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Empowered or Burdened? Tourism, Gender, Intersectionality, and Emotion

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Title: Empowered or Burdened? Tourism, Gender, Intersectionality, and Emotion

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Abstract:

According to the UNWTO (2015) “tourism can empower women in multiple ways...and is a tool to unlock their potential.” But for which women and under what circumstances? This paper will explore the intersecting categories of identity—gender, ethnicity, life-stage—and ecology, and how they interplay and add complexity, in order to interrogate this version of tourism and gender relations. Furthermore, it explores the role of emotions in understanding tourism development.

The unequal gendered power relations embedded in the tourism sector have been well rehearsed (Gentry, 2007; Schellhorn, 2010; Vandegrift, 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012; Duffy et al., 2015). However, inequalities in terms of access to resources, greater vulnerabilities, and disproportionate negative impacts have not yet been subject to systematic gender analysis.

Communities have largely been considered homogeneous. This paper not only provides a gendered picture of inequalities but also unpacks which women and why are empowered or burdened by tourism development.

Research sponsored by the British academy consisted of 88 interviews and four focus groups in April–July 2015 in the small east Indonesian town of Labuan Bajo. Neoliberal economic development policies have promoted tourism growth at any cost (Dale, 2015) and led to price rises and competition for natural resources, including water. This paper considers not only how women bear a disproportionate share of the hidden costs of tourism development, but also unpacks the differential impact on different groups of women and explores how they deal with their daily water struggles.

By unpeeling layers of multiple intersecting inequalities, a number of conclusions can be drawn: poverty compounds gender inequality and this is frequently related to ethnicity. Interlaid with socio-economic and ethnic identities, age and life-stage further complicated the picture. Tourism development has dramatically increased the cost of living and the cost of water in particular, driving women into exploitative paid work and doubling their burdens as they continue to be responsible for all domestic and water work. Migrants from further afield, including foreigners have used their financial and social capital to reap the greatest benefits from tourism. These women did not experience the expense of water, which they found relatively cheap, did not do their own domestic and water work, and were empowered in the ways the UNWTO suggests.

For the majority of women, everyday material practices: water collection, queuing, remembering to call and waiting for a delivery, moving hose-pipes and buckets, were arenas where gender norms and social inequalities are re-enforced. By exploring everyday emotions a more thorough understanding of tourism development was developed. As Heng (1996) suggests, pain and anger are rich sources of opposition knowledge among oppressed women. Hitherto these emotional geographies have been under-explored in tourism. The study found relations with water were emotional: worry, stress and shame affected social relations and added to

women's feelings of powerlessness. The women were unable to control the water that didn't flow or the tourism development that was stealing their supplies. Lack of control and powerlessness are the opposite to the dreams of empowerment sold by the UNWTO.