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I took GSTR 410 as an opportunity to explore the intersections between my two subjects of study, Peace & Social Justice Studies and English Literature, in the context of globalization. It was important to me to attempt to draw in as much of my academic experience and knowledge as possible, so that my 410 project could be considered the synthesis of my four years as an undergrad. I also knew I wanted to reflect on the experiences I had while studying abroad, as they were foundational to so much of my learning. As a Berea College student, I traveled to Southern Mexico, home of the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, Ukraine, and Poland, where I visited Auschwitz. These places and experiences provided ample material for exploring big ideas and finding ways to make connections between all of the seemingly diverse subjects I studied.

While my project did not initially take the form of writing a series of travel essays, in my research and reflection the personal travel essay became the best form for encompassing all of the ideas I wanted to express. Reflecting on my experiences abroad allowed me to revisit old ideas in light of new understandings, especially in considering class conversations about globalization. I researched tourism and travel as a scholarly subject, researched further about the places I had been, and found examples of the type of personal travel essays I wanted to produce. The essays I produced do not utilize in-text citations, as a traditional research paper would. A works consulted page includes the texts I read while completing my 410 project.

What follows are two selections from the collection of travel essays I wrote for my 410 project, "The Grand Tour Revisited." The first essay, intended as an introduction for my project, explores the scholarly questions raised in my research about travel, tourism, and study abroad. The second essay reflects on my experiences at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Oswiecim, Poland, exploring questions about memory and representation, and how we might remember the Holocaust in a tourism-driven world.

The Grand Tour Revisited: Travel Essays from Mexico, Ukraine, and Poland

I.

From pre-history to the advent of mass travel, we've been traipsing around the earth since time immemorial. We're curious about what's beyond our backyards, how other people live their lives, and how we're different and the same compared to "everyone else." Though we've always been on the move, what has changed is how we understand the act of travel in the wake of the latest great historical development, globalization. Globalization has accelerated the movement of peoples and ideas and provided new channels for communication, and when describing contemporary conflicts and problems, this all-encompassing term at least manages to make a guest appearance. That globalization has a permanent seat at the round-table discussion concerning issues of travel is not surprising, given that it is now possible through the internet to tour the Sistine Chapel online, speak digital-face to digital-face with someone halfway across the world, and watch a revolution unfold in real-time. Though we're closer to the rest of the world than we ever have been, we're still traveling more than ever before in history. This fact leads me to believe that travel is not one just one lens through which to understand our changing world, but perhaps it is *the* lens.

In the wake of this overuse of the convenient catch-all “globalization,” it’s sometimes easy to forget that history tells us we have a long history of interacting with one another through travel. Travelling, the act of leaving one’s home with the promise of return, has always been the most physical foundation of cross-cultural exchange and it is the movement of people and ideas—these “encounters” between different cultures—that has shaped global history. As we know, these encounters, between the traveler and the subject, the colonizer and the colonized, the anthropologist and the natives, have never been without conflict. Much attention, both scholarly and otherwise, has been given to tourism in an attempt to characterize both the positive and negative aspects of what it means to be a traveler, and, perhaps more importantly, what it means for those people and places—more broadly put, cultures—which are the destination or draw for tourism.

One of the main targets of criticism is the Global Tourism Industry—all caps, intended. This is no surprise, as the global tourism industry is one of the worlds largest. The World Travel & Tourism Council, established in 1990, reports that more than 258 million jobs are supported by the tourism industry worldwide, and that tourism accounts for 9.1 percent of World GDP. When the WTTC was founded, one of its stated goals was “reducing barriers to growth.” This is perfectly in sync with the neoliberal policy prescriptions of international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF during the eighties and nineties, which were simultaneously calling for deregulation as the yellow-brick road to development. These attitudes and practices of the Global Tourism Industry have been rightfully perceived as being exploitative and one-sided in nature. Critics have pointed to environmental damage and greater disparities in wealth after the development of tourism infrastructure as evidence of the global tourism industry’s negative impact on local people and environments. The WTTC now sings a modified tune. Instead of actively seeking to reduce economic barriers to world tourism growth, the WTTC now engages in “business balancing economics with people, culture, and environment” and seeks “a shared pursuit of long-term growth and prosperity.”

Most have realized the failed logic of promoting an ever-reaching, ever-growing industry on a planet with finite resources, and while industry language has been softened, attitudes and practices modified, the global tourism industry hasn’t quite appeased its critics. Instead, the perceived exploitations of people and places as objects of tourism have created the conditions for new “brands” of tourism to emerge. Eco-tourism, pro-poor tourism, cultural tourism, and heritage tourism, are only a few examples of the “brands” of tourism which seek to distance their practices from the larger tourism industry. By utilizing these signifiers, these brands of travel have a purpose which is cultural, educational, identity-based, religious, political, and more simply put, thought of as embodying a “higher purpose” than the travels of the ignorant and self-indulgent tourist.

One form of tourism, usually not included in the ranks of “specialized” forms of tourism is the academic experience of living and studying abroad. Why the practices of study abroad and tourism are usually not conflated is no mystery. There is perhaps no more noble or higher a brand of tourism that that which brings together the pursuit of knowledge and the romanticism of a journey into a culture unknown.

Study abroad is sold to incoming undergraduate freshmen all over the country as one of the main selling points for enrollment into any university or college. Posters annually advertise the next batch of courses abroad which promise to inspire and transform students’ hearts and minds. The potential student traveler can choose from diverse offerings and opportunities. While advertisements promise the allure of little and well known places, receiving academic credit whilst globetrotting is not a hard sell. The “bettering” effects of a term abroad are so ingrained in higher

education that most do not feel prompted to reflect upon why study abroad has become the first tenant of molding ethnocentric undergrads into young cosmopolitans. When asked “why study abroad?” typical answers usually fall upon a spectrum, from the more frivolous ambitions of “it will be fun and the drinking age is lower in (insert destination of choice),” to the more serious, “I want to actually study (serious subject) while I am actually in (serious place), which I couldn’t possibly do on campus.” If asked, a blanket “I want to expand my horizons through learning about other parts of the world” usually mollifies any would-be critics.

This spectrum, while an admittedly gross simplification of the complex motivations for hitting the road, skies, or rails in the pursuit of knowledge and cultural enlightenment reveals an important distinction between the lowly tourist and the enlightened traveler. As participants in the global exchange of people and ideas through tourism, student travelers are not immune from such designations. The elevated status of “traveler,” code for “seeker of knowledge and experience,” leads the student to seek to distance from tourists in their locale, or from fellow students whose “touristic” behavior warrants disdain. The myth of the traveler/tourist is that while the tourist seeks the signs which tell them which sights to see, and where they can and cannot go, the traveler looks for that which is separate from the tourist route, safe from the taint of the commercialized experiences offered by the consumption-driven tourism industry.

Accounts of travelers’ adventures “off the beaten path,” away from the monstrous tourism industry, carry a guise of authority, and more importantly, claim that their experiences are more authentic. At first listen it’s easy to accept truth in travelers’ claims that their experiences are more “real” or “pure” than those of the tourist. Perhaps there could be a kernel of truth, albeit small, in the midst of these tall tales. It could theoretically be possible that there are peoples and places entirely removed from the commercialization of travel- the most remote of beaches and villages, an undiscovered tribe. However, in an increasingly globalised world, formerly described “little known” places are quickly becoming the subject of travel blogs, online forums, and the travel sections of newspapers. The lure of the little known itself has become the subject of commercialization. In a world where little is left undiscovered, and more “travelers” are seeking destinations free from commercialization, what authority do self-designated travelers have to claim that their experiences are truly “off the beaten path”?

When the location of tourism activities is not enough to allow the noble traveler to assume superiority over the tourists, many cite their individual mindset and intentions as evidence of their enlightened status. Scholarly investigations into the nature of tourism which attempt to take inventory of motivations for travelling are less than revealing. Scholars admit that gaining insight about internal motivations to draw conclusions about the act of traveling is easier said than done. However, historically there have been proclamations against certain behaviors as being unbecoming of the seriousness of the destination traveled. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, pilgrimages to holy places were popular tours undertaken by religious individuals with the means to finance a spiritual journey. Along these heavily traveled routes, some recognized an opportunity, and sold trinkets to commemorate the pilgrims’ experiences along the way. Priests scorned the peddling of such trinkets, claiming that they were sacrilegious and revealed a defamation of character or commitment to God.

This understanding that some actions are intended to be solemn and separate from commercialization or overrepresentation is an area worth exploring in the modern context of travel. It could be argued that we’ve always understood some movements and actions to be sacred and elevated above the normal daily experience. Some scholars have argued that travel today is the modern equivalent of the religious pilgrimages of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The

modern traveler engages in a pilgrimage around the globe to find “authenticity” and to derive meaning in an increasingly hyper-commercialized world. Naturally, the inevitable conclusion to this line of reasoning is bleak. Our pilgrimages for authenticity are useless, because there is nothing authentic to be found. These shattered expectations could be a result of what prominent tourism scholar John Urry has coined “the tourist gaze.” The tourist gaze is the heightened perceptiveness one assumes while traveling, away from the drudgery of the everyday. The tourist gaze is not individual to each traveler, but instead is socially and culturally constructed, by the traditional shapers of identity such as class, race, gender, and nationality, as well as the “shapers” of the destination culture. Acknowledging that the tourist gaze is socially constructed sheds light on the reasons why we chose the places we do and the experiences we seek to have, as well as the disappointment when our expectations concerning authenticity and meaning do not meet the reality we encounter.

The study abroad participant, while motivated by a variety of reasons, can’t approach the study abroad experience with at least some reverence and expectation of transformation, the modern equivalent of the spiritual pilgrimage. The term abroad has been romanticized to such a degree, the myth and subsequent expectation-building is inescapable. If the historical tradition of the pilgrimage helps to explain the reasons why we undertake some voyages with a certain reverence and expect to gain some form of spiritual or personal insight, then history of the grand tour helps to explain why undergraduates across the country include studying abroad as a cornerstone of their college educations.

The academic term spent abroad could be considered the modern manifestation of The Grand Tour, a route traveled by the children of wealthy aristocrats in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Grand Tour’s purpose was, through travel and cultural exchange, aid young men in “gaining historical insights, acquiring aesthetic tastes, displaying connoisseurship, and generally demonstrating visionary ways of looking.” Study abroad promises self-improvement through exposure to cultures and experiences unknown. Like study abroad, The Grand Tour was an expedition taken by the elite for the purposes of grooming young aristocrats into diplomats capable of interacting with dignitaries from other countries. In our increasingly globalized world, employers are placing greater value upon the study abroad experiences of applicants as evidence that they are capable of cross-cultural exchanges, and are perhaps more sensitive to cultural differences than applicants who have not spent time abroad.

Much of this essay has prodded the subject of tourism and more specifically the experience of study abroad. Thus, it seems imperative to note that I too have joined the ranks of student travelers, not once, but twice. Before my own experiences traveling abroad, and for a great time after, I did not consider study abroad in any light other than an opportunity to visit places I had never been, to meet and mingle with people of cultures different from my own, and to gain academic credit while having meaningful experiences. The mindset which I did bring with me while studying abroad was that studying abroad was an opportunity to test and make revisions to the knowledge I gleaned in the classroom. The results have always been messy, which in and of itself is perhaps the best evidence for promoting study abroad as a transformative learning experience and a worthy endeavor.

My own experiences as a tourist and a student took me to two sites which experience moderate to a great deal of tourism: Southern Mexico, home of the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, L’viv, Ukraine, and the Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Oswiecim, Poland. Tourism has invited curious foreign travelers to enter these lands and communities, museums and monuments, for many reasons, including expressing political solidarity, expressing sorrow through collective

memory, and promoting remembrance whilst inspiring further action. If someone had told me as a freshman the destinations I would travel to and the experiences I would have studying abroad, I would have been deeply perplexed and not a little disturbed. Though unplanned, each of my stints abroad was decidedly “dark” and political in nature. My experiences have been as varied as staying in Zapatista camps to absorb the stories and politics of a “postmodern revolution” in Southern Mexico, hiking historical sites with young Ukrainian architects in L’viv, Ukraine, and going to tourist routes of Poland, home to perhaps the darkest corner on earth, Auschwitz.

In the collection of essays which follow, I hope to explore the complexities inherent in the experience of traveling abroad, including those outlined in this introductory essay.

II. Genocide & Gelato

Some part of me denied I was entering Auschwitz until the bus rolled into the lot. Touring a concentration camp had not been a particular draw for choosing to study abroad in Poland. Still, there was little to be gained in attempting to get out of it, knowing that had I tried to articulate the reasons why someone would not want to tour Auschwitz I would fall victim to the usual rational concerns concerning most travel decisions: “When else would you go? This is probably the only opportunity you’ll ever have.”

Aside from feeling like a bad member of the human species, I maintain that any description of Auschwitz in terms “opportunity” and “once in a lifetime” seems obviously at odds with everything Auschwitz means.

The bus rolls to a stop and everyone slings their backpacks over their shoulders to begin the long mournful shuffle down the aisle and onto the consecrated grounds. As the gates of Auschwitz become visible, I am struck with the panicky feeling that I’m not ready. I’m immediately struck with the ironic realization that I could never be ready and that if any human was ever ready, something would be horribly wrong. Still, I’m plagued by doubts as I’m walking towards the entrance. The concentration camp Auschwitz I and deathcamp Auschwitz-Birkenau was the site of the deaths of 1,100,000 people. I wonder how effective a visit to Auschwitz is in ending genocide, mass murder, ethnic cleansing, or violence. Can a tour through a museum keep it from happening again? Clearly, the battle cry of “never forget” has not prevented genocide. One only needs to think of the Kurds, Vietnam, Rwanda, or Darfur to be reminded. If preservation, education, remembrance, and physically experiencing the spaces in which the Holocaust took place have not prevented genocide, it becomes inevitable that I think—is the experience of Auschwitz really, as some have likened it, sightseeing in the mansions of the dead?

Entering the museum, there are no signs which announce the weight of the experience one is about to undertake. It appears to be a building/museum no different from any others. In my moment of relief from entering and not having to immediately be led through the gas chambers, I suddenly realize I have to pee. Not wanting to be solely focused on this biological fact during my time at Auschwitz, I step outside of the line and make a break for the bathrooms. My sudden movement triggers an outburst from our museum guide. Our guide, hands dangling with wires, headphones, and radios shakes her head and rattles the electronics. I’m informed that our tour is scheduled to begin promptly at three, and that our tour bus was ten minutes late, and that there is no time for a bathroom break. I understand her position, as I have inadvertently sparked a group exodus, but it doesn’t change the fact that I have to go. Thankfully, my professor is an advocate for our predicament, and I’m told to make it snappy.

The moment of confusion and admonishment on behalf of the tour guide has shattered my contemplations and attempts to prepare for what lies outside of the museum's walls. It's only appropriate, because on my trek to the bathrooms of what could be described as the welcome center of Auschwitz that I have a quick series of revelations about the nature of Holocaust tourism. The first revelation is that I am not engaged in the holy-sort of pilgrimage to the darkest corner of the world. Instead, I am a tourist and a student, and I am to be processed as such.

Almost one million people tour Auschwitz each year, and like many group tours, ours has been scheduled in advance. We are expected to follow the schedule of entering on time, spending a block of time walking through the museum, outside to the shooting wall and the gas chambers, and leaving before the museum closes. Second, I realize that though the bathroom facilities aren't gold-plated or particularly ornate, they're modern and convenient and perfectly serviceable. Considering the conditions of Auschwitz, the convenience of a bathroom is suddenly horrifying. I'm nauseated at the thought of these modern conveniences and constructs built upon the ashes of Auschwitz: opening and closing times, museum cafes, guided tours, radios, tiled floors, tour buses, educational DVDs, and, in a phrase, the rigid impositions of modernity on the memory of the Holocaust. I'm not ready, I think again, and I wonder if the group will go ahead without me and I can say forever that I went to Auschwitz and had a transformative experience which recognized the evil of humanity while I found hope in the preservation of memory. No one would have to know that I never made it past the bathrooms.

It's impossible to capture the experience of Auschwitz on the personal level. To attempt to dissect my own personal and spiritual experience of visiting Auschwitz borders on the sacrilegious. As such, it is only after reflection and more research about museums and their relation to collective memory that I am able to mediate between the experience of the visitor and the process which the site of Auschwitz has undergone in order to enable the one million visitors to visit the site each year. It is only through the separation of the personal experience and relation of and to collective memory as institutionalized by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum that it becomes possible to separate the tragedy from its representations.

Influential Holocaust scholar James Edward Young observes in his work *The Texture of Memory* that "what most visitors remember from trips to the Auschwitz museum are their few moments before the huge glass-encased bins of artifacts: floor to ceiling piles of prosthetic limbs, eyeglasses, toothbrushes, suitcases, and the shorn hair of women." Young questions what the sight of concentration-camp artifacts awaken in viewers, "for when the memory of a people and its past are reduced to the bits and rags of their belongings, memory of life itself is lost." Young's assertions are powerful. He suggests that the presentations of scattered belongings of those who perished at Auschwitz do little to celebrate the lives and traditions of those who lost their lives. Though the stated purpose of Auschwitz is to educate the world about the horrors of the Holocaust, the displays of Auschwitz I and the barren structures of Auschwitz-Birkenau are only one manifestation of representing and remembering the Holocaust.

If the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum represents the absence of life, then perhaps there are other forms which could contain life. I stumble across a quote online spoken by German philosopher and sociologist Theodor Adorno. Floating free online, without a date or a source of publication, Adorno is quoted as having said "It is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz." As an English Literature major, I'm immediately intrigued by the sentiment, and I set to work in investigating the topic of representation of the Holocaust through literature. My paperback of choice during the long flight from the United States to Ukraine was Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, the story of a young American traveling to Ukraine in search of the

woman who saved his grandfather from death during the Holocaust. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum recently published an anthology of poems entitled *The Auschwitz Poems: An Anthology in English*. The anthology includes poems written by Auschwitz prisoners, Elie Wiesel, and other important modern Jewish and Polish poets. The blurb on the Museum website calls the publication a triumph in the face of Adorno's statement.

My inner-English major warns me that there is validity in Adorno's concerns. Adorno's larger argument concerning the barbarity of poetry after Auschwitz is that because it is imperative, for the sake of humanity, that event of the Holocaust be represented in art there is a great risk in doing so. Mass extermination is almost impossible to represent--the scale of the event is so large, so horrible, that artistic attempts to represent the Holocaust risk leaving out important details, failing to capture the scope of the Holocaust, and worst, promoting a false understanding of history and memory. If the museums only exist to educate and commemorate, and art can't accurately capture the Holocaust, then where is the life to be found? The dark answer would be that in the wake of the Holocaust, there is no life to be found.

Ruminating on my experiences at Auschwitz, I realize that the physical tour of Auschwitz ultimately has no iron chains around the collective memory of the Holocaust, as represented and internalized by people. The nature of memory is that it is fluid and all-reaching. Though memory is not bound by nationality, religion, or politics, the memory of the Holocaust has certainly been fostered by these once rigid demarcations of identity. Still, I can't claim that arguments of representations and ownership of the collective memory are a waste of time. Memory is not *that* fluid. While humanity collectively bears the weight of the Holocaust, some groups carry this weight more heavily than others.

To visit Auschwitz is to ultimately be a tourist. The world would benefit wonders in working to redefine our understanding of what it means to be a tourist in respect to visiting the sites of the Holocaust. Because the Holocaust is a historical event, and the ruins of Auschwitz undergo the process of preservation, reconstruction, and selection for displays, the distance between the individual and the events of the Holocaust are mediated by these channels of influence at every level. Artistic representations of the Holocaust undergo equal channels of mediation. I can't decide who is right or who is wrong concerning representations of the Holocaust, but I am convinced that only by recognizing the forces which shape our understanding of the Holocaust can we begin to find the common underpinnings of it all.

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