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Citation for final published version:

Wynne-Hughes, Elisa 2015. Governing through garbage-city tourism: producing international neoliberal subjects. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 17 (6) , pp. 839-852. 10.1080/1369801X.2014.998264

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2014.998264>

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369801X.2014.998264?journalCode=riij>  
20#.VQKxpGTkcnM

**Article Title:**

Governing Through Garbage-City Tourism: Producing International Neoliberal Subjects

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# **Governing through Garbage-City Tourism: Producing International Neoliberal Subjects**

## **Abstract:**

In this article, I examine “ethical” Western tourism in Garbage-City, Cairo, to demonstrate how contemporary international governance works through everyday practices in “non-Western” tourism destinations. To do so, I use ethnography and discourse analytic methods to analyse the ways in which tourism practices at this site regulate the conduct of individuals by shaping the subject positions of “Western tourists” and “Garbage-City residents”. I found that, on Garbage-City tours, Western tourists were positioned as worldly in their unique knowledge of the “real” Cairo and responsible in their support for the free-market recycling innovations of Garbage-City residents. Tourists were defined in relation to Garbage-City residents who were represented as marginalized, authentically local entrepreneurs. Drawing on governmentality and postcolonial approaches, I argue that Western tourism practices in Garbage-City function as a technology of governance that reinforces neoliberal rationalities by naturalizing market-based environmental initiatives. Meanwhile, they obscure the ways that international and Egyptian neoliberal practices, in which tourists are complicit, have increased the marginalization of Garbage-City residents. The tour therefore functions less to teach tourists about the complex context of Garbage-City and more to shape the standards and means for individuals to become “good” international neoliberal subjects who develop and fulfill themselves according to market logics. Western tourism and neoliberal practices in this contact zone ultimately define and privilege these international neoliberal subjects in relation to “others”. Studying Western tourism therefore helps us understand how the co-positioning of Western tourists and Garbage-City residents reproduces neoliberal forms of power that perpetuate (post)colonial asymmetries and exclusions.

**Keywords:**

Western tourism, environmental tourism, Garbage-City, authentic locals, neoliberal subjects, international governance

**Article Text:**

Garbage-City<sup>i</sup> is a densely populated informal settlement located at the base of a large rock hill within a central area of Cairo called Mokattam. Its mainly Coptic Christian garbage workers (or Zabbaleen) sort and recycle 80 per cent of the garbage they collect from the city for their livelihood, processing an estimated 30-40 per cent of Cairo's waste (Joos and Conrad 2010, 11). Garbage-City has recently become an urban eco-tourism site, represented as an "off the beaten track" and "ethical" destination, mainly attracting Western tourists. It is part of a growing trend of "moral" international tourism, positioned in contrast to "mass" tourism (Butcher 2003). This article studies how "Western" tourism practices in "non-Western" destinations like Garbage-City are key to understanding contemporary international governance. Western tourism practices, broadly defined, function to identify the experiences and conduct in other countries that are desirable and beneficial, both for tourists themselves and for the world. In other words, tourism practices provide the criteria and means for Western subjects to best engage with new people and places. Ultimately these practices contribute to defining the normative ideal of the international subject,<sup>ii</sup> reproducing very specific transnational logics, practices and relations, and excluding others.

This article contributes to International Relations (IR) literature that studies how the representations and practices of "ethical" Western tourists play a key role in the production of "international subjects" in a way that reinforces various contemporary discourses, or systems of meaning (Lisle 2008; Vrasti 2013). In contrast to existing

research, which is either more abstracted, or focuses primarily on the productive subject formation practices of tourists, I empirically analyse the positioning of Western tourists *and* Garbage-City residents in the specific context of Cairo, Egypt. This allows me to identify how the social construction of international subjects in these sites articulates with international and Egyptian urban discourses, highlighting both the productive and violent outcomes of these articulations. To do so, I combine governmentality and postcolonial IR approaches in my use of “contact zones” as an analytical tool to examine Western tourism practices in Garbage-City.

Literature on governmentality within IR, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, analyzes how international governance functions not solely through states, but through multiple technologies, tactics and means that regulate conduct by setting up the standards of behaviour for individuals and institutions according to neoliberal market rationalities.<sup>iii</sup> Neoliberal governance makes the logic and values of the self-regulating “free-market” – investment, capital costs, profits – the model for economic growth, social relations and societal order. It encourages individuals to govern themselves by applying the economic criteria of competition and accumulation to their life choices, both personal and professional, with the aim of developing and fulfilling themselves as the successful entrepreneurs of their own lives. This occurs by adding to one’s “human capital” or individualized marketable skills and assets.<sup>iv</sup> I combine governmentality and postcolonial IR approaches in order to examine the colonial logics that reproduce neoliberalism (Chowdhry and Nair 2004). I thereby account for the role of non-Western sites and subjects in shaping international neoliberal governance, as well as for the inequalities embedded within it, insofar as its standards of conduct determine which subjects are privileged, and which excluded.

In my use of “contact zones”,<sup>v</sup> I define them as social spaces in which subject positions are not solely predetermined, imposed or repressive, but are co-constituted via

negotiated practices that nonetheless perpetuate multiple preexisting hierarchies and exclusions. Subject positions regulate behaviours and relations with “others” to the extent that individuals perform, reproduce, and are understood through these positions in a particular spatiotemporal context, disciplining themselves according to the standards of particular discourses or rationalities within which these positions are constructed. I employed ethnographic and discourse analytic methods to generate and analyse evidence on Western tourism practices in the contact zone of Garbage-City.<sup>vi</sup> More specifically, I studied how these practices shape the subject positions of Western tourists in relation to Garbage-City residents, and thus function as a technology of contemporary governance to propagate neoliberal rationalities. This article argues that Garbage-City tourists are positioned as more worldly and responsible than mass tourists through their first-hand knowledge of, and support for, the “authentic” free-market recycling innovations of Garbage-City residents. Nonetheless, Western tourism practices in this contact zone ultimately serve to define and privilege such tourists as “good” international subjects, obscuring the neoliberal practices that marginalize the majority of Garbage-City residents.

### **Worldly Tourists, Authentic Locals**

I accompanied seven tours to the area run by the same male guide, Gerges.<sup>vii</sup> Gerges is in his late twenties and lives with his wife and two children in Garbage-City, where he has worked previously in recycling and with local NGOs. These tours are organized by the company “Venture Tours”, a small “personalized travel consultancy” owned and run by Dave, an American tour leader in his thirties, who founded the company in Cairo, in 2007.<sup>viii</sup> Tourists discover and learn about Venture Tours through its website, as well as through the *Lonely Planet* guide, budget and upscale travel magazines, and press coverage mainly from American news sources.<sup>ix</sup>

Garbage-City tourists are students and young professionals in their late twenties to early forties, men and women from North America, Europe, and Australia.<sup>x</sup> They therefore approach the tour from the outset with high levels of economic and social capital. In addition, this tour is one of many life choices that they have made in order to enhance their self-development as worldly individuals. Indeed, all those who visited Garbage-City on the tours that I accompanied either study or work in international development/sustainability, or have attended similar tours in other countries. For most, a Garbage-City tour is part of their customized tour programme provided by Venture Tours. Many tourists I spoke with explained that they had limited time off work and that this personalized programme was the next best thing to being travellers that “go with the flow” and “experience local life”, as would be their preference. Garbage-City tours themselves cost USD \$20, all of which goes to Gerges. The tours took three or four hours, beginning at the St. Simeon church complex. They then included a walk through and description of Garbage-City itself, and a visit to a local NGO, the Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE), finishing at Gerges’ apartment where he demonstrated the use of his bio-gas digester and introduced the sustainable development campaigns of his co-founded NGO “Urban Sustainability”.<sup>xi</sup> This article focuses on the Garbage-City section of the tour; a contextual analysis of tourism practices in the church complex and the APE require separate treatment.<sup>xii</sup>

Garbage-City tours highlight the historical marginalization of the community, positioning Western tourists as superior to mass tourists, adding to their self-development through their unique knowledge of the “real” Egypt. On the Garbage-City tours that I attended, tourists got their main introduction to Garbage-City from the roof of the four-story cafeteria building at the church complex, which offers a bird’s eye view of the whole area. From this height, the guide pointed out the areas where workers used to keep pigs that processed organic waste, explaining that in 2009 the government

forced them to send their pigs to be slaughtered, out of concern for the spread of the swine flu. The guide outlined the repercussions of the pig cull, which adversely affected the livelihood of those who raised and sold pigs, and hampered the efforts of garbage workers to process organic waste efficiently. The guide connected the pig slaughter with the government's plan to allow workers to keep pigs again, if the community agrees to move out to the desert far away from the city. He explained that, according to the government, this move is required to protect the city as a whole from the pollution caused by garbage-processing activities. The guide also put the pig cull in the context of the general marginalization of the community by the government.<sup>xiii</sup> Finally, the guide talked about the Western-based multinational corporations (MNCs) that the government brought in to process solid waste in the city, taking jobs away from garbage workers in the area.

By discussing the marginalization of this area of Egypt, the tour positioned Western tourists as worldly subjects, interested in getting what, according to Venture Tours' owner, is "a more well-rounded view of Cairo" (Dave, interviewed by the author, via email, 20 September 2011). In turn, tourists positioned themselves as worldly, asking questions about the history and marginalization of the community, expressing their interest in gaining a more complete understanding of Egypt via access to its underbelly. They stated, both on the tour and in questionnaires, that it is important to understand the disadvantaged in a society one is visiting, and that Garbage-City is certainly "a must for every traveler". Hence, through the Garbage-City tour, tourists sought to augment their self-value by learning about this community and its marginalized status as a means of understanding the "truth" about Egypt.

Tourists thereby equated marginalization with authenticity, stating explicitly that they joined this tour because they wanted to see and experience something "real" that most tourists do not, explicitly differentiating themselves from mass tourists. Indeed, in



its information materials for tourists, Venture Tours depicts this area as the “real” Cairo, stating, “You will start your day inside the ‘real’ Cairo – the Zabaleen community!” Tourists themselves expressed to me that they joined this tour because they wanted to see something “gritty”, “authentic”, and “real”. Many stated that they wanted to see a place that was “not a mainstream tourist site”, to do something a bit “off the beaten track” or “groundbreaking”, so as not to take the same photos that every other tourist takes.<sup>xiv</sup> Tourists were thrilled by the uniqueness of the tour, exclaiming that they “never had an experience like this before”. Despite the fact that almost all Garbage-City tourists took the same route and the same pictures from above the cafeteria, the representation of the tour ultimately positioned them as accessing knowledge that is special and new.

Finally, tourists represented themselves as superior to mass tourists through their access to personal interactions with authentic locals. Most tourists to Garbage-City explicitly critiqued the mass tourism model, categorizing package or group tours as less respectful or as impeding interactions with locals. In contrast, Garbage-City tours are carried out for one or two tourists at a time, and, according to Venture Tours, offer “meaningful interaction” and “one-on-one time” with locals (Venture Tours website; Dave, interview). Tourists stated with pleasure that, since Garbage-City is a less touristy area, the interactions they had with locals were “more real” as they were less commercially based. Many discussed their relief at not being treated like “tourists” who are constantly solicited to buy things; one said that this meant he let his guard down and talked to more Egyptians in Garbage-City than in any other tourist area.

To the extent that the tour itself was a form of consumption, the notion of Garbage-City tourism as less commercialized functioned primarily to position such tourists as more worldly than mass tourists through their “authentic” interactions with locals. Overall, the Garbage-City tour positioned tourists as advancing their individual

development through a unique knowledge of the “real”, “authentic” Cairo. In so doing, such experiences become a criterion that shapes the normative ideal of international neoliberal subjectivity. Western tourism in Garbage-City thus functions as a technology of governance, offering experiences for tourists to develop themselves and achieve this ideal.

### **Responsible Benefactors, Sustainable Entrepreneurs**

At the same time, I want to underscore that the tour did not focus solely on the marginalization of the Garbage-City community. Rather than representing its residents as victims, the Garbage-City tour went on to position them as innovative neoliberal entrepreneurs. The main focus of the tour was on the technologies that the community has developed to recycle 80 per cent of the solid waste brought into the area, turning garbage into a marketable “good”, providing both a service to the city and multiple jobs in a country with very high unemployment. From the cafeteria roof, the guide talked tourists through the recycling process. He showed them where trucks with garbage enter, where the garbage is sorted, and the workshops where garbage is cleaned, broken down, melted or compacted before being sold to companies in Egypt or China. He stressed to tourists that everyone in the area is self-employed, taking on different autonomous roles in the process. He pointed out how they continually develop ways to recycle new materials and create more jobs.

In addition, the guide explicitly highlighted non-Western innovations in recycling by demonstrating the use of a bio-gas digester at his apartment to produce cooking gas. Bio-gas digesters use bacteria to produce methane gas out of fermented food waste. The guide explained that digesters, developed in India, function both to process organic waste in the absence of pigs and as a sustainable alternative fuel source. The guide discussed his project to increase the use of bio-gas technologies in the area

through the NGO Urban Sustainability, which he started with an American co-founder George Stirling through a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The guide thereby positioned Garbage-City residents as innovators, implementing new technologies to create a market around waste, and tourists as interested in non-Western solutions to international environmental concerns. The guide's representation reflected the aim of Venture Tours, which wanted to avoid creating a slum tour, and to instead portray Garbage-City as a tight-knit, organized community that is coming up with new, internationally-recognized, "initiatives" to work "towards greater self-sufficiency" (Dave, interview).

Lastly, the guide emphasised the benefits of the Garbage-City model in contrast to Western-based multinational waste management companies brought in by the government in 2003, which failed not only to recycle much of the city's waste, but also to efficiently collect it, as they imposed a system that did not fit within the Egyptian context. The guide outlined how the government's policy of contracting solid waste management to MNCs meant that, at best, garbage workers had to give up being self-employed and take jobs "as workers" for these companies, while many workers in Garbage-City lost their jobs and income altogether.<sup>xv</sup> Although they did not explicitly label residents as such, the representational practices of the tour guide and company articulated with neoliberal discourses to position residents as neoliberal entrepreneurs, empowering individuals within free-market models, in comparison to what the guide identified as government-imposed Western corporate models.

Meanwhile, the tour's content positioned tourists, in relation to innovative Garbage-City residents, as worldly in their knowledge of non-Western neoliberal development models. Tourists performed this position through their expressed fascination with and admiration for the community's recycling innovations, positioning non-Western locals as neoliberal entrepreneurs that offer hope for the world's future

through their market-based waste management solutions. Indeed, the tour's focus on recycling allowed tourists, instead of pitying the residents as some had feared, to represent themselves as interested in and inspired by the practices of fellow self-made men and women, exclaiming that they are "very sophisticated" and "advanced".<sup>xvi</sup> The tourists explicitly recognized through the tour that the West and the international community writ large can learn from non-Western market-based waste management technologies to solve the international problem of waste. Tourists stated that the area's innovations are a "lesson for the rest of the world", and that "the West's recycling system is nowhere near as successful". Several commented that Garbage-City is a real "free-market" system or a "true democracy" run from below by market forces, implying – in line with neoliberal logics – that the free-market system is the ideal and defines democracy. Their comments positioned residents as non-Western free-market entrepreneurs and themselves as worldly Westerners through their awareness of the community's recycling innovations, and of the virtues of non-Western neoliberal development models. Garbage-City tourism therefore does not fall into the colonial trope of constructing non-Western spaces and subjects as inferior to the West, or as victims requiring the West's aid; it instead characterises the residents as fellow neoliberal subjects who contribute to international development according to neoliberal rationalities.

However, the aforementioned portrayal of Garbage-City residents as "authentic" and "real" reinforced other colonial logics by implying that, although their innovations have international influence, they are derived locally in this untouched non-Western community. The tour and tourists thereby represented the community as available to be discovered and known – at least temporarily – in its native habitat, reproducing colonial imaginaries that position tourists as explorers.<sup>xvii</sup> Paradoxically, what makes Garbage-City even more appealing to "discover" is the notion that tourism will progressively

ruin this site by bringing the community into contact with foreigners; indeed, several tourists predicted that in ten years tour buses full of package tourists will regularly pass through Garbage-City, corrupting its residents. Instead of serving as a self-critique for Garbage-City tourists, this notion functioned to reinforce the idea that the area is “untouched”. Western tourists visiting Garbage-City were thus represented as explorers in the “untouched” Garbage-City community, serving to position these tourists as adding value to themselves by “discovering” this area and recognizing its internationally relevant innovations. Such a positioning implied that Western tourists are otherwise detached from and uninvolved in this community. At the same time, the tourists’ interpretation of Garbage-City residents as purely local further naturalized neoliberalism by suggesting that their recycling innovations arose organically, and indeed democratically, in this untouched community where free-market developments express the common interest.

Garbage-City tourists were only implicated in the community as responsible consumers who help residents develop their innovations. Tourists were positioned as having a positive impact on residents through the tour company’s scheme, announced on the Venture Tours website. As per the scheme, the company funds the materials and installment of a bio-gas digester for every twenty-four visitors to the area. In my interview with Dave, he justified this scheme by arguing that bio-gas digesters not only have a “lasting impact on the community” but that they are constructed cheaply from the same “found materials” used by garbage workers to make a living (interview). Venture Tours thereby represents its tourists as responsible consumers, helping the community on its own terms, and indeed contributing to enhance the neoliberal innovations of Garbage-City residents. Tourists also interpreted themselves as benefactors during the tour, expressing a keen interest in the pilot bio-gas digester installed by the tour company as an exemplifier of tourists’ contribution to the

community.<sup>xviii</sup> Venture Tours explicitly positions its tourists as benefactors who are aware of the limited impact from a single tour, describing on their website that a visit to Garbage-City is “perfect for people who know they can’t change the world in an afternoon, but are willing to try” (Venture Tours website).

Moreover, many Garbage-City residents see Western tourists as supporting the area in a number of ways, reading them as responsible international subjects with higher human capital than themselves. Firstly, residents I spoke with saw Western tourists as using their higher economic capital to help the area through financial contributions, a belief that is reinforced by stories that foreigners hand out clothes, money, and food to residents. However, although some tourists found it funny, most displayed discomfort when children – looking for extra pocket money – asked them for money during the tour. Most tourists were visibly unsettled when they were positioned as wealthy Westerners who are expected to give money, preferring instead to be seen as contributing to the community through their choice of tour.

Residents, garbage workers, tour guides, and NGOs also see Western tourists as benefactors with high cultural and symbolic capital, and a corresponding ability to raise international awareness about the area and its recycling innovations through their photos and blogs. Many in Garbage-City informed me that any international attention could enhance the stability of the area by making it more difficult for the government to move the community to the desert. Insofar as the government marginalizes Garbage-City, its residents locate their influence and support in international or Western sources represented by tourists.

In addition, tourists on the Garbage-City tour performed the position of responsible subjects by expressing concerns about whether their presence and practices in the area were respectful. Most tourists anxiously questioned their role as observers in what they saw as a “poor” part of Cairo, asking whether their clothing was appropriate

and whether they could take photographs in the area, fearing that their practices might offend locals. To the extent that tourists attended the tour despite their anxieties, their expression of concern functioned mainly to further represent themselves as responsible. Venture Tours assuages tourists' fears, stating on their website: "we incorporate responsible practices not only into your programs, but into our operations, as well", describing their clients as "discerning adventurers seeking meaningful travel experiences that benefit local communities" (Venture Tours 2013). The Garbage-City tour offers Western tourists, as consumers, both the standards and the means to become responsible benefactors who recognize and support Garbage-City's marginalized residents as fellow neoliberal entrepreneurs, but who remain otherwise detached from the community. The tour functions therefore to reinforce a neoliberal discourse that prioritizes market-based development solutions and positions all individuals as free to innovate and fulfill themselves within that market.

### **Neoliberal Inequalities, International Interventions**

The tour's positive depiction of Garbage-City residents as authentically local neoliberal entrepreneurs nonetheless objectifies residents. The tour fails to highlight the hierarchies and exclusions in the community reproduced through international and Egyptian neoliberal practices in which tourists are complicit.<sup>xix</sup> Garbage-City has been the object of international neoliberal interventions since at least the 1970s when Egypt's Open Door economic policy was declared, and the World Bank started projects to support the "indigenous informal private sector" by incorporating workers from Garbage-City into Cairo's urban waste management system (Furniss 2010, 56-8). The World Bank introduced mechanized recycling to Garbage-City via microcredit schemes,<sup>xx</sup> bringing in machines to process and add value to the garbage<sup>xxi</sup> (Assaad and Garas 1994, 20-2, 58-9; Joos and Conrad 2010, 149). Such interventions disrupt the

notion that Garbage-City is untouched and that neoliberal entrepreneurialism therefore arose naturally and democratically in this area.

At the same time, the World Bank project contributed to increased class and power differentials in the area as its benefits were unequally distributed. Most of those who received microcredit loans were members of the Association of Garbage Collectors for Community Development and their families. They are now the wealthy minority of the community through profits from processing and selling garbage, in contrast with the poorer majority who work in garbage collection and sorting (Joos and Conrad 2010, 122, 160-2; Assaad and Garas 1994, 20-3, 59-60, 124).<sup>xxii</sup> Garbage-City's wealthiest residents are also those who take on official political positions in the community. Garbage-City's class hierarchy therefore coincides with who is politically dominant or not in the community, belying a notion that this free-market system equates to democracy. Moreover, the recycling machines introduced through the World Bank project contributed to increase the pollution that is motivating the government to relocate the area to the desert in the first place (Assaad and Garas 1994, 24).<sup>xxiii</sup> Insofar as the tour positions the community's market-based innovations as purely local, authentic, natural and progressive, it obfuscates how the practices of Garbage-City residents are shaped by international neoliberal interventions and inequalities, producing an acceptance that environmental sustainability and the free-market go hand in hand, naturalizing key neoliberal tenets.

In addition, the positioning of Western tourists as detached yet responsible consumers is contradicted by their positioning as international subjects with highly-developed human capital. Although some Garbage-City residents see tourists as supporting the community through their international status, others see their practices as threatening to the garbage workers' way of life. Some residents do not distinguish between tourists, journalists and researchers,<sup>xxiv</sup> and think that all foreigners have



misrepresented the community to the world as backward by publishing photos,<sup>xxv</sup> stories and films of them working with garbage. Residents I spoke with were concerned that tourists' photos and writings have been the catalyst for unwanted police interventions in the area because the government does not want to give Western tourists a "bad image" of Egypt or to jeopardize their safety. Worse still, some residents believe that tourists' photos and stories encouraged the government to contract Western MNCs to take over solid waste management, and to move the community to the desert.

Residents' concerns about the presence of international tourists are confirmed insofar as the government was partly motivated to restructure waste collection and relocate the community to improve the image of Egypt shown to international tourists, and to make way for tourist accommodation. Despite support for the "private indigenous" garbage system from the World Bank, Egypt's "National Strategy for Integrated Municipal Solid Waste Management" argued, with reference to informal garbage locations like Garbage-City, that "the aesthetics and hygiene at these areas are unacceptable".<sup>xxvi</sup> The National Strategy instead promoted a public-private partnership approach that would see more "active participation" from the private sector, and specifically sought contracts with international companies that used modern treatment techniques (Furniss 2010, 60-7). Overall, in employing multinational garbage disposal companies and cleaning up the city, the government wanted to show the world, through tourists and other international representatives, that Egypt can develop and compete at an international level according to "modern" and efficient international standards, reproducing neoliberal rationalities held by Western donors like the USAID (Milik 2010, 9-10, 45-7, 59; Furniss 2010, 25, 64; Walker 2005, 14-15). By the time the National Strategy was written, garbage-processing areas were already being "relocated to assigned areas further from the cities (about 40-50 km)". Moreover, Cairo's urban development plan, "Cairo 2050", involves the potential conversion of Manshiet Nasser

(one of the largest informal settlements in Cairo, of which Garbage-City is a part) into tourist accommodations (Furniss 2010, 42-65). This approach reflects Egypt's neoliberal urban practices that privilege and protect the lifestyles of elites and tourists through securitized enclaves that exclude the poor (Singerman and Amar 2006), abandoning the majority of Cairenes who live in informal communities like Garbage-City that fall "outside" of official state administrative control or support (Sims 2010).

The positioning of Western tourists by the Egyptian government and Garbage-City residents as international subjects with high economic and symbolic capital, although concealed from tourists, reinforces international hierarchies that privilege Western tourists and Western neoliberal development approaches, reflecting colonial rationalities that equate modernization and development with Westernization. The tour therefore fails to teach tourists the complex local and international history of Garbage-City, which would avoid equating authenticity with the marginalized or local. Instead, it functions to shape the international neoliberal subject position through the reified positioning of Western tourists who enhance their self-value by "discovering" and supporting authentic non-Western local innovations for international neoliberal waste management. The positioning of the Western tourist as a unique self-made international individual who, from the cafeteria roof, literally stands above, knows and supports non-Western free-market innovations, thus relies on the positioning of Garbage-City residents as an authentic undifferentiated community of entrepreneurs, a representation that obscures, and in some ways reproduces, interventions and hierarchies that benefit a minority of residents.

Moreover, the tour's characterisation of all Garbage-City residents as focused on innovative recycling initiatives functions to privilege the aims and self-development of the Garbage-City guide, Venture Tours' owner and researchers like myself. On the tour, Gerges positions himself, and is positioned by the company and tourists, as a

responsible and successful international neoliberal entrepreneur through the success of his eco-campaign. Tourists admire him for being “very driven” and “proactive” in line with the normative ideal of neoliberal subjectivity. The guide’s emphasis on the community’s recycling projects and bio-gas digesters substantiates his portrayal of Garbage-City as a community of residents motivated by environmental aims. In so doing, the guide generalizes to the community as a whole the specific goals and practices of his NGO, “Urban Sustainability”, thereby marginalizing other community projects and discourses. Indeed, the dominant motivation among residents working with garbage is not to protect the environment, but to make a living. Moreover, bio-gas digesters are not widely used. This is not to say that people are solely concerned with money, but that people are proud to support their families through their work. Not only does the guide profit financially from the tour, but also the success of his NGO has enabled him to travel internationally to promote his projects, while the majority of Garbage-City residents remain excluded from such opportunities. By offering “ethical” tours, Dave, despite not benefiting financially from them, caters to his own human capital as the owner of a company that, according to its website, combines “off-the-beaten track destinations with commitments to responsible tourism and customer service”. Finally, this new type of international “moral” tourism contributes to enhance the individual careers of Western academics like myself, who add to their self-development by publishing articles analyzing the significance of such tourism practices.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Insofar as it is difficult for Egyptians to travel freely due to visa restrictions, most Garbage-City residents perceive tourists and other foreigners as a means of gaining human capital through the financial donations, international recognition, and increased social status derived from interactions with “developed” Westerners. However, despite the free-market innovations of Garbage-City residents, the

inequalities facilitated through neoliberalism ultimately limit international neoliberal subjectivity to subjects like the tourists, Venture Tours' owner, myself, and a minority of Garbage-City residents. This type of tourism therefore reproduces, rather than disrupts, the asymmetries and exclusions embedded within Western tourism<sup>xxviii</sup> and neoliberalism in Egypt.<sup>xxix</sup> Overall, the positioning of tourists as international neoliberal subjects with higher human capital functions paradoxically to perpetuate the residents' marginalization that, by accessing and critiquing it, locates Garbage-City tourists as superior to mainstream tourists. I argue therefore that "ethical" Western tourism practices in Garbage-City privilege international neoliberal self-enterprising subjects and naturalize free-market development models, revealing the important role of Western tourism as a technology of contemporary governance to propagate neoliberal rationalities internationally, requiring and reproducing (post)colonial asymmetries and exclusions.

**Acknowledgements:**

This article would not have been possible without the help of Dave from Venture Tours, who offered me the opportunity to participate in the Garbage-City tours and to interview him. I also want to thank Gerges and the other tour guides, tourists, NGO workers, and Garbage-City residents, with whom I engaged for my research. This research was funded by the UK Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme, the University of Bristol, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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### Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Amongst Cairenes, the area is more commonly named with reference to the Cairo suburb (Mokattam) or informal area (Manshiet Nasser) in which it is located, though I have heard some Egyptians calling it *Mintaqat al Zabbaleen*, the Garbage Worker Area, or *Haya al Zabbaleen*, the Garbage Worker Neighbourhood. I am unaware of the origins of the name “Garbage-City”, which is the commonly used English name for the area, used by tourists and expatriates.

<sup>ii</sup> Examining specifically “international” subjects and practices allows me to account for how, through international tourism, subjects are shaped in relation to those in other states, privileging the international mobility of “good” subjects. I can therefore study how tourism contributes to the social construction of the “international”, its subjects, hierarchies, and divisions (e.g. West, non-West). At the same time, I do not focus solely on the “international” level – which would obscure multiple everyday subjects and relations – but analyse how practices at different scales function in often contradictory ways to shape subjects and the relations between them.

<sup>iii</sup> Rationalities or programmes of government “refer to the more or less systematized modes of thought embodied in the political discourses through which human and

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institutional conduct is problematical and solutions to tackle the issues are formulated” (Merlingen [2006, 183-4])

<sup>iv</sup> Pierre Bourdieu identifies several elements of “capital” that, although not exhaustive, are useful to differentiate between the types of human capital that produce distinctions between subjects. These include economic capital, cultural capital (gained through the acquisition of skills), and symbolic capital (gained through recognition and prestige).

<sup>v</sup> Mary Louise Pratt coined the term “contact zones” in her 1992 work Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.

<sup>vi</sup> Focusing on Western tourism practices in Garbage-City does not mean that I will solely examine the practices of Western tourists, but will also focus on the practices of tour guides, the tourism industry, Garbage-City residents, the Coptic Church, NGOs, international financial institutions, the Egyptian government, and Egyptians, whose practices constitute Western tourism in this contact zone.

<sup>vii</sup> I did so to help the owner of Venture Tours who was concerned that the (untrained) guide was letting the tours drag on too long, and needed someone to keep the tours on schedule. The tours I attended and refer to in this article took place on the following dates: 28 September 2010; 2 October 2010; 25 October 2010; 5 November 2010; 28 November 2010; 28 May 2011; 18 July 2011. I also showed several friends the area, mainly replicating Gerges’ tour, and carried out questionnaires with some tourists.

<sup>viii</sup> Venture Tours organizes programmes to more traditional tourist destinations, along with more “off-the-beaten track” and “responsible” options like trips to the Siwa Ecolodge, and opportunities (for females only) to live with a Bedouin family.

<sup>ix</sup> These include articles from *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, *Luxury Travel Advisor* and *Budget Travel Magazines*.



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<sup>x</sup> Quotes from tourists for this article were derived from participant observation on Garbage-City tours (recorded in a field journal) and from questionnaires conducted with tourists.

<sup>xi</sup> The names of the tour company, company owner, guide, guide's NGO, and the NGO co-founder have been anonymized.

<sup>xii</sup> Evidence for this article was also generated through interviews with APE and Spirit of Youth NGO managers and workers (19 May 2011; 30 June 2011; 23 July 2011; 26 July 2011). I also refer to interviews with guides, including Gerges (11 July 2011) and Pilot (20 June 2011 and 23 July 2011). I interviewed several garbage factory owners, community leaders, garbage workers, and residents, some formally and some informally (7 June 2011; 18 July 2011; 19 July 2011; 23 July 2011; 28 July 2011).

<sup>xiii</sup> He gave different examples on each tour, but they include the following: the community's lack of proper representation in government, the government's decree that the area's composting project be moved to a site too far away to make it financially viable, and the government's ban on the use of (more affordable) donkey carts to transport waste.

<sup>xiv</sup> Garbage-City tourists also distinguished themselves from mainstream tourists through their ability to appreciate and handle this more "difficult" style of tourism, adding further to their individual prestige. They remarked that other tourists would not be able to "handle" the area, referring to the smells, and scenes of garbage. Indeed, Venture Tours' website describes the tour as a "one-off" trip that "no other operator provides" but that it's "not for everyone". Dave recommends this tour to those who have "experienced poverty before", through their choice of career or activities (Dave, interview).

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<sup>xv</sup> In the end, many of the MNCs did not adhere to their (albeit weakly-enforced) contracts, with very low rates of efficiency in collection by 2009-10 (Milik 2010, 149-153).

<sup>xvi</sup> Many tourists stated on the tour and in questionnaires that they had worried the area would be a dump with garbage everywhere and “desperate” people climbing and picking through it. Tourists were relieved to find the area and its people more organized, clean and developed than they had expected, with multi-level brick houses, and people “working with dignity”.

<sup>xvii</sup> Some tourists even expressed the feeling that that they had “discovered” the tour itself, having searched through websites and blog trees to find something different.

<sup>xviii</sup> One tourist said that this donation influenced his decision to go on the tour, and another even saw the tour as standing in for the volunteering that she did not have time for on this trip.

<sup>xix</sup> These inequalities are highlighted within non-tourist Garbage-City discourses, to which I was exposed through discussions with residents, NGO workers, and other researchers, and by reading reports and publications about Garbage-City.

<sup>xx</sup> The World Bank projects were co-sponsored by organizations including the Ford Foundation, OXFAM, USAID, Catholic Relief Services, the European Economic Community, EMMAuS and the Association des Amis de Soeur Emmanuelle (Joos and Conrad 2010, 66; Walker 2005, 19).

<sup>xxi</sup> Before this, workers had been mainly sorting the garbage and selling it, cleaning it if necessary, and processing organic waste through the pigs.

<sup>xxii</sup> Indeed, despite discussing the multiple jobs created through garbage work, the tour guide failed to outline the class-based hierarchies between workers depending on their role in the recycling process. Collectors make up approximately 31 per cent of workers in Garbage-City and have the lowest income. Collectors sell garbage to sorters, who

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make up 36 per cent of garbage workers and who sell items to the 33 per cent that are recyclers and traders.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The World Bank project is just one example of the many interventions in the area, which include funding to NGOs in the area from numerous national and international sources, such as banks, companies, embassies, international organizations and institutions.

<sup>xxiv</sup> There is also resentment amongst some residents that foreigners benefit financially from publishing articles, photographs and films, but do not “give back” by distributing their gains to people in Garbage-City. Indeed, several Garbage-City residents were suspicious about my presence and I explained to them the nature, aims, and potential outcomes of my research. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the role that the process and outcome of this research plays in my own privileged self-development as a “good” international neoliberal subject.

<sup>xxv</sup> The guide advises tourists against taking photographs of Garbage-City residents, but does not explicitly explain why; tourists are left to interpret the reason and some continue to take photos, presumably calculating that it is alright if they do so covertly.

<sup>xxvi</sup> This strategy was published by the government in 2000 with support from the USAID.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The study of international researchers and their practices in Garbage-City is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Overall, tourism development has functioned to financially benefit “a relatively small number of ever more powerful and prosperous financiers and entrepreneurs” in Egypt, along with foreign investors and major international hotel chains (Mitchell 1999, 462; see also Singerman and Amar 2006).

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<sup>xxix</sup> In general, neoliberal growth in Egypt has only benefited the top 10 per cent of society and absolute poverty has grown from 16.7 per cent to 20 per cent in the last 10 years (Shenker 2009; see also Sims 2010).