Tourism is Everyone’s Business: The Participants and Places of Township Tourism in Cape Town, South Africa

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A once niche industry providing tours of satellite African townships has grown into a standard excursion in Cape Town, South Africa. Township tours introduce visitors to the history and effects of apartheid as well as feature local culture and development in these disadvantaged areas marked by race and economic class. I describe how tour places and practices are normalized and socially produced, depending on and transforming social relationships and positions. I examine the major paradoxes of this type of cultural tourism that emerge from deep-rooted conflicts over issues such as representation and authority. I draw out these practices by exploring three aspects of the industry: company entrepreneurs and operations, guides’ employment experiences, and women bed & breakfast accommodation providers. Overall, I consider how tourism plays out in the lives of local participants in an effort to offer new ways to consider the manifold impacts of the growth of tourism in so-called marginalized communities, especially in developing world cities of Africa and beyond.

Rachel Harvey holds a 2011 Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Florida. Her graduate research concerned community-based tourism development and urban studies, including fieldwork in Cape Town, South Africa. She is currently a RISE Mentor for Kupu, a program to develop Hawaii’s green workforce and implement a variety of sustainability projects. She serves as a community organizer on waste management issues for Kokua Hawaii Foundation and Kanu Hawaii.

Presentation VIDEO: https://vimeo.com/50640788