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UWC2101J: Sites of Tourism

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First Draft of Paper 2

Due 9th March, 2020.

Natives, Tourism & Culture : A Review of Edward Bruner's *The Balinese Borderzone* and Davydd Greenwood's *Culture by the Pound*

In this paper, I will compare and contrast Davydd Greenwood's essay *Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization (inclusive of its epilogue)*, and Edward Bruner's *The Balinese Borderzone* along with the introductory excerpt *Introduction : Travel Stories Told and Retold.* I will deal with the two texts mainly on the grounds of how they view natives' agency in shaping their culture. I will show how a close analysis of the two in relation to the frame of reference and their publishing history leads to a quagmire which merits further analysis.

Evidently, any such enterprise should begin with a contextual summary of the two texts. Greenwood's essay, as its name suggests, is a pioneering undertaking in tackling the "implications of the use of local color in tourism" and thus analyzing the "commoditization of local culture" wrought by it (172) . The reputed anthropologist uses his case study of the practice of the *Alarde* ritual in Fuenterrabia in the Basque region of Spain to illustrate how "local culture . . . [is] often destroyed by the treatment of it as a tourist attraction". His

epilogue, however, takes a step back from the discussion and deals with the shifting viewpoints that culture is "dynamic", and not "static", and that tourism and culture might have a more fluid, multifaceted relationship (183-185). Published 16 years later, Bruner's introduction and chapter also deal with case studies, but this time of tourists and natives in Indonesia. Bruner uses his role as an ethnographer-cum-tour guide to investigate "how the Balinese and other Indonesian peoples respond to tourism, and to study how American tourists experience Indonesia" (195). He builds his essay to argue that it is not worthwhile to engage in binaries while thinking about authenticity; he concludes that all cultural performances (regardless of their purpose) are authentic, and that "tourists are primarily not concerned with authenticity" (209).

I will introduce my analysis by discussing Greenwood and Bruner's views on culture itself, before moving on to the natives' influence in shaping culture. Greenwood in 1975 seems to be a hallmark of what Bruner calls a "traditional ethnographer" – he follows a static lean to Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as an "integrated system of meanings by means of which the nature of reality is established and maintained" (173). He underscores the "fragility" and static brittleness of culture by adding that "anything that falsifies, disorganises, or challenges the participants' belief in the authenticity of their culture threatens it with collapse". This foreshadows his account of what is to occur in Fuenterrabia as well. On the other hand, Bruner adopts a dynamic, "porous" view of culture in line with his self-professed "reflexive, progressive" mode of ethnography. Bruner's discussion of his experiences with a tour agency owner (whom he dubs "Lisa") in his introduction offers a crisp way to summarize the two authors' stances in relation to culture and tourism (4). Lisa, the embodiment of the tourist industry, mirrors the "classical, objectivist ethnography" of Greenwood in 1975 as "chasing anthropology's discarded discourse, presenting cultures as

functionally integrated homogenous entities outside of time, space, and history." Greenwood's epilogue and Bruner seem to agree wholeheartedly in this respect of treating culture as more fluid – an agreement that is reflected on several counts throughout this paper.

Both Greenwood and Bruner seem to initially lend water to the idea that local people have no control over how their culture changes. Greenwood does so by first building up the image of the *Alarde* as a redeeming, meaningful public ritual (one that would back up Geertz and his "classically objectivist" notion of culture), and then stressing on the helplessness the locals faced as they witness the institution of the *Alarde* start to lose its meaning. He starts off with a characteristic description of the *Alarde:*

> [The Alarde] involves almost all the men, women and children . . . . It is essentially a ritual recreation of Fuenterrabia victory over the French in the siege of AD 1638 . . . . Together these people, who most of the time are divided, vulnerable and confused, are a single spirit capable of withstanding the onslaughts of the outside world as they once withstood the siege of 1638. . . . It is an enactment of the "sacred history" of Fuenterrabia. . . . It is an affirmation of their existence and identity at a time when most of the people earn money outside Fuenterrabia. (175-177)

The comprehensive, richly detailed and admiringly-spun description of the *Alarde* is meant to emphasize its importance in infusing collective meaning amongst the people of Fuenterrabia. Greenwood ensures that the reader closely associates the *Alarde* with solidarity by detailing the involvement of "all the men, women and children", with "children who play Basque flutes and drums", "men armed with shotguns" and "*hacheros* (woodchoppers) dressed in sheepskin cloaks". "The refrain of phrases like "sacred history", "three-hundred years", and

"divided, vulnerable and confused" highlight the timelessness of the ritual and depict the *Alarde* as a refuge for the masses. This rich backdrop sets up for a powerful statement with the "collapse of cultural meaning" that is to ensue courtesy the municipal government's decision that "the Alarde should be given twice in the same day to allow everyone to see it" :

> Culture is being packaged, priced, and sold like building lots, rights-of-way, fast food and room service, as the tourism industry inexorably extends its grasp . . . .The people of Fuenterrabia only express confusion and concern about their *Alarde*; they know something is wrong and do not know exactly what it is or what to do about it. The *Alarde* is dying for them, and they are powerless to reverse the process. Making the culture a public performance took the municipal government a few minutes; with that act, a 350-year-old ritual died . . . . The commoditization of culture does not require the consent of the participants; it can be done by anyone. (179-180)

Through these lines, Greenwood clearly points out that locals have absolutely no control over their culture. The fact that culture is said to be "sold like building lots" to the highest bidder shows that the persons with power and agency over local culture are the tourists with money ("as the tourism industry extends its grasp"). Greenwood emphasizes that the case study of Fuenterrabia is not a localized phenomenon as he "does not think this is a rare case by any means". The use of passive voice and of phrases like "they do not know exactly . . . what to do about it" in depicting the loss in agency of the people of Fuenterrabia is meant to compound the impact for the reader as well. Greenwood also implicitly delineates the "municipal government" from the natives here, to point to an external entity that decided the future of the *Alarde.* Finally, Greenwood drives home his point that locals are robbed of their

culture by explicitly stating that “the commoditization of culture does not require the consent of the participants”.

However, Bruner departs from Greenwood’s narrative, and provides a more amenable view of how tourism and foreign influences affect cultural change. He maintains that cultural change incorporates a two-way exchange, and that it has room for both internal and external forces to act. His more “borderzone” view of culture leads him to cite the *barong* and the Ramayana dances :

> Colin, McPhee, Bateson and Mead . . . commissioned new forms of the *barong* dance. The famous 1937 Bateson-Mead film, *Trance and Dance in Bali* . . . was actually a film of a tourist performance commissioned and paid for by Bateson and Mead. . . It is not unexpected that the *barong* dance that an earlier generation of ethnographers helped to construct is described by a more recent ethnographer as the incarnation of “the Balinese version of the comic spirit” (C. Geertz 1973, 118) and as emblematic of Balinese religion. . . . To overstate the case for emphasis, the Balinese became what ethnographers studied in that Western interest in the *barong* led the Balinese to modify their culture so that the *barong* became more prominent in their performances. (200-201)

Bruner evidently portrays his postmodern views of how culture and cultural change work here. He provides an interesting fact in that the *barong* as a cultural performance actually originated from foreign influences, contrasting with Greenwood’s belief that all such rituals must originate from a common system of meaning indigenously developed by natives. That the film *Trance and Dance in Bali* was expressly “commissioned and paid for” does not perturb Bruner like it does Greenwood. We also notice a marked deviation from Greenwood

in that Bruner uses the active voice to that foreign influences "led the Balinese to modify their culture" – their culture was not modified for them. This indicates that the *barong* dance has seeped benignly into Balinese culture, and that there is a strong sense of conscious will on part of the Balinese to accept it as such. Interestingly, Greenwood's epilogue foreshadows this very case when he concedes that "the objectification of local culture via tourism does not always destroy it, on occasion it transforms and even stimulates its further proliferation" (183).

Bruner also explicitly endorses the ideal of the deliberate choices that native Balinese make in relation to their culture:

> The Balinese, of course, know whether they are performing for tourists, for themselves, or for the gods. They are very aware of the differences between audiences, and indeed they have public debates about the impact of tourism on their culture. The Balinese try to keep some sacred performances exclusively for themselves, but their language does not distinguish between sacred and profrane, and in practice, over time, there is slippage. Ethnography, tourism, and art . . . are porous at the borders, and cultural content flows from one arena to the other, sometimes in profound though subtle ways. (200)

Bruner's description of the active role that the Balinese undertake in the proliferation of "cultural content" is again in stark contrast to Greenwood's account of the passive, victimized position of the people of Fuenterrabia. The suggestion that they are "very aware of the differences between audiences" implies that the Balinese assign different levels of meaning ("sacred" or "profane") to the performance of their rituals as well. Bruner signifies that most of the Balinese sacred performances eventually become "public" or touristic in nature, which,

according to Bruner, is not deleterious to the performances. Bruner's postmodern outlook and the existence of healthy "public debates about the impact of tourism" among the Balinese reflect Greenwood's non-structural view of culture in his epilogue, especially as he says that "what is traditional in a culture is largely a matter of internal polemic" (183). By now, Greenwood's epilogue contains a marked departure from his earlier notions of culture having a static nature and of tourism as being wholly detrimental to culture. More importantly, he also aligns himself with Bruner's view of postmodernism and that natives do have a considerable degree of agency in shaping their culture.

However, Bruner and Greenwood perhaps undercut this stance by continuing to harbor a latent notion that societal interactions hinge on a capitalist framework, and that the native's willingness or agency in incorporating something into their culture might be out of the capitalist drive to profit off of it. This is highlighted when Bruner discusses the dual role of playing a tourist and ethnographer:

> At times, when our tour group approached a new site, the Indonesians would behave toward me as if I were another tourist. . . . At other times, by emphasizing my role as a working tour guide, I could identify with the Indonesian performers and locals, saying in effect, that we are in the same situation, catering to tourists, *who are our source of income*. (204) (my emphasis)

The key relationship shown between the tourist and the performer is a transactional, deterministic one. The performer is primarily driven by his desire for money here, and this is what separates the tourist-guide and performer from the tourist. Bruner seems to hint at some background capitalist framework of dealing with tourism in indicating that he "tried the mechanisms of production of cultural performances" (204). This terminology of

"mechanisms" is repeated in his reflection on the seminar with tourists – "the key issue for students of tourism, then, becomes the mechanisms by which a tourist production is made convincing and believable to the tourists" (209). Likewise, Greenwood does not provide any reasons for why his bold argument that "once set in motion, the process [commoditization of culture] seems irreversible" no longer holds when he considers culture to be a more diverse, fluid entity. He does not sufficiently entertain the possibility that the phenomenon by which "culture is being packaged, priced and sold" (179) might entail natives to modify their culture to satisfy touristic needs for material ends as well.

I have illustrated that there is a tension within both Greenwood and Bruner's considerations of whether natives have true agency in shaping their culture, especially in light of the stark contrast between Greenwood's essay and his epilogue. This leads me to ask the question "Do natives have true agency in shaping their culture"? I suggest that it merits further analysis by investigating the exact underlying intentions that direct natives to assimilate a foreign entity into their culture, and by validating whether these intentions extend across different geographies and regions.