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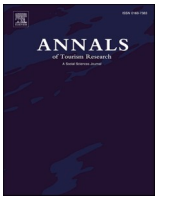

Full Length Article

Tourism mobility (in)justice: Exploring lived experiences of cross-border tourists☆

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is often seen as driver for equality and sustainable development, yet the differential scrutiny tourists face at the border directly challenge this narrative. Using a narrative inquiry, we examine how marginalised tourists with low-ranking passports navigate border-crossing predicaments, despite meeting pre-entry requirements. Findings reveal that marginalised tourists experience border-crossing as a continuous feedback loop between the felt border and the performed border. We demonstrate how borders become imprinted on and internalised within tourists' bodies, producing automatic confessions and obedience. We critique the blurred lines between compulsion and obedience at borders, exposing the contingent nature of travel mobility frameworks. This study advances critical border thinking, highlights ongoing uneven tourism mobilities and calls for humane and equitable travel experiences.

Introduction

> *"Someone with a low-ranking passport will tell you that……you absolutely must keep your counsel, knowing that this border guard who has your passport … is, for the next few minutes, the most powerful person in your life. They are a sovereign; they can make or unmake laws on the spot and possibly plunge you into financial ruin. Even if things are bad, you must always remember that they can get much worse.*
> – Malik (2022)

Cross-border travel signifies more than a cosmopolitan encounter of cultural exchange but a complex choreography of power, vulnerability and contested human mobility. In 2025, 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded worldwide, with over 50% occurring at European destinations and most visitors from developing regions (UN Tourism, 2026). The sustained growth stemmed from an expanding affluent middle class and the softening of border through visa-free or streamlined entry schemes (Bianchi et al., 2020; Mau, 2010). However, "a new system of stratification" has emerged (Mau, 2010, p. 339) between "a privileged minority for whom seamless cross-border travel materialises" and the rest of the world's citizens who endure ubiquitous barriers to movement (Bianchi et al., 2020; Harpaz, 2021). Such contradictions are ingrained in the neoliberal global order, which seeks economic growth from trade and tourism, while simultaneously restricting other forms of mobility (i.e. migration) through security processes (Stoffelen, 2022).

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The selective permeability of border(ing) has received extensive attention in migration studies (Khosravi, 2007), critical border studies (Paasi, 2012; Salter, 2012), mobility justice (Sheller, 2018, 2021), citizenship (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013; Torabian & Mair, 2022), security and geopolitics (Adey, 2009). Tourism remains an under-utilised epistemic lens to problematise the relationship between tourist mobilities and border politics (Su, 2024; Timothy & Gelbman, 2023). This study defines tourism, specifically cross-border tourism, as a privileged mobility: while marked by freedom, exploration, and self-actualisation, it remains historically and structurally embedded in capitalist and colonial logics (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2018). Often embodied by the White, affluent Western travellers, tourism mobility continues to reflect and reproduce inequalities of class, race and nationality (Becklake, 2025). Importantly, while fraught, we distinguish tourist mobility as temporary, circular, voluntary and consumption-based, against the often permanent and precarious mobilities of migrants or refugees.

The expansion of air travel has made the airport a crucial threshold of the tourist journey, yet it remains peripheral in tourism scholarship. Crossing airport borders has increasingly become a choreographed stage where sovereign power, privilege, and identities are enacted and negotiated to shape micro-level experiences (Sheller, 2021; Torabian & Miller, 2017). Tourists are channelled through carefully orchestrated security procedures, which produce stressful experiences or 'false positives' (Adey, 2009). These practices reveal a critical tension in tourism mobility, caught between the territorial logic of national security, focusing on screening for unwanted or unsafe arrivals, and a neoliberal risk framework, that prioritises efficiency and individualises risks (Adey, 2009; Côté-Boucher, 2010). Existing risk management approach, predicated on the screening of 'dangerous' individuals, raise moral concerns of how "*imaginaries that saturate risk with culturally specific meanings and significations*" are applied to tourists (Côté-Boucher, 2010, pp. 44-45). Such imaginaries inevitably turn borders into sites of power, where inequities in access and freedom of movement are tangibly felt by tourists who are subject to selective bordering and risk profiling (Torabian & Miller, 2017). Thus, situating airport border-crossing within the tourism contexts highlights how global systems of inequality manifest in individual tourist encounters - an entangled and urgent issue demanding greater scholarly, industry and policy attention.

Echoing Sheller's (2021, p. 8) call for 'commoning tourism/mobility' as commitment to equity, this study aims to *explore how airport border-crossing security rituals are felt and experienced by tourists*. We focus specifically on tourists with weak passports, from developing countries and marginalised backgrounds. Using a narrative inquiry, we uncover the predicaments and challenges faced by tourists crossing airport borders upon arrival, despite fulfilling all pre-entry travel requirements. Furthermore, we examine how tourists' diverse and intersecting identities shape their border-crossing experiences, highlighting the different ways tourists negotiate and resist the systemic inequalities embedded in mobility regimes. Responding to UNSDG 10 - Reduced inequalities, we provide nuanced insights into the complexities and inequalities inherent in tourists' border-crossing experiences, advocating the need for more equitable, humane, and inclusive border practices.

Literature

Tourism and cross-border (im)mobilities in airports

Tourism thrives on the premise of unhindered, albeit temporary, mobility. While mobility is often framed as a marker of progress and modernity (Bianchi et al., 2020), the mobilities turn has challenged its universality, exposing the plurality and contested nature of discretionary travel (Cohen & Cohen, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2004). Drawing on Sheller's (2018, 2021) seminal work, we contest the presumed accessibility of tourism, positioning the tourism system as a primary site of mobility injustice that actively produces and perpetuates differentiated and uneven mobilities. Mobility (in)justice takes various forms, such as uneven qualities of experiences, or temporal injustices like delay, exclusion, and disruption (Adey, 2014). This framework also highlights how racialised, classed, gendered and nationally identified bodies experience movement differently (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014), creating an assemblage of marginalisation, that operates behind the destination's welcoming disguise. Tourism mobility (in)justice stems from hegemonic conditions like extractive economies, geopolitics, colonial legacies, which create "uneven, differential", and at times subversive patterns of movements (Cohen, 2021; Sheller, 2018, p. 20). These conditions reflect the ongoing tension between the neoliberal emphasis on efficiency and increasingly complex geopolitical relationships (Côté-Boucher, 2010; Salter, 2013). Such disparities are exacerbated in cross-border tourism, creating physical, temporal and symbolic barriers for tourists.

Borders are integral in transnational tourism. As a threshold concept, borders embody a paradox, functioning simultaneously as barriers and gateways, mundane and exotic. Borders have evolved beyond physical state boundaries or commodified attractions, to encompass the omnipresent political, ideological and technical processes that permeate contemporary society (Paasi et al., 2019; Su, 2024). Further, tourism development actively contributes to (de)bordering and (re)bordering processes, adapting to the fluid global political shifts (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2018;Stoffelen & Timothy, 2023 ; Su, 2024). Emerging debates endorse the nascent value of border-scape in illuminating the interconnectedness between tourism development, consumptions, and the complex relationships between border politics and mobilities (Stoffelen & Timothy, 2023; Su, 2024). The intricate interplay of state, tourists, and airports demonstrates how power and authority diffuse, contributing to the ongoing construction and contestation of the modern state discourses (Salter, 2013; Torabian & Miller, 2017). Consequently, "border-scape" emerges to depict the "fluid, mobile, open zone of differentiated encounters - a border zone without borders" (Krichker, 2021, p. 1225).

Airport borders qualify what Salter (2007) terms a heterotopia: a contradictory, liminal zone where one is physically inside the country yet legally outside. As constitutive sites of the nation-state, international airports deliberately orchestrate 'legally outside' spaces that enforce differentiated penetrability, rendering the transition between home and away, departure and arrival a disorienting encounter of excitement and fear (Zare & Ye, 2025). Inherited from the post-9/11 and pandemic-era, border security rituals treat international (tourism) mobility as a form of deviance to be controlled through surveillance, interrogatory questioning and bureaucratic hold-ups (Bulley & Johnson, 2018; Salter, 2007; Villegas, 2015). Tourist border-crossing exposes an inherent tension, between tourism's push for frictionless travel and the geopolitical and historical legacies that produce highly differentiated, non-linear mobility patterns (Su, 2024). Consequently, the airport's façade of openness and freedom disguises its heterotopic reality of intensified border examination. Though justified as risk mitigation and safeguarding national security, these measures raise moral ambivalence over privacy, coercion, discrimination and destination national hospitality (Aliverti, 2023). Arguably, these securitised processes exhibit biases, disproportionately flagging racial groups to incite anxiety and fear-induced compliance (Adey, 2009; Bulley & Johnson, 2018).

As a pivotal moment in the tourist journey, airport border encounter, where state power is enacted directly upon tourists' bodies and minds, offers a productive site for examining how hidden inequalities and systemic injustices are experienced and navigated. Yet, despite the prominent macro-level influences of state policies, tourism research has paid little attention to the micro-level experiences and emotional toll these encounters entail (Torabian & Mair, 2022; Zare & Ye, 2025). Achieving these aspirations requires more qualitative, experiential and narrative-driven studies that humanise the airport border-scape, problematise the impacts of state geopolitical agendas on tourists' lived experiences (Krichker, 2021).

Passport hierarchy and symbolic power

The possession of passports is widely considered a legal requirement for cross-border tourism. Passports, as tangible markers of citizenship and political membership, serve simultaneously as legal national identity documents, and facilitators of secure and seamless border-crossings (O'Byrne, 2001). Stemming from privileges of birth, Franko's (2024) concept of 'hierarchies of citizenship' frames citizenships as drivers of inequality, which aptly capture unequal access to freedom of movements, rights and opportunities. The value of citizenship, manifested in the varying strengths of passports, underpins the Henley's Passport Index (HPI). The HPI ranks passports based on factors such as a country's economic and political stability, colonial histories and associations with risks or terrorism (Harpaz, 2021). Such rankings, subsequently, determine the number of destinations the passport holder can travel to visa-free and the amount of legal or bureaucratic measures at the destination border (Harpaz, 2021; O'Byrne, 2001).

Passport strengths and their implicit socio-political meanings shape cross-border experiences for tourists. Fundamentally, a passport functions as a gatekeeper, granting smooth and privileged access to tourists with stronger passports, a status typically concentrated among citizens of Western or Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. In contrast, those with low-ranking passports or with certain 'look', 'accent' or 'act' often fall victim to excessive checks and scrutiny (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014; Harpaz, 2021). The passport hierarchy is symptomatic of deeper mobility inequalities and social injustice in contemporary border regimes. These disparities are rooted in historical, colonial, and neoliberal legacies that disproportionately subject tourists, especially those with passports from the Global South, to restrictive mobility and unjust profiling (Franko, 2024). The everchanging geopolitical relationships between countries, concerns over irregular migrants (i.e. refugees), and resurgent nationalism drive border governance to normalise restrictive and differentiated practices (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2018; Khosravi, 2007). However, there remains a gap in understanding how passport rankings shape micro-practices of travel, specifically the inconspicuous, strategic and often precarious efforts required to cross the border.

Intersectionality provides a critical lens to unravel how identities (race, gender, class, professions), combine to form a symbolic power that adds nuances to tourist's border encounters (Torabian & Mair, 2022). This symbolic power is contradictory: it can act as a buffer, where high-status professions or signs of affluence can mitigate the suspicion of a weak passport. Yet, it can also nullify the formal 'passport power' for racialised tourists, leading to their marginalisation. Harpaz (2021) used bureaucratic deference to explain how identity markers become proxies for citizenship value, which in turn dictates the level of deference afforded by border officials, from waiting time, level of intrusiveness, to the certainty of admission. To lessen border scrutiny, individuals often deliberately highlight certain identities (like professions) while downplaying others (like cultural differences) (Bulley & Johnson, 2018). This interplay, where a pluralisation of identities is used to navigate border crossing, is exactly what Bianchi and Stephenson (2013) frame as an evolving meaning of citizenship that is crucial for resisting neoliberal inequalities.

Such processes of 'identification, verification… examination, confession, and arrival' (Salter, 2013, p. 10) epitomise the temporal and spatial complexities of current cross-border travel. These dimensions are also manifested in tourists' lived experiences and emotions, as Malik (2022) aptly described: *'one must face unscalable walls of bureaucracy and suspicion, comical demands for paperwork, and often, humiliation and refusal.*'

Emotions, practices and performances at airport border

The airport border is conceptualised as an affective-embodied site where emotions and practices are mutually constitutive. Emotions such as anxiety, fear, anticipation and shame operate to 'make' or orient bodies, shape conduct, and render certain actions

possible or necessary (Ahmed, 2014). Routine border practices: queuing, confession, bodily stillness, and document presentation, actively produce affective responses that discipline tourists into legible and governable subjects. Securing border-crossing requires a form of affective labour, as tourists must manage both their bodies and emotions (Vammen & Kohl, 2023). Yuval-Davis and Stoezler (2002) emphasise a disparity between how state discourses construct borders and how tourists experience them. Contemporary airport governance operates through 'affective borderwork', deploying emotions like fear, anxiety, despair and humiliation to control mobility (Vammen & Kohl, 2023). Such affective controls begin with restrictive visa regimes and culminating in interrogative border encounters that treat tourists as suspects. Affective borderwork produces emotionally charged geographies of exclusion where racialised inequalities are felt and normalised through our bodies (Vammen & Kohl, 2023). Emotions (feelings) create sticky relations with our existential being (bodies) and thereby actions (practices) (Ahmed, 2014). Border governance mobilises emotions to dictate where/how tourists stand, speak, wait and respond (Vammen & Kohl, 2023), while these embodied and performative practices simultaneously intensify feelings of exposure and uncertainty.

Using the 'suture' metaphor, Salter (2012) depicts the border's dual 'world-making' function as a process where individual border-crossers are stitched into the state narrative by performatively negotiating sovereignty and identities. Here, tourists' material bodies transform into a triple exposure - simultaneously being, feeling and performing themselves, through various choreographic setups (Pearson, 2018). This includes the set design (layout of queuing, booths & national flags), scripts (standardised questioning) and 'performing' a series of controlled movements, such as frequent intervals, orderly presentation of documents and amenable body language. Such setups materialise state's efforts to choreograph a performance of authority and control, while tourists are primed to adjust bodily postures that signal compliance and innocence (Bulley & Johnson, 2018).

Drawing on Foucault, Salter (2007) describes airport governance relying on confessionary complexes which incite tourists to become anxious and self-disclosing citizens during border examination. Tourists are conditioned to secure entry by performing a 'confession' of their mobility, using passport and oral testimony to prove their docility and obedience, which collectively contribute to the production of (dis)order and (in)security (Paasi et al., 2019; Pearson, 2018). The airport border is, thus, turned into a theatrical stage where state and cosmopolitan allegiances are contested and negotiated in unexpected, often contradictory ways (Pearson, 2018). On this stage, tourist's "presentation of character" is assessed on both "what they are as material bodies and what they represent themselves to be within the performance" (Pearson, 2018, p. 88).

While tourism studies have largely spotlighted privileged mobilities from the upper tiers of the passport hierarchy (e.g. Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014; Cohen, 2021), critical border scholars, particularly Black, brown and Indigenous thinkers, have long demonstrated how border represents racialised spaces of surveillance, pain, capture and bodily discipline (Anzaldua, 1987; Browne, 2015; Mbembe, 2019; Walia, 2021). Decolonial scholars further reconfigure borders as vital epistemological spheres, where the diverse, pluriversal experiences of those in the developing world, those '*who exist on the borders*", provide a necessary counter-knowledge to the singular logic of colonial modernity (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015, p. 11; Mignolo, 2007). While empowering one to 'think otherwise", the intersection of commercial imperative and state security often re-captures tourists within the rigid materialities of the border. For racialised tourists, airport border then becomes a space of potential misrecognition, where bodies are read through colonial and racial logics that blur the distinction between 'tourist', 'migrant' and 'refugee' (Zare & Ye, 2025). The 'tourist' identity and their claims to travel are precarious and contingent upon passport hierarchies and histories of racialised suspicion. These individuals encounter the airport border as a threshold of subjectification, where the 'tourist' identity is provisionally granted or denied depending on their affective and embodied performances. The border represents the final hurdle in becoming a bona fide tourist, requiring individuals to convincingly perform innocence, temporariness and economic legitimacy in order to avoid being reclassified as a 'migrant' or 'refugee'. This liminal positioning intensifies the affective stakes of border-crossing, as failure carries repercussions of denial, detention, delay, or lasting mobility stigma. Thus, exposing the structural inequalities and epistemic injustice in cross-border travel discourse requires a situated approach, one that captures how diverse identities, circumstances, and resources shape tourists lived border-crossing experiences.

Methodology

We adopted a narrative inquiry methodology to explore tourists lived border-crossing experiences upon arrival. Narrative inquiry focuses on how individuals ascribe meanings to their experiences and construct events of their lives in a relational way (Mura & Sharif, 2017). This approach emphasises individual uniqueness and the subjective making of personal experiences by unravelling emotionally vulnerable, socially embedded, and culturally influenced narratives (Clandinin, 2013). Lived experiences are incomplete without interpretations. A collaborative exploration of the social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts that shape individual experiences is central to understanding our 'storied lives' (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18). Narrative analysis achieves this by examining the narrator's construction of events, unveiling the subtle dynamics of how ideologies are constructed, accepted, or silenced (Mura & Sharif, 2017, p. 196). Using narrative analysis and memory-work, we unpack how tourists conceptualise and retell their border-crossing experiences following a chronological order (Torabian & Miller, 2017). This methodological scaffold avoids rigid patterns, allowing participants the freedom and improvisions to interpret and attribute meanings to their memories, while researchers' prompts elicit deeper situational and contextual details.

Stories can be remembered, articulated, elicited and interpreted in myriad ways. We focus on how participants recall and (re)tell their stories, exploring the impacts these narratives have on the individuals, their travels and audiences (Small, 1999). The collaborative researcher-participant relationship facilitated narrative co-construction, enabling participants to re-story and contextualise the complexity of their border encounters (Berbary & Boles, 2014). Here, researcher positionality is crucial in developing authentic conversations, shaping narratives and (co)constructing the meanings. Both authors held passports with limited visa-free travel entitlement (China & Iran), yet had studied, lived, worked, and travelled to many parts of the world. Extensive paperwork, bureaucratic holdups and tedious (micro-hostile) border scrutiny were our travel norm, let alone the need for visas everywhere we go. We shared struggles, frustrations, and anger towards the wearying, expensive, and anxious processes of travel planning, visa applications, and border treatment. Despite our shared passion for travel, this research stems from our years of accumulated frustrations, prompting a critical inquiry into how the global border regime and mobility injustice manifest in individual travel experiences. We, as researchers, become collaborative partners to re-tell and (re)construe the stories, not just 'about' the participants, but 'with' and 'for' them.

We used a synergistic, two-step method to generate rich narrative data. The process began with participants writing a retrospective narrative online, which was then used to elicit more spontaneous, co-constructed oral narratives during semi-structured interviews. This multi-layered approach captured each border experience as both a lived experience and a collectively recalled and re-interpreted narrative. Participants were recruited via social media and personal referrals, using purposive snowball sampling. Employing an intersectional approach, our selection prioritised individuals with low-ranking passports, who had visited developed or Western countries, alongside a small cohort of participants from ethnic backgrounds who hold 'strong' passports or with stateless status to examine how racial/gender dimensions shape border encounters, despite passport privilege. Data collection was conducted in English with explicit written/verbal consent obtained. All participants self-identified as middle-class professionals, a group selected to highlight the friction between economic capital and the structural barriers of 'weak' passports. Their professional status provides the resources to travel but fails to exempt them from border predicaments. Recruiting from this relatively secure population also mitigates the personal and legal risks participants face when discussing state surveillance.

This study focused on tourists crossing the airport border, as it serves as both an intense microcosm where abstract state power becomes tangible and a clearly bounded 'episode' potent for narrative recall. This focus enabled a fine-grained analysis of how power and suspicion are performed and experienced in their most acute forms. Participants were asked to describe a complete episode of a cross-border encounter, with prompts to chronologically de-construct their experiences from pre-departure, arrival impressions, and detailed narratives of the border-crossing. Confronting and recounting unpleasant, anxious and even traumatic memories could have potentially triggered feelings of vulnerability and exposure. Thus, participants were reassured that they could pause or end the interview at any time, with optional breaks offered. In total, 15 sets of memory journals and corresponding interviews were collected between 2023-24, with participants' profiles presented in Table 1.

Following Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clandinin (2013), we engaged in thematic narrative analysis, inductively developing iterative coding and extracting meaning patterns from participants' personal stories and the socio-cultural fabrics in which these stories were situated. The researchers, simultaneously participants, become immersed in an ongoing recursive and reflexive process of juxtaposition, recognising the complexity, variedness and even contradictions in the collaborative narrative-building.

Table 1
Participant profile.

	Pseudonym	Passport	Gender	Professional field	Destinations
1	Charlie	China	M	Education	London, UK
2	Hanh	Vietnam	F	Education	London, UK
3	Fei	China	F	Law	Copenhagen, Denmark
4	Song	China	M	Self-employed/Creative	Tirana, Albania
5	Tram	Vietnam	F	Education	London, UK
6	Joyce	Zimbabwe	F	Education	Tel Aviv, Israel
7	Isha	India	F	Medicine	New York, U. S
8	Alissa	Syria	F	Education	Munich, Germany
9	Celia	Philippines	F	Research	Melbourne, Australia
10	Pooja	India	F	Medicine	Prague, Czech Republic
11	Dylan	Brunei (*Stateless*)	M	Public service	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
12	Phoebe	United States	F	Banking/Finance	London, UK
13	Pete	India/Australia	M	Education	Auckland, New Zealand
14	Kim	Cambodia	F	Hospitality	Paris, France
15	Oliver	Argentina	M	Healthcare	London, UK

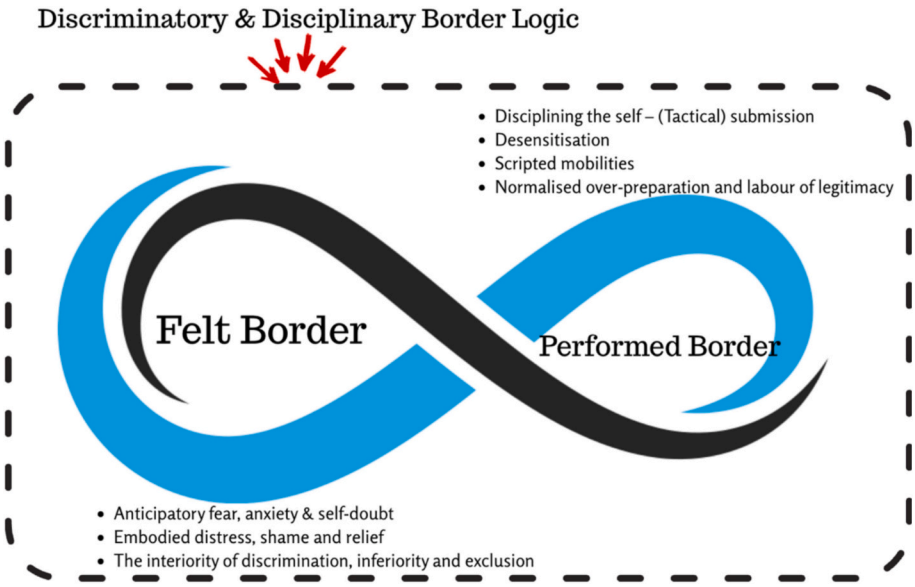

Fig. 1. A cyclical map of tourists' border-crossing encounters.

Findings and discussions: storying tourists' border-crossing

Two thematic categories emerged from the empirical material, illustrated in Fig. 1 as a cyclical feedback loop between the 'felt border' (interiority/affect) and the 'performed' border (tactical agency/submission). This loop shows how each register informs and reinforces the other within a border environment governed by the state's disciplinary and discriminatory logics, transforming the border encounter into a self-reinforcing cycle of affective impact and response.

The felt border

The felt border captures the embodied and affective dimensions of border-crossing, encompassing emotional responses and lived experiences of differentiation and exclusion. This theme depicts how unequal treatment is perceived, internalised, and made meaningful by individuals. Participants expressed intense emotions: feeling anxious, belittled, apprehensive, fearful, traumatised, insulted, humiliated, embarrassed, and experiencing self-doubt or self-blame. Although discrimination is enacted through social and institutional structures, it is examined here primarily through its experiential and affective impacts.

Anticipatory fear, anxiety & self-doubt

A persistent state of 'perm-anxiety' and fear dominated the narratives, driven by concerns over profiling, sorting and separation at airport borders. Many participants anticipated the insulting, condescending and terrifying scenarios that would occur at the border control, as evidenced below:

> *Whenever I land in the UK,* ***I feel apprehensive*** *- I never know just how suspicious border staff will be and* ***what condescending questions*** *they will ask… [Joyce – Zimbabwe – M6]*

> *Waiting for border control can be* ***unnerving.…*** *When I was using my ICI [International Certificate of Identity], it was* ***more stressful*** *given … time waiting in the queue to* ***ponder on what could go wrong****. [Dylan – Brunei - M11]*

The environment of surveillance, armed guards and stern-looking immigration officers circulates negative emotions. Confusion and disorientation at the separating queues were common. Celia [*Philippines - M11]* described her experience as "***patronising***" when the officer "***told me off*** *for using the electric passport queue*" and redirected her to the "*other queue and said,* ***'good job'*** *as though she was talking to a child*". Second, participants must confront extensive and at times condescending questioning, triggering anxiety, speculations and even self-doubt or self-blame. Despite carrying all the correct paperwork, there was always a lingering 'what if' in the minds of many. The (perceived) lack of proof produced feelings of personal deficiency and inadequacies, as illustrated by Pete:

> *I think part of this comes from … I've always travelled with an Indian passport, I know how things can go bad so in my head -* ***what have I done? What's going to happen? Are they going to let me through today? Are they going to let me go home****? I've brought all the right paperwork, but* ***I still thought it was my mistake****. [Pete – India/Australia - PI13]*

Embodied distress, shame and relief

The fear of denied entry can feel dehumanising and belittling, as it undermines their sense of dignity and autonomy. Participants attempted to remain calm; however, they were betrayed by their bodily reactions: "*tense up*", "*gear up for a battle*", "*sweaty palms, furtive eyes… mumbling*". Isha's story illustrated how borders are designed to be felt, intensely on the tourist's body (Vammen & Kohl, 2023). The default suspicion and threat of punitive consequences are engineered to produce intense embodied and emotional responses. Her questioning her own reality upon being interrogated about the legitimacy of her finances suggested psychological gaslighting which eroded her sense of innocence.

> *… **I felt insulted and confused.** Why have my cousins gone through after only 30 seconds of questions, or less? They were on the other side, looking **concerned and confused**... I told the woman that my cousins are over there. Then she got more annoyed that I kept giving the same answers… I **remember my entire body tightening up,** what is she getting at? … To try and trip me up. She's like how can you afford this? …She was trying to get it out of me that I was getting paid. …. **I started doubting myself, oh God, am I doing something illegal**? It was **absolutely uncalled for. It was unjust. It was aggressive. It was intrusive.** [Isha – India - PI7]*

Alissa was pulled aside in public with her young daughter, as passengers were passing through. The border space is public, yet the questioning process is individual/semi-private. The presence of others (passengers, officers) and the potential '*disapproving*' or '*judgemental*' gaze activate social emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and humiliation. Alissa being coerced to stop at a place of movement labelled her as 'problematic' in the eyes of the public. The border's discriminatory logic is experienced as an embodied sensation that reinforces suspicion and unjustly implicates innocent people. Alissa anticipated worry, embarrassment, humiliation and even physically 'shrink' at the prospect of acquaintances seeing her.

> *I'm [not] a person of any suspicion whatsoever. Still, somehow, they've decided - you stand on the side. There're **other people walking past you**. I **felt so humiliated** in that situation, as if I'm a **criminal** – **I wish I could shrink**. I remember that I **was worried if any passengers passing by were someone we knew**, I would **feel so embarrassed** because **we were standing there like criminals**, not allowed to go anywhere, watching people passing through. [Alissa – Syrian - PI8]*

Here, we drew analytical attention to the social emotions that affective borderwork creates by turning tourists into a visible and immobile border spectacle (Vammen & Kohl, 2023). This public shaming operates as a mechanism that both naturalise national inequalities and prolongs the affective strains on tourists.

Participants described a counterintuitive sense of relief when everything went smoothly. *Alissa [Syrian – PI8]* described, "*soon as we walked out, we felt **a weird sense of relief** because you've virtually done **absolutely nothing wrong**".* Relief marks the end of a tension-filled situation.

> *Travelling with an Indian passport was … **always onerous,** as you must plan months in advance to prepare paperwork and visa. Even with the right paperwork and visas, there is **always a lingering fear** that you may **not be allowed into the country**, along with **vigilance about how you are being judged**. [Pooja – India - M10]*

> *…everywhere I go, I have to apply for a visa, which requires PLENTY of documentation and proof. I guess it's the stereotypes of overstaying. Every time I travel internationally, I always **factor in extra time for dealing with airlines and border control**. I felt that until after I passed the border control, I **couldn't lower my guard.** [Song – China - PI4]*

The emotionality of borders exemplifies a confessionary complex, which pressures tourists to self-examine their 'truths' and question the believability of their stories to pass 'sovereign test' (Adey, 2009; Salter, 2007). Political techniques like passports, visas, and interrogative questioning elicit affective and embodied practices. These are often heightened through interrogations and bodily disturbances, where tourists are prodded, separated and incited. Here, emotions are essentially embodied practices (Ahmed, 2014), manifested through bodily reactions such as '*shrinking*' in embarrassment, or '*tightening*' in anger. Ultimately, bodies serve as conduits through which relational connections to people, situations and social world become possible (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

The interiority of discrimination, inferiority and exclusion

Participants described how the purposeful design of signage, bollards, barriers, biometric scanners, e-gates and surveillance cameras enact discrimination and exclusion. Discrimination here manifests as a profound shift in interiority, an affective encounter that provokes immediate feelings of inferiority and a sense of being cast as 'the other'. Passport/Nationality-based sorting render participants to substantially longer queues and more extensive questioning. Such sorting practices, according to Tram [*Vietnam – PI5*]: '*makes you think about how your passport can determine the way that you are … being allocated at the border'*. As a border policing tool, passport prompts questions of self-worth and invites real-time scrutiny of (il)legality (O'Byrne, 2001):

> *I queued at **'all other passports'**. I felt weird, nervous, yet familiar, there were **lots of windows open for certain countries** (EU, UK, and selected OECD countries) … but **only one window for the 'all other passports'**. This always gets me... **what is wrong with my passport? Why I am less worthy than** a Japanese tourist? [Charlie – China – PI1]*

> *…you always **feel second class**, don't you? I think it's **very undermining about who you are** because there is the 'white and privileged' …and the 'everyone else' queues. That's never sat very well because it's almost like - in your head, you're **expecting a more thorough interrogation in your queue because you are in the 'everyone else' queue** [Pete – India/Australia - PI13]*

Differential treatment based on outdated stereotypes of nationalities, races and/or genders were prominent. Joyce is a Zimbabwean and a seasoned tourist. Historical perceptions of Zimbabwe cast Joyce as a likely overstayer, thus, rendering her undeserving of leisure, and her mobility unwanted.

> *At the height of the political unrest, Zimbabweans were …fleeing to **seek asylum anywhere and everywhere.** … there was a very outdated perception of the Zimbabwean traveller… which would have been valid in the '90s, early 2000s, but not anymore. **I was part of a tour group** [of British tourists], so we all moved towards the same desk, and the guide confirmed we were all part of the same group, and **yet, ONLY I was asked further questions and to provide more documents…** I could **sense his disbelief** in why I was travelling, and staying for a whole week, which is **slightly condescending**. The **implied disbelief is frustrating, based on an old-fashioned, outdated stereotype** [Joyce – Zimbabwe - PI6].*

Participants struggled to break free from the prejudice projected upon their race, gender, and modes of travel (solo or with young children). Many reported a mixed sentiment towards the stereotypes about themselves - angry yet feeling helpless. Celia, a young female professional from Philippines, confronted the assumptions about her gender, nationality and profession, yet she was still labelled as 'suspicious'. Similarly, as a black single mother, Phoebe endured unjust accusations of human trafficking and an hour of detention:

> *… I am a **single woman, relatively young**…. I think they're not used to our demographic being how we are. When you are **of a certain nationality [Philippines] and they're so used to all of us being domestic helpers or labourers,** suddenly they see a professional, not old, not in their fifties with white hair…who can speak English well, who's not coming over to teach a second language suddenly they're like, **you're so suspicious, you don't fit our box** [Celia – Philippines - PI9]*

> *He [immigration officer] looked through the papers and my daughter's passport and said, well, where's her dad? I said, in the U.S and her father is aware. He **scoffed, then he went,** well I don't know, I just think you **could be trying to kidnap her or something**. I want you to sit down over there and I'm going to go talk to my supervisor [Phoebe – U.S. – PI12].*

The border exerts immense disciplinary power, accelerating or restraining movements, perpetuating hostility and compelling confession. There were many scenarios of helplessness, indignity and rationalised (forced) compliance with the border practices. Celia's *experiences* of always having to defend her identity revealed a sense of powerlessness: "*that fatigue - yes, I know I'm not supposed to be this person [according to the stereotype], but I am. **I'm just tired of explaining and defending myself, but I have to**" [Philippines - PI9].*

Such powerlessness intensifies for Dylan, a stateless individual, who lacks a recognised passport, and possesses only an ICI (*International Certificate of Identity*). His statelessness subjects him to constant secondary screening, denial of entry, detainment and years of legal limbo, as Dylan explained below:

> *… made it worse that **I had no passport, I was on the ICI. It was like multiple layers of failures**… If I have challenges in any country, there's **no consulate, or embassy to back me as their own.** [I] not only go through the hassle, paying for the expensive visa, but also through **constant scrutiny from different border** officers, all over the world. When I first came to Australia they were dumbfounded - What kind of document is this and **why do you NOT have a passport? No one really understands what an ICI holder goes through other than an actual ICI holder.** No-one will come and help you… border control **would try to detain you, ask you a multitude of questions.** They had this **stereotype** that you might be **a drug mule, or a spy.** I've had those looks – I'm not dumb …I know their line of questioning regarding interviews and citations and warnings and everything. It has **impacts** – it's a **deterrent.** It's **exhausting**… [Dylan – Brunei - PI11].*

These narratives exemplified the expansion of affective turn into tourism mobilities, revealing how borders are increasingly maintained through deliberately mobilising and producing emotions and affect (Vammen & Kohl, 2023). This precarity is especially acute for racialised (black/brown) and gendered (female/mother) tourists, whose bodies and mobilities are rendered vulnerable through constant surveillance, stigmatisation and interrogation (Browne, 2015). By identifying, sorting, and scrutinising, borders assert sovereignty and demand individuals to justify their innocence and to internalise the labels of "risky, unwanted, undesirable and unqualified" (Torabian & Mair, 2022, p. 402). It is exactly through these intense affective responses to border(ing) and othering, as Ahmed (2014) and Browne (2015) argued, that racialised boundaries are made. While the preceding analysis highlights the entwinement of emotions, affect, and border-making as forms of 'soft' governance, it does not fully account for how such governance is lived and reproduced. A fuller understanding must therefore attend to how tourists actively respond to these embodied, felt border encounters.

The performed border(-crossing)

The performed border explores how tourists actively negotiate the felt border encounters through deliberate choreographies of the

self and performance of legitimacy, employing 'tactics of the weak' to mitigate friction.

Disciplining the self: (tactical) submission

Self-disciplining constitutes an essential form of embodied labour that tourists perform to secure successful passage into the destination. The labour of self-discipline peaks for stateless tourists, for whom submission and a 'shrinking' of the self are deemed vital. For Dylan, the experience of being stranded at the border and missing his transit flight signalled a forced submission. While feeling a 'familiar fear', Dylan maintained a disciplined compliance. This enforced conformity corroborated Pearson's (2018, p. 106) depiction of airport border as powerfully "regimented and policed … that disciplines bodies as state-sanctioned subjects". While airport's (border) disciplinary power, exemplified by invasive inspections, is justified through a logic of exceptionality, its effectiveness hinges on tourists' confessionary complex (Salter, 2007). This Foucauldian concept explains the self-discipline compelling tourists to use documents to confess and legitimise their deviant mobility to the state. In the extreme case of the stateless, who possesses no documents to confess, the border is imprinted directly onto the stateless bodies; and these bodies become border, a site deemed, by its very existence, a transgression (Chattopadhyay, 2019).

> *I **waited… waited and waited** until the tension really built up… it never occurred to me, until 45 minutes later - I was going to miss my transit flight, and I needed to get through [border] and board the plane. What made it worse was when I was taken aside, and **other crowds of people were allowed to go through**, which I was fine with, well, I had to, but **it made me think I was powerless, I was at their mercy** …Since I didn't board the flight, my luggage was left behind. That's when they told me they couldn't find it… I had **no luggage**, where all my clothes for the wedding, and belongings, presents and whatnot. I was just with my backpack, my ICI …. [Dylan – Brunei - PI11].*

Participants recounted distressing border encounters: being publicly stopped, taken to secondary inspection, detained, or denied entry. Pete, an Indian tourist who resides in Australia, was asked to step aside without any explanations. He was placed in a state of petrifying immobility, ruminating about all the worst-case scenarios. He was exposed to the 'disapproving' gaze of other passengers as they move through in front of him. In that moment, his citizen status, dignity, rights and identity became "situational, conditional and unconfirmed", rendering him a "quasi-citizen whose rights can be suspended in a state of emergency" (Khosravi, 2007, p. 332).

> *…the people from the second plane were done and dusted before I was even through immigration because [officers] **made me sit down… in a really public space where… people were passing by and looking at me**. In my head - I'm going, this is so **embarrassing because it's not private**. There's **no dignity** because you're **in front of everyone** who are thinking, "I wonder what this guy has done?" They probably think I've **done something illegal, something dodgy**. It is quite … self-deprecating? **People are judging** me, with no context about what's going on… You **lose your agency in that moment** because **you are completely at their mercy, and what they say, and what they do.** You really remember that **you're NOT as everyone else in some ways**. [Pete – India/Australia - PI13]*

Border demands absolute subservience and compliance. The weight of holiday 'sunk costs', both financial and emotional, compels them to suppress momentary discomfort and injustice at the border. Pooja's Indian passport, a symbol of constrained mobility that evokes her outrage and anger, forces her into compliance despite her awareness of its inherent injustice. Her subservience signals her complex calculations when navigating the border, where compliance becomes a survival strategy, rather than an endorsement of authority.

> *My partner tried making light of the issue as **I felt outraged** (about only ethnic/non-white passengers were asked to remove masks for identification amid COVID)**. I was seriously considering not obeying their 'orders'.** You know, with a stern little head shake. But when it was my turn, **I gave in.** In that moment **I was numb, I'm frozen, and I'm like, 'I have to comply'**. It's just safe to comply … **There was safety in subservience. Why pick a fight during my holiday? I don't have enough resources to take on such an elaborate infrastructure of passport-apartheid**. As irksome as it is, it's a **realistic assessment**. [Pooja – India - PI10]*

Desensitisation

Participants described desensitisations towards the cumulative indignities of border-crossing: lengthy queues, onerous processes, micro-aggressions, extensive questioning and even detention. Many consider such scrutiny as the default border 'dramas'*:* "***would have been strange if it did not happen**…as someone with my passport, you **expect** dramas [Kim - Cambodia – PI14]"*. Seasoned tourists reported a sense of detachment (*numbing or mechanical*) to sustain such labour of submission:

> *[After getting Australian citizen/passport] it **makes you feel whole,** like a **burden that you were carrying for so long,** that you become **numb** - **had finally been lifted.** [Dylan – Brunei - PI11]*

> *…**because I was expecting it, I am desensitised to it.** Funny because, in some ways since the [border clearance] process **though onerous went smoothly**, I was quite happy with it. In the past, **I have been detained** while people checked on my visa and that didn't happen in this instance, **so it felt better** [Pete – India/Australia – PI13]*

In internalising border hostility as unremarkable routine, desensitised tourists effectively become 'docile subjects', their compliance no longer consciously performed but automated and embodied. Joyce's story exemplified Browne's (2015, p. 9) work on Black and brown bodies as key sites where perpetual "surveillance is practiced, narrated and enacted". Her self-mockery is, thus, a direct,

embodied consequence of what Walia (2021) terms contemporary border imperialism, a system that reproduces neoliberal and colonial power by (over)-borderisation of the world.

> *… within Zimbabwean community, we use terms like, the **green bomber**, not that there is a terrorist implication, but because **that green passport is unattractive**. It is **looked [down] upon** by the West as [they assume] we're either **trying and claiming asylum** or **enter and never return**. As Zimbabweans, we got that reputation, and that **reputation has stuck**. So, part of me was **annoyed and frustrated**, but I was also thinking, well, **what did you expect with your Zim passport**? [Joyce – Zimbabwe - PI6]*

Scripted mobilities

Airport border offers a theatrical stage where identity, space and appearances collectively determine the friction or fluidity of the encounter. The semi-visible nature of the questioning converts the queue into a border spectacle, a liminal and high-pressure rehearsal scene. Here, anxious tourists observe and mimic behaviours of others, effectively disciplining themselves to co-produce the docile bodies and performative obedience required for legitimacy. Frequent solo travel has cultivated in Fei a heightened awareness of surveillance, and an almost automatic compliance to perform the 'desirable' demeanour.

> *While queuing, I watched people in front - how they handed over passports, answered questions, even their body language. Without thinking, I **adjusted my posture, kept my responses brief**, and **mimicked calm** expressions, even **tried to small talk**. It felt necessary, just **do not stand out, act normal, and avoid drawing unnecessary attention**… [Fei – China – PI3]*

Over time, these 'border-specific acts' become ingrained as pre-programmed social scripts that tourists instinctively rehearse and practise. Charlie developed a routine of repeatedly rehearsing trip details and minimise any innocent inconsistencies that might attract scrutiny.

> *I normally get BRP and passport ready. I **rehearse my speech in my head**, especially **reminding myself** how many days I will stay in France, and the departing airport. We don't want to **mess up** or **act suspicious**. So, **we practise over and over or checking each other's answer** - how many days are we here, what we are here for? Just make sure that we can **immediately** answer their questions…I want to **come across as confident** in front of immigration officers, and **don't want to look dodgy**, even though I have nothing to hide [Charlie – China - PI1]*

Moreover, scripted behaviours are acquired social knowledge, honed through experiences and frequent exposures. Experienced tourists attuned to the injustice, developed strategies to manage their frustrations. These strategies included highlighting professions, presenting paperwork promptly, and speaking eloquently. Here, the nexus between performing and practising is crucial in training the body to move in a non-habitual way, that the border demands: a visible, sometimes immediate performance of compliance or genuine' calm collectedness (Pearson, 2018). Several participants shared pleasant encounters or reduced friction with border officials when highlighting socially desirable identities, as explained by Tram *[Vietnam – PI5]:* "***Occupation or qualification is a good distraction**. Soon as I say, I work at a university … they **became immediately friendlier**".*

Similarly, Celia carefully curated her professional identity and demeanour to appear trustworthy. Her frequent use of 'masking' pointed to the ongoing need for self-surveillance. This constant adaptation suggests that tourists with less powerful passports must continuously curate their identities to fit into a system that is inherently biased against them. Yet, despite the calculated efforts, Celia was scrutinised again, underlining the precarity of these performative strategies:

> *I always **[act] very business**. That's how I mentally prepare myself. I briskly power walk to the counter…act cute and answer questions nicely…I **posture** myself. I must **mask again**. **There is always masking right**? Yet, I was stopped again. Another officer asked me **additional questions** about my trip, and why I came from New Zealand if I had a Philippine passport. These questions **were asked twice**… Of course, I tried to **smile and put on my best "I'm a professional, educated, and worthy" persona. The more you can play up your intelligence and big words, the higher chances they'll treat you better**. Or so I hope. [Celia – Philippines – PI9]*

Pete described his moral discomfort and internal conflict over strategic self-presentation. This aligns with Pearson's (2018, p. 109) argument that "the willingness and ability to perform docility… becomes another tool for privilege differentiation at the airport." Pete's reflection critiques the border system that coerces individuals into adopting elite-coded behaviours to secure basic mobility and reduce suspicion.

> *I have **developed coping strategies** which include **using my title, making sure I speak quite articulately** to the person, and **in some ways hope these strategies separate me from the other -** which as I write this, it **feels and sounds so wrong** because it is a form of assimilation. [Pete – India/Australia – PI13]*

Normalised over-preparation and labour of legitimacy

A prominent pattern in the narratives was the burden of proof, manifested in pervasive overpreparing travel and identity documentations. Alessia's experiences show the long-term psychological conditioning of Syrian passport holders, a compulsion to over-prepare, even in the absence of immediate political turmoil. Celia's pre-emptive approach reflects her awareness that her legitimacy as a tourist must be constantly proven. The demand for documents like bank statements and birth certificates, which are not universally

required, exposes the arbitrary and unpredictable nature of border scrutiny, creating additional vulnerabilities for tourists. Both accounts reveal that crossing the destination border is not a straightforward right, but a psychologically taxing process of continuous justifications and performance of legitimacy. The performance of a docile, obedient and harmless sovereign subject is achieved through tourists' reliance on documents, which in turn, traps them within the apparatus of the state (Salter, 2007, 2013).

> *… if you hold a passport from one of the weakest countries in the world, this experience is not uncommon. You* ***don't feel it when you're home****. But as soon as you* ***make your first trip anywhere****, you start realising that it was* ***never pleasant, everywhere you go, you must carry [a lot] of documents.*** *I still have a* ***habit*** *of carrying* ***unnecessary documents.*** *By the way, this was* ***before the Syrian problems****, the conflict, before any of that [Alessia – Syria - PI8].*

> *I always have* ***everything pre-loaded on my phone*** *and* ***hard copies of all my travel documents****. That includes passport, accommodation, birth certificate, bank statements. I don't know, just everything to* ***prove that I am who I say I am, and I can travel*** *including the* ***return ticket and the visas****. [Celia – Philippines - PI9]*

Conclusion

Despite being stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to freedom of movement in tourism remains deeply unequal. Despite their pivotal role in shaping the overall tourist experience, the micro-level predicaments tourists face at airport border control remain limited in scholarly debates (Torabian & Miller, 2017). Our findings revealed that border-crossing constitutes an intensely emotional 'rite of passage', characterised by anxiety, shame, and self-doubt, an ordeal one must endure to access the destination. As Ahmed (2014) suggests, these emotions "stick" to certain bodies, necessitating a rigorous management of one's habitus bodies movement, dress, and tone, to secure passage. Through an intersectionality lens, findings highlighted how certain tourist identities (race, gender, class), compound the disadvantages of low-value passports during border examinations. These disadvantages manifest as discriminatory profiling, hostile questioning, and unjust border-crossing experiences. For some, the liminal yet tension-filled airport border-scape promises adventure and freedom, but for others, it embodies exclusion, aggression, and state violence, especially for those who fall victim to profiling or arbitrary detention (Torabian & Mair, 2022). Meanwhile, national security imperatives, coupled with fear of irregular migration and terrorism, as Bianchi and Stephenson (2014) note, renders the uncertain waiting and scrutiny necessary, even for tourists seeking temporary entry to a destination. States turned border into space of suspension by leveraging moral panic, thereby shifting the burden of security onto individuals, who are made to feel responsible for the scrutiny they face (Côté-Boucher, 2010). Consequently, the marginalised tourist remains a "suspect" whose status as a bona fide tourist is only granted post-clearance, making the practice of border-crossing a high-stakes negotiation of both state power and personal identity (Walia, 2021). This research extends existing knowledge on tourism mobilities, experiences and bordering by re-centring the often-hidden, transient and peripheral moments of border-crossing in travel, thereby advancing the discourses of tourism mobilities and justice.

Our findings exemplified the political, emotional and embodied nature of border-crossing, joining the growing attention to justice-oriented pathways to a more equitable, dignified and ethical tourism mobility future (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bianchi, 2024). This study demonstrates how borders become imprinted on and internalised within tourists' bodies, producing automatic confessions and obedience. Particularly, findings uncovered how tourists synchronise their physical rhythms to the fragmented pace of border-crossings, succumbing to publicly visible humiliations and curating their (desirable) identities to navigate the coercive and contingent state power. Juxtaposing tourists' border-crossing experiences provided deeper understandings of how mobility, race, passport and class are enacted in tourism spaces like airports. Our findings exposed a gap between the ideal of universal mobility and tourists' micro-level reality - a personal confrontation with a stratified and discriminatory system, rooted in race- and class-based stereotypes and profiling. This system deepens unequal power relations and undermine the tourism experiences of those racialised as "Other" (Torabian & Miller, 2017). It is a structure of perpetual surveillance and manufactured vulnerability that force Black and brown tourists to always consciously think about their identities (Browne, 2015; Walia, 2021). Moreover, recognising the diverse border-crossing experiences allows a more holistic and realistic understanding of the ethical, moral, and practical predicaments and, dilemmas that are integral to contemporary travel experiences (Villegas, 2015). This reality epitomised what Salazar and Schiller (2013) described that freedom of movement is possible for some, political/problematic for some, and absent or criminalised for others. Future research should continue to problematise the tensions and complexities of border-crossing, exposing the nuanced ways tourists negotiate racialized, class-based, and security-driven restrictions.

This study joined recent epistemological debates which posit tourism and (airport) borders as contributors to the uneven global mobilities and hindrance to freedom of movement (Su, 2024). Our findings enrich the ongoing critical theorisations how tourism production and consumption exert power and hierarchy through tangible tourism activities and cross-border movements (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bianchi, 2024; Su, 2024). Despite the progressively 'civilised' and 'covert' approach to border policing (Adey, 2009; Aliverti, 2023), ideological and neoliberal power continue to shape our "understandings of tourism and nascent concepts of global and/or cosmopolitan citizenship" (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013, p. 18). This study showcased the precarity and vulnerability embedded in tourist border-crossing, experienced by Global South tourists. Findings unravelled strategies tourists use to navigate the legal yet arbitrary border enforcement, including detachment, status-signalling and deliberate acts of compliance. This study enriched Aliverti's (2023) arguments of the blurred lines between coercion and consent, compulsion and obedience in the border encounters, alongside the contingent and provisional nature of contemporary travel mobility frameworks. By situating tourist border-crossing

experiences within broader debates on neoliberalism, citizenship/passport, and mobility justice, this study directly addresses the unequal power dynamics in global tourism. We advocate for a critical rethinking of borders/bordering as lived, embodied and intersubjective experiences rather than abstract geopolitical boundaries.

Our efforts to centre lived border experiences and narratives, from often marginalised or overlooked perspectives, advance the decolonial agenda of critical border thinking (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). Critically engaging with the lived experiences of tourists who have been excluded from tourism knowledge making, those who have struggled, and remained voiceless at the border, opens novel epistemic spaces and encourages a different paradigm for (re)thinking tourism and mobility (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles & Bianchi, 2024). However, mobility justice is inextricably linked to the contemporary poly-crisis of climate precarity, political, health and social crises (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bianchi, 2024). International tourism exemplifies this, as it is dependent on extractivist economies (oil and carbon for air travel). This system renders the world's most vulnerable populations less mobile (e.g., as climate refugees) so that tourists can be more mobile, reinforcing the very inequalities we seek to dismantle. Thus, future research should situate discussions of tourism mobility justice within the poly-crisis context, acknowledging its imminent disruptions on mobility systems.

Finally, understanding tourists' border-crossing experiences, offers practical implications for policymakers, border governance, destinations and aviation sectors to develop tourism experiences that are inclusive, humane and equitable, aligning with the UNSDGs. However, we must acknowledge the non-binding and state-centric UNSDGs can inadvertently reinforce the bordering practices, particularly in an era of escalating border crisis. This creates a disconnect where a state can rhetorically commit to reducing inequality, while its border regime enacts practices that produce marginalisation on an individual, embodied levels. Thus, we urge tourism scholars and practitioners to expand the debates with intention, through a decolonial lens, on the growing prevalence of (re)bordering practices and injustices in our societies, beyond national frontiers. This involves attention to the contextual nuances and ambivalences of different forms and logics of (re)bordering. Future studies should explore how diffuse bordering processes from pre-travel visa applications to post-arrival digital surveillance shape tourist mobilities, as border digitalisation continues to advance. By examining the fluid, mundane and invisible ways in which (re)bordering manifests in tourism encounters, we can better understand how power, privilege, and restriction are (re)produced at both structural and personal levels. This echoes Higgins-Desbiolles & Bianchi's (2024, p. 7) call to "*expand the emancipatory, empowering just and equitable potentialities in tourism so that the many can thrive, rather than merely the privileged few*".

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Isabella Q. Ye: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Samira Zare:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Gemini in order to improve the readability, grammar and language of some sentences within the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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