ASA 2007 draft discussion paper

Power, culture and the production of heritage

Donald Macleod

(This paper is 'Work In Progress' for panel discussion only and should not be reproduced)

Introduction

Tourism is playing an increasingly important role in the production of heritage. Various groups are aware that heritage in the form of attractions, centres, and museums can become a magnet for tourists and consequently bring money into a community, region or nation. However, the production of this heritage, in terms of choice of topic, interpretation and representation will usually be in the hands of a few people who are already in positions of relative power.

This paper explores the relationship between power, culture and the production of heritage, specifically looking at how cultural heritage is represented by groups in society and their ability to use their position to promote a particular aspect of their culture. This promotion may become recognised as purporting to represent the entire society or it may simply be the only aspect of a culture that is promoted. By looking at three examples based on field research this paper offers a comparative study in differing sociocultural and political environments and seeks to draw similarities enlightening us about the process of heritage production and representation.

La Gomera

Situated in the Canary Island archipelago, this small island (population around 18,000) is also known as the 'La Isla Columbina' – Columbus Island. However, this appellation is rarely used by the islanders themselves, but appears in tourism promotion. Columbus repaired his boat and prepared his crew for their initial journeys across what we now know as the Atlantic Ocean. He is associated with numerous buildings in the port and capital 'San Sebastian', where he stayed, and brochures refer to his residence on the island. Columbus is an icon, a very strong brand for marketing purposes, and strengthens the island's promotion of its bistroic built heritage and role in the Spanish colonial experience.

Elements of the culture of the pre-Hispanic indigenous people (The Guanches) have remained among the population, and skills such as the whistling language, basket weaving, hand-made pottery, music-making and dances have become commoditised and are sold to visitors through material gifts or attractions. A Visitors Centre in the middle of the island hosts a model of a traditional peasant's home, and has various people employed on the site to demonstrate how traditional craft products are made, including baskets and clay pots.

Some of the Spanish Roman Catholic religious festivals such as that celebrating the Virgin Carmen have been commercialised and become extended periods of late night entertainment and profane events such as donkey races lasting some five days. They

also offer cultural entertainment including traditional (pre-Hispanic) ‘tarajaste’ dancing and Gomeran music.

In contrast to the above examples of the commodification of culture and its transformation into the market place some of the children of fishermen lament the passing of simple festivals which focused on the original religious meaning; and collective community actions associated with celebration such as the burning of bonfires. They worry about the loss of their access to the beach because of overcrowding by visitors, the loss of time to spend with their families because of changing work patterns and increased hours, and the loss of fishing as a livelihood. There has been a loss of a way of life an culture, that of the fishers and their families (see Macleod 2002). They believe their heritage is being eroded, physically disappearing or beyond their grasp, and not commemorated. This is a less obvious sort of tragedy than the sort of dramatic transformation exemplified by of the Alarde of Fuentarrabia as documented by Greenwood (1989) and others, where a historically important festival is turned into a commercial show. The experience of many people living in tourist destinations, where livelihoods are based on primary forms of production which are disappearing, leads to a reorganisation of their social and cultural lives.

The Dominican Republic.

Columbus travelled across the Atlantic and reached the island of Hispaniola, which is currently comprised of Haiti and The Dominican Republic. In the latter there is a major statement of cultural heritage in the form of The Museum of Dominican Man. Here, the state had at one time represented its ethnic heritage through two huge statues standing outside the entrance: these were of the Spanish priest Bartolome de Las Casas and the Amerindian ‘Taino’ chief Enriquilo. However, there was one very important group missing: those of African descent, many of whose ancestors were transported to the Dominican Republic from Africa across the Atlantic as slaves. This deliberate exclusion was eventually rectified and a statue to Lemba, the ex- slave leader and symbol of emancipation was erected. As an example of the manipulation of heritage by a powerful group this is excellent. The governing elite have maintained their links with the early Spanish colonisers, and remain a dominant economic, political and cultural force in the country, and have previously sought to organise their history and heritage very tightly to reflect their perspective and prejudices (see Dobal 1997; also Lowenthal 1998 on the bias of historical works and heritage).

The production of heritage and representation of a population or place through specifically chosen icons and symbols also occurs in the coastal village of Bayahibe with a view to attracting visitors. This small village is represented and marketed as a ‘fishing village’ by images of the picturesque gaff-rigged sailing boats that have been associated with the area. This image is becoming increasingly misleading as the fishermen have dwindled from a total of around 100 in the 1980s, to some 15 in 2004. Most have found work on the motor-boats that ferry tourists to a small island. More tragically, one of the boat builders was forced out of his home and off his land by the landlord who claimed he had not paid his rent: this man was a direct descendant of slaves. Furthermore, the fish have been driven away from the coastline by the heavy traffic of motor boats, necessitating the few fishermen to travel much further for their

catch, increasing their fuel costs and time spent at sea. In short, the attractive image of the fishing village is rapidly becoming wholly inappropriate to reality in Bayahibe.

From the official state representation of the national heritage and the official image-making and branding of a 'fishing village' we move to unofficial local 'grassroots' understandings, interpretation and cultural representations of community and family heritage. One family, the Britos, is busy writing up its history and has made claims to ownership of the village land and surrounding plots in the courts (see Macleod 2005). They believe that their ancestor, who arrived from Puerto Rico, had a son who bought the land, but he had his title to the land stolen by the local government. They have nailed the ancestor's portrait to a tree in the village square and celebrate him as the founder of the village. This 'unofficial' creation of a special place is a physical manifestation of cultural heritage, a form of 'representational space as distinguished by Lefebvre (1991) in the sense of one created by local inhabitants through their daily lives and experience: as opposed to one created by government planners (see Macleod 2004: 40-41).

Together with the written history of the family in the region this begins to create a strong sense of heritage among family members, and a narrative of history in the village that inhabitants hear regularly and interact with. For the Brito family the land is their heritage, as is their family history, both of which are indigenous productions, interpretation and representations, and they are not sanctioned by the officials of the nation state.

Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland

In D&G 'culture' has been interpreted by agencies such as VisitScotland (ex-Scottish Tourist Board) in tourism brochures and development strategies as the following: visual arts, literature, film and music (DGTB 2001), and 'cultural products' as listed include festivals and events and castles (DGATP 2007). In addition, there have been initiatives developed by the indigenous population, sometimes with the stimulus from national agencies, that have created new types of cultural heritage: for example, the theme towns, including Wigtown Book Town, Kirkcudbright Artist's Town and Castle Douglas Food Town. These are building on their association with products, activities and people, and have evolved their proactive branding since the year 1997. These towns usually match the general definition of 'culture' promoted by tourism agencies, a form of 'high' culture supposedly appealing to the educated audience. This approach in turn tends to ignore other areas of culture as understood in its broadest sense by anthropologists (e.g. Geertz; Tylor) and including different modes of livelihood, folk beliefs and customs, everyday activities and material items: the type of culture that forms the bedrock of many local heritage collections around the world, and is to be seen increasingly in D&G (Creetown, Dalbeattie, New Galloway) manifest in collections of photos, household products and community memorabilia (c.f. Lowenthal 1998: 3).

The result of this is the representation of the cultural heritage of Dumfries and Galloway by official agencies in terms of icons and 'high' culture, including such notables as Robert Burns the poet, together with images of castles. These examples may equally well be used to represent the nation as a whole and inadvertently reduce

the region's local distinctiveness. McCrone *et al* (1995) show how traditional and conservative the members of the National Trust for Scotland is in its definition and approach towards heritage, an organisation which is dominated by people form the more powerful sectors of Scottish society[1]. In a time when tourism destinations need to distinguish themselves and the unique selling points this can become an expensive oversight.

Conclusion

Power[2] is exercised variously by different groups and in accordance with their desires and ability to enact their desires. There is a clear link between power and the promotion of heritage as only those able to do so can express, manifest and promote their heritage on a large scale. For example in the Dominican Republic officials of the government influenced the interpretation of the nation state's ethnic cultural heritage as represented in the official Museum of Dominican Man and originally ignored the African ethnic group in its symbolic statues outside the entrance.

Similarly, within La Gomera government agencies help maintain the dominance of the connection with Columbus, the museumification of the Guanche culture and peasant activities that represent the island's cultural heritage and offer specific marketable products. In contrast, aspects of recent cultural heritage, for example fishing traditions are being overlooked. Meanwhile religious ceremonies and festivals are becoming increasingly commercialised.

Within Dumfries and Galloway government agencies such as VisitScotland continue to promote Scottish icons and built heritage which dominate the media. However, grassroots desires to represent folk heritage and very recent memories is growing and beginning to create a new cultural image for the region.

The awareness among policy-makers and the general public of the economic importance of tourism and the part that cultural heritage can play in attracting visitors has led to an increase in the products of heritage (see Hewison 1987) and promotion of heritage by not only policy makers but also indigenous populations. This is the case in D&G, whereas for the Dominican Republic local heritage is a statement of ownership and identity. This difference in the utilisation of heritage indicates different levels of power: in Dumfries and Galloway the residents have security but desire to represent their own heritage and compete for additional outside resources, but in the Dominican Republic the population need to prove their right to their land and their cohesion as a community continually threatened by powerful people in the shape of local and national governing bodies and big business interests.

[1] McCrone *et al* (1995: 101) write about the organisation of the National Trust for Scotland: 'From the outset, this organisation has had a strong aristocratic and landlord domination of its council.'

[2] 'Power is defined as 'The ability of a person or social unit to influence the conduct and decision making of another through control over energetic forms in the latter's environment.' Fogelson and Adams (1977: 388)

REFERENCES

Adams, R.N. 1977. Power in human societies: A synthesis. In Fogelson, R.D. and Adams R.N. 1977. *The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies from Asia, Oceana and the New World.* New York: Academic Press.

DGTB 2001. *Dumfries and Galloway Area Tourism Strategy 2001-2006*. Dumfries: Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board.

DGATP 2007. *A Tourism Strategy for Growth: 2007-2009*. Dumfries: Dumfries and Galloway Area Tourism Partnership.

Dobal, C. 1997. *Herencia Espanola en la cultura Domincana hoy. In Vega (ed) Ensayos sobre cultura Dominicana*. Santa Domingo: Museo de Hombre Dominicana.

Geertz, C. 1973. The Interpretation of Cultures. London: Fontana Press.

Greenwood, D. 1989. Culture by the Pound: An anthropological perspective on tourism as cultural commodification. In Smith, V (ed) *Hosts and Guests: The anthropology of tourism*. Philadelphia: Pennsylavania University Press.

Hewison, R. (1987) *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline.* London: Methuen.

Lowenthal, D. 1998. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Macleod, D.V.L. 2002. Disappearing Culture? Globalisation and a Canary Island Fishing Community. *History and Anthropology*. **Vol 13 (1)** pp. 53-67.

Macleod, D.V.L 2004. Selling Space: Power and Resource Allocation in a Caribbean Coastal Community. 31-48. In Carrier, J. C. *Confronting Environments: Local Understandings in a Globalizing World.* New York: Altamira,

" 2005. Narratives of belonging and identity in the Dominican Republic. In *Caribbean Narratives of Belonging: fields of relations, sites of belonging.* Oxford: Macmillan.

McCrone, D. Morris, A. and Kiely, R. 1995. *Scotland the Brand: The making of Scottish heritage*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Tylor, E.B. 1871. *Primitive Society: Research into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and culture*. London: John Murray.