

VOICES FROM THE SOUTH

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THE
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FOUNDATION

The Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development.

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Threats to Women's Rights and Dignity: Tourism and Gender in Africa

It is estimated that 1 out of every 20 jobs on the African continent is related to tourism, especially in key tourism countries and attractions such as those found in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Egypt, Mali, South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. Being a predominantly male-dominated industry, however, with a high male patronage, tourism needs to be held accountable for its impact on women in varied and serious ways.

In this month's Voices from the South, Ms. Omega Bula of Zambia explores the implications and impacts of commercial tourism on women's rights and dignity. She argues that the 'good news' from tourism today lacks a class, racial, and gender justice analysis, and is hence not true for the majority of impoverished and marginalised women working in the tourism industry in Africa. This situation therefore demands life-giving economies and theologies that secure gender justice in the tourism industry in Africa, as well as the wider Global South.

The text consists of excerpts from Omega's chapter in the newly published book, "Deconstructing Tourism: A Theological Reading from the Global South" (2014).



By: Omega Bula
Lusaka, Zambia

African economies have not been spared the global financial and economic downturn that has touched even the strongest and largest economies in the world since World War II.

global financial and economic architecture and governance.

The "Good News" of Tourism?

The development of **tourism** as a commercial enterprise is therefore being raised by several African governments as the gateway to the development of local infrastructure.

Employment opportunities, local economy stimulation, attraction of foreign capital investments, increase for the state or local government tax revenues, increase in property values, increase in recreation opportunities for the local people who can access facilities, and new technologies and cultural impacts (among others things) are often men-

For many African countries, the global and economic financial crisis comes at a time when their economies are already subordinate, fragile, marginalised and struggling to be part of the



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tioned as outcomes.

In addition, the current discourse on benefits of tourism often focuses on tourism as a vehicle for promoting equal opportunities for women in particular: the creation of opportunities for women entrepreneurship in the industry, the enabling of women to study or train so they are better prepared to compete for lead jobs in the industry, the promotion of protection of women working in vulnerable areas of work within the tourism industry, etc.

Maximization of Profit

Yet these economic multipliers and supposed positives for women occur in a market economy that carries the values and principles of economic globalisation, based on the maximisation of profit.

This is primarily done through the exploitation of consumerism, individualism, and what author *David Korten* speaks of as “corporate colonisation,” i.e. where control and influence is held by a corporate elite in both the North and South- the new face of global domination and control.

Patriarchy, Economics, and Empire

The context of the global tourism industry today is also that of empire. Empire understood as a term

that connotes “the gathered power of pervasive economic and political forces throughout the globe that reinforce the division between the rich and the poor.” (World Alliance of Reformed Churches 24th General Council, Letter from Accra). Empire has its foundational basis in patriarchy, and patriarchy thrives in the context of empire.

Because patriarchy and empire are inextricably linked, the majority of African women continue to struggle for sustainable livelihoods in poverty and indignity.

A majority of women in the African tourism industry, for example, are working in low service jobs as waiters, cleaners, chamber maids, comfort workers, receptionists, tour guides etc. Several are found in risk/survival jobs working as prostitutes and poorly paid sex entertainers.

The risks are there and they include lowest paying and lowest status jobs, undetermined incomes, abuse, and sexual harassment, vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, and in some cases the lack of family stability and care for young children and older parents.

Ingrained traditional notions of masculinity and femininity also contribute to how women’s economic roles in the industry are determined. In many cases, it is very hard for women to compete with men, as

women are expected to do only certain things ascribed by society. For instance, it is not common to find women working as tour guides in a game park, drivers of tour buses, or as ‘bungee jump’ handlers, or white water rafting guides.

Need for New Theologies

In my formation as a feminist lay theologian, I have been influenced by theologies of liberation that address the intentional social, cultural, economic and political marginalisation of two thirds of the people in the world and the exploitation of the earth.

Work on gender justice in tourism in Africa should concern itself with rights and dignity of all people and building right relations among all people and all of God’s creation.

We need theologies that put justice at the heart of faith. Theologies that push the church to stand in solidarity with those who suffer the most from systemic injustice and marginalisation.

Anti-oppression Consciousness

Doing gender justice and theology is engaging in anti-oppression work. The goal of anti-oppression work is the transformation of self, systems and society in ending oppression.

It starts with the development of an anti-oppression consciousness and justice living, which includes a.) naming our own complicity in the oppression of others, b.) naming privilege and power and how this benefits or dis-empowers, c.) naming contradictions between our own faith and convictions and how we live these out in reality, and d.) working to build bridges and al-



lies as part of the agenda to end oppression.

It also begins with self-awareness of one’s own history, sources of power and privilege, and how these things are used to benefit self or groups of people and move into new understanding of self and society locally and globally.

It requires critical analysis that enables the understanding of systemic injustice in the world; how it is constructed, who benefits, who is oppressed by it and why, and what mechanisms or ideas keep it in place.

Anti-oppression work requires concrete actions to change unjust systems. It becomes critical, then, that theologies that support anti-oppression work be lifted in support of work for gender justice in the tourism industry. ■

Omega Bula is a Zambian/Canadian social worker and sociologist, who has over forty years been involved in ecumenical global contexts seeking justice and resisting oppression. She was Program Executive at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe Zambia, on the staff at the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and at the Justice and Global Ecumenical Relations unit, United Church of Canada. She now lives and works on a rural farm in Central Zambia, receiving Global North groups and engaging in global education as a form of alternative tourism.

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Deconstructing Tourism: Who benefits?

This month’s text includes excerpts from Ms. Bula’s chapter in the new book, “**Deconstructing Tourism: Who Benefits? A Theological Reading from the Global South**” (2014).

Edited by Caesar D’Mello, Wati Longchar and Philip Mathew, the book is published by the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia in Taiwan and the Serampore Centre on Pastoral Theology and Research. The book is being made available at bookstores, theological institutes and libraries, and online.

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