

On tourist commodification and the collaborationism it requires

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In 1988 the Australian cinema and photography director Dennis O'Rourke released *Cannibal Tours*, a documentary with a sound dose of fiction he had filmed eleven years earlier, in 1977, along the shores of the South of the River Sepik in Papua New Guinea. The film is about the river journey a relatively small group of wealthy Americans and Europeans undertake, and of how they interact with the local Papuan inhabitants of the Iatmul ethnic group they encounter in the villages they visit. Without really going into explicit political statements, most of the documentary is devoted to show the barbarian idealised past of the Iatmul, e.g. their extinguished cannibal practices.

But above all, O'Rourke conveys to us the anxious visual consumption of the Papuans by the tourists. Furthermore, given the lack of custom in these villages, the film shows to us their assumedly precarious skills in the art of bargaining when allowing the tourists to take photographs of their bodies, both from adults and children. The authenticity these bodies may contain fades as soon as they are priced. Improvised dances are also bought and craft souvenirs such as Wood carvings, masks, baskets and bags made of braided fibres and various objects of religious and collective use. Payments are not necessarily made in cash and we often find exchanges involving cigarettes, balloons and cheap perfumes.

To sum up, the dehumanisation with which the tourists unconsciously submit the Iatmul in their exoticisation and the commodification of their life styles, no matter how banal they might be, dehumanises in turn the very same tourists who seem to be solely motivated by the irrational commercialisation of those they see as different and that, in fact, are no other than practical, reasonable and, in short, as modern or more than them but always departing, of course, from a position of unequal power. With the final scene the documentary reaches its apotheosis, and it shows us the tourist boat throwing a party in which they all wear gadgets poorly bought to the Iatmul while they dance their white bodies, now painted, tropicalised and tribalised at the rhythm of a piece of Mozart. The spectator, stupefied, has long since realised who are the true anthropophagous.

Twenty six years after the filming, in 2003, and almost at the antipodes of the River Sepik, in full display of the first ecotax, the Balearic Institute for Tourism (IBATUR) began a promotional campaign using street posters that targeted the population of the Balearic and Pitiuses Islands under the catchphrase: "The tourist a friend. Make him come back". In these posters we find three characters around a table under a porch. One of them is a man in a suit (we interpret he is the tourist) who is standing with his hands on the table and who has unintentionally soaked the tip of his tie in his cup of coffee. The other two seem to be the hosts: a heterosexual autochthon couple. He, wearing jeans and also standing up, smiles to the camera while he fishes out his guest's tie with a half-sullen half-helpful pose. She –sitting down and dressed in red- shows signs of being exaggeratedly dismayed.

Unlike O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours*, where we are shown how the Iatmul enter in the monetised economy by selling their way at so many dollars a snap, the image of IBATUR would be unblemished if it were not for the tie soaked in coffee. The message is clear. Honouring a participatory economy, we are encouraged to warmly welcome tourists who visit us as well as actively take part in building a tourist fidelity that is thought to be basic for the economic sustainability of the sector and, given its importance to the islands' political economy, for the whole of the Balearic and Pitiuses society.

Yet such an image of bonhomie towards the tourist is not something new of our times. We, the inhabitants of the Balearic and Pitiuses Islands, have an important tradition based on giving full attention to our visitors. Read if not the description the Archduke Ludwig

Salvatore von Habsburg, a Central-European aristocrat traveller, wrote in his *Die Balearen* in the mid 19th century:

Any foreigner, even being a perfect stranger, for [Majorcans] is a welcomed guest to whom they will never get tired of paying attention. Therefore, they do the unspeakable to regale him with services, and it would be a question of honour to treat him to and show him the beauties of the island or of the city of residence.

The Archduke does not look into the reason of this attitude; he deals with it as if it were a natural state of the islanders, almost a matter of identity. We could think we might be confronting collaboration, that is, a kind of equitable reciprocity in which one way or the other everyone gains the same. While incipient, collaboration does not necessarily happen mediated by the nudity of economic exchange, it can happen in the guise of what we have come to know as social capital. In fact, unlike the *Iatmul*, these services shirk any money account. Both the islanders of our Archduke and the host couple of IBATUR's campaign attest how important it is not to mention the income generated by tourism (call it travel if you prefer).

However, it is the horizon of the economic return what makes them all collaborate with servile attitude to the extent of acting as «cicerones» showing the best kept treasures. Complacent attitudes aside, the fact of formulating the market in such equitable terms that it no longer looks like a market conceal the geography of power that runs across it and that privileges the history that confirms certain hierarchies. A whole complex of short-term profit that is decidedly intrinsic to our tourist economy hides behind the affable company of the couple that cares for the visitor's petty misfortune and the natives' complacent unveiling of the islands secrets. Other cases, though, are not as keen in holding it back. Let us take a look at the following sketch I introduce so to conclude this reflection.

Most recently, the collaborative economy the European Union encourages has reached the sphere of residential tourist rentals hand in hand with the platform capitalism that certain nowadays well-known companies champion. Following the tendencies already developed across the world, in 2017 the Balearic Government will open the way so that residential housing can be commercialised via tourism in our cities and villages. Different stakeholders speak of democratising the benefits that come from the offer of tourist accommodation –one of the main means of production within the industry, from helping with some extra income to a population that is still suffering the effects of the crisis, etc.

That said, if successful, this enterprise will lead us to the residential housing stock spell—which will necessarily also get reduced, to an invisibility of the precarious conditions of domestic work and, among other issues, a social gap in the very same working class, a gap between a strengthened small landlord class and a growing tenant class characterised by forms of highly flexible residential occupancy that will add to their current living conditions. The tourist commercialization of housing is, thus, a class matter that adds to the accumulated experiences of our urban society fuelling the capitalist extraction from labour.

Moreover, this commercialisation will depend every time more on individual fields of decision-making. Here, just like it happened with the Papuans of *Cannibal Tours*, although the economic relationship is not concealed, we still find continuities with the native representations of IBATUR and the Archduke; exemplified by a tourist fidelity that is first and foremost seen as an internal affair, not external. And this is so because the tourist commercialisation of housing requires the active involvement of small landowners to the extent of tuning their collaboration into and unconditional collaborationism. We have already given them the landscapes and the houses, now it is only a matter of time for them to take pictures of our bodies and, who knows?, for them to fast upon us.