles, perhaps aided by a form of affirmative action law privileging locals in hiring.

Another key decision for governments concerns the level of local input and involvement in the development process. This is a crucial element of successful, inclusive tourism development, as, “participation in meaningful work contributes to social inclusion and mitigates against fragmentation in society and an undermining of social cohesion” (Baum 2007:785). Allowing locales destined for tourism development to contribute to the decision-making process is instrumental in fostering a positive, productive tourism sector. Failure to do so can lead to resentment, alienation, and civil unrest, all of which are bad for governments, and can even undermine the attractiveness of a location to tourists.

Finally, land use policies are an important aspect of government involvement in tourism development. Inclusive land use involves the integration of tourism facilities into the existing fabric of the community, which lends the industry a sense of authenticity increasingly sought by conscientious tourists. Presumably, consulting with locals over placement of new facilities and building of infrastructure leads to increased satisfaction with decisions, although this assumes governments heed the concerns of citizens rather than including their thoughts for the sake of political appeasement. The counterpoint is exclusive land use, which ranges from using relatively undeveloped land to create resorts and facilities largely separate from local communities, to displacement of locals and marginalization of communities. The latter is particularly dangerous for the local poor, as the development of walled-off tourism “playgrounds” can actually hide poverty and suffering, cordoning the poor off from revenue generating developments (Duval 2004:60). This was the case in San Mateo, a neighborhood in the town from the introduction. Ambergris Caye is littered with expensive resorts, dive shops and fine beachside restaurants. Tourists who patronize these establishments however, are unaware that a significant portion of the locals were displaced to the decrepit neighborhood of San Mateo as the island developed its tourism sector, forced to build shacks on stilts in the putrid mangrove swamp. This neighborhood is intentionally tucked away off the main thoroughfare, so most visitors will never set foot in it. Not only is the displacement intrinsically unjust, but the façade of prosperity means few resources from the international aid community are devoted to Ambergris Caye and similar areas, where the poor are made invisible by exclusive development.

The government is the most influential actor in determining the effects of tourism on local poor. Policy decisions can either wrest economic autonomy from local communities, or it can nurture human capital development and improve economic agency. The combination of effects from the major decisions outlined above account for a significant degree of responsibility shouldered by governments for local poor outcomes, but foreign actors historically also play a key role in the state of tropical tourism development.

2e. Tourism and the Environment

Tourism and the environment have a complicated relationship, as interaction with the natural environment is the primary attraction of tropical tourism. The literature refers to this attraction as the 3S's, sand, sea and sun, and human visitation can significantly affect the former two. Unfortunately, in a typical tourist-hosting country, a conflict of incentives arises between locals and elites, especially foreign developers or large multinational companies. This clearly demonstrates an unbalanced power dynamic, one that has substantial consequences for the environment and the locals who depend on it to survive.

Akumal Bay is one of the most popular tourism sites in Mexico, situated conveniently between Playa del Carmen and Tulum, making it easily accessible as a day trip or for multiple nights. Bearing the Mayan name for "place of the turtle", Akumal is a classic case of rapid development and economic growth, predicated on unparalleled access to sea turtles and coral reef. By one estimate, the turtles alone account for $3 million in revenue yearly, a large sum even excluding revenue generated by restaurants, hotels and other ancillary businesses (Russell 2016). Decades of poor regulation and overuse, however, have strained the environment, and today Akumal stands to lose its primary economic driver if changes are not made.

A 2015 study of algae and coral in Akumal Bay found that between the summer of 2011 and 2014, the area saw a 79% reduction in coral cover, which coincided with 400% monthly increase in snorkelers (Gil 2015:2225). That is an alarming number, and obviously unsustainable if that usage rate persists. Despite the danger tourism presents to the area, little has been done to alter the model that governs use of the bay. Rather, local tour operators fight bitterly with developers and large companies over touring rights, meanwhile the number of snorkelers continues to skyrocket. A 2016 article from Mexico News Daily explained the ongoing problem, lamenting the recent sale of 1000 hectares of jungle, lagoons, underground rivers and mangrove forest to foreign hotel developers, promising to increase the total number of visitors (Russell 2016). Further construction not only directly harms the environment, but increased development increases chemical runoff, which upsets the delicate equilibrium necessary to sustain healthy coral and turtle grass (Gil et. al. 2015:2227). Simultaneously, these hotel operators and the largest owner of property on the Bay, the Centro Ecologico Akumal (CEA) actively block the local tour cooperative from bringing tourists into the bay, while bringing unsustainably large quantities of visitors through themselves. Herein lies the problem of competing incentives; major developers are driven to extract as much profit as possible from the natural environment, in this case from the preponderance of turtles and a once healthy reef. Motivated by the promise of massive short term profit, these operators bring thousands of visitors daily, harming the reef and causing health issues and stress for the turtles. Poor locals however, make their living strictly on the continued existence of turtles in Akumal Bay, and as such are strongly motivated to ensure a healthy environment from which they can extract a living for decades to come. This could be accomplished by capping the number of visitors per day, or by enforcing boundary regulations more strictly. Both measures limit daily revenue generation, and consequently are opposed by the tour companies who hold economic and political clout.

The damage wrought by the loss of coral and turtles in Akumal cannot be overstated, given the size of the industry that has grown around the bay. Reform efforts have been blocked by entrenched developers, who have increased hotel room count in the state by 80,000 since 1975 (Gil et. al. 2015:2226). Loss of coral not only decreases tourist volume, but also affects vital fish populations. For a large MNC with hotels in every other similar area of the Caribbean, ecological degradation presents a minor problem, but for locals whose livelihoods are inextricably intertwined with the health of the environment, the receding coral and dwindling turtle population represent a grave peril. This injustice is rendered doubly painful given the majority of revenue leaks away from the local economy, earned by international operators and repatriated or reinvested in a manner that rarely leads to significant benefit for locals.

III. Case Studies

This section contrasts the trajectory and impact of tourism development in two small island developing states, and the effects it has on their respective poor. Data constraints for such countries are considerable, and widely acknowledged in the literature. Each study will incorporate quantitative information where possible, but the difficulty of finding usable data means the analysis will be largely qualitative.

3a. Barbados

Barbados is a classic tourist destination, a former British colony frequented by travelers as early as 1900 (Gmelch 2003:3). A cursory survey would struggle to reveal significant differences between the island and its many neighbors; all are relatively small (Barbados is home to just under 285,000 people), feature gorgeous beaches and year-round warmth. But Barbados is undeniably one of the most successful developers of tourism amongst tropical islands. It trails behind the Bahamas both in yearly visitors and GDP per capita, but those simplistic measures hide distinct differences in the makeup of their respective tourism sectors.

Upon gaining independence in 1966, Barbados quickly established a stable, competent parliamentary democracy, notable for the near-complete and immediate transition of non-whites into positions of authority (Gmelch 2003:15). The strength of the Barbadian government proved a strong asset to tourism development, as the island was one of the first developing nations to seriously utilize tourism to achieve growth. Though the Barbadian government adopted a laissezfaire attitude towards tourism development, its interventions were largely successful, forward-thinking and conscious of spillover effects on locals. The government implements policy through national and physical development plans, the first of which were proposed in 1979 and 1970 respectively (Wilkinson 2004:91). The plans are notable for their concern with the potential negative impact of unplanned, unrestrained growth on the preservation of indigenous culture and environmental quality, which are impressively thoughtful goals. Specific examples of government initiative advance the image of the Barbadian government as an effective and anticipatory agent in tourism development. In the 1960s, the government established a village devoted to the production of crafts and trinkets to be sold to visitors, and subsidized the accommodations to attract workers (Jenkins 1982:509). This not only created employment, but lessened the island's dependence on imports. The government also encouraged tourism-related import substitution; iron producers were given tax credits to increase local production for the building of facilities and infrastructure, and subsequently most ironwork is done on the island (Jenkins 1982:507). Though the share of GDP and level of employment generated by agriculture has fallen since the tourism boom, Barbados revived some of its productive farmland to grow food for hotels and restaurants, further reducing the country's import propensity (Conway 2004:193). Finally, in the 1970s the Barbadian Development Bank made financing available for beachfront property owners to develop small tourist lodging facilities. The result is near universal local ownership of guest houses and rental apartments, and significantly higher rates of large hotels and tourist services ownership than its counterparts (Barbadians owned 25% of luxury hotels, 66% of tier A hotels and nearly all other tourism facilities in 1995) (Apostolopoulos 2002:40). The foresight to encourage local development and ownership, coupled with recently implemented human resource development programs and governmentsponsored scholarships for skill development in professions of national interest (Jenkins 1982:513) are evidence of a concerted effort to mitigate the pernicious aspects of tourism described in Section II, particularly the marginalization of locals through restrictive employment opportunities.

One of the more significant dangers reliance on tourism presents is vulnerability to exogenous shock. Barbados' diverse appeal positioned the economy to weather these shocks better than most. According to the annual arrivals report compiled by the Barbadian Statistical Service, tourist arrivals are spread quite evenly across a surprising array of origins. In 2015, just 17% of arrivals originated in the US, 6.2% in Canada and 22.1% in the UK, with nearly 11% from other Caribbean Common Market countries such as Trinidad & Tobago, Belize, Jamaica and Haiti (BHTA 2015:12). This spread acts as a hedge against all but the most globally impactful shocks, at which point the economy of a small country like Barbados might be affected through other channels. So, in the event of a significant shock to one source country, Barbados is unlikely to see a problematic decrease in arrivals.

Though Barbados has developed carefully over the past half-century, it has not escaped some of the negative effects. All-inclusive resorts are becoming more popular, which pulls money that would otherwise be spent in the local economy and leaks it back to the homes of major hotel operators. The country has tried to combat the rise of all-inclusives by dedicating resources to the promotion of culture and heritage attractions, expanding formerly niche markets into prominent differentiating features (Apostolopoulos 2002:39). Like most developing countries, local Barbadians are susceptible to the demonstration effect, particularly young males. The first drug dealing arrests ever made in Barbados occurred in 1971, coinciding with the growth of tourism (Gmelch 2003:23). Gmelch provides further anecdotal evidence of the danger, as hedonistic tourists created a market for drugs readily supplied by young men seeking to avoid the drudgery of farm or service work. Additionally, Barbados struggles with rising property costs, driven upward by increasing numbers of vacation home buyers, and inadequate enforcement of environmental regulations (Gmelch 2003:12).

Though the effects of tourism are not universally positive, most of the pitfalls are typical of small nations who engage in tourism development. For each difficulty however, Barbados has significant positives to show. Strong infrastructure, excellent basic services, thoughtful market differentiation and a high level of local capital ownership positioned Barbados well to take advantage of the fruits of tourism. The results are clear; the few Gini coefficients calculated for Barbados show a downward trend in income inequality, per capita GDP has risen over 300% since 1980, the island ranks 57th on the Human Development Index after steady improvements, and unemployment sits at 9.7%, a reasonable figure given the high degree of seasonality in tourism work (knoema.com).

3b. Fiji

Like Barbados, Fiji is a former British colony primed for tourism development by its familiarity to the British and the rest of Western Europe. The similarities between the two nations do not extend far beyond a shared colonial past however, as the stability of the Barbadian government contrasts sharply with the turmoil of the Fijian state. Fiji experienced three coups since gaining independence in 1970, one in 1987, which led to the establishment of a republic, in 2000 and in 2006. This instability harmed Fiji's image in the international tourism market, leading major countries to impose brief travel bans to the island nation in 2000 (Narayan 2000:20). Though Barbados demonstrably suffers some of the pitfalls of tourism development, its pragmatic and forward-thinking government implemented a series of polices designed to maximize developmental benefits to all Barbadians. Fiji cannot claim similar success, and an overview of its historical tourism development reveals a string of harmful policies and results.

Originally a refueling stop for trans-Pacific flights, Fiji experienced massive tourism growth in the 1970s. Whereas Barbados developed carefully and intentionally, Fiji fell victim to the pressures of competition, and grew at an astounding rate during the "boom years" of 1970-1975. 67% of all hotel rooms available by the 1980s were built in just that five year span, financed almost entirely by foreign capital (Britton 1982:264). The result was devastatingly low levels of local physical capital ownership; just 4.6% of hotel revenue in 1977 was generated by Fijian-owned enterprises, and retail revenue generation was even lower, a mere 1.5% (Britton 1982:270). These statistics are dated, but the degree to which foreign interests entrenched themselves in the Fijian tourist economy is staggering, and persists to this day. With such heavy foreign involvement came predictable consequences, many of which are covered in this paper. Foreign exchange leakage ranges from 60-70%, a number which has only marginally fallen in 30 years (Narayan 2000:21). Senior management positions are held almost exclusively by expatriates, relegating native Fijians to the prototypical low-skill jobs associated with tourism. Import propensity is high, though this is also attributable to the remoteness of the Pacific islands and their small landmass. Negative impacts extend to Fijian culture; crime is consistently high, and traditional customs such as firewalking and body modification have been stripped of cultural meaning and are now widely performed for the entertainment of tourists (Narayan 2000:22). Though some of these problems are remnants of the colonial era, the government bears substantial responsibility for the plight of the Fijian poor in the tourism industry.

The governmental approach to tourism development in Fiji is consistently antithetical to the choices which foster equitable rent distribution and empowerment of locals. Investment incentives for foreign businesses in the form of enormous tax breaks remain unchanged from the colonial era. Fiji has no laws regarding profit repatriation, facilitating the high rate of foreign exchange leakage mentioned above. Even development finance is broken; in Barbados, early availability of financing to locals for tourism development led to abnormally high levels of local capital ownership. Of the $27.5 million made available for tourism development by the Fiji National Provident Fund, nearly 90% went to non-Fijian investors (Britton 1982:265). Poor waste management systems and unchecked arrival growth led to environmental concerns, which disproportionately harm the poor, some of whom still rely on sugar production for income (Narayan 2000:21). Finally, the political instability of the past two decades has led to a brain drain, as skilled Fijians depart the country for better opportunities. This phenomenon not only increases the need for foreign skilled workers, which increases foreign exchange leakage, but it disincentivizes investment in skill development, for fear of losing individuals who have been invested in. Thus, poor Fijians remain trapped in cycles of low quality employment and low human capital development.

IV. Moral Discussion

> "Structural injustice exists when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them". (Young 2013:52)

> "[The Capabilities Approach] holds that the key question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice is, 'What is each person able to do or to be?'" (Nussbaum 2011:18)

This paper argues that the tourism industry, as it is structured in relation to small, tropical nations, often represents an example of structural injustice as defined by Iris Marion Young. Structural injustice is a situation which produces a moral wrong, in this case the marginalization and exploitation of poor people and their culture through neo-colonialist tourism business practices. It is distinct from injustice caused by individual action or the specific policy of a government or other powerful institution. Furthermore, a minimally just society requires that society to support the achievement by all people of a certain threshold of capability, so as to respect human dignity (Nussbaum 2011:28). There are ten central capabilities outlined by Nussbaum, three of which are violated for the poor by aspects of the tourism industry. Applying Young, Nussbaum and Sen, it is clear tourism causes structural injustice, and through the capabilities approach, there exists a moral obligation to correct that injustice.

Though the concept is counterintuitive, I argue that corporations bear minimal responsibility for the structural injustice brought upon tourist-hosting poor. The purpose of a corporation is to seek profit, which multinationals operating hotels, airlines and other tourism services do in developing countries. In most cases, they have not forced their way in, but rather were approached to fill a capital void that cannot be fulfilled with resources from the host country. Furthermore, the hiring of foreign managers does not constitute a moral wrong, despite the restrictive effect it has upon locals seeking to develop skills and earn better wages. Hiring is often driven by necessity, as a newly developing tourism sector in a poor country lacks the human capital base necessary to fill such positions. Thus, the government is more responsible for ensuring sufficient human capital development, as to make locals employable across all levels of tourism occupations. As long as corporations operate within the rules established by international organizations and host governments, the negative effects of their choices cannot be morally held against them.

The same logic however, does not absolve organizations such as the UNWTO from responsibility. As discussed in Section 2c, these organizations misled developing countries with grandiose promises and overly optimistic economic evaluations. Compounding that misdirection was wide availability of financing for tourism development, which funneled poor countries down a particular pathway without full knowledge of the potential consequences. In line with the definition of structural injustice, the malicious action of individuals did not cause the problems faced by the poor in tourism-dependent countries. Rather, incomplete understanding of long term effects and creation of incentives counterproductive to the increased freedom and capability of the poor perpetuates negative outcomes, representing an insufficient promotion of local poor capabilities.

Governments shoulder perhaps the largest portion of responsibility for assuring positive outcomes from tourism development. Currently, collusion with economic elites and foreign investors often leads to neglect of local input, stripping local poor of their freedom of self-determination. Government policy can and should create conditions for flourishing, correcting for the structural injustice suffered under many systems. As it stands, most jobs available to local poor are the type that position the unskilled as servants. This situation fails to respect the central human dignity essential to a just society, as it prevents the poor from fully exercising their capability of sense, imagination and thought. Not only can employment in servitude to westerners be humiliating and culturally degrading, but the lack of employment choice is a direct restriction on the freedom to develop capabilities and turn those to functionings. Restrictive employment options marked by cycles of low human capital development fail to fulfill the requirements of the fourth central capability, which requires an adequate education and opportunities to undertake “truly human” experiences (Nussbaum 2011:33). It is the role of the government to provide sufficient opportunity to pursue enhanced quality of life, to cultivate the freedom of choice amongst all peoples, not just those with economic means. This is why tourism fails to deliver a just system under the capabilities approach; its dominance and foreign source leave locals disenfranchised, unable to exercise meaningful political and economic participation. If freedom is, “the primary end and principal means of development”, then tourism development runs counter to the goals of a just society, and thus a moral obligation exists to correct such injustice (Sen 2013).

Tourists themselves must bear a portion of the responsibility for correcting structural injustice. The demonstration effect and the imposition of cultural inferiority discussed in Section 2d fails to respect the human dignity of locals, creating harmful social change and delegitimizing host nation culture by accentuating the relative deprivation of the poor. This is a violation of the seventh central capability, which requires, “the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin” (Nussbaum 2011:34). Given that vacations are a quintessential luxury good, no moral sacrifice is made in asking tourists to more thoughtfully consider where they spend money on vacations, and to better control their behavior in interactions with the host people and culture. This will require synthesis of available information and choices made on ethical grounds, rather than strictly on value or amenities. Furthermore, tourist desires for drugs and sex demonstrably drive increases in risky behavior amongst locals, seen in the case study of Barbados and in the Cuban sex worker example. This also constitutes a challenge to the fulfillment of the third central capability, which requires physical safety and bodily integrity. Prostitution and drug-dealing are indirect results of the economic conditions imposed by tourism. Tourist demand for sex and the lack of alternative viable employment leads women to the unsafe practices, and also restricts control over one's environment, the tenth central capability.

Essentially, tourism adversely affects both internal and combined capabilities, the intertwining of which is indispensable to the existence of a just society under the Capabilities Approach. Tourism can restrict internal capabilities by blocking off access to resources which can improve quality of life, such as health infrastructure and education. It also restricts combined capabilities by making only undesirable occupations available to the poor, and by perpetuating a host of cultural ills and neo-colonialist practices. Under the framework of Young, governments and multilateral organizations have a moral responsibility to promote the capabilities of the deprived poor, but that responsibility extends to the tourists who consume the product which disenfranchises the poor in tourism-reliant nations.

V. Policy Recommendations

Designing policy to combat the negative effects of tourism development towards the poor faces a distinct power imbalance. The countries who most rely on tourism are small, remote, relatively young states, lacking experience in the global economy and political or economic clout. Multinationals control the economic fate of many of these countries, and individual alterations to regulations or strategies by governments can threaten profits, and lead to economically disastrous divestment. This power imbalance necessitates a degree of unilateral action in most policy implementation situations, so recommendations must consider the political feasibility of successful unilateralism. Strengthening the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) is one potential avenue to achieving policy coordination, whose goal is, "the enhanced coordination of Member States' foreign economic policies and enhanced functional cooperation" (caricom.org).

Governments should enact a form of "Omanization" detailed in Section 2d, wherein locals gain access to human capital development programs ranging from English lessons to financial literacy, intent on phasing out foreign management of revenue generating facilities. This helps mitigate the cycle of low human capital development perpetuated by foreign-dominated tourism development by opening pathways to skill development and better career prospects. Human capital development increases economic agency, and integrating locals into management lessens the foreign exchange leakage tied to salary repatriation. Such programs can be funded by levying a tax on the form of tourism most guilty of facilitating foreign exchange leakage, all-inclusive resorts. All-inclusives vertically integrate the components of island vacations, preventing local involvement in any stage of the process, including booking, air travel, touring, accommodation and food. As the primary driver of negative outcomes for local poor, a tax on all-inclusive vacation packages could be applied to human capital development programs, which create new entry points into the oligopolistic mass tourism sector.

One problem confronting passage of new tax law could be Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), a form of arbitration established in trade agreements which allows corporations to sue states over infringement on potential earnings. Though vulnerability to legal action under ISDS varies by country, ISDS is a powerful tool for resource-rich multinationals, and allows them to challenge legislation made in the public interest. The most notable example is the case of Philip Morris vs. Uruguay, in which popular plain packaging laws for cigarettes led the company to sue tiny Uruguay for harming profit potential (McGrady 2011:6). A collective legal fund, overseen by an organization such as CARICOM, could be useful in providing resources for small countries to defend themselves against these challenges. Furthermore, some forms of ISDS require losing companies to pay the legal costs of the government, a provision that should be implemented broadly if it is not already.

A policy that does not require unilateral action is selective import substitution. Typically decried in the free market, import substitution is a development strategy employed by larger developing nations. To generate growth and employment domestically, protectionist tariffs and regulations are implemented in industry to shield an emerging market from harsh foreign competition. Neoliberal economics suggests this is inefficient, but for small tropical nations reliant on tourism, the tradeoff is worthwhile. Imports require the spending of foreign exchange, which contributes to leakage. Protecting industries ancillary to tourism provides an opportunity to retain that money, while promoting local job growth. This alleviate some of the ethical downside to tourism dominance, by offering a legitimate alternative to employment in the tourism sector. Additionally, relatively higher prices on tourism inputs would most affect foreign multinational corporations, as the primary purchasers of imported goods. Effective specific industries vary by country, but could range from food to textiles to building materials.

Finally, the development of a tool for tourists to better evaluate the impact of their travel choices ought to be developed. The development of this tool is contingent upon substantial improvement in data consistency and availability in small developing nations, which should command the attention of tourism researchers in the immediate future. Yet, a portion of the problems generated by tourism development stem from a lack of awareness amongst tourists. As I continue to explain this paper and its implications to my peers and professors, the most common question I receive is how consumers of tourism can make choices that are more ethical and beneficial to the poor. A tool to bridge the information gap could help concerned tourists make better choices, and eventually cause a shift in consumer tastes and preferences that alters the goals of tourism development to more closely align with the interests of the poor. A tourism scorecard, developed by the UNWTO is one form this tool might take. The UN bears some responsibility for the current conditions of the international tourism industry, described in Section 2b. Administering a scorecard, which tracks government decisions, the level of foreign control over capital, proxies for local economic agency, human capital development, foreign exchange leakage, and import propensity is a method for the UN to mitigate its role in encouraging harmful tourism development decisions in the infancy of the industry. Made available to governments and the public alike, this scorecard should make it easier to determine where tourist dollars are most effective as generators of pro-poor economic growth, to be employed by conscientious consumers who are increasingly concerned with authentic tourism that contributes positively to the destinations and their people. The success of this tool is intertwined with policy changes described above however; simply encouraging tourists to visit countries like Barbados where leakage is low and locals own tourism assets isn’t enough. This paper establishes that the poor rarely contribute to economic decision-making in tourism development, and pushing visitors away from nations with less favorable policies adopted by states also harms those poor. Encouraging tourists to vacation in Barbados may expand the positive benefits of tourism to Barbados, but at the expense of vital tourism dollars in Fiji, which is similarly reliant on those dollars. Adoption without accompanying change may mean the scorecard unfairly harms countries with poor rent distribution, and while the resulting economic losses may eventually spur new legislation, the brunt of that loss will be felt by the poor, exacerbating the very effects the scorecard seeks to alleviate.

VI. Conclusion

This paper explored the variable effects tourism development can have on the poor given a confluence of factors. It found that governments and foreign actors both play a significant role in the evolution of tourism in the developing world, and argued that governments, multilateral organizations and tourists themselves have a moral obligation to promote economic empowerment and agency through tourism, while minimizing the demonstration effect, cycles of low human capital development and neglect of community input. Data constraints remain a theme in the literature, and as such further research must begin with attempts to collect more comprehensive and standardized data from small, developing nations. Furthermore, more resources must be devoted to understanding the impacts of tourism on a smaller scale, including analysis for population subsets rather than regional or national studies. Research into formal modeling revealed a gap in economics; modeling can analyze the contributions of tourism development to a macroeconomy, but cannot model the distribution of those contributions within a country (Guen 2017:8). The primary economic tool for examining distribution is the Gini coefficient, a complex statistic that is extremely challenging to calculate in small, developing countries where data is sparse or unstandardized. These deficiencies represent the most significant barriers to the advancement of our understanding of tourism's effects on the poor, consequently representing the next step to be taken by researchers. Without new models and data to apply them to, mitigating the pernicious aspects of tourism will be challenging, and our knowledge of the issue will remain incomplete. Tourism can be the solution to economic growth for small tropical nations and serve the needs of the poor, but ensuring such outcomes requires policymaking informed by evidence that largely does not yet exist.

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