

Title: Trumping the Myth of Travel: A Window into the Role of Tourism in Sustaining Post-Truth Neoliberalism

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Abstract:

There is much buzz in academic circles about the post-truth era and the rise of populism, which rejects the established political order and expert knowledge, across western countries. The thesis of this paper is that contradictions in this popular movement, which is inextricably interlinked to neoliberalism, help to identify myths that support social and economic order. These windows provide society with an opportunity to deliberate world views, which in turn helps shift social, political, and economic order.

Myths are best recognised when they are busted or broken. Myths strive to produce a prescribed view of the world or an attitude towards social institutions which is then responsible for the maintenance of the status quo, and which ensures continuity of the existing social order. Myths constitute a conservative socialising force, the function of which is to sanctify existing institutions and foster the values of sociality. Myths in this sense act to produce world views that maintain the status quo. The right to travel and the so-called democratisation of travel is one such myth. With the rise of Trump, there have been many contradictory policy positions in his short time as president of the United States. At the heart of the neoliberal project is the duality that the free market is purported to be the best way to distribute goods and services, and this is presented as a natural state of affairs, somehow linked to natural rights. But, importantly, the free market is not a natural phenomenon and is very much a social construct, with various institutions needing to be maintained to ensure the dominance of neoliberal order. Whilst Trump may have gained power purporting anti-neoliberalism (anti-establishment rhetoric), his style of ethno-nationalistic neoliberalism has morphed with the dispensing of expertise informing political debate. The effect is that he has control over markets utilising a new institution: post-truth or post-fact politics, which are purported as natural and normal.

When Trump initiated the ban on the migration of people from certain Islamic states, a window on the myth of travel and mobility was revealed. The action of Trump was important in two ways: First, it revealed the contradictory nature of neoliberalism. The preservation of a free America meant curtailing the rights of travel. This had unintended social and economic consequences for the United States and has been documented widely. Second, and importantly for this discussion, Trump has uncovered the myth of unfettered right to travel/migrate in a globalised world. That is, the so-called democratisation of travel is a myth which cannot be reduced or dismantled, and any attempts to do so attack the core of what it means to be a global citizen in a capitalist world where 'people' are commodities traded through international travel. Whilst there are slight differences between bans on migration and international tourism travel, there are parallels. In this exploratory paper, I unpack the myth of travel and its linkages to a post-truth neoliberal order. I argue that the democratisation of travel is a core myth of neoliberalism and that the post-truth populism of neoliberalism unwittingly assisted in revealing the myth of the democratised travel. I present arguments for and against such a position. The significance of this to tourism studies is that understanding the link between individual actions (travel) and wider social forces is important in determining the role of travel in the political

economy of the Anthropocene and the changes that may arise from disruptions in the Anthropocene era. Literature from the field of tourism mobilities informs the arguments of this paper and will be provided in the presentation.