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Reflections on Zygmunt Bauman's Relevance to Critical Tourism Studies

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Title: Reflections on Zygmunt Bauman's Relevance to Critical Tourism Studies

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Abstract:

In this presentation I shall be looking at how Bauman's major themes of consumerism, retrotopia, identity and othering might have resonance in critical tourism studies. As a sociologist, ethicist and critical yet hopeful thinker, Bauman does not write much specifically on tourism. At times he seems to see tourism as the epitome of all that is wrong with the world, a substitute for real encounters with others and for properly ethical action in the world. He is well known, also, for drawing a conceptual distinction between the figure of the pilgrim, someone who is travelling with a long-term goal in mind, and that of the tourist, emblematic of the postmodern / liquid modern world in which people's motivations are short-term and instant desire-driven. For Bauman, tourism is the leading edge of consumerism.

A critic of consumer society and proponent of a postmodern ethic which sees the essence of morality as putting the powerless Other at the centre of one's concerns, urging action on their behalf, it is not surprising that Bauman has little time for tourism. Were he to have engaged with CTS scholarship he may well have approved of our general outlook and forms of hopeful tourism such as justice tourism, though; other forms such as volunteer tourism too, so long as they seek empowerment of those whose misfortune it is to be "toured."

Some strands in Bauman's work have clear resonance with debates in tourism studies such as those on mobilities and postdisciplinarity. His emphasis on other mobilities such as immigration and his empathy for the migrant lead him to another interesting conceptual distinction: the tourist versus (not the pilgrim now but) the vagabond. Where for tourists every door is open, vagabonds, destitute immigrants and asylum seekers are more likely to find doors slammed in their face. Bauman's insight here can be used to reinforce the call for tourism studies to be considered together with mobilities studies, and reconceptualised as a new research agenda. Bauman's insights can also amplify the call for tourism studies to move beyond economic efficiency and envisage itself in a more postdisciplinary manner, taking account of diasporality, hybridity and plural knowability; foregrounding the listening to and learning from the perspectives of the "toured", the "clandestino" and other Othered populations, for a more critical understanding of tourism's effect, or as Bauman called it "the tourism syndrome", in today's world.

This will, therefore, be a conceptual presentation and one that could fit neatly into several of the Conference's themes. I want to emphasise in particular how Bauman enables us to think critically about retrotopia and how it is making life even harder for immigrants; and Wild World and its correlates of liquid modernity and ethics without ontology, both of which concepts are Baumanian hallmarks.
