

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Indigenous Tourism Movements. By Alexis C. Bunten and Nelson H. H. Graburn.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xk307f4>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 43(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Spears-Rico, Gabriela

Publication Date

2019

DOI

10.17953/0161-6463-43.1.113

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

living and thinking decolonization work (both inside and outside of academe). It is also an invitation for educators to rethink and engage in their own internal work to develop a relationship to the land and reflect on their positionality in the place they find themselves.

Judith Landeros

University of Texas at Austin

Indigenous Tourism Movements. By Alexis C. Bunten and Nelson H. H. Graburn. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. 268 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$32.95 paper and electronic (CND).

In defining “Indigenous tourism” in specific terms that center the priorities of Indigenous hosts in tourist-Native interactions, this collection makes an important intervention in tourism studies and heritage studies. Edited by Alexis Bunten and Nelson Graburn, the volume’s introduction points out that in an era when Indigenous people are still disempowered and rendered invisible, tourism is the primary means through which Indigenous people export images of themselves and educate the world on issues impacting their communities. Tourism to Indigenous communities is thus a critical tool for building intercultural communication and furthering understanding about Indigenous communities. Because it has been studied primarily through a development lens, however, it is important for “Indigenous tourism,” as anthropologists call it, to be studied using decolonial frameworks that center Indigenous perspectives. *Indigenous Tourism Movements* itself reframes conversations on authenticity and showcases how Indigenous communities across the world mobilize tourism to promote their political and cultural priorities. The collection succeeds in its intentions, but notable gaps remain in the research that necessitate further engagement with critical Indigenous studies.

Featuring ethnographic and archival examples of Indigenous cultural innovation and hybridity, the majority of the contributors to *Indigenous Tourism Movements* directly and enthusiastically critique the antiquated construct of Indigenous “authenticity.” Contributors participate in the debate over representation, insisting that Indigenous cultures are not static and should be seen as living cultures that are continuously accommodating, adapting and changing despite their preservation of ancestral traditions. This intervention engages Dean MacCannell’s concept of the “performative primitive”: in *The Tourist* (1976), MacCannell argues that in light of the existential isolation produced by late capitalist modernity, the leisure class desires to “sightsee” the third world to experience people coexisting in communal arrangements, “in purer, simpler lifestyles” (3). This desire is driven by an imperialist commodification of the “purity” and/or primitivity found in human interaction in societies other than one’s own. In *Empty Meeting Grounds* (1992), MacCannell claimed that, much to the dismay of these desires, there are no longer any “authentic primitives.” Instead, he insists, there are “ex-primitives” or recently acculturated people who are lost in modern industrialization and are merely actors who stage performances for tourists (286). These

performative primitives construct the savage to make money as a long-term economic strategy to survive in the modern world.

The authors in the volume somewhat agree with MacCannell, but complicate tourist measures of authenticity by insisting that in its adaptation and accommodation of tourism, the Indigenous still remains Indigenous. In other words, Indigenous communities view accommodations of modernity as a continuity of culture, rather than “ex-primitive.” Laurence Douny’s chapter “The Commodification of Authenticity,” for example, reveals how Dogon heritage, or what Dogon people call *atem*, is shared with outsiders without “selling out.” When contemporary Dogon sculptors produce art, they engage foreign perceptions of Dogon art and the sculptural resources available to them to market objects that tourist-clients will want to buy. Dogon artists recreate traditional forms by manipulating and altering objects. For Douny, this is not fraud, but performance. Additionally, in the production of Hogon-style masks, Dogon mask-makers engage traditional mask-making practices to mass-produce masks but do not engage in traditional blood sacrifices that are believed to empower the masks with protection. Traditional blood sacrifices are still performed for Hogon masks that remain among the Hogon, however. As Douny contends, what is sold to tourists is the material representation of the culture, not the ontologies and agency of the Dogon.

Ethnographies in the book additionally reveal Indigenous agency in defining authenticity: when they change and incorporate elements to accommodate to tourism, Indigenous people reinvent their image for economic gain while rearticulating meaning to traditions. Karen Stocker’s chapter demonstrates how recuperating and reinventing traditions through performance can become significant to Indigenous people. Working in Costa Rica, Stocker describes how Chorotega people have incorporated popular Mesoamerican and American Indian imagery into their displays to give meaning to their own indigeneity and position it alongside hemispheric struggles and signifiers. Additionally, Chorotega artists have reinvented one of their past dances inspired by a ritual of using fire to purify people and spaces. The dancers’ outfits include references to popularized tropes about Plains Indian culture. While reinvented and curated to be recognizable to tourists, Stocker reveals that these dances and performances have gained value in local life to Chorotega people.

Granting Indigenous people power over code-switching and curation converses with significant scholarship on Indigenous agency in heritage tourism literature. Alexis Bunten’s article “Sharing Culture or Selling Out?” (2008) explores how Alaska Native tour guides sometimes appropriate stereotypes to play with tourist desires, yet are in control of how much cultural knowledge they actually share with tourists. Bunten terms the code-switching that occurs in Indigenous tourism contexts “the commodified persona,” explaining how Indigenous people differentiate between the persona they perform for tourists and who they are when out of performance. Bunten’s chapter in *Indigenous Tourism Movements* builds on this previous work, analyzing how Aboriginal hosts at Tjakupai Cultural Park in Australia rely on visitors’ perceptions of their otherness and manipulate the tourist imaginary by utilizing tropes of indigeneity to profit from tourist desires. While they market to tourist desires by proclaiming that their shows and cultural activities are approved by Aboriginal elders (and thereby

marketable and stamped as “traditional” and “authentic” to tourists), they also engage in acts of resistance such as showing a documentary about the effects of colonization in a continual loop during tourist visits.

Perhaps the volume’s most important contribution lies precisely in reversing the tourist gaze by privileging Indigenous hosts as agents in tourist transactions. Furthermore, Bunten and Graburn’s introduction offers a productive critique of how tourism and tourism studies have reproduced the tourist machine as inherently othering. Ruth Helier-Tinoco’s ethnography of *Days of the Dead in Michoacán* (2011), for example, concludes that the tourist gaze continually produces P’urhepecha others. In response to these earlier conclusions in heritage tourism scholarship, *Indigenous Tourism Movements* highlights how Indigenous agency is always present as a reversal to othering. Not only human agency is featured, but also the nonhuman, which is framed as critical to the survival of interconnected ecosystems. Marcela Palomino-Schalscha shows how Trekaleyin tour guides incorporate their ontologies to transform tourists into more conscientious visitors and world citizens. Centering the nonhuman in tours, such as the mountains, Trekaleyin guides invite tourists to enter the interconnectedness of the Trekaleyin world and teach them to value the agency (*newen*) of natural entities. Trekaleyin and additional Indigenous ontologies then become political, visible, and exportable through the tourist gaze.

Although I celebrate the collection’s contributions, that a volume with this ambitious range has an overall lack of Indigenous contributors—except for coeditor Alexis Bunten, who is Aleut/Yup’ik—is problematic, as coeditor Graburn acknowledges in his concluding thoughts. Furthermore, the book could have engaged more strongly with emerging frameworks in critical Indigenous studies. In one example, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos’s chapter acknowledges that Embera people were once embarrassed to wear loincloths, yet employing a latinx Indigenous framework (as, for example, in *American Quarterly*’s 2017 special issue *Critical Latinx Indigeneities*) would have illuminated that in Latin America, such embarrassment is provoked by mestizo and ladino anti-Indigenous racism. Finally, the recurring theme that tourism can feed cultural and political resurgence does not promote enough critical engagement with the concepts of refusal, autonomy, and resilience currently popular in Indigenous studies, indicators of where the field is moving (see Audra Simpson’s *Mohawk Interruptus*, 2014). While I appreciate the volume’s argument that tourism grants visibility and voice to Indigenous communities, the contributors do not fully engage the continuity of Indigenous people as political subjects. Certainly, tourism is an important vehicle to the outside world, but Indigenous people have been engaging in active reclamation efforts, social movement building, and grounded existence since the outset of colonialism. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *As We Have Always Done* (2017) reminds us, we have been and are agential in our actions to reclaim, protect, exist, and rebuild, and should not continuously be seen or written about as constantly responding to external forces in order to self-actualize.

Gabriela Spears-Rico
University of Minnesota Twin Cities