

Tourism and social exclusion in the dominican republic

Countries



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<http://lap.sagepub.com/content/35/3/21.refs.html> Downloaded from lap.sagepub.com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 Tropical Blues
Tourism and Social Exclusion in the Dominican Republic by Amalia L.
Cabezas Tourism development is the backbone of many Caribbean
economies, and its advocates argue that it contributes to sustainable
development, the alleviation of poverty, and integration into the globalized
economy.

Scholars and activists, in contrast, point to tourism-related ecological deterioration, profit leakage, distorted cultural patterns, rising land values, and prostitution. They suggest that tourism perpetuates existing disparities, fiscal problems, and social tensions. Examination of tourism development in the Dominican Republic indicates that it deskills and devalues Dominican workers, marginalizing them from tourist development and sexualizing their labor.

The majority of people are relegated, at best, to positions of servitude in low-paid jobs in the formal sector, unemployment, or unstable activities in the informal sector that include the commoditization of sexuality and affective relations. Keywords: Tourism, Caribbean, Dominican Republic, Capitalism, Social exclusion In A Small Place, the Caribbean writer Jamaica Kincaid elaborates on the inequities of tourism (1988: 18-19): “ Every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. In international tourism, only some people are able to travel and experience a respite from the crushing banality of their lives; others, too poor to go anywhere, are relegated to servicing the needs of foreign travelers. Travel and tourism are among the most important economic activities of the global economy not just for the transnational monopolies that control them but also for those who dream of traveling and perhaps being able to turn someone else’s commonplace reality into the source of their own pleasure. This is the reality of the tropical blues. Tourism development is the backbone of many Caribbean economies.

For the small island nations, tourism today represents what sugar was a century ago: a monocrop controlled by foreigners and a few elites that services the structures of accumulation for global capitalism. 1 Can tourism change the economic context of small nation-states in the Caribbean by creating possibilities for the population to improve its standard of living? Tourism promoters, policy makers, experts, and development officials certainly think so. They Amalia L. Cabezas teaches at the University of

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She thanks the Centro de Promocion y Solidaridad Humana (a nongovernmental organization working in Sosua, Puerto Plata, and the surrounding communities) and the Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas for research assistance. LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 160, Vol. 35 No. 3, May 2008 21-36 DOI: 10. 1177/0094582X08315765 © 2008 Latin American Perspectives 21 Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 22 LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES have historically made enthusiastic claims about the positive impact of tourism on host societies.

From fostering world peace to preserving biodiversity and indigenous cultures, tourism has been considered a panacea for societies' ills (Castellanos de Selig, 1981). More recently, tourism has been seen not only as generating foreign exchange and employment but also as contributing to sustainable development, the alleviation of poverty, and integration into the globalized economy. Governments and multilateral organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and United Nations development agencies promote tourism as a viable mechanism for economic and social development.

It is easy to understand why so much hope is riding on tourism. Tourism is a vital component of the spread of global capitalism. It accounts for one-third of the global trade in services and is expanding at twice the growth rate of world output (El Beltagui, 2001). Tourist arrivals, which stood at 25 million in 1950, are projected to reach 1. 6 billion by 2020 (WTO, 1999). According to <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2005), the travel and tourism industry accounts for US\$4. 4 trillion of economic activity worldwide. In the Caribbean region, tourism development is of paramount importance as an indispensable source of foreign exchange (ILO, 2001). Judged by the International Labor Organization as the most tourism-oriented region in the world, the Caribbean is a region where a fifth of the gross domestic product is produced for tourists, directly or indirectly, by one out of every seven workers (ILO, 2001: 119). Scholars and activists working in the field of tourism are much more critical of tourism than policy makers and politicians.

In the past three decades, assessments of tourism's socioeconomic impact have included discussions of ecological deterioration, profit leakage, social displacement, distorted cultural patterns, rising land values, drugs, and prostitution (Harrison, 1992; Crick, 1996; Pattullo, 1996). Tourism has also been linked to the creation of demand for foreign-made goods, consumerism, the commodification of culture, trafficking in women and children, internal migration, and the disruption and corruption of traditional values and behaviors (see, e. g. McElroy, 2004; Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Pattullo, 1996). Furthermore, scholars postulate that tourism perpetuates existing disparities, fiscal problems, and social tensions (Britton, 1996; Greenwood, 1989). Given such incongruities in opinions and assessments, I seek to examine the framework within which tourism development takes place and to explore why tourism has failed to raise the standard of living and create better life chances for people in the Caribbean region. The concern here is with the political economy of tourism development in the Dominican Republic.

In this article I argue that the history of economic, political, and social subjugation within the global capitalist system determines the institutional framework for the current tourism trade. I offer the interpretation that the international division of labor in tourism deskills and devalues Dominican workers, marginalizing them from the process of tourism development and sexualizing their labor. I am concerned with the impact of these processes on the most vulnerable elements of the population. This case study is based on fieldwork undertaken in the Dominican Republic.

Beginning in 1997, participant observation was conducted on the Downloaded from lap.sagepub.com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011
Cabezas / EXCLUSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 23 northeast coast of the country in Puerto Plata and the neighboring beach resort developments of Playa Dorada and Sosua. Puerto Plata, a historic city with a population of over 60,000, was targeted for development during the boom in tourism growth in the 1970s. It is the oldest and one of the most developed tourism areas of the country, and it continues to grow (ASONAHORES, 2004).

Its port attracts cruise lines, and it has an abundance of luxury resorts located east of the city in an area known as Playa Dorada. Sosua, a few kilometers up the coast, is a small beachside community settled by European Jews brought into the country by the former dictator Rafael L. Trujillo to “whiten the nation” (Symanski and Burley, 1973). It has many businesses owned by expatriates and continues to attract European travelers, many from Germany. The north coast area has a large transient population of internal migrants who come to work in the tourism industry, its informal trade, and the free-trade zone.

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My research was assisted by two nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Puerto Plata and Sosua that are concerned with community health. Tape-recorded interviews were conducted in 1997 at a community clinic with women who identified themselves as sex workers, many of whom were affiliated with the Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas (Movement of United Women—MODEMU), an NGO that advocates for the labor and human rights of women in the sex industry. Further research for this project was carried out in 2004, 2005, and 2007, including work in the capital city of Santo Domingo and in the nearby tourist beach resort of Boca Chica.

Data collection involved interviews with hotel workers, sex workers, community activists, members of MODEMU, people involved in the informal economy, local businessmen, and tourists. **STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND THE CAPITALIST GLOBAL SYSTEM** Tourism exists within a political-economic framework characterized by monopoly capital—a system of global capital that has evolved over the past 500 years and is in a new stage of accumulation characterized by the transnationalization of state formation, production, and consumption (Robinson, 2004; 2007).

It is important to keep the colonial patterns of capitalist accumulation in mind when examining tourism development, since global inequities lie at the heart of the tourism project. The capitalist world system has continually expanded through access to cheap labor, land, resources, and markets. These processes are clearly evident in the commercial and organizational systems of the hospitality and travel industries. Transnational tourism reflects the asymmetrical distribution of power and economic resources between former colonies and their colonizers (Fanon, 1963).

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As Britton (1982: 355) declares, “ The more a Third World country has been dominated by foreign capital in the past, the greater likelihood there is of the prerequisites for establishing a local tourist industry being present. It is metropolitan tourism capital that is the single most important element in determining the organization and characteristics of tourism in underdeveloped countries. ” Time and resources have been important in the development of tourism, but so has economic power. While tourism is a global industry, the Downloaded from lap. sagepub. om at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 24 LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES majority of the receipts accrue to Europe and the United States (ILO, 2001; WTO, 2002). Indeed, the new forms of global capitalist domination, as manifested in the tourism and travel market, demonstrate that Dominicans face an “ empire of global capital” (Robinson, 2007: 19). The Caribbean is thus relegated to a “ pleasure periphery” within the international division of labor, a “ host” region that accommodates leisure travelers and the demands of transnational corporations (Turner and Ash, 1975).

The tourism industry in the global North emerged with subsidized state-led development. Growth in infrastructure and technology benefited from statesponsored research and development. In the 1950s the U. S. Senate authorized more than US\$12 million to support the development of improved transport aircraft, and U. S. policy encouraged the development of civil aeronautics and air commerce both within and outside of the United States (Truong, 1990). The use of U. S. aviation equipment, U. S. aeronautical procedures, and the English language as the world standard in aviation guaranteed the United States dominance in civil aeronautics globally. In

Western Europe, the concept of “ participatory enterprise,” by which airlines are owned in part or wholly by governments, helped to cover the losses incurred by the operation of unprofitable but strategically important routes (Truong, 1990). Both the United States and Western Europe subsidized and cultivated the global travel infrastructure and established the regulations and norms of the travel industry, facilitating their control and domination.

Travel and tourism enterprises experienced rapid growth and expansion as they sought to capture the disposable earnings of wage workers in the booming economies of Western Europe and the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s. Their growth was enhanced by new patterns of production and consumption in the global North and the creation of social legislation ensuring holiday time off. It was advantageous for the United States to further its political and commercial interests in the Caribbean by promoting the growth of tourism as a form of economic development.

As Truong (1990: 104) explains, The advocated tactical and strategic flexibility in the execution of civil aviation policy has been translated into the use of multilateral aid channels to cover U. S. interests and overt intervention in international aviation and tourism. The promotion of tourism itself mirrored the awareness of the relation between air transport and economic development. This intervention has two main advantages for the United States. From a commercial perspective, such intervention contributes to the strengthening of the U.

S. position as a manufacturer and exporter of aircraft and navigation equipment. From a political perspective, it helps to consolidate the direction of social and economic development in the third world, which benefits U. S.

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interests under a screen of peaceful understanding. In due course, the growth of the tourism industry became a “peaceful” method of attaining long-lasting political power and financial control in the markets and politics of the South (Lanfant, Allcock, and Bruner, 1995).

The framework for the development of the travel and tourist industry impedes poor countries from generating foreign exchange, increasing employment, or promoting the participation of the most marginal segments of the community (Britton, 1996). It enables transnational corporations to use their superior technology, resources, and commercial power to control Third World

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tourist destinations.

Tourism’s tendency to perpetuate patterns of economic dependency and vulnerability for developing countries is evident in the island nations of the Caribbean, where small local suppliers have limited access to tourist-generating markets monopolized by powerful wholesalers and retailers (Ashley et al., 2006). Tour operators—a transnational industry based in Western Europe and the United States—can project an image of a country through worldwide marketing campaigns that ensure a steady flow of visitors. Because of economies of scale, they can control tourist packages and demote or promote particular destinations (Britton, 1996).

They unite suppliers and consumers in the pursuit of profits and pleasure; with direct contact with travel consumers through vertically integrated travel agencies, they can control particular destinations and dominate the flow of visitors. They can pressure hotels to operate in certain ways and negotiate

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low prices, especially in beach resorts. They favor a standardized product, such as the all-inclusive deal, a comprehensively controlled tourist experience in which the familiarity of the brand and the security of the travel experience are more important than local differentiation. The all-inclusive tourist package allows tour operators and travel agencies to combine all of the components of a destination's attractions—recreation, meals, food, lodging, and transportation—into a single product paid for at the point of origin. This limits the participation of local producers and confines the profits to the global North. As the Dominican Republic has adopted the all-inclusive model, the earnings per tourist have decreased: per-room spending has declined from a high of US\$318 in 1982 to the current low of US\$154 (UNDP, 2005: 73).

The all-inclusive package is only one component of the revolution in information technology that has integrated travel and tourism into a circuit that combines air transport, sea cruises, tours, and car rentals into a worldwide monopoly. Further vertical integration of airlines, car rental, and tour operators has been facilitated by the Internet. 4 Electronic commerce in tourism services, which represents a new possibility for online holiday booking for tourism providers, works to the disadvantage of developing countries, which have only limited access to the Internet.

Other practices include the mergers of transnational corporate giants in the areas of technology, travel, hospitality, and media. HOTELS, CRUISE LINES, AND DISASTERS In an increasingly globalized industry, the trend in the hospitality industry is from independently owned and owner-operated hotels to the multinational hotel chains that have become the industry standard. In <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

the Dominican Republic, hotels with more than 400 rooms have the highest and least volatile occupancy rates (UNDP, 2005: 75; Secretaria de Estado de Turismo, 2007).

In the accommodations industry, an impressive amount of consolidation took place in the 1980s, resulting in hotel brands under fewer and larger corporate umbrellas. Major multinational hotel chains have been involved in important acquisitions and mergers (ILO, 2001: 38). Cendant, the largest hotel chain in the world, operates 6, 000 hotels with 500, 000 rooms. Some major hotel Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 26 LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES corporations, such as Best Western, operate in almost 100 countries (ILO, 2001: 120). Since the mid-1990s, multinational hotel companies entering foreign markets have used consolidation strategies to strengthen their position vis-a-vis local markets. Furthermore, brand-name hotels promote themselves by advertising their own products—facilities, amenities, services, and prices—more than any particular country. Because so many corporations strive for a standardized and homogeneous product, one facility is the same as any other, regardless of geographic destination. The disdain for difference and diversity is part of what some scholars have identified as the “McDisneyization” of post-tourism (Ritzer and Liska, 1997).

The promotion of industry control through monopolistic practices is also noticeable in the increasing number of strategic alliances aimed at supplying diversified products and services that strengthen the hotel corporations’ market position. 6 The ILO (2001) indicates that major multinational corporations such as Hyatt and Starwood are partnering with Microsoft’s

Expedia in the acquisition of new information and communication technology. In the distribution of products and cross-marketing between food service providers and hotels, Marriott and Hilton are now linked with Pizza Hut.

Strategic alliances between multinationals also include distribution and cross-promotion between financial services, credit cards, and hotels. In this area, American Express is now working with Accor Hotels and Visa and American Express are partnered with Bass Hotels and Resorts. The consolidation of hotels and transportation means that some hotels, such as Cendant, have now partnered with more than 20 airlines. Cendant's holdings also include vehicle rental companies, online ticket sales enterprises such as Orbitz and CheapTickets, and major resort condominiums and real estate holdings.

In media and entertainment, the copromotion of hotels and films has combined the resources of industry giants such as Marriott and Bass Hotels and Resorts with ESPN, Discovery, and E-Entertainment (ILO, 2001: 3). The Disney Corporation, with its Caribbean Disney Cruises that target all age-groups, has been able to create all-encompassing corporate control by combining cruises and airfare with its own private depopulated Caribbean islands. 6 Disney cruises feature Disney merchandise, entertainment, and films. Through these methods, cruises operate as the ultimate product-placement scheme.

This represents a significant impact on the region on a number of levels. Not only is the Caribbean the most important geographic market for the cruise industry (ILO, 2001) but that industry is one of the most egregious violators of labor and environmental standards (Wood, 2000). For example, the <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

majority of its workers come from Southeast and South Asia and are paid wages as low as US\$1.55 an hour (Wood, 2000). As a deterritorialized industry, cruise lines are able to evade labor standards such as minimum wage and restrictions on overtime that are established by national laws.

The interaction with actually populated islands is limited to a few hours of shopping for souvenirs. Consequently, the overall market for cruise tourism in the Caribbean translates into lower earnings for the region, since its participation in the profits is restricted to, at best, a few hours of shopping in a port community. The increasing horizontal integration of the travel and tourism industry is manifested in the computerized reservation systems, with high access charges, that have rapidly become the industry norm. Tourism services are increasingly Downloaded from lap.sagepub.com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 Cabezas / EXCLUSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 27 being purchased on the Internet via three main mechanisms: a computer reservations system known as Global Distribution Systems (GDS), third-party web sites such as Orbitz and Travelocity, and hotel- and airline-owned-and-operated direct booking. GDS is used primarily by tour operators and travel agents in destination countries to book not only travel and accommodations but other tourism products as well. The cost of GDS fees and technology is prohibitive for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Orbitz, one of the two biggest online travel agents, is owned by the five biggest U. S. airlines—American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, and United. Travelocity is owned by Sabre Holdings, the world's largest travel agent reservations system, and GDS (PSTT, 2004). At an impressive rate, consolidation and strategic alliances by multinational corporations have

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limited the opportunities for small and medium-sized suppliers in the tourism industry, thereby restricting access to profits to those aligned with transnational capital.

With few alternatives, largely because of their lack of technological development and capital, small nation-states cannot eliminate these powerful intermediaries and deal with tourists directly. A number of other structural issues are associated with the vulnerability of Caribbean destinations and the impediments to their benefiting from tourism development. One alarming concern is the “leakage” of foreign exchange earnings in the amount of imported consumer goods required to sustain the tourism industry.

As John Urry (1996: 215) explains, “Much tourist investment in the developing world has in fact been undertaken by large-scale companies based in North American or Western Europe, and the bulk of such tourist expenditure is retained by the transnational companies involved; only 22–25 percent of the retail price remains in the host country.” A major problem is the high import content of construction material and equipment and the many consumable goods required to cater to the needs of tourists.

It is difficult to bring local suppliers into the supply chain, since the goods required by tourists may not be produced locally, and, when they are, tourists tend to reject them (Ashley et al. , 2006). Another source of leakage is the repatriation of income and profits to metropolitan locations through generous tax incentives created to stimulate investment (Urry, 1996: 215). Finally, excessive reliance on one industry renders tourist destinations

extremely vulnerable to external markets. Anything that weakens demand for a destination undermines the national economy.

Circumstances such as the September 11 attacks and the weather can generate a considerable downturn in the tourism economy. With the acceleration of global climate change, the Dominican Republic, for example, is increasingly susceptible to more powerful and frequent hurricanes. Stronger tropical storms and the rise in sea levels could cause the disappearance and erosion of beaches? the main engine of the economy and a source of livelihood for the nation. Hurricane Noel in 2007 devastated parts of the islands, killing hundreds and generating an epidemic of leptospirosis. The minister of tourism, Felix Jimenez, reported that news of the epidemic had tainted the national image and that the images of Hurricane Noel's destruction televised in Europe had led tour operators to cancel charter flights (Hoy, November 25, 2007). However, the majority of areas and people directly suffering from the catastrophic effects of the hurricane were those already living in extreme poverty, certainly not in tourist zones. Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 28

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The government appears more preoccupied with its image than with creating an infrastructure that reduces damage. One family of five, for example, has been living in a temporary shelter since Hurricane Jeanne destroyed their home in September 2004 (Listin Diario, November 20, 2007).

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC While Barbados, Cuba, and Jamaica developed their tourism infrastructure in the early

twentieth century to accommodate North American travelers, the Dominican Republic did not become a tourist destination until close to 70 years later.

The nation's negative image during the era of dictator Rafael Trujillo reflected fear of a violent political system. 8 The political instability that followed the U. S. assassination of Trujillo in 1961 and the subsequent invasion and occupation by 23, 000 North American troops did not support an alluring image of a tropical paradise. The physical security of guests, an essential component in the packaging of tourist destinations, could not be ensured.

In 1966 Joaquin Balaguer, an old crony of Trujillo and an anticommunist ally of the United States, came to power through corruption and force. Balaguer's regime, in concert with multilateral agencies, sought to capture the U. S. tourist market that had been temporarily displaced since the Cuban Revolution. Through World Bank loans and development packages, the productive structure of the country was transformed and its economic strategy redirected toward absorbing foreign investment in tourism. Tax concessions that amounted to more than 10 years of tax exemptions for investment in tourism development were established by Law 153-71. 10 International tourism in the Dominican Republic grew slowly at the end of the 1960s as a way of generating development without making large investments in manufacturing and technology. Since tourism relies on the packaging of natural assets, it was considered to support economic growth by using existing resources, such as sandy beaches, a warm and sunny climate, " friendly people," and local arts and music (Tavares, 1993).

In 1968 the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo established the outline of a strategy for the tourism sector (Castellanos de Selig, 1981). In 1971 the Central Bank established a department for the promotion of tourism development to be financed by the World Bank. Through loans and with the technical expertise of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, in the 1970s the Dominican Republic began to move away from state-led industrialization and sugar toward tourism and free-trade zones (Atkins and Wilson, 1998).

The acceleration of its incorporation into the global economy was facilitated by structural adjustment programs that, for example, devalued the Dominican peso in 1987 to help the country compete for foreign investment. Tourism rapidly displaced sugar as the main source of earnings, and by 1997 it was generating more than half of the country's total foreign exchange (Jimenez, 1999). The government created generous tax concessions to stimulate foreign investment with the goal of producing employment, paying off the foreign debt, and generating revenue.

In the long run, however, this approach failed to create sustainable development or to enhance the well-being of the population. Downloaded from lap.sagepub.com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 Cabezas / EXCLUSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 29 majority of the population. National elites have benefited, as the increasing polarization of income indicates, but the majority of the population has been relegated to positions of servility in a competitive labor market that provides predominantly low-paid, seasonal, and unstable jobs.

EXCLUSION AND MARGINALIZATION OF THE LABOR FORCE The exploitation of labor and natural resources in beachfront resorts is particularly acute on <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

the north coast of the Dominican Republic, where the environment is showing signs of degradation due to the extensive development that has taken place in the area. Over 95 percent of the resorts operate under the all-inclusive enclave model (Departamento de Estadísticas, interview, ASONAHORES, October 2005), and over 60 percent also use time-share allocation (ASONAHORES, 2004). Enclave resorts have a reputation for being “gilded ghettos”? segregated spaces that exclude Dominicans while providing luxury accommodations to foreigners. The resorts are small cities and, as such, are developed with all kinds of facilities (UNDP, 2005: 68). They represent foreign, exclusive spaces that keep tourists from seeing the local poverty that might make them uncomfortable and keep them from wanting to stay in the country. The latest development scheme, the 30, 000-acre mega-resort Cap Cana, features four luxury hotels including the Ritz Carlton, apartments, villas, five golf courses, condominiums, boutiques, restaurants, a convention center, and a marina.

This resort complex will target the high-end market instead of the mass tourism market that the country has sought for decades. These tourism compounds provide electricity, sewerage, paved roads, and running water for their pleasure- and leisure-oriented guests, but basic infrastructure development in the country remains chaotic, lacking planning, development, and environmental control. Shantytowns often lack plumbing, electricity, and paved roads. This neglect represents a hidden cost to the host society and a further appropriation of social and environmental resources by foreign capital. 11 The United Nations Human Development Report for the Dominican Republic (UNDP, 2005) indicates that the tourism labor force is

made up primarily of young women, over half of them younger than 39 and with fewer than eight years of schooling (UNDP, 2005: 77). The salary for tourism workers is below the national average (UNDP, 2005: 78), with women earning approximately 68 percent of a man's salary in the industry.

Women are nearly absent from supervisory and management positions. This reflects an industry norm, for, as the ILO (2001: 86) points out, women globally have little access to the higher levels of corporate management in the hotel, catering, and tourism sector. Globally, women also experience income disparities vis-a-vis men at all levels of hotel, catering, and tourism employment. They generally occupy the lower echelons in the tourism labor market, with few career opportunities and low levels of remuneration.

While Dominican women experience greater vulnerability and gender discrimination in the workforce, Dominican men are displaced and excluded from employment and meaningful participation. Camilo, an informal tourist guide in his late twenties, has been working for the past 10 years in activities Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 30 LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES connected with tourism. He and other guides idle outside of the Playa Dorada resort complex hoping to befriend the rare tourist or, better, tourist group that ventures outside the all-inclusive beachfront compound on foot.

The modus operandi of these well-dressed young men is to approach foreigners with multiple offers—for example, to dine with them at a typical Dominican restaurant, to show them around town, and to teach them how to dance merengue. The day that I met Camilo, he was angry to hear that resort's management had been making disparaging comments about <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

Dominicans during orientation meetings for their guests. He explained: I want to fight against the lack of information or disinformation about Dominicans and the Dominican Republic.

I would like to have a crew secretly filming in the hotel, and I want to send that to the national media. The agents of these corporations are talking bad about us, about assaults, assassinations, and such things. We are walking guides; we provide a service. My friends and I speak different languages. Why is it that all the hotels and the travel agencies and the stores in the resorts have to use foreigners to work there? Why, if I speak German, I can defend myself in Italian, I am excellent in English? I can sell anything in German.

It is something that I do not understand. If I go to Germany, they will not let me work. I used to sell horseback riding tours; now all those are owned by Germans. They are displacing us in our own country. Camilo's statements address the massive displacement of Dominican workers. With the majority of resorts managed by expatriates, many of whom do not appreciate the cultural, social, and economic realities of the countries in which they work, locals are frustrated by the lack of respect accorded them by foreigners and the severe competition for the tourist market.

Camilo had started out with a small business that took tourists on horseback riding trips and had been forced out of the market when the resorts began offering these excursions to their guests. Such displacement has led many citizens to feel like foreigners in their native land. Most resorts keep the local populations out with security personnel and by requiring guests to wear

wrist-bands during their stay. Treated like outsiders, Dominicans are turned away at the front gate unless they come as workers.

This exclusion positions Dominican labor as a marginalized and deterritorialized workforce, performing roles and functions similar to those they would carry out as foreign, undocumented workers in Europe or North America. The common practice of the resort enclaves in the Caribbean region of recruiting top management and skilled labor from Western Europe and the United States means that Dominicans seldom work in positions of management or as chefs in the resorts, and, as Camilo mentions, they are even excluded from retail operations.

These exclusionary practices marginalize the local population—not just the working class but also nationally trained executives and mid-level managers. Dominican men are relegated to service labor such as work in accommodations, reception, security, and grounds-keeping or, as Camilo does, scrape out a living in unstable and contingent activities in the informal sector. Gender also creates labor hierarchies within hotels. Dominican men are excluded from management, but gender stereotypes also give them access to positions with more opportunities for gratuities, such as bartender and luggage

Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 Cabezas / EXCLUSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 31 handler. Dominican women, in contrast, are employed in gender-designated positions of domesticity such as housekeeping. There are few opportunities for Dominicans to participate directly in the tourism economy. To escape this predicament, many cultivate relationships of companionship, friendship, and <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

romance with tourists and other foreigners as a way to access the global economy, travel to the global North, and improve their lives.

Many relationships between Dominican women and foreign men mingle intimate, affective relations with economic activity, but others emphasize payment for sexual services. While some studies indicate that Caribbean formal tourism workers have sex with tourists in the resorts (Cabezas, 2004; CEPROSH, 1997; Crick, 2001), many more reports reveal that it is people hustling in the informal economy who provide tourists with sexual and affective exchanges (Herold et al. 2001; Padilla, 2007; Gregory, 2007).

In the Dominican Republic the young men are popularly known as *sanky panky*, heterosexually identified men who provide romance, companionship, and sex to men and women. These new sexual formations have also appeared in other touristdependent islands such as Jamaica (*rent-a-dreads*), Barbados (*beach boys*) and Cuba (*pingueros* and *jineteros*) (Hodge, 2002). Although many men are able to exploit foreigners' fantasies of racial eroticism to enhance their life chances and masculinity, women who use intimate relationships with foreigners to support their households bear a heavy burden of stigma and riminalization (Cabezas, 2004; 2005). It is primarily working-class women of color who bear the burden of state-inflicted violence, harassment, extortion, and rape (Cabezas, 1999; 2005). Miriam, a 23-year-old mother of two, had one child when she met the father of her youngest, a vacationing African-American police officer from New York in his late thirties. John visits Miriam often and sends approximately US\$60 a month to support his eight-month-old daughter. However, Miriam must

continue to seek out relationships with foreign and local men to supplement his support.

Her oldest daughter has liver disease, and the doctor visits and medication are costly. She tells me fearlessly, “ From luck and death no one can escape. ” Johanna, a 20-year-old single mother of two, cannot find any type of work that would allow her to support her mother and two children. She was fired from her job as a waitress when she got pregnant and began selling sex to foreign men who live or vacation in Boca Chica. Her aim is to meet a tourist who will provide her with travel to a foreign country. Any place is better than here,” she tells me. When I asked her if she was frightened by reports of sex trafficking or other forms of exploitation that could potentially take place in a country where she knows no one, she looked down and replied intensely, “ I have to assume that risk, because here I am going to either go crazy or die of hunger. ” HIV/AIDS Discussions of travel associated with work or leisure have increasingly pointed to the risks involved in mobility and HIV/AIDS. 2 Paul Farmer (1992) has argued that the HIV virus was introduced to Haiti by gay North American men vacationing on the island, and the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre indicates Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 32 LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES that this is true for the Caribbean as a whole (Camara, 2001) and that the countries that are the most economically dependent on tourism in the region have the highest prevalence of HIV cases (Camara, 2001; Padilla, 2007: 171).

Padilla (2007) maintains that tourism in the Dominican Republic “ continues to function as an important source of new infections, exerting an ongoing

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influence on the scope and impact of AIDS in specific locales. " This assertion is confirmed by the UNDP report (2005: 85), which indicates that the areas with the highest incidence of HIV in the country are also those with the highest rates of tourism. However, there has been little preventioneducationtargeting tourism-sector workers.

Padilla argues that this is because of the fear of fostering a negative image that could potentially " contradict the escapism, exoticism, and consequence-free environment that compose at least part of the tourism package offered to foreigners" (2007: 172). The women informants for my study, who worked primarily with tourists, were adamant in attesting to their use of condoms and resistance to offers of unsafe sex for higher compensation. Mari explained, " This is my body; it is the only thing I can count on to support my children.

I'm not going to risk everything for a few extra dollars. They can't pay me enough. " Another woman exclaimed, " If I get sick, are they going to take care of me? Are they going to take care of my children? " These statements are representative of what many women told me; however, a few caveats are in order. First, the women I interviewed were associated with MODEMU and CEPROSH, two organizations that provide peer-to-peer safer-sex education. Also, Puerto Plata has a governmentmandated policy of condom use in sex establishments (Haddock, 2007).

These women were educated and aware of the dangers of unprotected sex. Secondly, most of the women identified with the term " sex worker," meaning that many of their relations with foreigners were direct sex-for-moneyexchanges. Women who engage in less rigidly structured and more
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ambiguous relationships, in which the conditions of the exchange deemphasize economic factors, may take more risks to prove that they are not “ from the street. ” Research from the Caribbean also confounds easy assumptions about sexual identity, sexual practice, and HIV/AIDS.

Padilla’s (2007) research in the Dominican Republic and that of Fosado (2004) and Hodge (2002) from Cuba testify to the difficulty of categorizing the mode of HIV transmission in these countries as “ heterosexual,” given the growth of same-sex male sex work with tourists. The political economy of tourism serves as the context for straightidentified men to engage in same-sex relations with foreign men to support wives, girlfriends, and families. The notion of sex workers as vectors of disease also needs to be reexamined. My research with 30 women infected with HIV/AIDS, who worked in sex establishments serving a predominantly Dominican clientele in Santo Domingo, indicates that all were infected by their husbands or regular boyfriends, with whom they did not use safer-sex techniques. Thus far, all the women that I have interviewed claim to use condoms for protection with their clients and to let their guard down with regular partners. Third, many of the young single workers are internal migrants to tourist areas and are more likely to engage in riskier practices and have a less stable lifestyle (UNDP, 2005). There are few educational and prevention programs to target this population.

These are two areas in which more research is needed. Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 Cabezas / EXCLUSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 33 CONCLUSION Few viable alternatives exist to the current structure of travel, leisure, and tourism, <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

which consigns people in the South to poorly remunerated labor. The Dominican Republic, along with other Caribbean nations, attracts foreign investment by offering a low-cost labor force, tax exemptions, and other incentives, but tourism denies the majority of its working people “ decent work. 13 The squeezing of labor power and natural resources has left the country with a massive tourism infrastructure, with more than 60, 000 hotel rooms, and over 3 million pleasure visitors a year (Secretaria de Estado de Turismo, 2004–2007) in an ecology of disaster. These figures continue to grow every year without concern for the quality of life of Dominicans. The majority of people are relegated, at best, to positions of servitude in low-paid jobs in the formal sector, underemployment, or unstable activities in the informal sector that include the commoditization of sexuality and affective relations.

Dominicans dream of being leisure travelers, holding decent jobs, and securing a better future for their children, but the transnational tourism industry cannot provide them decent wages and higher standards of living. Various scholars have documented the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Caribbean people in acting on the tourism infrastructure (Cabezas, 2004; Fosado, 2004; Padilla, 2007), but the opportunities and potential for significant democratization are modest or absent.

Tourism may provide the opportunity for people from the global North to recreate themselves, but people from the South have access to this opportunity only through sexual exchanges that place their lives at risk. Reciprocal leisure travel is what every native needs to dispel the tropical blues. NOTES 1. Tourism and travel are considered export-oriented services.

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2. Increasingly tourism is one of the world's largest generators of jobs. The WTTC (2005) calculates that the sector accounted for 10 percent of total employment in 1997 worldwide and is expected to generate an estimated 328 million jobs by 2010. . The UNDP (2005) is rather critical of the all-inclusive model of development in the Dominican Republic. It contends that this model offers a homogeneous product marked by the stereotypical image based on sun, sand, and sea, a tourism product with facilities that face away from local populations and one characterized by constant competition and lack of state regulation. While I support this spatially concentrated form of development and the general segregation of tourists from local populations, my point here is to express concern for the lack of human capital development of the population.

Further, tourism development generally promotes a “ slash, burn, and move on” approach to the environment. Leisure travel in the Dominican Republic follows the pattern of exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor prevalent in neocolonial regimes whereby transnationalfinancecapital and local elites benefit from these structures and the local people are left to suffer the consequences. 4. According to one estimate, 33-50 percent of Internet use is based on tourism (ILO, 2001). 5. The trend in consolidation is evident in ILO's data (2001). It maintains that in 1999 the 10 biggest companies controlled 2. 4 million rooms but by 2000 9 giants controlled 2. 98 million hotel rooms. 6. In the Caribbean, of the eight major cruise lines operating, “ six own their own private islands which they include among their ports of call” (Wood, 2000: 361). 7. Leptospirosis is caused by a bacterium, *Leptospira*, that can be transmitted through exposure to water, food, or soil

containing the urine of infected animals. The epidemic had killed 27 people by November 20, 2007. Downloaded from lap. sagepub. com at University of Sheffield on September 8, 2011 34 LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES 8. Trujillo was dictator from 1930 to 1961.

His regime was characterized by extreme violence and repression, the massacre of 12, 000 Haitians in 1938, and the accumulation of immense personal wealth. He created state structures and placed his cronies in offices within them to perpetuate his power (Betances and Spalding, 1995). 9. Various multilateral agencies created specialized units for the evaluation, approval, and funding of the projects of member countries. In the 1960s the Inter-American Development Bank, the U. S. Agency for International Development, and the World Bank, for example, directed their lending in Latin America toward tourism development (Monge, 1973).

The Organization of American States also promoted financial resources for tourism development. All these efforts were enhanced in the Dominican Republic by Law 153, which granted tax concessions to tourism investors and corporations. Thus foreign entities took the lead in creating highly favorable conditions for foreign investment. 10. The legislation that governs these practices established an incentive system to stimulate development in the tourism sector by providing an initial 10-year 100 percent tax exemption on earnings, imports, and construction. 11.

Environmental costs are borne entirely by the local population, since the enforcement of environmental regulations is nearly nonexistent (see UNDP, 2005: 86–87; Gregory, 2007). 12. The United Nations (2004) epidemiological report indicates that the Dominican Republic had an estimated adult rate of <https://assignbuster.com/tourism-and-social-exclusion-in-the-dominican-republic/>

HIV infection of 1. 7 percent and Puerto Plata one of 8 percent. Recent reports suggest that the infection rate has been reduced to 0. 8 percent (Listin Diario, December 1, 2007), but the northeast coast continues to be one of the areas with the highest rates. 3. The term “ decent work” is used by the ILO (1999: 4) to capture the notion of quality employment that can provide basic security to workers. REFERENCES Ashley, Caroline, Harold Goodwin, Douglas McNab, Mareba Scott, and Luis Chaves 2006 “ Making tourism count for the local economy in the Caribbean: guidelines for good practice. ” [http://www. propoortourism. org. uk/caribbean/caribbean-whole. pdf](http://www.propoortourism.org.uk/caribbean/caribbean-whole.pdf). ASONAHORES (Asociacion Nacional de Hoteles y Restaurantes, Inc.) 2004 Estadisticas seleccionadas del sector turismo ano 2004. Santo Domingo. Atkins, G.

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