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Jordan Nelson
Portland State University

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Issues of Authenticity in Small Scale Tourism: A study of the McDisney Experience

by

Jordan Nelson

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Thesis Adviser

Stephen Frenkel

Portland State University

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Abstract

The small scale tourist industry began as a rejection of mass tourism and the consumerist ideals associated with it. The search for authentic experience and authentic culture has become synonymous with small scale tourism and backpacker culture. The rejection of mass tourism typically results in a more culture centered approach to tourism which entails more interactions with locals in hopes of an authentic cultural experience. However, in this article I will discuss the issues that arise with the commoditization of culture and the people of that culture when the search for authenticity is informed by western ideals in the case of Central America and the Caribbean. The inequality between tourist and local plays a role in the commoditization. I will also discuss the impact of western culture on tourist destinations which often manifests in inauthentic McDisney towns, stripped of culture and instead cater to the tourist demands. Ultimately, the search for authenticity has too many contradictions embedded in it making it nearly impossible to attain.

Introduction

While working on a farm in Costa Rica, I spent my first weekend in the nearby town of Puerto Viejo de Limon, where I enjoyed a sunny day on the beach and then relaxed at a local bar with live music. They played songs that would be well known to tourists like Bob Marley and the Wailers' "No Woman No Cry" and Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit". The next Saturday, flyers advertised the same bar so we returned. The same band was performing and as one song came to an end, I was able to anticipate the next song like a familiar playlist on my iTunes. In fact, they played the same set every Saturday to a new crowd of tourists. The band was not the only thing on repeat, the whole town performed like a real life *Groundhog Day* experience. The same young men loitered around the main strip of town selling cocaine and marijuana. The same teenagers waited at the towns' bus stop to hand out flyers advertising some deal for a tourist attraction or bar. All the events and places catered towards the desires of partying tourists in search of an authentic experience along with sex, drugs and a good time. The whole town was a McDisneyland experience where the locals played a part expected by tourists who fund the operation.

That experience in Costa Rica made me wonder if Puerto Viejo is an isolated tourist experience or if it is common across all of Central America and the Caribbean. The majority of tourists visiting small scale tourist destinations chose this location to avoid the unauthentic mass tourist experience. Can the search for authenticity through small scale tourism lead to an authentic experience? That is the question my paper will explore.

There are many contradictions involved with a tourist's search for authenticity. First, because tourism is an opportunity for economic growth and tourists are the source of income, experiences cater often to the tourist. The more tourists a town has, the more the town resembles

a McDisneyland version such as in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica. Here, McDonalds represents the standardization of a product or experience to ensure customer satisfaction and Disneyland represents the packaged and controlled experience (Gottdiener 55). Most tourist destinations provide a standardized and packaged experience that the tourists believe to be authentic, even when the authenticity they seek is not authentic at all. Many tourists do not differentiate between the culture of Guatemala from Honduras or from Puerto Rico. These countries each have a different culture and those cultures vary within the country as well.

When a tourist is searching for a certain idea of culture it may lead locals to perform the role expected of them; in some case that means creating a party environment or in others a stereotypical cultural identity. As long as tourists have preconceived notions informed by western ideals of culture in Central America and the Caribbean the experience will never grow into an authentic experience. Ultimately it is impossible to find an authentic experience by searching for authenticity since it implies a search for a perfect version of an authentic culture.

Importance of the Tourist Industry

While tourism was originally reserved for only the wealthy, since the end of World War II it has become an increasingly global and industrial economy, allowing more of the population worldwide to travel. Before the 19th century, the European grand tour was the precursor to modern travel. As travel became easier with railways, accessible ships and eventually planes an increasing number has the mobility to travel (Gyr). Today, tourism is no longer reserved for the wealthy. An increasing number of the population takes part in the tourist industry, and the numbers skyrocketed in the last 20 years.



(UNWTO World Tourism Barometer)

By 2012, the number of tourists worldwide that traveled internationally surpassed 1 billion for the first time with 1.035 billion up from 980 million total in 2011. The World Tourism Organization expects the number of international tourist arrivals to continue to increase with an expected average growth of 3.8% from 2010 to 2020. Of the 1.035 billion international tourist arrivals of 2012, 51% traveled to Europe, 23% to Asia and the Pacific, 16% to the Americas, 5% to Africa and 5% to the Middle East (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer).

Approximately 74 million international tourists arrived in Latin America in 2010 and in 2009 international tourism receipts reached over 58 billion US\$ (“UNWTO and the Inter-American Development Bank”). As of 2009, the tourist industry made up 6.6% of the GDP in Latin America and accounted for 6.4% of direct and indirect employment. The tourist industry represents 8.9% of exports of goods and services in Latin America (“Tourism Growth” *Inter-*

American Development Bank). Rates of tourism in Central America and the Caribbean continue to increase. For example, in 2001 1.1 million tourists entered Costa Rica which doubled within the decade with 2.2 million tourists entering Costa Rica in 2011. In Nicaragua, fewer than 500,000 tourists entered the country in 2001 which more than doubled in the next decade to over 1 million in 2011. Even in countries with fewer numbers of tourists entering the country, like Honduras and Belize, the numbers are still steadily increasing (“Data Search Report”). The increasing rates show a growing industry which means opportunity for development and economic growth. With a constant increase of tourism rates in most of the countries, it is even more important to consider the way the countries’ tourism industries are developing and being practiced.

Tourism represents an especially enticing source of economic growth since neoliberal policy enforced through the free trade market leaves smaller, less developed countries with fewer economic opportunities. A smaller country cannot easily protect its smaller industries against global economic forces. This problem encourages smaller countries to develop alternative, non-industrial economies like tourism by tapping into the “cultural market” where unique cultures and tropical locations can be marketed to tourists. The cultural market advertises anything from exotic foods and artisanal pieces to friendly natives to exotic prostitutes (Scher 8). The marketing of the ‘other’ and the “exotic” comes from a long tradition of orientalism as described by Edward Said. Merrill describes the indulgence in finding and attaining the “other” as a continuation of the US control as an empire; “Mayan pottery prominently displayed on the fireplace mantel or Cuban cigars lit up after dinner symbolically and materially conveyed U.S. affluence and domination in world affairs, “(258).

During the colonial era, the myths and lure of the oriental “other” lumped all of the “others” together as the same. James Bate, a nineteenth century travel writer, describes the scenery and environment in Mexico as so similar to Palestine or Egypt that he could have been convinced he were in either country (Merrill 226). For many tourists that mentality is the same today as Mexico is often assumed to share the same culture as Honduras, even though the culture varies greatly from country to country and from region to region in the same country (Scher 9). The lack of knowledge of the varying cultures makes it difficult for countries to market their particular culture to tourists. This encouraged many governments to try and differentiate some aspect of their culture to draw more visitors (Scher 9). The more unique of an attraction a country can provide the more tourists they will attract which will improve their economy. The search for the “other” also implies the search for an authentic “other”.

The study of authenticity

In order to discuss issues of authenticity, the term authenticity must be defined in regards to tourism. Tourists often search for an authentic or real experience so that they are able to find their authentic self. Something authentic is believed to be real and worthy of belief. Often the search for authenticity when traveling is akin to searching for knowledge of a “real” self along with a “real” world (Wang 351). Within the context of the study of tourism, authenticity studies center around two major arguments; the commoditization of culture leads to the culture losing authenticity and that the commoditization of culture does not always lead to in-authenticity but rather culture is fluid and always evolving. In 1973, MacCannell was one of the first scholars to begin discussing issues of authenticity in relation to tourism, attributing the search for

authenticity to the original tours which were pilgrimages. People go on pilgrimages to tour a site of religious importance and in that tour they sought the authentic experience of being a part of the site of importance. The purpose of a pilgrimage and a tour are the same; to take part in something authentic. Tourists are trying to visit an authentic space of cultural, historical or social importance (MacCannell, 593).

This ever increasing desire to find the authentic has led to an increase in tourism rates which has led to more dependence on the tourist industry in Central America and the Caribbean. As demand increases supply also increases, thus as the desire for an authentic experience increases and provides opportunity for income, more locals are performing the authentic ideal as the tourist imagines it should be. This leads to commoditization of places, cultures and the commoditization of people. Certain aspects of a culture, typically more colorful costumes or artwork, become the most focused on by tourists and are seen as authentic.



The postcard above advertises the traditional, colorful dress of the Mayan women in Guatemala, weaving textiles for tourists to purchase (Ivanescu). The more colorful and recognizable as the “other” an image is, the more it is advertised as a representation of a culture. Some items like the

textiles the women produce are made for the tourists so they begin to look like the stereotypical image the tourist seeks, and no longer is an authentic item for the producer. As they lose meaning for locals, tourists continue to believe in the authenticity of the item or ritual creating a staged authenticity, where the locals perform a staged idea of authenticity for the tourists to consume. “It is a staged back region, a kind of living museum for which we have no analytical terms” (MacCannell 596).

Although Erik Cohen agrees that traditional activities and art become commodities for tourist consumption he argues that this does not necessarily lessen the authenticity of the tradition but rather creates an “emergent authenticity”. Tourists may desire an authentic experience so the locals revive an ancient custom to package and sell yet over time this revival is considered authentic by the locals and is embraced as a part of their culture (Cohen 1988, 379). Thus, culture based on Cohen’s work is always evolving and authenticity is not as black and white as MacCannell believes. If a “staged authentic” activity for tourists becomes a part of local culture, is it no longer staged? When does it become authentic and when is commoditization of peoples and traditions solely inauthentic?

The “untourist”

The rejection of mass tourism or “untourism” is at the heart of the small scale tourism industry. The untourism marketing approach rejects mass tourism and encourages a more authentic experience;

“Mass tourism is about infrastructure (big hotels, souvenir shops, garish promotions and the fast buck) Whereas untourism is about caring for people, maintaining unspoiled environments, authenticity and value-for-money...If untourists won't go to places created solely to soak up the tourist dollar, preferring to see and do what the locals do...there will be less and less room to spoil what is natural, authentic and/or special about place” (Fursich 211).

Travelers attempting to follow the untourist's ideals search for the most authentic and out of the way experience as a rejection of mass tourism and its capitalist agenda.

As tourists choose small scale tourists options they often choose to backpack and stay in hostels for the simplest and farthest removed from the inauthentic, all-inclusive experience. The image that comes to mind is traveling cheaply and living like the locals in order to receive the most authentic experience. However, in most cases the backpack a tourist carries cost more than the locals' monthly salary. The flight to reach one's destination costs more than many locals could ever afford. And most importantly, the tourists' temporary reprieve from their more comfortable first world life is simply that; temporary. At any point they can choose to return home and resume their lives (Fursich 215).

On the other hand, the majority of locals in these developing countries have less mobility than the tourist. They live in the destination where the backpacker comes to temporarily rough it or get "back to basics". They also have far less opportunity to travel especially to reciprocate and travel to the tourists' home country. The tourist seeking an authentic experience looks to small scale tourism to find the "real" world through authentic experiences with locals. Is it possible for an authentic experience to arise from such an unequal experience where tourists take a quick peek into the lives of locals who are at a clear economic disadvantage? (Fursich 211). The idea of living simply and among locals is negated when the cost of everything on a travelers backpack costs more than some locals' wages and the tourists' visit is only temporary making the relationship entirely unequal.

Attempting to find an authentic experience through "back to basic" means and learning from local culture has contradictions embedded in the very concept. These are mostly poor

regions where authentic lifestyles are a result of inequalities from the colonial history and neoliberal policies. Yet tourists view the simplistic lifestyle as the ultimate get away not as a result of structural injustice.

Due to the economic superiority of the tourist, their desire for the authentic often results in the locals catering to their expectations. In many cases, working in the tourist industry provides more economic opportunities for locals than other sectors in the economy. The problem with catering to the typically western tourist ideas of tourism and travel is that the idea is one sided. Narratives of American culture and western culture as a whole are far more plentiful than narratives of the Caribbean and Central American cultures. The “single story” is a reality many non-western cultures suffer since there is typically only one or two aspects of a culture portrayed through media and the arts (Adichie). The Caribbean and Central America suffer from this since tourists often lump the ideas of culture together and reject any non-stereotypical form of culture. Just as the media chooses one aspect of a culture to portray, tourist companies also do the same by marketing the most popular or well known aspect of a culture. So when a tourist reads a pamphlet advertising a certain style of dress or certain behavior and beliefs, that is what the tourist believes to be the most authentic and what they search for, “Tourists authenticity is not necessarily determined by gaining a genuine appreciation for another culture but rather by verifying a marketed representation of it,” (Silver 303). If the tourists expect to find the singular vision that a tourism brochure portrays then they will not find the multifaceted culture that a region has to offer but instead a very singular version.

Case Studies of Culture as Stereotype

The marketing of different cultures as unique and capitalization on those cultures can manifest in many different ways. For example, governments promote ecotourism and their nature preserves like in Costa Rica or a unique aspect of indigenous culture like traditional textile weaving in Guatemala or more modern culture of reggae music in Jamaica.



Map of Bay Islands in Honduras (“Honduras

Maps”)

In Roatan, Honduras, a popular tourist destination for its coral reefs, the Garifuna community has seen their culture become a commodity. The Garifuna community is an Afro-Caribbean indigenous community which is primarily settled in the small community of Punta Gorda, located just off of the typical tourist trail (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 136).

Although the Garifuna are a minority culture in Honduras, their culture has become a part of the more mainstream indigenous folklore of Honduras. Certain aspects of Garifuna dress, dance and stories are marketed to tourists but only through stereotypical visuals that would be recognized by tourists. This developing and marketing of their culture is done without their consent or help (136).



Above is an image of the Garifuna which is displayed on the main page of the Honduran travel website; “Let’s Go Honduras”. The Mayan culture is explicitly mentioned on the site, and the Garifuna communities of the Bay islands go unmentioned.

As tourism has increased in the Bay Islands, the most visited areas have become more developed and transformed into tourist destinations. Even though the culture of the Garifuna is used to attract tourists to the islands, Punta Gorda remains mostly unvisited and as a result underdeveloped. The Garifuna community does not benefit through development nor do they receive any of the tourist income despite people commoditizing their culture. The tourism department uses their culture to attract tourism but the village and locals are seen as “too primitive and thus incapable of full participation in the modern world” (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 137). This strategy capitalizes on the community’s culture but does not allow the town to develop into a sustainable tourist destination. Many of the Garifuna express a desire to develop the tourist industry in their village and also a desire to market their own culture so that it does not become morphed into a stereotypical version that is describes by an outsider (151).

Erik Cohen describes the trend to create stereotypical images that are recognizable by the majority of tourists in commoditization of ethnic arts. To participate in the growing small scale

tourism market, many indigenous groups have begun morphing their traditional arts into a more mainstream version which is influenced by the image of the tourist (Cohen 1993, 5). “The commercialization of ethnic crafts involves a process of gradual adaptation of the products to the needs, tastes, and preferences of the different segments of the market” (5). One trend specifically, is the tendency to revert back to ancient forms and images which the tourist will typically recognize more than the images that are specific to the indigenous group who are producing the art (3). The indigenous group producing the art often has no cultural connection to the ancient forms but the tourist still purchases the art thinking that it is an authentic representation.

The premise of the search for an authentic culture is a contradiction since it involves commoditizing culture for the tourist consumption where the tourists have an upper hand economically. Since the tourists are typically wealthy and the locals are not, they are dependent on the tourist economy and produce cultural products that are in demand by tourists. This relationship allows the tourists’ desires and western ideas of the locals’ culture guide the transformation of once authentic aspects of culture to become stereotypes of that culture. The more a culture transforms into a stereotype the more the experience transforms into a generic, McDisney experience. However, the majority of tourists still view the transformed cultural representation as authentic since the stereotypes are often what the tourist is searching for under the impression that it is authentic.

The Transformation of Place

Preconceived western notions of culture result in altered representations of culture but the western culture itself also leads to a transformation of tourist destinations. A prime example of a tourist destination transforming into a McDisney experience is Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, Costa Rica. Puerto Viejo is a small town located on the southern Caribbean coast of Costa Rica and has a diverse population of Afro-Caribbean, indigenous and ticos or Costa Ricans of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent. The travel website, *Anywhere Costa Rica* even includes “hippyesque counterculture” in the mix of cultures in Puerto Viejo to account for the large number of travelers and expatriates. Only a few decades ago, it was a sleepy town that attracted only a few avid surfers, but after word spread the town has become a well known party town in Costa Rica (“Puerto Viejo de Talamanca” *Lonely Planet*). The entire town has grown in the image of a tourist destination where the main commodity is not culture or even the waves of Salsa Brava but sun, sex, sand and drugs. The town has become marketed as a party town with Rasta influence. The *Lonely Planet* website description envelopes the changing town by explaining, “The scene can get downright hedonistic, attracting dedicated revelers who arrive to marinate in ganja and guaro”.



This map shows Puerto Viejo on the southern Caribbean coast of Costa Rica (“Travel to Puerto Viejo”).



The image above is an example of the flyers that bars hand out to English speaking tourists when they arrive in town. Every night, each bar offers some sort of free drink special to entice tourists to spend their evening at the bar.

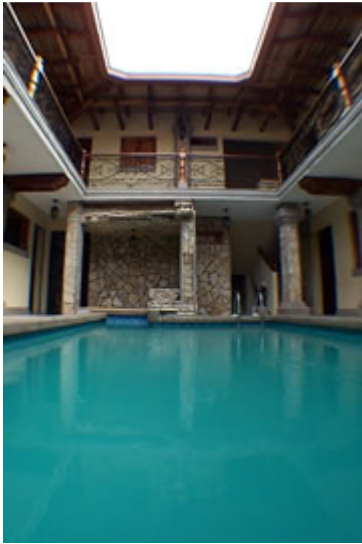
Although the town has developed due to tourism, the majority of the town off the main road is largely underdeveloped. The main road facing the beach is occupied by foreign owned businesses and hostels housing tourists. Most locals live on the outskirts of the main area in run down homes. The local owned businesses are also typically relegated to the side roads where most tourists do not venture, even though the authentic Caribbean food can only be found at the displaced locally owned sodas which are smaller less formal restaurants. The restaurants on the main road cater to tourists providing food from sushi to Italian yet not one of the major restaurants serve typical Costa Rican or Caribbean dishes (“Puerto Viejo de Talamanca” *Lonely Planet*). The foreign owned restaurants also employ mostly other foreigners especially westerners to interact with tourists. This transformation of place and cultural orientation has happened in many other tourist destinations (Vandegrift 787).

Many small towns transform into a tourist destination because a few tourists find the area uninhabited by other tourists and revel in the authenticity of an untouched community. Fast forward a decade and word of mouth to a few friends has turned into articles and a page in guide books. As more tourists arrive the town changes and so do the tourists that arrive. It's a never ending cycle since the tourists that originally discovered the authentic town are now searching for a new untouched town and the tourists that arrive are more interested in the transformed, well known town than the town from a decade before (Brenner and Fricke 218). The word backpacker used to be associated with a laid back drifter, but increasingly the backpacker is a middle class, educated group on scheduled travels. The new generation of backpackers expects a more "sophisticated infrastructure at fashionable places" and are more substantial consumers than the original drifters (218).

Since the new generation has more influence as consumers they have a greater impact on the destinations they visit. In many areas the tourists have taken on the role of developing the tourist destination by contributing to a more "sophisticated infrastructure" as business owners. The foreigners that buy restaurants and hostels are often former backpackers who are able to cater to the new generation of backpackers. They provide the extras that attract these groups like fans and modern, tiled kitchens that go beyond the "back to basics" set up. Their approach attracts more of the tourists than the businesses owned by locals that were built for the first wave of backpackers (Brenner and Fricke 225 – 226).

In Granada, Nicaragua, the Hostel Oasis is advertised as a "backpackers paradise" with a pool, air conditioned rooms, a computer room, and a wide screen television with a large selection of DVDs to choose from ("Oasis Hostel"). This is not a basic hostel that follows the "back to

basics” approach. Instead, it caters towards backpackers who want to be surrounded by all the comforts.



(“Oasis Hostel”)

The swimming pool and balconies, shown above, resemble that of a nice hotel rather than a backpacker hostel.

As an increasing number of foreigners buy businesses in small scale tourist destinations they often prefer to hire foreigners to work for them as well. They are often long-term tourists or expatriates from Europe or North America hired for “front stage” positions. These long-term tourists and expatriates create a sense of familiarity and provide a cultural bridge for other tourists (Vandegrift 787). They are often hired as waiters, tour guides or receptionists; all front of the house positions whereas locals are relegated to back of the house positions like cooks and cleaners (Vanegrift 786). This creates an environment where tourists are surrounded by other foreigners and an authentic experience becomes less possible. By choosing to visit the tourist filled Mango Sunset Bar in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica or an Italian restaurant with Italian food and servers, the tourist is choosing not to participate in the authentic local culture, and simultaneously support the cultural takeover by foreign owned businesses.

Although backpackers are becoming major consumers in the small scale tourist industry they still subscribe to the untourism label which rejects the capitalist agenda of mass tourism. Ironically though, a whole new industry has stemmed from this movement with alternative travel stores that supply expensive equipment for backpackers; from 500 dollar backpacks to expensive jackets and high tech gear. (Fursich 211) Entire television shows and publishing companies inform tourists on untourist trips, from snorkeling in the Caribbean to living with a local family for part of a trip. Lonely Planet, a publishing company geared towards the backpacker on a budget, is a \$15 million company which promotes authentic and environmentally conscious travel options (210). Their website includes articles titled; “Where to have a Tribal encounter”, “Voluntourism tips: Is it ethical to visit orphanages?” and “Green travel: How to find an eco-friendly tour operator”, all of which focus on authenticity and ethical travel practices (*Lonely Planet*). All their advertised adventures reject the mass tourist, money making routes of tourism.

Lonely Planet advocates for authentic experiences, yet their TV show on the Travel Channel airs with commercial breaks featuring the mass tourist vacation deals like cruises and all-inclusive resorts in Mexico, which fund the TV channel and TV show itself (Fursich 211). Cruises are possibly the most all-inclusive experience a tourist can chose where the interactions with the destination culture is limited to a few hours for a few days out of the week. Promoting environmentally friendly travel options and culturally authentic travel is important to educate future untourism tourists yet the ethics may be questioned when that company receives checks from large scale, unauthentic companies like cruise lines. An entire industry has grown out of the untourism movement even though it rejects the industrial, capitalist tendencies of mass tourism

revealing the contradictions that arise when industries grow with the popularity of small scale tourism.

The new generation backpackers who have more sophisticated tastes also begin to overlook the ethical implications of a growing tourism industry. Many travel companies cater to the new generation and advertize the authenticity and adventurous nature of small scale tourism but overlook the social and environmental implications which the untourism movement rejects. *Traveler* is a show focused on showing how young westerners can go and explore new cultures for the most authentic experience. Focused on the all American cast immersing itself with locals, the show focuses on only the positive and exciting aspects of the tourism industry. They overlook overcrowded beaches in Spain and environmental degradation and instead show the cast enjoying pristine views and isolated areas (Fursich 216). The show disregards any issues of mass tourism and why there should be alternative forms of tourism or the effects on locals that they are befriending for a week before moving on to the next location.

“Travelers resonates a common strategy of the tourism industry to provide “adventures” that are controlled and seemingly risk-free. This connects to what Ritzer and Liska (1997) call the “McDisneyization” of tourism, acknowledging the close relationship between commodification, consumerism and tourism, and the search for highly predictable, efficient and controlled vacations such as to Disney theme parks and on cruises. These safe vacation setups give “us, as tourists (and more generally), a choice of goods and services to consume” (Fursich 216).

The “McDisneyfication” of small scale tourism, where providing safe and controlled environments which can be duplicated is a selling point, the reality of negative effects from tourism are ignored and create an unauthentic experience. Spending time with locals and exploring the land that mass tourism has a hand in ruining does not make their experience any more authentic even though it is advertised as authentic.

The Transformation of Roles

The changing of places and tourists has resulted in changing roles for locals as well. The locals' roles in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica and other small beach towns have changed according to the culture and demands of the tourists. Tourists come to Puerto Viejo to party so there is now a lucrative business of selling drugs, allowing many of the young local men to sustain themselves without traditional jobs. Along with providing drugs the men have also found that having short relationships with foreign women can result in even more money. The marketing of the Rastafarian culture in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica and Jamaica extends to other locations including Afro Caribbean towns on the Caribbean coast of Central America. The marketing of the stereotypical Rasta man and the lure of the exotic "other" has resulted in a new form of sex tourism (Seyfert).

Case Study: Jamaica

Although there are women working in the sex industry, some men become objects of desire for many female tourists but are not directly paid for sex. Every year over 80,000 women visit Jamaica, many travel alone and often in search of sex with a Rastafarian, Afro-Caribbean man. Seyfert states that the women are usually older or overweight or for some reasons are not as desired in their home country so they seek affairs while on vacation. The women often bring gifts or money for the men they have relations with but typically do not pay directly for sex. They may also be searching for relations with a younger, Afro-Caribbean man while on vacation since it is not deemed appropriate in their home country (Seyfert). The romance tourism industry allows foreign women to explore new gender roles in the relationship since the women are "free

from their own society's constraints". The local men are also able to step outside of their typical role and explore the romance industry as an economic opportunity (Pruitt and LaFont 423).

The appeal and marketing of Afro-Caribbean, Rastafarian men as sexual objects dates to the 1970s when reggae music became popular with the rise of Bob Marley. With the rise of popularity in reggae music, Jamaica began advertising tourism to the beautiful beaches and resorts with attractive, dreaded models that resembled Rastafarian men. In reality, most of the Rastafarian men did not work in hotels or the tourist industry in Jamaica at all. Some of the core beliefs of the Rastafarian religion reject white supremacy and the rule of a hypocritical Christian church. These beliefs stem from a long history from the slave trade to the colonial era. Yet the sex tourism is a result of slavery and continues the power inequalities of the white developed nations and the non-white underdeveloped nations (Seyfert).



(“Adeevee”)

The advertisement above was used by the Jamaican Tourism Board and highlights the use of sex as an enticement for women to travel to Jamaica (“Adeevee”).

The women chose poor, indebted countries to visit like Jamaica because the men will give them attention for gifts. A man could work all week and make the typical wage of eighty dollars or they could spend the night with a wealthy tourist and make fifty dollars worth in presents and money. A man could try and take advantage of the tourist industry through more

legitimate means by selling artwork or other souvenirs and struggle to survive or sell their body or cocaine daily and make a decent living. As one man asks in the movie *Rent a Rasta*, “how do you stop a man from being greedy” (Seyfert). One man asks why they are perceived as gigolos and looked down upon when the woman they have a relationship with often has sex with multiple men in one week or even day.

Some of the women swear that they are not taking advantage of the men because the men are always approaching them and initiating the affair. Many of the men explain that they are not a fool in the situation and know that the relationship will often end in gifts or money. If they are not taking advantage of the men because they are not initiating they are still taking advantage of the men’s economic situation. These women receive the attention they want because of structural and historical injustices that have resulted in poverty and inequalities. The women would not be deemed as desirable in a wealthier destination like Hawaii or Barcelona where there the locals are not as poor and in need of money (Seyfert). The women perceive an authentic attraction yet in reality they are paying for sex creating a very unauthentic situation.

This is also an issue in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica since many of the men do not have legitimate employment and instead sell drugs and their bodies. While women do not directly pay the men many of them look for the opportunity of forming a relationship with tourists in hopes of a continued relationship and continued monetary support. Some women give the men money or leave them their laptops and other gadgets (Frohlick 144). A few of the men in town who are unemployed and live in poverty have been to Europe since their fling turned into a girlfriend abroad who paid for them to come visit (156). In Jamaica the women may go in search of sex but in Puerto Viejo it seems to be more a part of the overall culture and an opportunity for men to make money from women who feel obligated to support a boyfriend even after they return home.

A large reason for the transformation of space, roles and culture into inauthentic experiences is largely due to the economic superiority and subsequent purchasing power of the tourist. The “single story” of non-western cultures promotes stereotypes rather than the numerous, multidimensional cultures that exist. These stereotypes reinforce a generic, McDisney experience. With all of the purchasing power, tourists set out for authentic experiences but instead look for the stereotypical images of culture that they recognize causing more production of these stereotypes. The new generation of tourists has also begun to change as they flock to party towns like Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica and not for culture but still claim to be rejecting mass tourism. The more tourist money that is spent on party towns the more the towns begin to represent a generic mass tourist destination. If the locals were more economically stable they may have more power to develop their town as they see fit rather than catering solely to the tourist. Obviously tourists will always influence the tourist industry but locals should have the opportunity to influence development and represent their own culture.

Addressing Contradictions of Authenticity

The main issues that arise with the search for authenticity are the inauthentic stereotypical representations of culture, the imposing culture of tourists on destinations which leads to transformed, McDisney places and transformed roles of locals. The study of ethical tourism aims to fix these growing issues in the tourism industry. “Spurred by these complaints and inspired by the global environmental movement that took hold in the 1970s, experiments began in various parts of the world to create types of tourism that were less damaging to both nature and local people” (Honey 2). Ethical tourism focuses on a variety of issues from

environmental preservation to socioeconomic issues. In order to address issues of tourism, ethical tourism should follow a code of ethics which focuses on the following; ecological issues, sustainable development issues, humanistic and social issues, and tourism education issues (Hultsman 557).

A code of ethics pertaining to the ecological issues will have set guidelines for environmentally conscious development and environmentally conscious business practices. Ecotourism is an example of environmentally conscious development and business practice which has already attracted many tourists with ecological concerns (Hultsman 557). Along with protecting the environment, ecotourism is also associated with helping the locals through conservation projects that benefit the local economy (Weeden 8).

Sustainable development involves environmentally sustainable practices as well as sustainable business practices that sustain local cultures and benefit the locals economically. The goal of sustainable development is to develop a tourist industry that will benefit present generations and future generations of locals. Developing an industry that continues to benefit locals means also sustaining the environment that is necessary to provide for local and tourist needs (Hultsman 557). CBT or community-based tourism allows locals to be a part of decision making in the development process. Instead of tourists shaping development, the goal of CBT is to give the people who are most affected by the tourist industry the power to make decisions (Weeden 8).

Allowing locals to have the most influence in development will lead to a more sustainable industry since it will address their needs and issues rather than the state or foreign desires for development. One common concern is that a destination will grow in popularity and become overcrowded or transform from its former charming identity (Hultsman 557). Puerto

Viejo, Costa Rica and other beach party towns are an example of unsustainable tourism development since locals are unable to participate in the industry and are forced to the outskirts. When the locals do take part in the tourist industry they are only allowed to fill in predetermined roles which are typically cultural stereotypes or in the case of Caribbean men, prostitutes. The physical space has changed along with the roles which do not meet the needs of present or future generations of locals.

Humanistic and social issues are addressed through socially responsible tourism which primarily focuses on promoting authenticity and being aware of micro-level impacts of tourism. Until tourists realize their impact on the destinations they visit, towns will continue to transform to cater to the culture of the tourist like in Puerto Viejo. Often indigenous cultures are the focus of socially responsible tourism practices since their culture change as a result of unethical tourism practices. By being more sensitive to local populations and being aware of individual and different cultures, tourism practices will hopefully be conducted in a way that supports individual cultures rather than stereotypes (Hultsman 558). This idea goes together with sustainable development through local involvement in development since they will be able to represent their culture as they wish rather than how the cultural market portrays them. Socially responsible tourist businesses should also guarantee that locals are given a fair wage and that the business is benefitting the local community and not only foreign investors.

The final step to conclude the code of ethics for tourism is to focus on education. Tourism studies has largely left out ethical codes of tourism from textbooks discussing tourism yet scholars as a whole have been discussing it through articles for many years. Ethical tourism codes should be taught in classes that discuss tourism and international tourism industry as it is an increasing issue (Hultsman 559).

Aside from teaching ethical tourism practices in academic settings, in order to travel responsibly tourists need to be aware and understand the issues. Travel sites like *Tourism Concern* updates their page with current issues and also advises on how to “avoid guilt trips” and “find ethical tour operators”. The *Rough Guides* Travel site lists steps for how to be an ethical tourist which mostly focus on being aware of how one is affecting locals and the environment. The steps include booking with ethical tour operators, traveling as efficiently as possible, spending money at locally owned businesses, respecting local cultures and attempting to learn the language, bargaining fairly, not littering and using water sparingly. Although these are simple steps they follow the code of ethics as described by Hultsman since they cover environmental, sustainable and humanistic issues. Hopefully if the issues are well known amongst tourists then they will chose to spend their money supporting responsible tourist businesses and practices.

Conclusion

From stereotypical cultural representations such as brightly colored Guatemalan textiles to sex tourism in Jamaica and party destinations in Costa Rica, Central America and the Caribbean are full of inauthentic tourist experiences. Contrived and duplicated McDisneyland experiences are a result of tourists’ desire for the western stereotype of the “other” cultures and a result of their economic and cultural dominance.

The study of authenticity focuses mostly on the issues of commoditization of cultures, but offers few alternatives. It is still important to understand the economic inequalities that lead to the commoditization of culture. However, with the understanding of the economic inequalities it should become clear that it is nearly impossible to create an authentic relationship between the tourist as the consumer with all of the purchasing power and the local as producer for the

consumer. The search for authenticity becomes even more contradictory when the cultures are not only commoditized but ultimately transformed to reflect the tourists' idea of the local culture. With most of the power in the hands of the tourist as consumer the culture and roles of the locals transform into an inauthentic stereotype. The important role of the western ideal transforms local culture but also transform the overall landscape and destination. The more popular a destination becomes the more likely it is to transform into a town such as Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica where most aspects cater to tourists and become a McDisney version.

Even though the cultures, locals, and places are transforming into clearly inauthentic spaces, tourists still claim to be taking part in something authentic by rejecting the all-inclusive mass tourism. Is a week in Puerto Viejo, more authentic than a week at an all-inclusive resort in Cancun? Yes, but the popularity of tourism and the popularity of small towns create economic growth and development which still have positive aspects. The tourist industry should not be viewed as a failed way to develop. Even though the search for authenticity has resulted in inauthentic experiences, the role of authenticity should not be devalued when considering where to travel. Rather, authenticity should not be the main focus and instead focus on developing local economies so that locals have economic sovereignty. Once inequalities lessen, locals will gain economic sovereignty allowing them to have more control over the development of the tourism industry. Inequalities will not disappear overnight but tourists can help to support the local economies in hopes of attaining this goal.

Is it possible to travel to a less developed country without leaving a mark on the culture and space? Probably not. However, the tourist does and will most likely always have power as a consumer when traveling thus making use of purchasing power to support businesses that benefit locals and support the local culture is key. Instead of focusing on the most authentic experience

which is often informed by western stereotypes, tourists should search for the most ethical way to travel by giving back to communities so drugs and prostitution or performing inauthentic roles are not the best economic option for locals. A code of ethics for development and tourist practices would help to lessen inequalities through sustainable development and socially responsible practices. Ethical tourism would also support businesses that are environmentally conscious which would also contribute to a sustainable future. Tourism is still a valid method for economic growth and development in Central America and the Caribbean. Tourism can either be a tool for economic development and economic sovereignty or a tool for losing culture and spreading the McDisney experience. As the main influence of that development, tourists must begin to look at their role in shaping the future tourist industry and the ethical implications of how and where they travel and ultimately spend their money.

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