

**Moving off the Beaten Track:  
Developing a Critical Literacy in Backpacker  
Discourse**



Submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

By  
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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Rebecca Jane Bennett

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## Publications and Conference Presentations

### ***Publications***

Bennett, R. (2005). Heritage and Hard Rock: Silencing the Grosvenor Hotel. In T. Brabazon (ed.), *Liverpool of the South Seas: Perth and its Popular Music* (pp72 – 80). Perth: University of Western Australia Press.

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Bennett, R. (2008). Entering the Global Margin: Investigating the 'Other Scene' in Independent Travel. In P. Burnes & M. Novelli (eds) *Tourism and Mobilities: Local-Global Connections*. Oxon: CADI.

## **Conference Papers**

Bennett, R. (2004). *Do You Want Lies With That? McBackpackers and the Pleasures of Globalisation*. Perth: Cultural Studies Association of Australia.

Bennett, R. (2006). Entering the Global Margin: Setting the 'Other Scene' in Leisure Travel. *Imagine There's No Countries: Inequality and Growth in the Age of Tourism*. Brighton: Centre for Tourism Policy Studies (CENTOPS).



## Abstract

Reaching beneath the market surface of backpacker culture, this doctoral research probes uncomfortable politics, excluded voices and global inequalities. It questions why, in a context of economic inequality, environmental crisis, terrorism and war, the tourism industry continues to grow, unhampered by politically fractured and uneasy mediations of the world. Arguing that tourist modalities are defined in a popular memory matrix where the rules and norms for becoming a tourist are negotiated through conversation, television, popular literature, travel guides and the Internet, this research project critiques both popular and academic tourist pedagogy.

In forging an interdisciplinary dialogue between Cultural Studies and Tourism Studies, this doctoral research seeks new ways of theorising de-post-globalisation. Market-driven renditions of the *tourable* world displace, marginalise and exclude oppositional, negative, violent and discriminatory narratives. Placing a spotlight on the discomforts found in backpacker discourse requires the application of progressive meta-theoretical discourses, alongside postcolonial and poststructuralist analysis. A serious study of touristic popular culture implicates tourism in terrorism, backpacking in poverty, imperialism in globalisation, mobility in power and backpacker discourse in the re-writing of a contemporary subaltern.

The original contribution to knowledge emerging from this doctorate is via the application of Bauman and Said's late work to independent tourist discourses. The innovation is formed through disciplinary connections and popular cultural applications. There is also a re-theorisation of Spivak's most famous study, applying metaphors of the pyre to sites of backpacker tourism, with the aim of developing 'listening literacies.' My research justifies the introduction of two new theoretical trajectories for the Tourism Studies academy. The first new approach encourages and frames a **listening literacy amongst tourist cultures** so they can acknowledge silenced and displaced agents in host – guest interaction. The second new approach aims **to infuse touristic popular culture with a powerful and political pedagogy** that teaches mobile citizens to read difference and diversity.

A pleasure filter obscures the costs and consequences of global markets, often at the expense of local communities and individuals. This thesis focuses on the inequalities disseminated in and through backpacker tourism. It posits that it is not only important to change the way the tourist industry operates but also that it is necessary to change the way tourists *tour*. Moving off the beaten track in approaches to the study of tourism, this research project forges a new path for Tourism Studies that merges cultural theory and everyday life to develop a critical academic literacy for backpacker discourse.

Buoyed by three A-levels and a place at university, Jonty and Bunty and a quarter of a million of their mates set out to save the world. First they went climbing in Kathmandu. Then they stumbled into a local school and taught English to baffled Nepalese. Fifty spliffs and a thousand emails later, they returned home with a Hindu charm and tie-dye trousers. They had lots of great stories but the world remained thoroughly unsaved.<sup>1</sup>

P. Barkham, 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Barkham, "Are these the new colonialists?" *The Guardian*, Friday August 18, 2006: <http://travel.guardian.co.uk/gapyears/story/0,,1852960,00.html> (Accessed Online: 10/12/06).