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Series Editor: Mike Robinson

Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Tourism, Globalisation and Cultural Change

An Island Community Perspective

Donald V.L. Macleod

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Preface

What influence do tourists have on a community? This was one of the motivating questions that drove me to live in a remote Canary Island fishing settlement for a year. Back in 1989, there were just a handful of books within the discipline of social anthropology that dealt head on with the impact of tourists and tourism. Following a reconnaissance trip to the Canary Islands with the original intention of studying pre-Hispanic traditions manifest in contemporary culture, I changed the emphasis of my study to what I perceived as a more important and interesting issue: change in a community and the influence of tourism.

Over the years there have been many changes and one of the tasks of this research is to highlight those changes that can be most directly associated with tourists and tourism. Related to this is the conviction that specific tourists will have specific influences. The majority of visitors to La Gomera are those whom I term 'alternative', and as a result of their characteristics, I argue that they communicate and interact with and consequently influence the local community to a greater extent than would package tourists. These influences and changes penetrate almost all areas of culture and most of the population's lives: personal as well as public. A longitudinal research project, in this case covering the years 1990–2002, which includes a full continuous year of intensive participant observation fieldwork, is a particularly good way of enabling the researcher to appreciate the breadth and depth of tourism's influence on a community.

Despite its intensive focus on one community, this study has ramifications worldwide and, in true anthropological tradition, comparisons are made with examples taken from a wide canvas, in space and in time. Furthermore, the relevance to other island communities is made clear throughout the book and all peripheral communities experiencing tourism will be able to draw parallels with their own experience. The bulk of academic literature and sources are taken from anthropological works, with much support from sociology and geography, and the area of Tourism Studies with its collection of academics from a wide variety of backgrounds has also supplied much material.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the majority of material is primary research data, gleaned through talking with people in the community – fishermen, shopkeepers, foreign settlers, tourists and so on. This is the stuff of ethnographic fieldwork: the fieldworker tries to blend in with the community and pick up information without overly distorting or influencing opinions and conversation. The book, therefore, contains a diverse collection of opinions, ideas and perspectives, which further increases its richness: an intended goal that partly supports the contention that tourism, globalisation and cultural change are complex by nature. Nevertheless, I have developed arguments that run through the book relating to the subject of globalisation, the nature and causes of cultural change, the influence of specific types of tourist, the immense influence of tourism, the relevance of power, the social construction of identity and the importance of individual human agency in the entire process. Furthermore, in the tradition of the ethnographic monograph, I hope that the reader will gain a good picture of the people described and a general insight into the human condition.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to numerous people, organisations and funds and I will attempt to acknowledge them in rough order of their appearance in the making of this text.

At the University of Oxford, where the adventure began, the Pirie–Reid Scholarship funded three years of postgraduate studies; Brasenose College provided a warm collegiate embrace, the award of the Hulme Continuation Grant and a Travel Scholarship; the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology provided an excellent research environment and the Peter Lienhardt Travel Scholarship – Peter had been an enlightening first supervisor in social anthropology; Marcus Banks gave inspired and conscientious doctoral supervision; and Peter Riviere offered support and insightful comments.

In the Canary Islands, I acknowledge the help of Alberto Galván-Tudela and Juan Pascual-Jimenez for their initial encouragement and in particular, I thank the people of Vueltas who were a most welcoming community and have proved to be enduring friends.

More recently, the University of Glasgow Crichton Campus has provided a good base for reflection and a vigorous one for research in the Crichton Tourism Research Centre. During the latest development stages of the book, Mike Robinson has given excellent advice and been an invaluable reader of the material. Finally, I would like to thank my immediate family for their continuing and good-humoured support.

Part 1

***The Issues, The Community and
the Tourists***

Chapter 1

Tourism, Globalisation and Cultural Change

Introduction

Tourism is a genuinely powerful and unique force for change in the community. This study outlines its impact on economic, social and cultural life: all these are embraced by the broad term 'culture' but, for the sake of the analysis, the different elements which make up a culture are broken into specific areas.¹ Anthropologists and others have sought to view different elements of society in a unified, holistic way, intending to highlight their interdependence. For example, in this work we see how families as kinship groups often form the workforce for business operations and influence political inclinations, social identity and values. By understanding the interconnections within a society, we are better able to appreciate the repercussions of external influences such as tourism and the major and deeply felt changes that such phenomena as the introduction of ex-tourists into the family through marriage can have. However, these types of changes are not as obvious as the more salient material developments relating to construction and the economy.

Here, it is argued that the community of Valle Gran Rey (VGR) on the Canary Island of La Gomera has experienced tremendous changes in a short period of time since the early 1980s when tourism began to develop seriously. Moreover, the type of tourists has had a particularly strong impact due to their propensity to communicate with and live in close association with the local population. It is suggested that the experience of La Gomera may be comparable with other isolated communities, especially islands, around the world. The advantage of long-term research is that various transformations can be traced over time and family groups can be observed in such a way that the agents of change – local people, tourists, foreign settlers and others – become real personalities. Throughout this book, quotations from those involved in this process are given. Field research has spanned more than a decade, from 1990 to 2002, with the bulk

of the intensive fieldwork taking place during 1990–91 followed by intermittent return visits.

Research has shown that tourism is a very complex business, as are the responses from the destination community, itself composed of different groups with differing interests. Much of the conflict regarding the resources supplied by tourism and demanded by tourists seems to be between local factions. In some way tourism has accentuated and put pressure on fissures within the local social landscape. Political interests were particularly divided over a proposed development plan for the beach – and a massive protest, accompanied by wide media coverage, led to a historic climb down by the mayor and his supporters. Tourism has become a very important part of the political agenda.

The book is divided into two parts: the first 'The Issues, The Community and The Tourists' provides a grounding, giving an overview for the reader, embracing the theoretical concerns, a detailed description of the destination and its history and an examination of the tourists who visit the region. The second part 'The Influence of Tourism' focuses on the specific changes that tourism and tourists have initiated in the community: in particular it explores the areas of work and property, power and conflict, social identity and family and belief. These chapters give detailed descriptions of the people, their lifestyle and their relationship with tourists and tourism. Finally, the concluding chapter 'The Ability of Tourism to Change Culture' draws these issues together, reaching conclusions on the environment and identity, globalisation and tourism and tourism's specific influence on cultural change. It summarises the findings of the research as well as presenting final arguments and thoughts about the role of tourism in changing the culture of a community.

As the introductory chapter, this one outlines the central theoretical concerns of the research, draws attention to the experience of islands and tourism making comparative generalisations, describes the place of 'history' in the book and, finally, places the fieldwork site and research into context.

Theoretical Concerns

Globalisation, change and agency

Tourism is very much part of the globalisation process.² In essence, globalisation involves the exchange and flow of economic and intellectual items in terms of goods, knowledge, values and images, as well as people, on a global scale (cf. Featherstone, 1990a, b; Featherstone & Lash, 1995). We will regard it as a process that has its historical roots in the European trading expansion of the 16th century, the opening of the trans-Atlantic

routes and the beginnings of the Eurocentric worldwide network. Scholars such as Wallerstein (1974) and Wolf (1982) have examined this phenomenon, perceiving the origins of the modern world system as lying in the development of the processes that we describe today as global. Other interpretations of globalisation see it as beginning at the dawn of recorded history or with the post-industrialisation of society (Waters, 1995). We can theorise that globalisation as a concept and experience does not necessarily have to be confined to a specific time or place but should be seen as (a) implying a group's efforts to homogenise their 'global' environment as they see it and (b) the development through communication and trade of a vast network. Both notions are grounded in the cultural worldviews of the participating actors.³ However, for the purposes of this book, we will focus on the European-based expansion and, in particular, on the Iberian colonisation of the Canary Islands that began the globalisation process for La Gomera. We view its development as concurrent with the development of the world system described by Shannon (1989: 20) as

[t]he set of relatively stable economic and political relationships that has characterised a major portion of the globe since the sixteenth century. Initially the system was limited to Europe and South America in the sixteenth century. Since that time it has expanded to include all areas of the world.

The period following the industrial revolution, with its impact on travel, trade and technology, referred to by Robertson (1990: 19) as the 'crucial take-off period of globalisation' begins the most recent phase. This has accelerated over the past decades with computerisation and, in the specific case of La Gomera, has increased since the mid-1970s as a result of political and economic factors, especially tourism. Wahab and Cooper (2001: 4) give a description of globalisation as it is understood in current times, one that coincides with many popular interpretations:

Therefore, globalisation is an all-embracing term that denotes a world which, due to many politico-economic, technological and informational advancements and developments is on its way to becoming borderless and an interdependent whole. Any occurrence anywhere in the world would, in one way or the other, exert an impact somewhere else. National differences are gradually fading and being submerged in a homogeneous mass or a single socioeconomic order.

There are numerous understandings, some more abstract than others, which point to the perceived outcomes of globalisation. These include the creation of cultural homogeneity, as suggested here, or contrastingly the increased perception of heterogeneity; the resulting awareness of the

finitude of world resources and the assimilation of previously separate groups into a larger whole, with the consequent sharing of experiences (Featherstone & Lash, 1995). These broad issues will form part of the background to investigations in this book with its focus on cultural change.

Although the word 'globalisation' has been with us since the 1960s, according to Cheater (1995: 124) it is only since the late 1980s that it has received attention from social scientists as a serious concept. Similarly, due partly to its recent growth as a social phenomenon and partly to the attitude of many academics who were not convinced of its relevance, the subject of tourism has also been slow to receive serious attention. Things, however, are changing, and globalisation is currently a popular topic of study and discussion, whilst social scientists are also choosing to research and publish papers on tourism in increasing numbers.⁴ Yet the two topics have rarely been deliberately combined in an ethnographic monograph.⁵

Tourism is regarded as part of the process of globalisation: in order to appreciate this more deeply, we need to examine the concept of tourism as well as theoretical issues that have been developed relating to it. The tourist has been described as a 'temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change' (Smith, 1989c: 2). This presumes that the tourist has leisure time, discretionary income and positive local sanctions, all features which characterise the ideal lifestyle in westernised industrial societies. Just as globalisation reaches out to others, resulting in the exchange of money, items and information, encouraging trade, travel and communication, so does tourism. In terms of exports, the tourist attraction is simply another commodity embedded in a network that spreads overseas. The globalised world of communications, advertising and travel enables customers to participate as tourists – consumers of export commodities on the salesman's doorstep. Images, dreams and expectations are 'sold' for future consumption as the media attract the clients. This book shows how the island of La Gomera has been part of a global trading network and hence, part of a very powerful geopolitical system since its colonisation by Europeans: it continues this pattern by exporting its assets for tourism. However, the arrival of tourists who consume their purchases on the island sets up a totally different relationship between vendor and purchaser.

One way in which we may think about the situation and events in La Gomera is to use the concept of world-system theory (Wallerstein, 1974; Shannon, 1989) as a means of understanding events both historically and as they continue today. The central theme is that there is a core that controls capital, with political power and cultural dominance in relation to a periphery that is part of the economic system and exploited for its resources.⁶ This enables us to comprehend the Canary Islands' relationship

as a peripheral region to the core of urban continental Spain. On an even smaller scale, there remain core and peripheral sections of society within a peripheral region, just as there are workers as well as capitalists in the core region. In fact, it may be fair to say that there will be a network of politically and economically influential people overseeing the whole area embracing both core and peripheral regions. Wolf (1982) argues that societies are not isolated or self-maintaining systems and that there are cultural sets of practices and ideas that are continually changing. Wolf's ideas together with the concept of a world system give us a basic model with which to approach the problem of theoretically interpreting and comprehending the ethnographic data within this book and, in turn, relating it to the process of globalisation.

The term globalisation is a means of describing a process: it does not offer any explanations. World-system theory analyses and offers an explanation of the historical and social development of a process and a system – a system that may itself be described as an example of globalisation. As suggested earlier, La Gomera became part of a developing world system after it was colonised by Spain and it has remained a peripheral region, exploited as an agricultural exporter throughout its history up until the present day. A new export product, tourism, is replacing the older commodities – fish, tomatoes and bananas. The core area has changed and includes the metropolitan areas of Spain, Germany and the UK, with the European Union (EU) being a developing conglomeration of political and economic power that has already had a major impact on the island. The EU's impact includes economic funding for building and infrastructural work, with a resultant political entrenchment in VGR and the possibility of radically changing the future of the island through its heavy investment in an airport and tourism. In fact the EU's development program for La Gomera may be read as a form of cultural hegemony (akin to the 'modernisation' ethos) and VGR is now on the cusp of a transition from being a locally run small-scale tourist economy to becoming subordinated to a capital-intensive tourist industry. The funding, which was intended to encourage equality between islands and within the island, may ultimately benefit big business alone.

Whilst world-system theory gives us a means of analysing macro-economic and political events, it also allows us to interpret the micro-changes that happen in terms of the grass-roots interaction between people from the core regions (urban European tourists) and the local population of this peripheral region. Thus, the metropolitan wealthy or those rich in intellectual capital (in terms of a metropolitan-oriented education and experience) may mix with local people and influence their morals, ideas, social and personal behaviour, work patterns and fashion amongst other

things and be influenced, in turn, by the local people. Some observers of tourism processes have described the arrival of tourists as an invasion or colonisation and there are parallels with imperialism. Even though the tourists may not perceive themselves to be exploiters of the resort population, they may be gaining comparative economic advantage and they represent the core regions – if only unwittingly – as they inevitably contain aspects of that culture. And it is this limitless interaction and communication between people, be they tourists and locals, business partners, politicians or fishermen, that is globalisation in the flesh.

We must not forget that these processes are grounded in the action of individuals and that people are the drivers of development. The key involvement of people in this process makes our research important and revealing. The world is expanding not shrinking because of globalisation. An increase in communication, ideas, possibilities, travel, knowledge, capital, construction, associates, relationships and so on means that many people's worldviews incorporate more items than before: their knowledge horizons have expanded. Nothing has shrunk but the time it takes to obtain information or to get from 'a to b' and this may even have increased due to heavy traffic – try London. This highlights the fundamental perceptual context of globalisation and its location in the minds of people – which is why an examination of cultural contact and change is so relevant.

It is with this acculturation that most of this ethnography is concerned – the contact and interaction of people from different cultures which results in sociocultural change. Albeit the cultures concerned are not totally different, there is sufficient difference to make it an interesting and valuable exercise. Nash (1996: 21) in a discussion of 'tourism as acculturation or development' draws attention to the predominant tendencies of writers embracing an anthropological viewpoint to adopt the 'cautionary platform':

Loukissas [1978] points to the degradation of the environment on Myconos. Lee (1978) views tourism as enhancing the position of an entrenched élite in Yacatan. Jordan [1980] sees it undermining and distorting traditional values in a vacation village in Vermont. Pi Sunyer [1977b] studying mass tourism on the Costa Brava, thinks that it promotes stereotyping. Kottak [1966] sees a general deterioration of the communal life of a Brazilian fishing village brought about by the influx of second homes, sport fishermen and hippies.

Of the more positive opinions, the 'advocacy' stance, there are, according to Nash, the following examples: McKean (1976) in Bali, Cohen (1979a) in Thailand, Boissevain (1978) in Malta and Hermans (1981) on the Costa

Brava 'who found tourism to be a benign and possibly beneficial agent of change' (Nash, 1996: 22).

Here we will see a very broad set of influences, which may be regarded as positive or negative according to the position of different observers. To decide in a judgemental fashion on the general outcome is often unwise and unrealistic: there are various impacts and many outcomes cannot be truly gauged over a short time period. Nash (1996) is in favour of a dispassionate, objective analysis: this is a worthy but particularly difficult task for an ethnographer deeply involved with a community. It is hoped that the changes examined in this book are assessed with a reasonably fair touch, although an inevitable occasional bias is not denied.

The research seeks to discover the actual influences that tourists have on local people and uses specific concepts including 'role', which is held to mean publicly acceptable ways of behaving in accordance with a socially recognised position. These roles are not those envisaged by functionalists (see Linton, 1936) who associate them with social status and the passive acceptance of actors (a static quality) but rather they are roles which are various and changing, with actors making deliberate alterations to them and social actions influencing and developing them. They include roles attributable to gender, such as wife, girlfriend, father; roles related to status, such as official or fisherman and general roles recognised in social life, such as friend or tourist. And they all involve the conscious behaviour of the participants who have a mental conception of the expectations of others as they perform their role.⁷

Together with role, the concept of 'agency' is utilised: the active and deliberate action to achieve a specific purpose. People are, therefore, regarded as actors within a social role or as personalities making their own decisions. This allows for a description of people as making their own impression on the general environment, self-consciously deciding to act. For example, much of the tourist development has been created through the agency of local people – fishermen and agricultural workers – who decided to build apartments. This use of agency and freedom to operate leads to the issue of choice, by which it is meant that there are greater opportunities for action, a diversity of paths to be taken, as a result of the growth of tourism. Choice, however, expands with knowledge as well as economic opportunities and areas of social life have increased in which individuals can actively choose from a wide selection and determine part of their future, such as employment opportunities, consumer goods and sexual partners.

Such changes that happen on a micro-level are largely due to communication – the exchange of ideas between different individuals and groups – and the extent and degree of change is also proportional to the amount and

type of communication and exchange between groups. Consequently, the type of tourist visiting La Gomera, 'alternative' backpackers, will, because of their tendency to communicate on a personal and informal level, have a considerably different influence from that of the package tourists who choose to remain more isolated from local people, interacting only occasionally in a formal situation.⁸ The mechanism, degree and extent of change is the major enquiry of this book. Ethnographic fieldwork provides an excellent opportunity to research this phenomenon, with the meeting between tourist and locals being a uniquely representative example of such intercultural interaction, where either side is more at liberty to give and take than in other cultural group encounters such as migration, wartime invasion and colonisation.

Smith (1989c: 9) sees tourism and 'modernisation' as separable, with modernisation being the predominant influence. However, it is argued here that by recognising tourism as part of a greater globalisation process which includes modernisation, caught up in a world system, we acknowledge that it is but one particularly salient facet of this process⁹ – and one which can be studied with a degree of isolation because of the blatant human interaction involved and other consequent explicit events. Here are some examples from VGR in which tourism as a specific part of globalisation and not merely 'modernisation' is responsible: marriages between local people and foreign visitors, beach developments and apartment construction, employment in hospitality services and local people learning the German language. And so we seek to place the study of tourism firmly within the corpus of research into globalisation and world-system theory, whilst recognising that tourism has unique qualities that are worth investigating in their own right.

Many discussions of world-system theory are based on the notion of power centres, usually metropolitan cores, which, in turn, influence ideology and cultural values: such values influence the way in which the natural environment is perceived. The difference between the way a business speculator, a tourist and a fisherman will see a beach – their various 'gazes' – gives us a clue as to the importance of experience, cultural background and current activity in relation to their interaction with the environment. On La Gomera, there are serious disagreements about how the natural environment should be utilised. Natural resources have been exploited historically as export products and subsistence products (plantations, smallholdings, goat-herding and fishing). With the arrival of tourism, the resources can take on different qualities – aesthetic assets, leisure zones and speculative commodities: thus, the sea and the land have been dramatically transformed in terms of their social usage and value. In this sense we have a situation that may be understood in terms of political