

Touristic ethnicity: a brief itinerary

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Abstract

Touristic ethnicity is increasingly important for understanding ethnic relations, culture and identity in the world today. Empirically, this reflects the spread and importance of the tourism industry and its many ramifications for ethnicity. Theoretically, it is argued that the study of touristic ethnicity constitutes a particularly fruitful strategy for deepening our understanding of the construction of ethnic identities and relations generally. This two-pronged empirical and theoretical argument is developed in relation to three phenomena: 1) tourism as a form of ethnic relations; 2) the development of touristic ethnic cultures, in which interaction with tourism becomes an integral part of the construction of ethnic identity; and 3) the dedifferentiation of the tourist realm, such that touristic modes of visualization and experience become characteristics of the expression and consumption of ethnicity.

Keywords: Ethnicity; race; culture; tourism; travel; stratification; identity; heritage.

Introduction: why should scholars of ethnicity care about tourism?

I propose in this article to offer an overview – a brief itinerary if you will – of several intersections of two fields of study: race and ethnicity on the one hand and tourism on the other. This might seem an odd combination. On the one hand, race and ethnicity in the contemporary world constitute about as weighty a subject as one can find today. From Los Angeles to Rwanda, from Bosnia to Tajikistan, race and ethnicity are matters of life and death. On the other hand, tourism studies has long suffered from a certain defensiveness about the seriousness of its subject matter. Studying tourism sounds suspiciously like going on a vacation and getting paid for it. Is looking at touristic ethnicity, provisionally defined simply as ethnicity in tourist contexts, therefore a frivolous and escapist form of sight-seeing?

It certainly might seem so. Several recent surveys of the race and ethnicity literature, including the otherwise excellent Oxford Reader on ethnicity edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (1996), make no mention of tourism whatsoever. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* has not

published an article on tourism and ethnicity since Pierre van den Berghe's pioneering 'Tourism as Ethnic Relations' in 1980. To the degree that the ethnicity literature has paid any attention to tourism at all, it has most commonly been in the form of exposing and (implicitly or explicitly) condemning the 'bastardization' and 'commoditization' of previously authentic ethnic cultures for the purpose of touristic display.¹ Touristic ethnicity, in other words, has been assumed to be phony ethnicity.

It is certainly not my intention to overstate the importance of bringing tourism into the study of race and ethnicity. At the same time, I believe that a brief tour of some of the relevant tourism literature will indicate that touristic ethnicity has a greater significance for ethnic identity and ethnic relations than has generally been recognized. My argument is to a large degree an *empirical* one about the spread and importance of the tourism industry and its ramifications for race and ethnicity. But it is also a *theoretical* one, in the sense that a case is made that the study of touristic ethnicity constitutes a potentially fruitful theoretical strategy for deepening our understanding of the construction of ethnic identities and relations generally.²

This conviction crystallized in the course of editing, with Michel Picard, a book on *Tourism, Ethnicity, and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies* (Picard and Wood 1997). While I shall contend that touristic ethnicity, in its various guises, is a worldwide phenomenon, I will give somewhat disproportionate attention to Asian and Pacific cases. For purposes of general orientation, in the next three sections I shall take the work of Pierre van den Berghe, Michel Picard, and John Urry as the starting points for exploring three key intersections of ethnicity and tourism.

Tourism as a form of ethnic relations

Pierre van den Berghe, one of the relatively few scholars who have come to tourism studies directly from the study of race and ethnic relations, has stressed in several works (1980; 1992b; 1994) that tourism often constitutes a form of ethnic relations, particularly in the Third World. Commonly, the tourist, the 'touree' (the object of the tourist's interest, particularly in cultural and ethnic tourism), and the middleman who brings them together represent three different and economically unequal ethnic groups.³ In fact, taking into account the wider tourist infrastructure of tour operators, national and local tourism promotion boards, the accommodation and transportation industries, and so forth, may further expand the range of interacting ethnic groups implicated in the tourist context. What this suggests is that tourism should be seen as one structuring element of the global phenomenon of ethnicity and ethnic stratification, not something that stands outside of it.

Empirically, the involvement of ethnic groups in tourism is variable and changing. As objects of what John Urry calls the 'tourist gaze',⁴ the

possibilities for incorporation into tourism are almost limitless, and few ethnic groups today escape entirely from *someone's* tourist gaze. Moreover, an increasing proportion of members of ethnic groups around the globe have the resources and inclination to travel and gaze on *other* groups. It is often overlooked that the great majority of tourists in most developing countries, even for ethnic and cultural tourism, are domestic tourists.⁵ Thus, the same person who is gazed upon in one context is likely to gaze upon someone else in another.⁶ Since, as Fredrik Barth reminds us, 'ethnic relations and boundary constructions in most plural societies are not about strangers, but about adjacent and familiar "others"' (Barth 1994, p. 13), the growing importance of domestic ethnic tourism carries the potential for redefining the 'diacritica of difference' and potentially of ethnic boundaries themselves.

Furthermore, as employees in the tourist infrastructure in industrialized countries, economically disadvantaged minority groups tend to be considerably overrepresented in this predominantly low-wage part of the service sector, with their economic fortunes linked to an industry often characterized by seasonality and instability. Global ethnic stratification in the tourism industry has been accelerated further by the rapid growth of the cruise industry, particularly in the Caribbean, where the cruise ship labour force comes disproportionately from South and Southeast Asia, and from areas of Eastern Europe prone to ethnic conflict. The travel and tourism industry is the largest employer in the world, and is expected to become the world's top export industry by the turn of the century (Garrison 1989, p. 4). The World Tourism Organization (1996)⁷ reports that there were 567 million international tourist arrivals in 1995, with international tourism receipts reaching \$372 billion, accounting for fully one-third of all world trade in services.

Impressive as the statistics on trade and employment are, they only begin to tell the story. A key finding in the tourism literature is that the effects of tourism often extend far beyond the immediate sites of tourist-local interactions. Involvement in tourism often alters an ethnic group's relationship to the state and to other ethnic groups, and may change the balance of power within the group as well (Wood 1984; 1993). The most important impacts of tourists therefore are often on people they never see, in places they never go.

Looking at ethnic relations in the context of tourism is *theoretically* interesting for several reasons. For one thing, while the emergence of tourism is likely in the first instance to reflect and reinforce prevailing patterns of ethnic stratification, the dynamics of the industry offer the potential for changing those patterns. For example, even if a historically-dominant middleman group succeeds in siphoning off the bulk of tourist revenues at first, its interest in promoting the touristic appeal of the ethnic 'tourees' may in the long run tip the scales towards the latter, as they achieve national recognition for their cultural and economic

contributions. Hence, studying ethnic relations within the context of tourism provides a way of identifying processes of both the reproduction and restructuring of ethnic relations, and of seeing how these processes are increasingly linked to diverse processes of globalization.

Kathleen Adams (1997) provides a fascinating account of how this restructuring process has played out between the highland Toraja of South Sulawesi, second only to the Balinese as the most popular tourist 'hosts' in Indonesia, and the lowland Buginese, who have failed to attract much tourist attention but have in the past reaped many of the economic rewards by virtue of the coastal Buginese Makassarese city of Ujung Padang constituting the starting point of the traditional overland route into the mountains. As the construction of an airport in Tana Toraja and Torajan investments in the tourism industry have weakened Buginese economic dominance, many Torajans have expressed unrestrained glee at the plight of their age-old rivals. Adams quotes a Torajan official:

The Buginese are jealous of all the development tourism has brought to Tana Toraja, but it's too late for them to do anything – they just have to be content with being a 'Gateway to Toraja', rather than a real tourist destination.

In turn, Toby Alice Volkman (1982, p. 31) notes that Moslem Buginese unhappily 'express the view that tourism has unjustly ignored their own gentle landscape, colorful marriage ceremonies, and, in their eyes, more sophisticated culture'. Interestingly, the major way in which the Buginese and other lowland groups have sought to attract tourists for themselves has been to build a regional ethnic theme park (which opened in 1991) near Ujung Padang, where three other South Sulawesi cultures are presented alongside the Torajan.

While the literature documents many instances of local ethnic rivalries being played out through tourism (for example, Brown 1984; Rodriguez 1989; Pitchford 1995), instances of this level of status reversal are relatively rare. None the less, modification of negative stereotypes among middlemen guides has been reported in several cases (Toops 1992; van den Berghe 1994), and it is clear that touristically-successful groups, for example, the Balinese, have often been more able to assert some level of local autonomy and to make more effective claims on the state. Even where such efforts have failed, tourism has provided some ethnic groups or would-be nationalities, most notably Tibetans, an otherwise unavailable means of educating the outside world about their plight (Klieger 1990; Schwartz 1991).

Ulf Hannerz (1990, p. 237) has claimed that there exists a world culture based on the organization of diversity. Tourism is a major mode of both visualizing and structuring that diversity, as well as generating it. In varying degrees linked to other forms of global population movement –

guestworkers, immigrants, exiles, refugees – tourism is one reason why, as Arjun Appuradai (1990, p. 297) puts it, ‘the warp of [local] stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move, or the fantasies of wanting to move’. For Appuradai (1996), the emergence of diasporic communities resulting from global migration is one of the key factors shaping modern identities. Tourism has contributed to the development of diasporic ethnic communities in a variety of ways: by eliciting flows of guestworkers and migrants to work in the tourist industry; by providing an entry ‘cover’ for would-be illegal immigrants; by dispersing individuals across the globe who choose to settle down at some destination point, often becoming local tourism entrepreneurs; and more generally through the demonstration effect of rich tourists who seem never to have to work and are presumed to come from lands of universal plenty. For Appuradai (1996, p. 192), tourist sites around the world are the archetype of *translocalities*, where a variety of circulating populations create new types of communities. They would also appear to be likely generators of what Stuart Hall (1993, p. 362) has called ‘cultures of hybridity’ and ‘new ethnicities’ (1988, p. 19).

Since ethnicity is inherently relational (Avruch 1992), the study of the entry of tourism highlights the relational dynamics of ethnic identity. Tourism by its nature introduces new actors into the local picture (not only the tourists, but the state and other economic actors as well), widening the range of relevant others. Following Alan Sandstrom (1991) and those who have stressed the importance of material rewards in the choice to assert a particular ethnic identity, we can see how the introduction of tourism can change the local ethnic calculus significantly. And in fact not just the local ones – the touristic celebrity of their island of origin is said to have led to a reassertion of formerly-lost Balineseness among transmigrants in faraway Sulawesi (Davis 1979). The advent and development of tourism may not only affect *which* ethnic identities are asserted, but *which ethnic markers* are chosen to symbolize group membership and culture. This, in turn, both reflects and shapes the unequal distribution of touristically-relevant knowledge in an ethnic population – what might be called touristic cultural capital – that enables some groups and individuals to take disproportionate advantage of the economic and other benefits of tourism.

While the commodification of such knowledge and artifacts is often decried in the literature as a form of cultural degradation, A. Fuat Firat (1995, p. 18) makes the provocative argument in *Marketing in a Multi-cultural World: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cultural Identity* that:

Cultures of all types – ethnic, national, regional, and the like – that are able to translate their qualities into marketable commodities and spectacles find themselves maintained, experienced, and globalized.

Cultures that cannot or do not (re)present themselves in terms of marketable qualities, simulated instances, experiences, and products are finding themselves divested of members. In particular, traditional cultures . . . find that the way to keep their members interested in maintaining their culture is to involve the young people in the marketization of the culture, especially as touristic spectacle, through their music, dances, food, clothing, and ornamental items. This allows the youths to have incomes and, thereby, the ability to participate in the larger global market. . . . Cultures that cannot succeed in translating some of their qualities into spectacles or commodities seem to vanish only to become museum items.

While Firat tends to reify culture in this passage, his observations foreshadow the two other themes I want to pursue: the way ethnic cultures and identities may become 'touristic', and the broader ways in which tourism and other aspects of culture are becoming 'dedifferentiated'.

Touristic ethnic cultures and identities

In his studies of Bali, the French anthropologist Michel Picard helps us recast the way we think about the relationship between tourism and ethnic culture. Historically, scholars have been accustomed to thinking of tourism as an external force, something like a moving billiard ball, acting upon a pre-existing object, ethnic culture. Typically, scholars have asked how the introduction of tourism 'affects' pre-existing cultures. In his careful analyses of cultural tourism on the Indonesian island of Bali, however, Picard (1990, p. 74) argues that it is no longer possible to view international tourism as something 'external' to Balinese culture. Rather, he suggests, Balinese culture has become a 'touristic culture', defined as 'the product of dialogic construction between the Balinese and their various interlocutors, in a context defined by the growing integration of Bali within the overlapping networks of the internal tourist industry and the Indonesian state'. Interaction with tourists and the tourist industry, Picard (1995) argues, has become such a central component in the definition of ethnic identity in Bali that the very presence of masses of tourists is commonly cited by Balinese as proof of the continued authenticity of their culture. Indeed, Picard (1996, p. 165) notes that the Balinese phrase for 'touristic culture' (*budaya wisata*) has shifted over time in the Balinese mass media from identifying a threat to Balinese society to describing a positive feature of contemporary Bali.

While nowhere nearly as infused with the tourist presence as the Balinese, the Chambri of Papua-New Guinea, who host boatloads of tourists in search of the 'primitive', appear to display similar tendencies. Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewertz (1989, p. 47; see also Gewertz and Errington 1991) describe a Chambri initiation rite in which the young

men are met with the challenge, 'Are you [man] enough to make carvings and place them in the men's house for the tourists to buy?' They report that the presence of tourists, even at initiation rites, is interpreted by the Chambri as demonstrating the power of ancestral knowledge to 'pull' tourists to the village, and that the presence of tourists is regarded 'not as testimony to the transformation of Chambri tradition but to its persistence and strength'. Some observers have delighted in the allegedly 'postmodern' ironies of seemingly primordial identities being constructed in dialogue with tourists and other outsiders. Constructions of ethnic identity on the basis of interactions with outsiders is hardly a new phenomenon, however, as Leach (1965), Barth (1969) and others demonstrated long ago. What is new is the presence of new categories of outsiders and the incorporation of new and uniquely touristic modes of visualization, experience and discourse into long-standing processes of cultural construction. It is this aspect of the relational nature of ethnicity that calls for new theorizing.

Few concepts have travelled so widely and with such effect as the anthropological concept of culture. Yet, as Joel Kahn (1993 p. 14) observes: 'It might be argued that the very birth of the modern anthropological idea of "other cultures" coincided with the final demise of genuinely discrete cultures in the context of cultural "globalization"'. Despite earlier expectations, and often fears, of global cultural uniformity, most researchers argue that globalization promotes homogenization and heterogeneity at the same time (for example, Clifford 1988; Friedman 1990; Tomlinson 1991; Robertson 1992; Hall 1993; Appadurai 1996). But as Kahn also points out elsewhere (1997), discourses of resistance to global uniformity and celebrations of local diversity are very much a part of global culture itself and of tourism as well. Ethnic and other forms of cultural diversity are increasingly articulated within and through the discourses of globalization and are mobilized through technologically advanced forms of media and communication. It is simply untenable to call any form of ethnic identification 'pre-modern' in the contemporary world.

As an *empirical* matter, it is obvious that the degree to which ethnic cultures are touristic cultures is highly variable, and relatively few are as deeply shaped by tourism as the Balinese.⁸ At the same time, in a globalizing world in which 'cultures' are no longer discrete, the kind of dialogic construction of ethnic identity that Picard identifies can be as much with imagined and quasi-touristic others as much as with actual tourists. Indeed, in the case of Pakistan, Linda Richter (1989, p. 149) has suggested that the comparative absence of tourists can undermine ethnic or national self-confidence in a world where tourist interest functions as a mode of validation of uniqueness and distinction.⁹

Constructions of ethnic identity in the context of tourism, including the designation of ethnic markers that can be marketed to tourists, are

particularly interesting *theoretically* because of their unusually highly self-conscious and transparent quality. In his classic study, Fredrik Barth (1969 p. 15) proposed that the critical focus of ethnic study should be 'the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses'. As the discussion so far suggests, the tourism industry has become an important player in processes of ethnic boundary determination, maintenance, and change. But studies of tourism and ethnicity also suggest that the marketing and commodification of ethnicity to tourists tend to make people much more self-conscious and reflexive about the 'cultural stuff' which they may have taken more or less for granted before.¹⁰ Partly this is generated by the demands of tourist marketing, of defining the ethnic product in competition with others. In addition, however, the very act of objectifying and externalizing ethnic culture makes it more visible and subject to reflection, debate, and conscious choice – the exercising of what Mary Waters (1990) has called *ethnic options*.

While the ethnic options Waters identifies in the American context tend to have a more limited meaning than in many other places, her term none the less serves nicely to remind us that the ethnic labels and markers that enter the tourism arena are neither automatic reflections of some pre-existing objective reality nor in themselves determinative of the 'cultural stuff' that will be marketed to tourists. Both the labels and the definition of their cultural content involve the exercise of ethnic options by a number of different actors in interaction – and sometimes in competition – with one another. By its nature, then, tourism both elicits and *makes particularly visible* processes of cultural representation and construction.

This self-conscious and unusually visible construction of ethnicity in the tourist context helps to shed light on two important theoretical issues in the field of race and ethnic relations. The first is the widely lamented but durable opposition between primordialist and instrumentalist approaches to ethnic identity and mobilization: between a conception of ethnicity as a force powerfully rooted in the past and experienced in the present as overpowering and ineffable, versus a conception that emphasizes its plasticity and its use as a resource in competition for scarce resources. 'This is a perennial debate about the nature of ethnic identity to which all students should be introduced', observes Richard Jenkins (1996, pp. 811–12), who then expresses frustration with the fact that 'the protagonists are usually misrepresented' and notes a variety of reasons 'for becoming impatient with this debate'. Hutchinson and Smith (1996, p. 8) similarly note that few scholars hold to one extreme or the other, but at the same time raise some question about whether attempts at theoretical synthesis are likely to be empirically helpful.

It seems to me that tenable versions of the primordialist position are in essence forms of the instrumentalist position, in the sense that they

acknowledge that ethnic memory operates in the present and is linked to the situation people find themselves in. As Hutchinson and Smith (1996, p. 8) observe: 'It is important to note here that "primordiality" is attributed by individuals to the ties of religion, blood, race, language, region, and custom; it does not inhere in these bonds'. The primordialist-instrumentalist duality survives mainly because it recapitulates the idealist-materialist dichotomy so deeply rooted in Western thought and social science. Much of Western social theory, at least since Marx, may be seen as an attempt to overcome this dichotomy, and yet it remains as durable as ethnicity (in its changing forms) itself.

While it would be foolish to believe that the study of touristic ethnicity is likely to resolve this long-standing debate, I do believe that it provides a case in which the interaction of 'instrumentalist' and 'primordialist' factors may be perceived unusually clearly. It also highlights the varying importance of these sorts of factors in different situations. On the instrumentalist side we have the material interests which various individuals and groups perceive in the promotion of certain ethnic identities, markers, boundaries, and practices in the context of tourism. 'Ethnic entrepreneurs' are entrepreneurs in a literal sense here, bringing 'ethnicity' to the market and seldom having to mask their ethnic agendas in the way that ethnic entrepreneurs in the political arena may have to. The calculus of gain and loss for different groups that is involved in different ethnic options is generally clearer than with the more ambiguous outcomes in the political realm. We can also see how 'instrumentalist' interests may change as tourism evolves, and how the resources available for the promotion of different ethnic agendas in the tourist context are always unequally distributed but may shift over time.

On the primordialist side, we see how existing material and ideal culture constrains the options of such entrepreneurs, since neither are all ethnic cultures equally marketable nor are all elements within any given ethnic culture.¹¹ Furthermore, the strength and content of shared myths, memories and symbols that Anthony Smith (1981; 1992; 1994) and others have drawn attention to can affect the likelihood of ethnicity becoming touristic. For example, Jean Michaud (1997) has found that a powerful sense of Hmong identity in Northern Thailand has limited both involvement in the tourism industry and the cultural impact of the trekking tourism that has developed. At the same time, it remains the case that it is the *contemporary construction and identification* of primordialist factors that is critical; there is ample reason to believe that these will not remain constant, either in the Hmong case or others. There is much room for both creativity and contention in identifying elements as 'traditional', 'authentic', or primordial, and for the promotion of particular 'tourist gazes' on these phenomena. Indeed, quite different gazes can be simultaneously promoted, for example, for foreign versus domestic tourists, or for foreign tourists from different places.¹²

This brings us to the second theoretical issue, one that links studies of tourism and of ethnicity quite directly: *authenticity*. As already noted, the early literature on touristic ethnicity tended to emphasize the way in which ethnic display was consciously constructed and marketed to tourists and therefore represented a departure from authentic ethnic culture. 'Staged authenticity' was designed to hoodwink the tourists, and its logic was assumed both to prevent tourists from seeing the 'real' culture and to lead towards the debasement and ultimately the destruction of ethnic culture itself.

Perhaps the most famous article along these lines was David Greenwood's (1977) report about how tourism had 'destroyed' the Basque festival known as the Alarde in the town of Fuenterrabia. In an implicit identification of commodification with cultural degradation, Greenwood (1977, p. 137) asserted: 'Making their culture a public performance took the municipal government a few minutes; with that act, a 350-year-old ritual died'. In the late 1980s, however, Stephanie Young found the Alarde to be alive and well; what had changed was the local meanings attached to it, thanks in part to changes in the municipal government: 'the men no longer march to celebrate a Spanish victory over the French, but rather to state their Basqueness' (quoted in Wilson 1993, p. 37). Greenwood (1989, p. 181) himself acknowledged at about the same time that the festival appeared now to be imbued 'with contemporary political significance as part of the contests over regional political rights'. What we see here is that authenticity, both for tourists and for local hosts, is always a matter of ongoing attribution, as tourist expectations change and as traditions are invented and reinvented. As Hanson (1989, p. 888) has commented in a related context, our task is 'not to strip away the invented portions of culture as unauthentic, but to understand the process by which they acquire "authenticity"'. Or, one might add, fail to do so. But the point is that changes associated with tourism cannot be assumed in advance to be unauthentic (for useful discussions of touristic authenticity, see Cohen 1982, 1988, 1989; Mac Cannell 1984; Redfoot 1984; Silver 1993; Gable and Handler 1996). As Handler and Linnekin (1984, p. 286) remind us, 'authenticity is always defined in the present'.

Timothy Oakes has observed that the touristic value of authenticity has led to a 'commerce of authenticity' among the ethnic minority villages in southwestern China, in which villages vie to be recognized as both culturally distant from the Han Chinese majority and as embodying the fullest development of a particular minority culture. China is unique in the way that the state gives official sanction to fifty-five ethnic minority groups and in the way that the state designates official tourist sites and determines whether specific areas are to be opened or closed to foreign tourism. Tourism, and its accompanying 'commerce of authenticity', are the latest of a long series of historical forces

to become appropriated by a local cultural discourse of identity and meaning. Conceiving of tourism as an adopted component of a local culture's internal dynamics of on-going change, rather than an uncontrollable force bearing down upon locals, yields a more accurate view of the situation and urges a reevaluation of the belief that tourism is simply another cog in the wheel of modernization's steamroller (Oakes 1997, pp. 66–67; see also 1992).

In similar fashion, Picard's (1997) analysis of Balinese 'culture' shows that many of its classic features, as identified by locals and outsiders alike, have been deeply shaped by the interaction between tourists and the Balinese for at least sixty years. Furthermore, efforts in recent years to stake off certain preserves of Balinese culture from tourist influence have frequently had the opposite effect. For example, in the late 1960s the Balinese authorities commissioned the creation of a new 'secular' welcome dance for tourists, to avoid the (assumed) desecration of sacred welcome dances originally intended for the gods by their presentation to tourists. The new, supposedly secular dance proved so popular, however, that it was soon imported back into the temples for sacred ritual purposes (Picard 1990). This and a variety of other efforts to throw up a barrier between the sacred or core elements of Balinese culture on the one hand and touristic forms of cultural expression on the other have failed partly because they have attempted to impose distinctions (for example, sacred/profane) alien to most Balinese but also because tourism has become a central thing that Balinese *do*. It is part of their culture, and part of their ethnic identity.¹³

The dedifferentiation of the tourist realm

In his classic study, *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell (1976) argued that the study of tourism offered a basic insight into the nature of post-industrial modernity. Tourism, MacCannell held, was fundamentally about the search for authentic experience in a world in which such experience seemed to be rapidly receding. It involved 'a ritual performed to the differentiations of society' (MacCannell 1976, p. 13). In his more recent work (MacCannell 1992) and more explicitly in John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), the argument is given a new twist. Tourism itself has become 'dedifferentiated' from a wide range of other social activities, as these latter have been increasingly recast in 'touristic' form. Echoing MacCannell in his assertion that 'tourism is significant in its ability to reveal aspects of normal practices which might otherwise remain opaque', Urry (1990, pp. 2, 82) goes on to argue that:

There has been a reversal of the long-term process of structural differentiation by which relatively distinct social institutions had come to

specialise in particular tasks or functions. Part of this reversal is that “culture” has come to occupy a more central position in the organisation of present-day societies, whose contemporary culture can be at least in part characterised as “postmodern.” Postmodernism involves a dissolving of the boundaries, not only between high and low cultures, but also between different cultural forms, such as tourism, art, education, photography, television, music, sport, shopping and architecture. . . . What I have termed the tourist gaze is increasingly bound up with and is partly indistinguishable from all sorts of other social and cultural practices. This has the effect, as “tourism” *per se* declines in specificity, of universalising the tourist gaze – people are much of the time “tourists” whether they like it or not.

The implications of these dedifferentiating processes have been most fully explored with respect to the ‘postmodern’ city. Sharon Zukin (1991; 1992), for example, focuses on how a new merging of circuits of economic and cultural capital undermines historically-rooted ‘vernacular’ landscapes and creates new ones characterized by liminality, staging, and fantasy – all commonly identified with tourist sites. In *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, Michael Sorkin (1992) and his contributors focus on despatialization, surveillance and simulation in their analyses of how theme-park characteristics are invading other areas of social life, an observation elaborated upon further in Mark Gottdiener’s (1997) *The Theming of America*. John Hannigan’s (1995) survey of the literature on the postmodern city links postmodern architecture to ludic, pleasure-oriented consumption; gentrification to élite value preferences which celebrate the consumption of (properly-managed) diversity; new types of urban fantasy-scapes to different types of theming; and tourism urbanization to the creation of tourist cities with distinctively new ecological, demographic and economic structures. Not only does the past distinction between tourism and other aspects of culture become increasingly blurred, but touristic modes of staging, visualization and experience become increasingly central to other areas of social life. Furthermore, these dedifferentiating trends are often linked directly to the expression, consumption and experience of ethnicity, both one’s own and others’.

These trends are symbolized by the third most visited tourist attraction in North America – after Disneyland and Disney World – the world’s largest (110 acre) shopping mall in West Edmonton, Canada, that contains an indoor lake, the world’s largest indoor amusement and water parks, a fantasy-themed hotel, over 100 restaurants and close to a thousand stores, dozens of theatres and nightclubs, and replicas of ethnic and natural sites from around the world. The imitation of ‘Disneyzone’ principles in an increasing array of institutions and sites prompts Hannigan (1995, p. 186) to observe: ‘It is possible, therefore, to speak of the

“Disneyfication” of the contemporary city.’ Indeed, a recent analysis of the transformation of one of Singapore’s oldest attractions, Tiger Balm Gardens, into ‘the world’s only Chinese mythological theme park’, renamed Dragon World and fitted out with rides and with lasers and state-of-the-art technology to allow ‘hair-raising encounters with the Chinese spirit world’, notes that both the feasibility study and the designing of the transformed park were carried out by US firms associated with Disney (Teo and Yeoh 1997, pp. 199–200).¹⁴

These examples are suggestive of how broadly integrated ‘ethnicity’ is in ‘postmodern’ trends of cultural theming, simulation and consumption. ‘Ethnic’ becomes a signifier of something interesting to see, promote, and experience locally and afar: ethnic restaurants, ethnic neighbourhoods, ethnic markets, ethnic museums, ethnically-themed parks and sites, etc. Just as partaking in tourism became part of an emergent sense of Britishness in the late nineteenth century (Urry 1990, p. 26), so now partaking in the ethnic diversity of one’s culture becomes almost a civic responsibility, and for some, part of one’s ‘identity work’ (Lu and Fine 1995, p. 539). The US President, Dwight Eisenhower, once said that he did not care what religion American citizens had, as long as they had one. In an age which celebrates diversity and multiculturalism, it has become almost a civic duty to have an ethnicity as well as to appreciate that of others.¹⁵

The key empirical issue suggested by Urry’s analysis of dedifferentiation involves the degree to which ethnicity itself has become touristic, in the sense that the experience of being a member of an ethnic group and of interacting with others acquires attributes historically associated with the realm of tourism, and what this means in practice. In his article, ‘From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity’, Zygmunt Bauman (1996) offers some useful points of departure. While the tourist once inhabited the margins of ‘properly social’ action, Bauman writes, the tourist now moved to its centre. The activity of tourists is purposive and oriented towards the experience of difference. However, difference is experienced in a domesticated, packaged form, and it is primarily *aesthetic*, structured and evaluated by aesthetic criteria. And while tourist is defined by having a home to return to, home too becomes increasingly experienced in a touristic mode.

In terms of the touristic experience of ethnicity, several tendencies can be drawn out from these observations. First, ethnicity becomes increasingly an object of purposive, self-conscious consumption of commodities and experiences produced for sale in markets. Second, both ethnic commodities and experiences are increasingly simulated in ways long characteristic of tourism: through theming, staged authenticity, and recreations. Ethnic tradition, as Gary Fine (1989, p. 271) has observed in a slightly different context, is portrayed in ways acceptable to modern sensibilities, rather along the lines of the motto of the Society for Creative Anachronism, which seeks to recreate the Middle Ages not as they were,

but *as they should have been*. Thirdly, ethnicity becomes the object of a socially-structured 'gaze', constructed out of a complex interaction between a variety of insiders and a variety of outsiders. Finally, touristic ethnic experience becomes part of an ever-wider range of social activities and sites, from malls to casinos, from civic education to festivals.

In some countries this touristification of ethnicity is perhaps most evident in the creation of ethnic theme parks, in which the ethnic diversity of the nation is both celebrated and interpreted within an official nationalist discourse of 'unity in diversity'. Ethnic theme parks have proved to be major attractions for both domestic and international tourists in such countries as Indonesia and China. Indeed, China has even invested in the establishment of such a theme park, 'Splendid China', with a fairly strong emphasis on 'ethnic minorities', only a few miles from Disney World in Florida.¹⁶ Studies of ethnic theme parks indicate that like ethnic tourism generally but even more so, they tend to select ethnic markers that are easily visible and commoditized, most notably architecture, ritual artifacts and staged performances.

It is not just the ethnicity of others that can be consumed touristically in an increasingly wide array of forms and places. People increasingly consume their *own* ethnicity in touristic forms. Partly this reflects the relentless march of global commodification, which tourism is more a part of than a cause. But as the boundaries between consumption and tourism blur in the process of dedifferentiation, the commodification of ethnicity takes on a touristic form. Jocelyn Linnekin (1997), for example, describes the assertion of essentialized ethnicities in Hawaii through T-Shirts with ethnic logos, sold in tourist markets primarily to locals.

It has long been recognized that a considerable amount of domestic cultural tourism constitutes a form of national pilgrimage: Americans affirm a sacred link with their national heritage through visits to Philadelphia, Williamsburg, Gettysburg, Washington DC, Boston and so on. In a multicultural age the sites of pilgrimage appear to be extending to places and events that celebrate the contribution of American ethnic groups as well: the new Museum of the American Indian, African-American museums, the Holocaust Museum, local ethnic festivals, etc. At the city of Philadelphia's visitor centre, one need only press a button indicating either one's own ethnic identity or one that one wishes to explore, and a computerized itinerary emerges. Just as the mass media and other Americanizing influences undermine the distinctiveness of ethnic culture in the family, so more and more parents rely on touristic places and events to teach and demonstrate ethnic identification and pride.

Similar processes are at work in European societies, in Great Britain often under the label of 'heritage' (Hewison 1987; 1989). Nationalist and ethnic identities often exist in uneasy balance at these sites, for example, those discussed by Susan Pitchford in her analysis of Welsh heritage sites. Pitchford (1995, pp. 42–3) notes, for example, that the promotion of

Wales as an ethnically distinct, bilingual region within the United Kingdom goes down considerably better with foreign tourists than with English ones, and that the 'culture card' is played much more cautiously in English markets.

In a discussion centring on Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in Louisiana, folklorist Barry Ancelet (1992, p. 165) comments that a byproduct of the kind of ethnic tourism that the park represents is that

local people get a long-overdue chance to learn about themselves. . . . Cajuns who go [to] places like Vermilionville and Jean Lafitte learn about their history and culture alongside visitors from the outside, which at its best could be just the kind of empowerment at the grass-roots level that folklorists interested in cultural equity seem to hope for.

Indeed, one analysis (Esman 1984) credits tourism as being a major factor in the survival of Cajun identity, and similar claims have been made elsewhere. An important issue here is how the touristification of identity affects not only the strength but the content and meaning of ethnic identification. Lest this sounds like a uniquely American issue where Euro-American ethnic identity is largely 'symbolic' (Gans 1979; 1994), it is worth quoting a Javanese couple speaking about Mini-Indonesia, Indonesia's state-run cultural theme park: 'We go there regularly. It's less of a hassle than going back to Central Java' (quoted in Pember-ton 1994, p. 249). Here a tourist park seems to have become the preferred means of experiencing ethnic origins and culture.

Looking at the issues posed by dedifferentiation processes more *theoretically*, two points stand out. The first is that while ethnic identity is becoming 'dedifferentiated' from other arenas of life, this is basically a recasting of a basic fact long-recognized by most ethnicity researchers: that ethnic identities are commonly constructed in interaction with and reaction to other groups and institutions. The intersection between tourism and ethnicity is interesting and important because it provides new incentives and forms, but the interactive nature of the process is not new. Indeed, for several reasons I have outlined in this article, studying touristic ethnicity may help us to understand these universal processes of identity construction better.

Cultural dedifferentiation in the context of tourism also alters the role of the state in defining and managing ethnic diversity. The central role of the state in both eliciting and constraining processes of ethnic identification and modes of ethnic organization has been particularly stressed in the literature of the past decade or so (Yinger 1985; Williams 1989; Calhoun 1993; Toland 1993; Brown 1994). By and large that literature has stressed the state's efforts – sometimes successful, sometimes not – to domesticate or literally kill off ethnicity (Van den Berghe 1992a). As Toland (1993, p. 4) puts it in a recent anthology:

The history of state building has shown us that those in power have tried, with little success, to eradicate ethnicity through genocide, bury it under accusations of “tribalism,” discredit it with the mindframe of “modernization,” relegate it to local rather than national political arenas, and until recently, generally wish it away through the silence of such organizations as the United Nations.

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina showed that certain states and insurgent groups were quite prepared to destroy not only the tourist trade but centuries-old tourist sites in pursuit of chauvinistic ‘national’ and ethnic goals. But in less polarized circumstances, tourism often acts to complicate and modify state goals and interests. On the one hand, as Leong (1989; 1997) has observed, a natural affinity exists between the nation-state and tourism in terms of a shared interest in representing a place as unique and attractive. Because of this, the state’s interest in tourism is as much political as economic. On the other hand, the most evident and most easily marketed forms of cultural uniqueness are often the lifestyles and artifacts of sub-national ethnic groups – often ones considered ‘backward’ by the dominant ethnic majority. Indeed, even the ethnic markers touristically identified with majority groups are often marginal or ‘pre-modern’ ones (Simpson 1993). States everywhere attempt to resolve these tensions through discourses and practices that attempt to reconcile nationhood and ethnic diversity, generally by subordinating or domesticating the latter in some way (Kipp 1993). However, the very efforts of the state to do so may inadvertently empower ethnic groups to assert their interests and identities in new ways. A variety of case-studies attest to the potential for such unintended consequences.

Touristic concerns have become part of both official and popular discourses of ethnicity. The Indonesian state, for example, launched a Tourism Consciousness Campaign in preparation for Visit Indonesia Year (1991) that reached all corners of the country. As Adams (1997) reports:

The Tourism Consciousness Campaign prompted even villagers off the beaten track in Outer Indonesia to consider their own touristic charms and attracting powers. For instance, as a result of this campaign, villagers I spoke with on the remote island of Alor enthusiastically speculated that their own dances, architecture and scenic landscapes would be of interest not only to foreign but domestic tourists. Noting their “uniqueness” in Indonesia, they pointed out that their small island offered a wider array of languages and cultures than most other Indonesian islands. Since “uniqueness,” indigenous architecture and dance are all key markers of touristic marketability in Indonesia, it is clear that even the Alorese have absorbed the touristic rhetoric.

Furthermore, touristic rhetoric is often utilized as a strategy for ethnic acceptance and inclusion. Touristic rhetoric and display have been shown to facilitate incorporation of ethnic practices into the official discourse of Indonesian culture (Hutajulu 1995), and to provide the basis for affirming otherwise-rejected ethnic practices. For example, the Torajan Christian Church has maintained a ban on 'pagan' ancestor effigies known as *tau-tau*, which have proved to be a major international tourist attraction. Government sponsorship of tourism has been mobilized in opposition to this ban, as in the following statement by a Torajan nobleman, quoted by Adams (1993, p. 42): 'The Church is going against the national government's goals to preserve culture and tradition. Forbidding tau-taus will wipe out Torajan culture – but according to the government's tourism development plans, we must preserve our cultural traditions!'

Touristically-important groups can sometimes use both their economic importance and their international recognition to assert their claims against the state and other institutions and, sometimes, gain real concessions. States find themselves caught between the desire to assert a single national culture and the benefits of marketing ethnic diversity. As a web of economic interests grows up around this major industry, both the state's desire and the state's ability to domesticate sub-national ethnicity may weaken. No universal generalizations about outcomes are possible, but almost everywhere ethnicity, state cultural policy, and tourism are increasingly linked.

Summary

We have gazed on ethnicity in the tourist context from three different angles. First, we have explored how tourism, both domestic and international, can be an important force restructuring ethnic relations. Second, we have seen how it is no longer possible in many places to see tourism as something outside of ethnic culture; its importance is such that it has to be seen as an integral part of the process by which ethnicity is represented and constructed. Third, we have noted some ways in which the boundaries between tourism and other social and cultural activities have been increasingly eroded as part of a broader process of dedifferentiation, and how one consequence of this has been the linking of ethnicity with touristic modes of discourse and experience. I have sought to make the case for looking at these intersections of ethnicity and tourism on both empirical and theoretical grounds: empirically, because tourism has become pervasive in becoming the world's largest industry; and, theoretically, because the construction of ethnic identities and relations in the tourist context is often particularly transparent.

In colonial Nigeria, locals who had travelled to England were referred to as 'beentos': they had journeyed to the political and cultural centre (Hannerz 1992). Today, prominently-displayed souvenirs in the homes of

more and more people around the world attest to a similar pride in having 'been to' somewhere else and having been moved by the experience. But the world is not only increasingly full of 'beentos'; adapting the Nigerian colloquialism, we can add that the world is also increasingly full of 'beenseens', people self-conscious about the fact that they are gazed upon by others. In this context, the study of touristic ethnicity may offer insights into the fate of ethnic identities in a globalizing world.

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Notes

1. For a typical example of this sort of analysis, one which accuses tourism of demeaning and distorting culture; inciting the pillage of artwork and historical artifacts; leading to the degeneration of classical and popular dancing; profaning and vulgarizing places of worship and perverting religious ceremonies; and creating a sense of inferiority and cultural demoralization which 'fans the flames of anti-development', see Bugnicourt (1977a; 1977b). Turner and Ash's *The Golden Hordes* (1976) is a popular statement of the tourism as destroyer of culture position. For more contemporary examples, see Gabriel (1994, pp. 145-49), and Munt (1994). A balanced assessment with a useful typology may be found in Doğan (1989).

2. My argument here has some parallels to that made about tourism and geography by S. Britton (1991), who argues that the study of tourism is particularly enlightening for understanding the social construction of space and place, and how this in turn is incorporated into economic processes.

3. Other discussions of culture brokers and ethnic middlemen include Cohen (1982) and Eastman (1995). In an interesting twist, Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1994) note that in East Africa, Kenyan guides and drivers take Western tourists not only to gaze on the 'primitive' Maasai, but also on Europeans maintaining archaic colonial lifestyles. Tourism here not only structures ethnic relations, but provides a legitimate arena for the expression of identities that in other contexts are frowned upon or suppressed. For a similar point about Hawaiian religious notions, see Buck (1993, p. 188).

4. Urry's concept of the 'tourist gaze' is intended to draw attention to the fact that what tourists look at and see is to a significant degree socially organized and constructed by the tourism industry, broadly defined.

5. The standard estimate is that there are four to five domestic tourists for every international one (Heath and Wall 1992, p. 3), an estimate that appears to be confirmed in a variety of countries, including 'less-developed' ones.

6. For an interesting twist on this, see the witty and insightful discussion by Jean-Paul Dumont (1984) about how he and his wife came to be viewed as a tourist attraction by the locals on the island in the Philippines where they were doing ethnographic research, even to the point that their authenticity as Americans was staged by locals, who in turn adopted characteristic touristic stances (for instance, liminality) in their interactions with them.

7. These data are derived from World Tourist Organization (1996) on the World Wide Web (as at January 1997). However, since that date the WTO has reorganized its Web Site, and these data are no longer available free. Apparently one must register and pay to gain access to WTO statistical information. A copy of the relevant table on the Web Site at the date at which it was available may be obtained from the author on request.

8. An interesting contrasting case is described by Jean Michaud (1997) in which Hmong villagers have successfully limited the impact of twelve years of trekking tourism. Traditional agriculture remains the most desirable and rewarding activity for most villagers, and most tourist work has been left to marginal villagers, particularly the opium-addicted. Michaud finds the explanation of this response in the resilient ethnic identity and social organization of the Hmong, ironically in some ways reinforced by trekking tourism itself.

9. For a discussion of the shift in the tourism literature towards a more positive view of tourism's effects on ethnic culture and identity, see Wood (1993). For examples of such analyses for one ethnic group, the Sherpa of Nepal, see Fisher (1990); Stevens (1991); and Adams (1992).

10. For a nice illustration of this point, see the analyses of Toraja ethnic identity in Volkman (1984; 1990). Largely because of tourism, Volkman (1984, p. 166) writes:

The construction of identity has shifted away from boundaries and toward the content of identity. . . . The process of reformulating Toraja identity is acutely self-conscious and reflective, as Toraja attempt the uncertain task of locating these assumptions in a complex, changing world that now stretches from the shipyards of Irian Jaya to the banks and offices of Jakarta.'

11. In terms of Stephen Cornell's (1996) stimulating attempt to go beyond the instrumentalist/primordialist debate and specify the variable bases of ethnic identity, tourism offers a particularly clear case both of 'how content matters' and of how the bases of ethnic identity may shift over time, as participation in the tourism industry potentially redefines all three of the dimensions he identifies (interest, institutions, and culture).

12. Mark Liechty (1996, p. 112) discusses this phenomenon for Kathmandu, which is presented to tourists from neighbouring India as a modern, glitzy, anything-goes gambling and consumer haven, while for Western tourists, it is the lack of modernity and Eastern spirituality that are stressed.

13. None the less, in his recent work, Picard (1997) has taken pains to emphasize that the role of tourism has to be placed in the context of a variety of long-range historical forces that have also shaped Balinese self-identity and Balinese relationships to others.

14. It is worth noting that Teo and Yeoh report that the 'Americanizing/Disneyfication of the park' was not successful. Singaporeans resisted the level of commodification and missed the simpler, idiosyncratic features of the original villa and gardens. The park's name has been changed back to Tiger Balm Gardens and parts of the original garden landscape are being restored. The historical focus will be more on the Aw family that originally created it. See Teo and Yeoh (1997).

15. This issue is complicated, however, by the confusion of race and ethnicity in the United States and elsewhere. 'White' and 'black' are often treated as ethnic labels, and it remains an open question whether the emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity will accentuate or attenuate tendencies towards racial categorization and pan-ethnic lumping. For a discussion of the importance of state policies in this process, see Wood (1997).

16. Interestingly, the park has provided a vehicle for protests against Chinese government policies towards Tibetan and other ethnic minorities by US-resident minority group members and their US supporters. See Rohter (1994).

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