Asia Pacific
Academy of Science Pte. Ltd.

REVIEW ARTICLE

COVID-19 and the invisible war: Is it the end of hospitality?

Maximiliano E Korstanje

Universidad de Palermo, ABT C1175, Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: mkorst@palermo.edu

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the virus known as Sars-Cov2 [or coronavirus] has been significant blow that confirms a trend initiated after 2001 to the self-cannibalization or finishing of Western hospitality, but rather transforms the body itself and disposes it as a weapon to attack the other. As already mentioned, the old dichotomy between the tourist desired as an agent of economic growth and the immigrant feared as an unwanted guest gives way to a new landscape, where the tourist is seen—with some suspicion—as a potential enemy. Like the war against cancer in 1970, the war against local crime in the 1990s, and the war against terror in 2001, the world is now living a war against a virus. In this new world, classical hospitality gives way to an absolute hospitality where the hotel is recycled as a hospital.

Keywords: hospitality; tourism; coronavirus; COVID-19; the fin of tourism

1. Introduction

To refer in a short essay to a new virus such as COVID-19 and its short and long term effects on culture seems a difficult task to accomplish, due to the dynamism of the phenomenon as well as the almost frenetic media coverage. In a hyper-mobile world, where the fluidity of productive apparatuses has generated a liquid-like modernity, COVID-19 has created a state of shock that has undoubtedly shaken public opinion. As Zygmunt Bauman rightly warns, in liquid modernity the solid melts into air, just as the productive apparatuses at scale give way to the advent of a consumerist modality, where the consumer is transformed into a consumed good.

Such a globalized world marks the final of causal correlation, and the audience, unaware of the causes of the events that disturb it, only focuses on the consequences[1–3]. In the same vein, Paul Virilio refers to a cosmopolitan world that has become flat, geographic boundaries have blurred in the face of the tyranny of a screen that never sleeps. If modern means of transportation have gridded the world, it is no less true that the ancient wall that defended the ancient city has fallen. That suggests two important points. The first concerns a global fear that is transformed into a means of entertainment for global audiences. Second, the total destruction of otherness at least as it is imagined by the West[4,5]. Is COVID-19 a clear and unquestionable sign of this decomposition?

In particular, experts not only have limited knowledge about the virus, which is first observed in the city of Wuhan (China) by the end of 2019, but also its high transmissibility has led health systems in the first world to an unprecedented crisis. It should be clarified that COVID-19, despite its high

transmissibility, maintains very low levels of lethality compared to other viruses. Experts estimate that only 18% of those infected will require intensive care due to the worsening of the disease. Its case fatality rate is estimated at just 2% (even though it varies from country to country). Having said this, it is no less certain that an age group over 60 years of age will be particularly affected by this new virus (with much higher rates).

As of mid-June, the virus has claimed the lives of 433,634 victims while infecting nearly 7 million people. These numbers seem to be on the rise and countries that have gone through the pandemic, such as China and Japan, fear a new outbreak with greater virulence. The countries with the highest mortality are those that have enjoyed high mobility and have allowed the importation of the virus from China, through the tourist industry. Having said that, the United States is the country with the most officially recognized deaths (117,646), followed by Brazil (42,837), United Kingdom (41,698), Italy (34,345), Spain (27,136), France (29,368), and Belgium (9,655). Europe and the world experienced a degree of chaos and uncertainty like never before as borders, airports, and the tourism industry came to a unilateral and surprise halt. Some doctors suggest that, for every infected person with symptoms, there are possibly up to 6 more infected people transmitting the disease, but in an asymptomatic, i.e. silent, manner. In view of the above, the Coronavirus (Covid-19) has not only paralyzed commercial activity throughout the world, but has also generated an unprecedented shock in the collective imagination worldwide. Gradually and in combination with Asian countries, Western governments adopted restrictive measures ranging from the closure of borders or airspace to the cancellation of commercial flights and tourism. Hotels, the primordial sign of hospitality, have been recycled and transformed into field hospitals to house the sick. Following Jacques Derrida, it is worth asking to what extent this event has marked the fin of mobility or what is even more problematic, the fin of hospitality conditioned by an absolute hospitality.

2. Thinking about the origin of the conquest

From a historical perspective, it can be said that Europe-during the 18th and 19th centuries - set out to conquer and then annex new economies and independent nations to form an imperial matrix known as European imperialism[6–8]. In doing so, literature laid the groundwork toward a new form of entertainment directly associated with the figure of the native or good savage. This non-Western other was not only an object of worship, fear, and fascination, but allowed for a greater understanding of one's own internal European matrix, repressed by enlightenment ideals[9,10].

As Mary Louise Pratt rightly points out in her book Imperial Eyes, the desire for colonization by the European imperial powers was based on the scientific need for classification and observation. It was the botanist Karl Linnaeus who was one of the main exponents who has fostered the idea of being there to observe and classify different kinds of plants. Literature, of course, has done its own thing, creating the idea of "otherness" or "otherness" as a mirror that prefigures, reflects and legitimizes the supposed European superiority over other cultures. Pratt warns that the 18th century European traveler could be considered a rational traveler who subordinates the native through his description, his portrayal, and in doing so avoids being marked. In other words, European travelers can be compared to Adam's presence in paradise, since they have all the benefits of Eden while at the same time they cannot be controlled, their freedom is absolute[11].

It is worth mentioning that modern anthropology was born from the idea of being there to understand[12], a cultural trend that is maintained today with cultural tourism[13,14]. The non-European other becomes an object of fear and admiration at the same moment in European history[15]. It is in this context that the first anthropologists begin their journeys to primitive societies, most of them located in colonial territories, with the finish of documenting as many experiences as possible with the finding of an

inventory before their disappearance. It was thought that indigenous cultures were doomed to disappear as industrialism advanced.

Like the colonist, the anthropologist needed to be there, in the place, living as a native in order to understand it[16,17]. In parallel, the ethnographers' notes became the virgin material for the European literature industry interested in this type of experience, while giving precise and clear information to the colonial governors on how the natives were organized. In this sense, tourism and modern colonialism have much in common. For both colonialism and tourism, the other is a born creator of cultural experiences that challenge one's own identity[18].

Once World War II ended, the natives and settlers coordinated efforts to pressure their empires with the sole objective of obtaining rights that had been denied to them and were fundamental for a democratic life. Soon these natives began to migrate to the great metropolises, transforming not only the metropolitan area but Europe itself. This era was known as the process of decolonization. They were educated in European universities, occupied professional positions and created an inter-ethnic bridge between the metropolis and its peripheries[19].

The constitutive idea of colonialism which assumed that the need to be here, at home, is synonymous with security and outside something dangerous is gradually subverted generating a great methodological crisis in modern ethnography. That non-Western other had been transformed into a Western other who lived like us. The French anthropologist Marc Augé suggests that the epistemological limits of ethnography have been blurred, in the same way as the binomial between a here and a there. That different other now inhabits the modern and prosperous cities of Europe, and looks like a European. Globalization has not only generated new identities, but has homogenized the different cultures in the same cultural matrix encrypted in consumption. The tourist journey, unlike the colonial one, is transformed into

an impossible journey from which one never departs, because it is never sought[20–22].

3. Fear and the birth of the unwanted guest

September 11, 2001 was a major blow to the West. It was, in part, the first time that four commercial airliners were used as real weapons against the most powerful country on the planet. As a foundational event, 9/11 not only humiliated the United States, using modern forms of mobility against it, but created a state of uncertainty where the worst could come at any time and claim victims anywhere[23–25].

From that moment on, the West and the sense of mobility - which was its main pride - were seriously damaged. For the first time, Western leaders were beginning to disbelieve that the issue of terrorism was exclusive to non-democratic or Middle Eastern cultures, warning of the risks of globalization itself, which destroys the geographic boundaries between states. 9/11 and the fight against terrorism has caused significative changes for democratic institutions in the United States and Europe, accelerating what we have baptized as the fin of hospitality[26].

The reaction of these countries, as a result of the fear of terrorism, was oriented towards closing borders, adopting supremacist and racist discourses, hatred or fear of the Arab world, or hostility towards foreign tourists, not to mention the use of digital technology to spy on their own citizens[27]. Foreign tourists, who in other times were the object of admiration and also considered agents of progress and civilization, were now feared, avoided and considered unwanted guests.

Jacques Derrida establishes a metaphor that helps us to better understand modern hospitality. Is the meaning of hospitality contingent on two essential questions that outline a state, who are you and what do you want? While those who can pay for the hospitality received benefit from the kindnesses of the guest, in what Derrida baptizes as restricted hospitality tourists, those who cannot respond with their

patrimony appeal to a generalized hospitality. In other words, there is no consideration on the part of the host that can compensate the host (migrants)[28].

A homologous comparison can be made here. While generalized hospitality can be translated into the figure of the hospital, which attends to the sick regardless of their wealth, at least in countries such as Argentina, England, Italy or Spain, the hotel represents restricted hospitality, which is impossible without prior wealth.

4. Wall street, the economy and the radicalization of capitalism

Undoubtedly, another major blow that has affected the idea of otherness in the West has been the 2008 Wall Street stock market crisis, an event that seriously affected the tourism and hospitality industry. Some reactionary groups blamed not only the foreign migrant for that crisis but globalization itself[29,30]. Curiously reactionary movements allowed the rise to power of leaders who otherwise would never have reached the presidency, such as Donald Trump (USA), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Victor Orban (Hungary) or even in the Brexit phenomenon in the UK[31].

What we are trying to say is that the fear of terrorism laid the cultural foundations for the birth of new political movements that no longer consider the native as an enemy, but suggest that this unwanted other now lives among us. In what we have called the culture of terror, the enemy lives and looks like us, but lurks in the darkness of the underground waiting for the moment to strike. Such a metaphor not only disorganizes social ties, but destroys the very idea of hospitality, at least as it has been thought of by the ancients. If during the European colonial process, that non-Western other was material to be consumed in literary circles, in the days following 9/11, it was an enemy to be feared. The idea of here-there as us and them was subverted to a world where mobility and fear were placed as marks of globality.

5. Cannibalized otherness

The outbreak of the virus known as Sars-Cov2 (or coronavirus) has been the third blow to this trend of self-cannibalization or finishing of Western hospitality, at least as we imagined it. Like the figure of the terrorist crouching at the heart of Western culture, the virus stealthily has the ability to circulate throughout society, internalized as an unwanted guest by one's own body, which becomes an unwitting agent of contagion.

Now we are the potential terrorists and we must be locked in a mandatory quarantine. Quarantine is expressed as the ultimate denial of the other, the brother or the neighbor. The COVID-19 transforms one's own body and disposes it as a weapon to attack the other. As already mentioned, the old dichotomy between the tourist desired as an agent of economic growth and the immigrant feared as an unwanted guest, gives way to a new landscape, where the tourist is seen—with some suspicion—as a potential enemy. All citizens are considered potentially infected and quarantined to protect the health system. Those who violate it are subject to the full weight of the law and the repressive power of the state.

Like the war against cancer in 1970, the war against local crime in the 1990s, and the war against terror in 2001, the world is now living a war against a virus. In this new world, classical hospitality gives way to an absolute hospitality where the hotel is recycled as a hospital. In this new world, classic hospitality gives way to absolute hospitality where the hotel is recycled as a hospital. The former enclosed an absolute and disinterested form of hospitality while in the latter case the economic exchange prevailed. In the same way that the here and there have disappeared, the contours between absolute and conditioned hospitality (to the Derrida) are also blurred in these new times of crisis.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Bauman Z. Liquid life. Cambridge: Polity Press; 2005.
2. Bauman Z. Collateral damage: Social inequalities in a global age. Cambridge: Polity Press; 2011.
3. Bauman Z. Liquid modernity. New York: John Wiley & Sons; 2013.
4. Virilio P. Speed and information: Cyberspace alarm! Ceory 1995; 8–27.
5. Virilio P. Desert screen: War at the speed of light. London: A&C Black; 2005.
6. Blaut JM. Colonialism and the rise of capitalism. Science & Society 1989; 53(3): 260–296.
7. Bryant JM. The West and the rest revisited: Debating capitalist origins, European colonialism, and the advent of modernity. Canadian Journal of Sociology 2006; 31(4): 403–444.
8. Hart J. Comparing empires: European colonialism om Portuguese expansion to the Spanish-American war. New York: Springer; 2003.
9. Burnham M. Captivity & sentiment: Cultural exchange in American literature, 1682–1861. London: Dartmouth College Press; 1999.
10. Strong PT. Captive selves, captivating others: The politics and poetics of colonial American captivity narratives. Abingdon: Routledge; 2018.
11. Pratt ML. Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation. New York: Routledge; 2007.
12. Harris M. The rise of anthropological theory: A history of theories of culture. Chesnut Creek: AltaMira Press; 2001.
13. Palmer CA. Tourism and colonialism: The experience of the Bahamas. Annals of tourism Research 1994; 21(4): 792–811.
14. Santana Talavera A. Cultural tourism, tourist cultures. Horizontes Antropológicos 2003; 9(20): 31–57.
15. Korstanje M. Reconsidering cultural tourism: An anthropologist's perspective. Journal of Heritage Tourism 2012; 7(2): 179–184.
16. Lewis D. Anthropology and colonialism. Current Anthropology 1973; 14(5): 581–602.
17. Wolfe P. Settler colonialism. London: A&C Black; 1999.
18. Pels P. The anthropology of colonialism: Culture, history, and the emergence of western governmentality. Annual Review of Anthropology 1997; 26(1): 163–183.
19. Kay DA. The politics of decolonization: The new nations and the United Nations political process. International Organization 1967; 21(4): 786–811.
20. Augé M. El sentido de los otros: Actualidad de la antropología (Spainsh) [The sense of others: Anthropology in the news]. Madrid: Grupo Planeta (GBS); 1996.
21. Augé M. Impossible journey. Barcelona: Gedisa; 1998.
22. Augé M. The object of anthropology today. Psychoperspectives 2007; 6(1): 9–21.
23. Adey P, Bissell D, Hannam K, et al. E Routledge handbook of mobilities. London: Routledge; 2014.
24. Amoore L, Marmura S, Salter MB. Smart borders and mobilities: Spaces, zones, enclosures. Surveillance & Society 2008; 5(2): 96–101.
25. Korstanje M. The mobilities paradox: A critical analysis. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar; 2018.
26. Korstanje M. Terrorism, tourism and the end of hospitality in the West. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2017.
27. Lyon D. Surveillance society: Monitoring everyday life. London: McGraw-Hill Education; 2001.
28. Derrida J, Dufourmantelle A. Of hospitality. Stanford: Stanford University Press; 2000.
29. Altheide D. Terrorism and the politics of fear. New York: Rowman & Littlefield; 2018.
30. Kundnani A. The Muslims are coming! Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic war on terror. London: Verso Trade; 2014.
31. Korstanje ME. The Challenges of democracy in the War on terror: The liberal state before the advance of terrorism. Routledge; 2018.