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The moral terrains of ecotourism and the ethics of consumption

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Abstract

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of Western philosophical ethics as they may pertain to tourism. Our discussion then turns to one of the most popular attempts to address sustainability across the globe: ecotourism. Ecotourism as distinct from tourism writ large is earmarked by appeals to concepts and ethical practices pertaining to sustainability (in all its varied meanings), consumption, preservation, and the politics of colonialism and the dynamics of global development strategies. In order to bring the ethics of consumption into the context of ecotourism, we provide a case account of ecotourism that represents one of the more popular versions, national park tourism, and the exchanges that occur over what we call the 'moral terrains' of ecotourism. At Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park ecotourism pertains to market dynamics, colonialism, adjacent and conflicting heritage, challenges to environmental identity, micro-management strategies aimed at cultural reconciliation and political agency, as well as the ethics of entertainment that plagues tourism as a human form of consumption. We conclude with sections addressing the elevation of the ethics of ecotourism to a quandary of global environmental justice and utilize the controversy of the Uluru-climb to exemplify normative demands on today's quest for sustainable tourism.

Keywords

consumption, terrains, ecotourism, moral, ethics

Disciplines

Life Sciences | Physical Sciences and Mathematics | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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18 The moral terrains of ecotourism and the ethics of consumption

Robert Melchior Figueroa and Gordon Waitt

Introduction

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of Western philosophical ethics as they may pertain to tourism. Our discussion then turns to one of the most popular attempts to address sustainability across the globe: ecotourism. Ecotourism as distinct from tourism writ large is earmarked by appeals to concepts and ethical practices pertaining to sustainability (in all its varied meanings), consumption, preservation, and the politics of colonialism and the dynamics of global development strategies. In order to bring the ethics of consumption into the context of ecotourism, we provide a case account of ecotourism that represents one of the more popular versions, national park tourism, and the exchanges that occur over what we call the 'moral terrains' of ecotourism. At Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park ecotourism pertains to market dynamics, colonialism, adjacent and conflicting heritage, challenges to environmental identity, micro-management strategies aimed at cultural reconciliation and political agency, as well as the ethics of entertainment that plagues tourism as a human form of consumption. We conclude with sections addressing the elevation of the ethics of ecotourism to a quandary of global environmental justice and utilize the controversy of the Uluru-climb to exemplify normative demands on today's quest for sustainable tourism.

Tourism, ethics, and consumption

'When in Rome', the saying goes, 'behave as the Romans do.' It is perhaps one of the most common Western expressions that conveys one of the oldest philosophical ethics of the civilization, hearkening back to Aristotle's guidance in achieving the 'good (virtuous) life'; his bottom line: to be virtuous, behave like the virtuous person. As the classic motto indicates, adventuring to learn different customs reflects an educated-informed and ethically sensitive traveller – an ethical tourist. Thus, conceived of in terms of tourism, Aristotle's prescription for the 'good life' translates easily to this human practice of cultural exchange as a form of entertainment, and hence, a form of consumption. Changing our behaviour to the virtue of the 'Romans in Rome' – as it were – is part of the

enjoyment of being there; we are permitted to change our 'homeland ethics' in all sorts of ways, and this in itself becomes a form of cultural entertainment, and hence, a form of cultural consumption. Moreover, just as theatre, film, and place-based literature stretch the moral imagination, travel, and especially tourism, allows us to consider alternative ways of achieving the 'good life' while permitting for moral transgressions from 'homeland ethics'. By converting space, place, and human interactions into a form of entertainment, tourism informed by the code 'When in Rome' sets off a guide to alternatives in virtuous living across different cultural traditions, norms, mores, and political behaviour. However, if bracketing homeland ethics and our stretching moral imagination is part of the tourist experience this raises deeper questions about what constitutes good tourist practice.

Certainly behaving in *every way* like the Romans do will not produce ethical tourism, even if such mimetic behaviour is intended as a display of cultural respect. Cultural respect is indeed ethical behaviour, but contextually, acting exactly like people of different cultures does not yield ethical behaviour in itself. Likewise, not all behaviours that tourists encounter are necessarily good simply because it is done in that culture; thus, 'When in Rome' is not a virtue intended to slide into ethical relativism. There are limits to this virtue, or any virtue, as Aristotle warns us, because uncritical and unreflective attempts to achieve any virtue can easily turn into a vice. Far from the proper ethics of virtues, respect, conduct, and fairness, 'tourism' is often susceptible to the universalizing tendencies that follow most forms of industrial consumerism. Many a place transformed into a tourism destination relies heavily upon the reproduction and verification of Western and non-Western perceptions of racial, gender, and sexual stereotypes. For example, politicians in Egypt who are anti-gay tourists like to emphasize homosexuality as a Western form of corruption to the Islamic state. To discipline the collective will of the nation these politicians imagine a past and future without the subject of the homosexual. Hence, gay tourists are represented by the Egyptian media in the all too familiar tropes of 'alien', 'degenerate' and 'threatening'. In 2001, fifty-two Egyptian men were arrested during the raid of a well-known discothèque housed in a boat on the Nile for allegedly meeting with Western 'gay tourists'. Subsequently, the International Gay and Lesbian Rights Commission mobilized on the streets of Barcelona, Geneva, London, Manila, New York, Oslo, Toronto and Washington, DC to resist state sanctioned homophobia while the *Lonely Planet Egypt* (2002) guide asked all tourists to boycott travel to Egypt in protest against the heightened police persecution.

Since the interplay of ethics and politics is itself one of the entertaining aspects of tourism, the contemporary tourist is confronted with numerous unique ethical problems, because tourism is now global in so many respects and thus abides by patterns of consumption and resource allocation to a magnitude beyond what was historically possible. Many forms of contemporary tourism confront global social and environmental injustices by invoking a spatial-irony: the irony that much tourism is sold as a 'problem free' environment. Tourists certainly do not consume a 'problem free' environment, regardless of the tourist industry's

wish to extinguish daily ethical and political problems from the tourist experience; instead, tourism itself is an ethical and political problem that we willingly (though perhaps unreflectively) take on as part of the challenge and excitement.

The spatial-irony of tourism produces contradictions for most attempts at ethical tourism. Walking into certain international hotel chains there is an effort to achieve consumer familiarity regardless of where you happen to be: Rome, Sydney, Mumbai or Dubai. Spatially extensive tourism chains are carefully managed and planned to certain Northern base-line standards of comfort, cleanliness, service, décor and ambience. As Edensor (1998) has ably argued these are enclavic tourist spaces. Indeed, the spatial boundary of such resort spaces may often be regulated by guards, guides and surveillance cameras. These techniques reconfigure the boundaries of the touristic bubble by banishing potentially offensive sights, smells, and sounds, or encounters with the poverty lurking just outside. Order is maintained down to the manicured lawns. When stepping across the threshold to be surrounded by the familiar consumptive comforts provided in-house there is no necessity to conscientiously reflect on the world beyond the threshold of the resort.

Cocooned within familiar enclavic spaces there is no necessity to question the unethical presumptions of colonialism that are often deployed to market destinations in the global Southern world. Rather than dismantling gender, racial, sexual, cultural, or religious stereotyping, the staged in-house shows that feature at such resorts often appropriate and circulate this knowledge through performances of the familiar tropes of the non-Western world as a timeless, wild place inhabited by noble savages. Similarly disillusioning are habitual Northern consumptive-style practices that get transposed to areas throughout the global South that could never sustain such living conditions and comforts for its own citizens. Like the palatial grounds/buildings of former Haitian leaders (of the pre-2010 earthquake era), or the mansions and limousines of the political and economic elite of the poorest nations in the world, the transnational corporate tourist industry has generated countless highly monitored pockets of Northern consumption. Habitual practices of everyday life re-consume the tourist by displacing the locally lived experience with that of the experience of the global consumer.

Given these environmental and socio-economic façades and contradictions, how are we to determine which modes of tourist existence, values, behaviours, and encounters are 'good' or 'bad'? Of course, this is exponentially more difficult to assess than the question tends to imply, in part, because one common meaning of the 'tourist' already presupposes a person who is fundamentally disrespectful to the 'local' people, place, decorum, or the environment as a whole socio-ecological nexus. This meaning of the 'tourist' conjures up a visitor who is morally degenerate. As an act of socio-ecological consumption – that is, consuming both culture in its many expressions and resources in its many environmental and ecological expressions – the tourist of today is a living ethical dilemma, steering between ethically good and bad features of cultural exchange and

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contemporary tourist industry practices, encounters and ideas that constitute simultaneously local and global scales.

One of the most obvious scalar ethical contradictions for the contemporary conscientious traveller is the global environmental impact of modes of transportation made 'affordable' by transnational corporations; that is, airlines. How do we go about ethical tourism when the first leg of the holiday requires some rationalization of the carbon dioxide emissions of air travel itself? An intriguing and complex utilitarian calculus determining the greatest happiness (preference satisfaction) for the greatest number of moral subjects besets the conscientious tourist in the first moments of holiday excursion. The moral dilemma increases exponentially by the mile travelled, in large part because there is a fundamental connection between big business tourism and the consumptive behaviours of contemporary tourists that serve to aggravate the connotation of the tourist as morally insensitive. In particular, rather than simply being perceived as naïve or crass travellers, the social and environmental injustices related to global market forces produce much greater moral obstacles for the contemporary tourist to navigate than the virtues of 'When in Rome'. Big business and global forms of tourism impact ecologies and economies across geographical scales, and threaten cultures in ways that render social and environmental injustices inseparable. As a global industry that criss-crosses scalar obligations to human societies and non-human species and ecosystems, the ethical responsibility for the conscientious traveller can be daunting. It involves voyeurism and commercialization, consuming traditional environmental knowledge of others while also invading the spaces and situated experiences of others. Resolving the conundrum of economic development, environmental sustainability, and cultural sustainability in an industry that relies on inputs and outputs along a supply chain that stretches across international borders is a constant challenge to even the most conscientious traveller.

Sustainability, ecotourism, and moral terrains

Fortunately, the individual tourist is not merely left to her own devices to initiate conscientious travel. Indeed, scores of documents, inter-agency initiatives in the United Nations, and collaborative efforts in the tourist industry have brought the inspiration of sustainable development from the likes of Agenda 21, the model policy established in the UN Rio 'Earth Summit' 1992, to the tourism table. While much criticism can be made against the development strategies from Agenda 21, importantly it led to the UN charging the World Tourism Organization (WTO) with a mandate to foster sustainable tourism. A complex web of committees, offices, background papers, and corporate partnerships emerged from this mandate including the establishment by the UN's Economic and Social Council of 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. One agency response to this declaration of the 'year of ecotourism' was the WTO-sponsored World Ecotourism Summit, Quebec, in 2002. Another output from corporate partnerships around the world is the *Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria*, which stipulate a list of objectives under

the influence of the UN Millennium Development Goals: 'Poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability – including climate change'. Offering a code of best practices in the global tourism industry, the criteria include demonstrating effective sustainable management, maximizing social and economic benefits to local communities and minimizing negative impacts, maximizing benefits to cultural heritage and minimizing negative impacts, and maximizing benefits to the environment and minimizing negative impacts. Another major effort for branding and certification of sustainable tourism is captured in the world's largest cooperative, Green Globe International, Inc., which offers a symbol and criteria of its own for tourist activities that promote environmental protection and responses to climate change.¹

As a result of this extensive international attention, sustainable tourism – or more specifically ecotourism – may actually be one of the more popular forms of conscientious global citizenship. While it can be defined in a number of ways, at heart 'ecotourism' tends to concentrate on principles of environmental sustainability, empowering tourism service providers, and educating the traveller to become culturally sensitive and environmentally aware. In education terms, the conscientious ecotourist is a critical thinker who is open to challenging his/her own perceptions about the people and places he/she encounters. In consumptive terms, the conscientious ecotourist makes a definitive choice to economically, socially, and environmentally value the people and places visited, as well as to behave beneficently towards human and non-human others. These virtues and normative goals are well beyond the mere platitude of developing the local economy. Instead, principles of sustainability, locally empowered development (both in terms of recuperating goods for infrastructure and decision-making), consideration for ecosystems, and a desire to encounter difference – cultural, religious, ethical, etc. – are the focus of touristic experiences. In political and economic terms, ecotourism includes a transformative ethic intended to provide competition around 'good practice' through consumer choices, which grow individually and collectively to a form of boycotting industry players engaging in 'bad practice'.

However, since ecotourism has been broadened and/or normalized from its origins as part of a sustainable tourism development platform in the wake of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Weaver 2004), it has also inherited the subsequent ways in which 'green marketing' – aimed at capitalizing on green consumer sentiment – functions as a strategic force in tourist consumption; ecotourism has thus become quite problematic despite its efforts towards a transformative ethics. The corporate tourism industry has deployed its own interpretations of ecotourism marketing to reproduce, rather than challenge, mainstream tourism industry practices, strategically targeting the self-proclaimed environmentalist, ethical, conscientious, individual consumer (McMinn 1997; McNamara and Gibson 2008). By targeting the tourist who self-identifies with an ethical intent, ethical labels like 'ecotourism' and 'sustainable tourism' can be appropriated by corporations while generating moral blindness to the underlying controversies of consumption practices. McMinn (1997: 135) argues the term 'sustainable

tourism' has provided a framework which to promote development where "regular" tourists are. Purchasing holidays in 'remote' places in the conscientious consumer's quest to distance themselves from mainstream tourism utilizes environmental

Other authors of ecotourism are insufficiently focused on environmental performance. Font adds that 'the conscientious ecotourist wheat from the chaff' and 'green-washing' strategies with only lip-service to environmentalism. Visitor numbers to ecotourism work of Font (2003) illustrates how green ecotourism branding practices (2008) argue these practices have no legislative authority, regardless of context, various forms of ethical abuse. As this growth of conscientious travel is questionable ethics, it can back on to even the

In contrast, one of the most made extensive efforts in ecotourism is Pro-Poor ecotourism of the latest introduction. These charities have parts of the global ecotourism disrespect associated with the latest efforts in ecotourism, the perils of post-colonialism 'although the basic principle is knowing what is and instituting mechanisms to be patronizing of the privileged'. Tourism is only a set of standards for global ecotourism, international principles of sustainable tourism, and

tourism' has provided 'a philosophical base and a positive public image upon which to promote development, in particular newly discovered tracts of the world, where "regular" tourism might otherwise be seen as having negative impacts'. Purchasing holidays marketed as 'ecotourism' by mainstream companies in 'remote' places in the global South often enables affluent, well-educated, and conscientious consumers to continue with their affluent lifestyle and differentiate themselves from mass tourists, while feeling good that their holiday supposedly utilizes environmentally sensitive products and practices (Khan 2003).

Other authors offer similar warnings that 'eco' consumer preferences are insufficiently focused to create fundamental restructuring of social and environmental performances (Johnson 1998; Ross and Wall 1999). Honey (2008: 46) adds that 'the conscientious traveller can have a difficult time sifting tourism's wheat from the chaff to find a genuine ecotourism product'. For Honey, corporate 'green-washing' strategies allow tourism business practices to continue 'as usual' with only lip-service paid to the short- and long-term implications of increased visitor numbers to a particular destination (Williams and Ponsford 2009). The work of Font (2003), Font and Harris (2004) and Goodwin and Francis (2003) illustrates how green-washing practices are often exemplified by sustainable tourism branding policies and certification schemes. McNamara and Gibson (2008) argue these regulatory techniques offer directions to businesses, but have no legislative authority over practices. Indeed, Wheeler (1995) observes that regardless of contemporary labels, tourist industry marketing is often fitted to various forms of ethical abuse associated with discrimination and environmental abuse. As this growing scholarship in tourism testifies, tourists focusing on conscientious travelling remain situated in their own global context, forcing the questionable ethics and politics of neoliberal perspectives on development to fold back on to even the most conscientious, feel-good tourist.

In contrast, one example of a UK-based international organization that has made extensive efforts to work on many of the UN principles of sustainable tourism is Pro-Poor Tourism. Pro-Poor Tourism pursues its activities behind one of the latest inroads in sustainable tourism – the Pro-Poor Tourism movement. These charities have established community-based tourism initiatives in different parts of the global South to specifically address the environmental and social disrespect associated with the transnational corporate tourist industry. But even the latest efforts in conscientious, sustainable tourism can be conflicted by the perils of post-colonial ethical conundrums. As Fennell (2006: 103–4) observes, 'although the basic tenets of the Pro-Poor tourism platform are sound in principle, knowing what is good or right for tourism in the lesser developed countries, and instituting measures from the most developed countries, may seem to some to be patronizing'. The Pro-Poor Tourism movement may serve as an instance of the privileged position assumed by the global North. Admittedly, Pro-Poor Tourism is only one instance of international organizations putting forth moral standards for global tourism and tourists. But they serve to show that despite international principles, corporate cooperatives and initiatives for sustainable tourism, and new conscientious tourism movements, tourism itself is riddled

with ethical politics in ways that are simply 'built into' the nature of travel and tourism.

However, one cannot be an absolute moral sceptic about the various movements towards sustainable and ecological tourism. Certainly, there are other numerous instances of conscientious tourism that diametrically oppose the moral and political flaws of neoliberal global tourism, and these instances do reflect numerous positive ethical advances in this arena of human interaction. To add to the positive advances in tourist ethics made by the efforts and labour of many across the globe, we offer yet another, perhaps alternative, way of assessing this conundrum of touristic ethics and consumption in a post-colonial world where sustainability in all its meanings involves new global obligations to the traveller – the metaphorical configuration of *moral terrains*. We have introduced the concept of moral terrains in the broadest sense of ecotourism in several writings (Waitt *et al.* 2007; Figueroa and Waitt 2008; Waitt and Figueroa 2008), as a 'strategy to break from theoretical boundaries that have kept tourism geographies from embodied knowledge and broader notions of place ethics'. Such a reading of the ethics of tourism, especially ecotourism, through the lens of shifting moral terrains has several implications, specifically in terms of embodied-situated ethics, the critical place of emotions and affective experiences for ethics, the ethical reconciliation of difference, and the capacity for orienting to a relational environmental ethics.

Many Western ethical philosophies have been unable to appreciate the variability of bodily responses to tourism places. Every place-based interaction between peoples indicates different situated experiences, different dimensions of related power, and different ways of perceiving values and conducting oneself. It is through situated encounters with other bodies (human and non-human) that individuals make sense of both themselves and their worlds. Some encounters will evoke emotions that will strengthen a sense of self in the world, while others will evoke bodily responses that will become a source of reflection and offer potential for an alternative future. By considering the capacity of bodies to be affected where moral terrains intersect, we can better engage in the nuances and situated experiences of place-based ethics. Such thinking alerts us to the importance of bodies as more than containers of ideas; this has drawn our attention in our research to the importance of the affective capacity of emotions such as sadness, joy, disgust, embarrassment, guilt, fear, shame and pride (Probyn 2005). Like ideas, embodied experiences of shame and joy can help disrupt the existing power structures between those individuals constituted as host and visitor.

Admittedly, the global economic nature of most ecotourist endeavours is rife with contradictions and navigating the ethical pathways across differences (economic, political, cultural, religious, and environmental) is never easy or without fundamental messiness. However, adding the obligations of conscientious tourism opens gateways to alternative experiences of excitement that forge new alliances, thus increasing visitors' capacity to change their behaviour. The virtues of 'world-travelling' in the sense that Lugones uses the term then are not cut and dried but require constant ethical tuning:

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I am a plurality of selves. This is to understand my confusion because *it is to come to see it as a piece* with much of the rest of my experience as an outsider in some of the 'worlds' that I inhabit and of a piece with significant aspects of the experience of non-dominant people in the 'worlds' of their dominators.

(Lugones 1987: 14)

This plurality is part of the shared experience that generates a new moral terrain between resident and visitor reflective of the general benefits of human interaction with other humans, their places, and ways.

Another facet of the moral gateways opened up by the moral terrains framework is the foregrounding of new ethical relationships between humans and non-humans, tourists and their ecological values, human-to-human interactions, and the intrinsic value of place. The crux of these moral gateways rests on realizing the intrinsic value of place, as opposed to the instrumental value of place. Both tourist and resident relate to the moral status of place intrinsically in the sense that it acts uniquely on differently situated agents, and in many respects may actually present a version of its own 'agency'. Whether it be the deepest rainforest or the National Park experience – in terms of a method of sustainability, a cultural-ecological context, and a choice through which the tourist can operationalize the impacts of her consumerism – the place, sometimes the very rocks and setting, has an agency of acting upon and moulding the affective and ethical experiences of the human agent.

The concept of moral terrains as an inherently relational ethic thus reconceives moral agency: it is no longer reduced to a conscious subject acting upon the object. From this moral and ontological stance, the relational ethic of moral terrains is anti-dualistic, where dualism imposes an oppressive structure socially forged on to the place and spaces of moral agents and subjects. In the context of place or rocks or mountains or ecosystems, the relational ethic does not assume that consciousness is required, in order to act in a moral exchange. Thus, the tourist, the resident, the place, and non-human entities are seen as possessing their own capacities for agency. This relational ethic is one of the variants of the ecotourism vision, that place is worthy of sustainability in its socio-ecological heritage, and that supporting local political and economy agency are intrinsically important to sustaining relationships to place.

Scaling ecotourism to global environmental justice

Given what we have said of tourism and global consumption thus far, the ethical frame that best fits this arena of human activity lies beyond a strictly individualistic notion of the moral agent. Instead, justice, as a form of collective ethics, collective responsibility, and impacts that are collectively borne, is the proper moral scale. More precisely, environmental justice, and even more specifically global environmental justice, is the appropriate framework for understanding the collective moral terrains of tourism – a global consumption of place ethics.

A general concept of environmental justice has been alluded to earlier in this chapter in relation to the 'conceptual connections and causal relationships between environmental issues and social justice' (Figueroa and Mills 2001). Global environmental justice extends to the context of global market dynamics, development paradigms, scales of global, national, and local levels, and equity in the transnational benefits and burdens of the issues at hand. The local/regional or domestic scale of environmental justice is related to the global scale in a variety of ways. For instance:

Domestic and global environmental justice come together in the environmental justice struggles of indigenous peoples. For centuries indigenous groups who have maintained traditional, non-industrialized, self-subsisting, environmentally friendly, and spiritual lifestyles with their natural environments have experienced waves of colonial and industrial conquest, carried out for the explicit purpose of wresting away control over their natural resources.

(Figueroa and Mills 2001: 436)

In terms of the many concepts that form under the rubric of justice, both the scales of domestic and global environmental justice are bound by two interpenetrating, broad dimensions of justice – the distributive dimension and the recognition dimension (Figueroa 2001; 2003; 2007; 2009). Distributive justice, broadly construed, concerns fairness in the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, as well as the proper compensation and redistribution of resources in order to repair inequities or ultimately to ameliorate an unfair arrangement. Recognition justice, broadly construed, concerns identities, heritage configurations, and a proactive participatory parity of direct involvement in the (environmental) decisions that impact everyday activities. Recognition justice encompasses restorative versions of justice that allow differently situated agents to reconcile and restore respect for the varying ways that identities are associated with place. Thus, on the axis of scalar environmental justice – domestic and global – and the axis of dimensions of justice – distributive and recognition – the environmental justice frame best represents the feature of collective action and responsibility that encompass any case of ecotourism. In turn, what counts as ecotourism and ethical tourist consumption shifts into a dramatic complexity that defies many of the standard dualisms of environmental ethics.

In the US, for example, the national park most favoured by avid rock climbers is 'Devil's Tower', referred to by indigenous tribes of the Kiowa and Crow, among others, as 'Bear's Lodge' and a vital part of their creation story and environmental heritage. In an effort of reconciliation, the US government proposed compromise by maintaining the park and abiding by indigenous religious tradition. That is, until the law of the land (the *US Constitution*) was applied to the dispute and the courts ruled in favour of an interpretation of separation between church and state, and lifted the prior claim of the American Indian tribes to the normative and ethical authority over the practices of tourists

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(in this case the climbers). Despite the efforts of many conscientious climbers to respect the Bear's Lodge tradition of honouring the sacred ground during solstice, which required avoiding physical contact in the manner of climbing, a number of the avid climber tourist population believed it to be their right of constitutional heritage to climb the public space. Burton (2002) provides a detailed account of this case in his book *Worship and Wilderness: Culture, Religion, and Law in Public Lands Management*, and, among other similar cases throughout the US, he recognizes the issue is in large part the co-evolution of cultures and different environmental heritage. These clashes are indicative of different moral terrains occupying the same space in different place-related identities.

In effect, if environmental problems are seen co-existing and co-originating in social problems, the scope of global environmental justice broadens to ethical questions surrounding the emergence, conscience, and aspirations of ecotourism. The virtues of ecotourism are bound by the relational ethics between humans, non-humans, and place. If the argument that the global trend towards ecotourism is best understood at the level of global environmental justice, then one benefit for our understanding of global environmental justice is that justice can be seen to pertain to the non-human others and ecosystems that house, sustain, and allow them to flourish. Global environmental justice also helps us to better understand the scope of ecotourism to include postmodern touristic activities, such as visiting the neighbourhoods of extreme poverty in developing nations (also referred to as 'poverty tourism' or 'poorism') (Selinger 2008). The practice of 'toxic tours', a vital experience in the grassroots strategy for environmental justice, and even the more notorious practice of 'disaster tours', fits the range of ecotourism if we recognize that 'eco' has many meanings, despite the popularization of it referring to post-Enlightenment equivalences of nature, wilderness, remote, and preserved biosystems. Poverty tourism, for instance, considers the environmental sacrifice zones of colonization, global consumption and resource distribution, failed sustainable development rhetoric, and moral blindspots in mainstream environmental values, especially those myopically focused on non-anthropocentric frameworks. Toxic tours educate visitors on the environmental impacts of modern industrial society, typically the sites of transnational corporate manufacturing and waste, and on the most disenfranchised citizens, typically from historically marginalized races, ethnicities, and the poor. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, 'voluntourism' became an alternative for conscientious ecotourism, organizing many citizens to take their vacation time in New Orleans and the surrounding region of evacuation and disaster, in order to assist in the clean-up (mostly toxic) of the homes and properties of the victims of the hurricane. Meanwhile, bus companies and entrepreneurs generated an industry of disaster touring, where visitors paid upwards of US\$60 per person to board a bus and tour the neighbourhoods ravaged by the storm. This too is an ecotourism that illuminates everything from the impacts of climate change, to a heritage of environmental racism in the worse-impacted district of New Orleans, to the legacy of failed federal response, and the emergent identity of environmental refugees.

Joint management at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and the ethics of environmental heritage

The above discussion illustrates that global environmental justice need not be limited to some elite concept of the 'global', but should also extend the relational ethics between humans and non-humans in place. To exemplify this scale of relational ethics under global environmental justice and conclude the chapter we focus on the ongoing and recent controversies in the joint-management structure of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in the Northern Territory of Australia, commonly known as 'Ayers Rock'. Our exploration of this case here stands as an example of issues confronting ecotourism more generally. Even though this is not one of the typical 'rainforest' cases, it highlights indigenous struggles, state-sponsored agency interaction, and the ways in which colonial tourism obfuscates conscientious tourism in the global marketplace. Our specific focus is on the ways in which the moral terrains of the Park are played out through the ongoing debate over climbing 'the Rock' – Uluru, itself.

Indigenous nations, tribes, and communities are confronted with the political recognition of sovereigns within a sovereign nation, and that makes them particularly vulnerable to domestic colonial values and behaviours, as well as international colonial practices represented by global touristic perspectives. In the case of Uluru, this is reflected in the clash between the national heritage of settler Australian identity and the socio-religious-environmental law that constitutes the *body ethos* (as opposed to the body politic) of the recognized traditional owners of Uluru: the Anangu community. As we discuss below, moral concerns around climbing Uluru stretch back as far as tens of thousands of years in the Anangu environmental heritage, but the collision of moral terrains between the indigenous peoples and the tourist climber have existed only since the nineteenth-century settler colonization of the Australian continent. On the moral terrain of Anangu tradition, or *Tjurkurpa*, Uluru presents a cultural mapping of norms, law, heritage, ritual, and identity that grounds vital portions of the Anangu ethic. This ethic is inseparable from any account of environmental ethic as the Anangu *Tjurkurpa* is a relational ethic, that does recognize an anthropocentric/non-anthropocentric distinction. Given the rock itself carries agency in the collective moral activity of the community, the Anangu ethic exemplifies the deepest form of environmental justice. In this tradition exists multiple moral terrains for the Anangu: the rock can only be climbed by particular family groupings, specific licence is given only to males who have passed through particular rites of passage available only to specific elders, and the rock can only be climbed in particular windows of time. Surrounding the rock are a number of sacred sites that cordon off approach from different gender groups – men must respect the sites of women's rituals (business) by staying at a distance and turning their gaze away, and vice versa for appropriate behaviour of Anangu women with respect to the sites of men's rituals. A complex cultural map exists in this moral terrain, but this code is vastly different from dominant touristic activity that has been normatively guided by the tourist industry and Western colonial

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Elsewhere we have detailed the history of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park; the crucial summary is that since the Park was opened in the 1950s, a climb to the top of Uluru has been established and become a national heritage for settler Australians (see Figueroa and Waitt 2008). The Park and the tourist industry around Uluru has always been centred around the attraction of the climb, which, unlike the Bear's Lodge/Devil's Tower case, can be ascended with the assistance of a chain link by most able-bodied tourists. In recent history, the Anangu were returned the area that designates the Park under the provisions of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act 1985*, which led to a 'handing back' of Uluru in 1986 (*National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Amendment Act 1985*). The climb debate, if there ever was a public debate, was buried with the colonial ruin that the Anangu suffered, until the 'handing back' publicly revived the debate, as the Park now came into a joint-management structure between the Commonwealth and Aboriginal governance; ultimately, the site appropriately became a mixed designation (cultural/natural) World Heritage Site.

Today, a cultural centre exists for better understanding the environmental heritage and moral terrain of the Anangu, since all visitors considerate of Anangu law receive a *Pukulpa Pitjama Ananguku Ngurakutu* (Welcome to Anangu Land) in the form of a visitor pass that is written in both the Anangu language and English. The sign at the base of the climb requests in many languages that visitors avoid the climb, and provides numerous reasons for this, mostly out of cultural and environmental respect, directing tourists to alternative activities with the rock and its environs. The sign boldly states, 'We Don't Climb', which gives rise to a fundamental problem in environmental justice, identity, heritage, and the dynamics of moral terrains – who is included in this 'We'? The global tourist, the settler Australian, the Anangu, or some appeal to a universal 'we'? The insight that Burton gives of the Bear's Lodge/Devil's Tower debate is that the 'we' is a co-evolving subject; and in the case of Uluru the dilemmas of consumption ethics in the contemporary ecotourist are further complicated by the ethical task of reconciliation. Indeed, the Park, and Uluru perhaps as its central symbol, has become a site of reconciliation and 'sorry saying' or restorative justice, between the settler citizenry and the Aboriginal community.

As we write this chapter, Australians of all moral terrains have re-engaged the debate over permanently closing the climb to tourists, although the Environment Minister Peter Garrett estimates it will be some years before the Australian Federal Government succeeds in closing it. The reasons added to the signage at the base of Uluru identify dangers to climbers (including the annual number of fatalities), environmental erosion, degradation by litter and vandalism, and the cultural requests by the traditional owners. Despite the Anangu ownership of the Park, the joint-management scheme places the Environment Minister at the helm for setting criteria to determine the climb's closure. Criteria depend on significant drop-off in climbers, alternatives to dominance of the climb for international

tourists, and options available for the tourism industry. However rational these criteria sound, especially on behalf of the international tourism industry, the climb closure rhetoric outside the circle of federal politicians is often far more diverse and inflammatory due to the different moral terrains and concepts of justice as they apply to the different heritage constructions. Elsewhere we have indicated the moral terrains of colonialism, overt racism, generalized disrespect, and apathy, if not disdain, for the norms of the reconciliation process (see Waitt *et al.* 2007; Waitt and Figueroa 2008). Likewise, we have documented the moral terrains of co-evolution towards a place of reconciliation from the individual tourist to the collective behaviour of tourist resistance in defence of cultural and ecological respect (see Figueroa and Waitt 2008). According to some reports, the Park is witnessing a drop-off of tourist climbers already, as visitors are conscientiously taking up the alternatives, most of them culturally informed of the moral terrain of the Anangu, while the traditional owners are remaining resolute for environmental justice to take place.

Far to the north, in Arnhem Land, a vast territory that is predominantly Aboriginal Land, an elder reveals to a group of international tourists the magnificent ancient rock drawings of his ancestors: 'We share so you can understand; you cannot understand if we don't share.' What are we to understand from this sharing? That is partly up to the tourist, but it requires an ethical stance that recognizes the global implications and historical struggles of the place and its people. Back at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park the conscientious tourist is confronted with more than the biodiversity and sustainability argument, but also with questions about whose moral terrain to embrace, the settler heartland and colonial interpretations of nature, the traditional land and law of indigenous people, or the entertainment factor and tourism industry that the climb offers the consumer? Are we obligated to equally reconcile all perspectives on the climb? Certainly, the moral activity here cannot simply succumb to ethical relativism, because some moral terrains are the path of oppression and environmental injustice. For the tourist then, consuming ethics depends on consciously relating to the moral terrains of place, in order to determine the appropriate course of action.

Note

- 1 For further information on these initiatives see the following URL sites: www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_susttour.shtml; www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1998/eres1998-40.htm; www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58&Itemid=188; www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/IYE-Main-Menu.htm; and www.greenglobeint.com/.

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