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We're All Human, but Some Are More Human Than Others: Thoughts on the Hypocrisies of Global Travel

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Title: We're All Human, but Some Are More Human Than Others: Thoughts on the Hypocrisies of Global Travel

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Abstract:

When politicians, news writers, and the general public discuss the recent migration tragedies in the Mediterranean, they do so through images and words of extreme pathos. Pictures of crying fathers and drowned children echo the wider rhetoric of the severe victimhood of desperate migrants, yet this is often and contradictorily juxtaposed against the dangerous, resource-draining Otherness of foreign invaders. The victim/villain binary is paradoxical, however, because the desperate refugee figure trying to save his family from war-torn Syria and treacherous seas is simultaneously presented as a threat to the Western democratic states whose shelter he seeks, the integrity of which must be preserved through immigration policy and evermore brutal and aggressive border control.

And yet a third discursive figure, also a victim, has recently emerged. We have seen in recent news how western tourists are having their holidays 'ruined' by hordes of refugees in the resorts of Kos and other Greek islands, for example. The stories making copy are those of the tourists and their resentful displacement, or occasionally their charity. We are being told much less about the everyday lives of local Greek islanders who are struggling to cope with large numbers of homeless and hungry 'interlopers' in the midst of an economic crisis reminiscent of the Great Depression.

This presentation examines the discourse on refugees and makes a comparative analysis between the ways that immigration and tourism are valued and represented. It draws on a range of sources, including news stories, advertisements, and travel blogs to explore the contradictory, heavily racialized, and deeply embodied nature of the treatment of migrants in the context of the recent refugee crisis in Europe. It uses global tourism as a comparative backdrop to draw out some of the blinding hypocrisies in the ways that travel in its varying forms is represented and valued. It draws on research into the impacts of nascent markets for tourism in the developing world, including 'tribal tourism', cruise tourism, and small island tourism to illustrate the extreme discrepancies between conflicting constructions of travel, mobility, human needs and rights, and indeed humanness itself.