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Contradiction, Cultural Tourism, Development and Social Structure in Nepal

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Tourism is such a complex topic that sociologists Chris Rojek and John Urry (1997, 1) claim that "it is hardly useful as a notion of social science." Nonetheless, it is the subject of volumes of research and commentary. To consider tourism as development and its impact on host communities, anthropologist Dennison Nash (1996) advocates a standardized approach to the study of tourism instead of the more prevalent case studies. Despite Nash's assertion to the contrary, the case study approach prevalent in anthropology is well-suited for this pursuit if it is modified to include methods that can be applied across situations. By using a multiple methods strategy of "triangulation," each case study can focus on a similar range of phenomena, but allow for the particulars of each to come into play as a way of understanding locally derived situations. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to suggest a testable model of the effects of development-related, cultural tourism on local social structures in Nepal and elsewhere. This essay attempts to sort out some of the more salient, patterned features of social interaction from the messiness of the total social reality in which they exist, or to deal with what Rojek and Urry (1997, 3) have termed Modernity 1, "rules to live by" and Modernity 2, the, "disorderliness' of life." Order and disorder coexist. Although we are more accustomed to analyzing the former, the latter is equally important. The hard-to-pin-down aspects of everyday life viewed as contradictory or paradoxical bits of social reality are also inherent in tourism and must be skillfully manipulated by hosts to create consistent images of authentic, idyllic communities to attract tourists. Carefully orchestrated havens of culture, viewed in the foreground by the tourist, have background activities hidden and obscured from the tourist that contain these cultural conundrums upon which cultural tourism programs are sustained, at least in Nepal.

Research and Methods

Tourism has been investigated through a variety of methods reflecting to some degree the disciplinary affiliations of the people conducting the research. Anthropology, for example has employed the case study to a large extent, which Nash (1996) argues lacks the rigor necessary to facilitate building theory that applies more generally. The case study approach has been the fulcrum upon which studies

of hosts have been commonly conducted, in inquiries that attend to such issues as how hosts commodify culture for tourist consumption (Greenwood 1977, 1989, Parezo 1983), the infrastructural developments necessary to support tourism (Harrel-Bond 1978) and their negative impacts on the environment (Sharma 2000), the sustainability of tourism (Rogers and Atkinson 1998, Raj 2003), and the relationship between hosts and the anthropologist (Folmar 2003), to name a few.

Furthermore, methods have failed to address fully the impact of tourism on social and cultural issues, especially those not modified for consumption. Lanfant (1980) argues that while economic issues lend themselves appropriately to standardized, quantitative methodologies, sociocultural realities are better revealed by qualitative inquiry and obscured or minimized by quantitative data collection. There is a reductionistic tendency to quantitative methodologies that tempts the researcher to adhere to economic models, but they can prove to be a valuable adjunct to in-depth qualitative methods. For example, detailed, quantitative data collection and analysis reveals a level of social complexity heretofore not described for the Damai caste of the tourist village of Sirubari. Quantitative data alone, however, do not suffice to portray such a situation completely, nor do they replace the level of understanding achieved through careful use of a variety of qualitative data gathering techniques. Rudi Hartmann (1988) and Nash (1996), like a host of anthropologists before them, advocate for the use of multiple methods.

Questions of replicability and generalizability are germane to the comparative approach to the study of tourism (Nash 1996, Pearce, D. 1992), with both theoretical and applied implications. The case study approach, because of its focus on unique local situations, has not been concerned with such issues. However, an opportunity to use a modification of this approach across different situations presents itself in Nepal. The "model" tourism program of the village of Sirubari is now being replicated in several other areas (Kathmandu Post 2001) where hypotheses generated in this paper can be tested. These new village tourism sites exhibit sufficient ethnic similarity to suppose that the basic methodology used in Sirubari can be employed with some modification to other local contexts in a way that combines elements of case study with more standardized research designs.

This approach should help to satisfy Stronza's (2001) call for more in-depth treatments of host communities and the active role they play in the tourist-host dyad, which treat host communities as socially diverse. One way this goal might be achieved is to employ a methodology similar to that used by anthropologist George Gmelch (2003), who profiles people working in jobs related to island tourism. For Nepal, any method should include a focus on the lower classes of communities that host tourists, in a way parallel to how anthropologist Mary Cameron (1998) presents the lives of women and Dalits (low-caste Hindus) in rural Nepal. Especially because of its relevance to development issues, the anthropology of Nepal would benefit from a finer-grained treatment of Dalits that clearly distinguishes among the jats (castes or ethnic groups) highlighting the needs and potentials of each and their contributions to and benefits from tourism.

In this case, a more detailed understanding of Dalits' contributions to tourism will illuminate the need for heeding the contradictions inherent in tourism, whose connection to development further exaggerates these paradoxes. I will attempt to show that tourism as development ironically promotes the stagnation of villages as traditional communities in order to become modern. The paradoxical conduct of the tourist, who operates from inside an environmental bubble, further complicates this situation as do other internal paradoxes, too numerous to list exhaustively here. Tourism in Nepal relates to wider social and political concerns in complex ways, for example by supporting a national rhetoric of equalization of the jats by "uplifting" Dalits and "empowering women," meanwhile giving control of tourism to established elites whose own purposes are ill-served by uplifting the powerless.

Tourist, Host and Tourism

Definitions of tourist and tourism suggest an artificial separation of the tourist from the place she visits. Amanda Stronza (2001), an anthropologist, notes a similar tendency for scholars to focus either on the tourist or the host, but not the two simultaneously. Valene Smith's (1977, 2) definition of a tourist as "a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change," pays little attention to hosts or their communities, but it continues to be widely accepted as a starting point for discussions of tourist-related phenomena in anthropology (Gmelch 2004, Graburn 2004). Most treatments of tourism add other dimensions to this definition. For example, to Nelson Graburn (1983), a pioneer of anthropological theory in tourism, tourism is a variety of a larger category of social behavior, specifically a kind of ritual. Nash (1984) prefers to treat tourism more generally, "as a form of leisure involving travel," (1984, 504), which he claims engenders more potential for comparative research. As terse as Nash's definition is, it brings up questions of whether its components are necessary or sufficient to capture the phenomenon of tourism. If a tourist is by necessity at leisure, then what anthropologists do, for example, would seem to be distinct, although Stronza (2001) points out that there are strong similarities between the two. Hosts notice these similarities too. Such was the case in the village of Sirubari, Nepal (Folmar 2003, Folmar and Edwards 2002) where I continually encountered situations reminding me that I was very much a tourist in their eyes. Distinguishing work from leisure by the amount of effort each requires is also problematical, since many tourists exert far more effort in pursuing their "leisure" than they do their work (Gmelch 2004).

Whether and how travel is part of the definition of tourism is not clearer. How far one has to travel in order to be a tourist is unspecified. Presumably, by staying at home, a person excludes himself from the ranks of tourists, even if he visits a tourist site, but how far beyond his threshold he must venture is not stipulated. Nor is the necessary length of time he is gone from home clearly linked to the definition (Rojek and Urry 1997). Travel is nonetheless at least implicit in

most definitions of tourism, although how tourism is related to other forms of travel is also a thorny issue. Graburn (1983, 2004), for example, asserts that modern tourism grew out of earlier, more serious travels, such as pilgrimages, and although distinct, is akin to them in ways related to the structure of ritual (Turner and Turner 1978). Jagdish Kaur, an Indian anthropologist, (1985) has inverted this observation, claiming that pilgrimage is not just a kind of tourism in the Indian Himalayas, but a *new* kind of tourism!

Just as different motivations separate pilgrims from tourists, they also separate tourists from hosts, and although they are central to the definition of what a tourist is, hosts' motivations are rarely entertained in discussions of the topic. The inclusion of hosts' motivations would by necessity complete the description of what tourism is, since tourists and hosts do opposite, but complementary things—hosts stay at home and work for the tourists who travel to see them. Tourism in most contexts is a social interface involving tourist and host, the former motivated by leisurely pursuits, the latter economic and social concerns. Although interactions between tourist and host are often reduced analytically to economic exchanges, they also entail important cultural, social, religious, political and other interchanges.

If any degree of clarity emerges from debates over what tourism is, it is that many things can be called tourism and several authors have offered typologies of tourism or of tourists. Tourists are categorized according to many criteria, including temporality, that is whether they are “modern” leisure-travelers (post-World War II) or not (Smith 1977); destination, for example, international or domestic (Lanfant 1980); on whether they travel in groups or alone (MacLellan, Dieke and Thapa 2000); the varieties of experiences they seek (Smith 1977, Cohen 1979); or the motivations that spur them to tour (Pearce, P. 1992). Two of Smith's (1977) types are ethnic and cultural tourism, which, because of their focus on culture, in the present (ethnic) and the (past) are of particular interest in this paper and are also included in anthropologist Ken Teague's (1997) fourfold typology of tourism in Nepal. Because tourists can be motivated by many things (Pearce, P. 1992), motivation-based categories are not mutually exclusive. Savvy hosts recognize that eco- and cultural tourists may, for example, be spurred on by separate but overlapping agendas and therefore package the two together in various places in Nepal, such as ACAP, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (MacLellan, Dieke and Thapa 2000). Visitors to ACAP, motivated by ecological concerns or adventure also engage in the culture of one ethnic group, the Gurungs. If similarly motivated tourists prefer, they can experience Sherpa culture by visiting Khumbu. Although it is useful in some research to categorize tourists' motivations by the stage of personal fulfillment of the tourist (Pearce, P. 1992), in this case it is more relevant to focus on tourists' expectations of understanding or immersing themselves in other cultures.

Two other typologies of tourists, folk taxonomies generated by tourists and by hosts are of particular interest in this paper. Interestingly, tourists are reluctant to use the term, tourist, for themselves but willing to apply it to others, viewing their

fellows as somehow inferior if they do not tap deeply enough into “authentic” experiences in their journeys. They reserve other terms for visitors who rise above base levels of cultural involvement. Thus one person classifies himself as a traveler while identifying others as tourists or trippers (Waterhouse 1989). A person’s sense of touristic identity is also shaped by the degree to which she feels a bond with the hosts and moral distance from other tourists, with whom she would be ashamed to associate because of tourists’ ironic propensity to ruin the authenticity they seek (Frow 1991).

How hosts categorize tourists is still another matter, but one that has received surprisingly little attention by anthropologists (Evans-Pritchard 1989). For example, the “touristic shame” described above, might be used to create categories of tourists by tourists, but for hosts, it can put tourists in league with strange bedfellows, even terrorists (Phipps 2004), who also denounce the impact of tourists on their own culture. Just as they might lump tourists with terrorists, hosts may also distinguish tourists from one another using criteria quite different from the ones used by tourists. Anthropologist George Gmelch (2003) provides an example of this from Barbados where beach vendors claim that Canadian women stereotypically seek much more romance and sex than other women do. In Ghanduk, Nepal, foreigners are also stereotyped by nationality, but in this case by how fervently they bargain for lower prices. In Sirubari yet another distinction is made between foreigner and national, respectively called *bideshi* (foreign) and *swadeshi* (local, Folmar 2003). These two types of tourists differ in a number of ways, including motivation, familiarity with local culture, impact on the village, and levels of service provided. Distinctions among *bideshis* are less important; they can all be lumped together, regardless of why they are there, how they came or how long they will stay. Indeed, this was so in my case. Despite my deep interest in local knowledge and a far longer stay than the typical tourist, my visit was nonetheless orchestrated to adhere to the *bideshi* tourist model used locally (Folmar 2003). Somewhat ironically, being put in that position also enabled me to appreciate the motivations of tourist and hosts in a way that revealed their similarities and differences and the paradoxes inherent in their motivations.

“If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest—in all its ardour and paradoxes—than our travels,” (de Botton, 2002; 9). Among essayist Alaine de Botton’s paradoxes is that our anticipation of travel rarely lives up to the reality. Instead, the unique, uplifting experiences we seek vie with mundane procedural necessities, such as arranging for transportation or coordinating a time to engage in a specific activity, which may consume more of the clock than the central purpose of the trip (Hartmann 1988). Oddly, failed expectations tend to matter little, because in processing our experiences, we construct narratives that bring experience in line with our preconceived expectations about them. One mechanism for doing this is creating memories about the travel, which for some of us involves the artistic inclusion of things not obvious to all.¹ Conversely, most of us minimize or

erase the boring, paradoxical and inconvenient moments that stymie expectations in favor of cohesive journal entries that attempt to make sense of our travels. We, as tourists, construct narratives of our travels that match our original motivations: to search for happiness, view a “must see” sight, experience authenticity (MacCannell 2004), undergo personal transformations (Graburn 1977, 2004), step out of the ordinary (Jafari 1987), sample cultural differences that bring to life idyllic pasts (Smith 1977), or indulge in the romantic or sensual aspects of the human condition (Gmelch 2003).

It is a well-documented oxymoron that the tourist endeavors to avoid the authentic experience he seeks. He minimizes experience in actual cross-cultural encounters so that he insulates himself from the exploring too deeply the authentic culture he so avidly pursues (Groupe Huit 1976). The ironic attempt to experience the authentic, but not too deeply, is sometimes referred to as an “environmental bubble,” (Cohen 1977). These bubbles allow tourists to *perceive* that they experience authentic culture, when, in fact, they merely witness some approximation of it. From within protective membranes tourists sift out the unappealing aspects of authenticity and embrace the appealing ones. Visitors to Nepal revile those “authentic” aspects of local culture that require them to practice traditional toileting behavior, for example, which brings the tourist into direct contact with his own excreta. For personal narratives to be comfortable, “modern” toilets must become transformed into traditional culture or at least an excusable intrusion of the modern into timeless traditional space. Toilets are excused because they insulate the tourist from the unsavory aspects of a tradition that is supposed to embody only the nobler expressions of life. Thus modern toilets make up a part of the bubble and serve to confirm the tourist “in his prejudices and . . . left alone in a milieu as similar as possible to his own background,” (de Kadt 1979, 52).

Along similar lines, sociologist Martin Opperman (1993) draws our attention to the informal spaces and contexts of tourism. Informal moments often represent more spontaneous and perhaps more “genuine” (less orchestrated) encounters between tourist and host where each has the opportunity to form a subtler picture of the other. Often, since these encounters have not been planned, they reveal aspects of culture inconsistent with tourists’ preconceptions and cause tourists to retreat into their environmental bubbles safe from the potential nastiness that unstructured experiences confront them with. There they have opportunities to sanitize the experience, muting or erasing those that contradict their idyllic expectations. Meanwhile, hosts orchestrate in the background what the tourist will experience in the foreground.

Tourism and Development

Novelist Shashi Tharoor’s (1993, 17) observation that, “India is not an underdeveloped country but a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay,” challenges conventional notions of the term, “development.” Development grew

out of a post-World-War-II observation that the economic circumstances of the Third World were comparatively dire by First World standards and that in order to narrow the gap development must take place (Rapley 2002). By the 1980s, development discourse came to include the idea of social and cultural development, in good measure owing to the contributions of South Asian scholars interested in dependency theory. Unfortunately for development experts, culture poses the problem making "progress" harder to achieve and predict (Rapley 2002); what works in one place may simply not work in another. Culture's tendency to particularize situations not surprisingly should also contradict sociologist Marie-Francois Lanfant's (1980) assertion that international tourism introduces a universal "model" of social structure to the Third World. International tourism brings with it a technostucture that elaborates existing social structure with two new elites emerging: "a new techno-bureaucratic social class [and] a newly emerging propertied social class . . . facilitated by tourism," (Lanfant 1980, 41). This new form of social structure is supposed to exist across contexts, replicated wherever international tourism intrudes on indigenous peoples. A counter-argument posits that local social structures will become less differentiated because the equitable distribution of income will foster greater social equality (Stronza 2001).

The debate over whether social structure will become less or more elaborate has important ramifications for how development efforts play out at local levels. The evidence, I believe, supports the increased differentiation of local social structures, which can occur at several different levels. Development can, for instance, create ethnic divisions in the tourism industry or elaborate the social structures within ethnic groups. An example of the former effect can be seen in mountaineering, especially in the Khumbu regions of Nepal, where it has become almost the exclusive purview of Sherpas. Their control over mountaineering can be traced to their historical monopoly over trade granted to them in the early nineteenth century (Stevens 1993) which was replaced wholesale by tourism by the mid 1970s (Furer-Heimendorf 1975). So closely identified with mountaineering are the Sherpas that many Westerners confuse their ethnicity with an occupation and the term Sherpa now has both referents. Gurungs and other ethnic groups contest the Sherpa's control over high altitude tourism, although not very effectively. Gurungs have had more success carving out the niche of ecotourism/village tourism in the Western foothills, near Pokhara, where they dominate tourism in the Kaski, Lamjung and Syangja districts. Thus a level of ethnic-based differentiation of tourism has begun to develop in Nepal. Within local situations, there is also the potential either to confirm existing social hierarchy or to elaborate it. Such is the case in Sirubari, a Gurung-dominated village where participation in the Village Tourism Project (VTP) has created a hierarchy within the tourism industry based on whether a family can host *bideshis*, *swadeshis*, or no one at all (Folmar 2003).

Tourism can also reinforce existing structures. A common observation, for example, is that in mountain communities, the roles of women tend not to be expanded as a result of tourism, but their traditional roles tend to be extended into

touristic activities (Godde, Price and Zimmerman 2000), as is the case in Helembu (Lama 2000) as well as in Sirubari and Ghandruk, Nepal. Such an extension though does not necessarily indicate that women become more empowered. In Sirubari, for example, the roles of the Gurung and the Damai women's committees have been elevated, but, as Lama (2000) observed in other parts of Nepal, women's input into decision making is still severely limited.

The amount of development introduced into host cultures affects how dependent on tourist cultures hosts become (Erisman 1983). Cultural dependency results from a negative valuation of hosts' own cultures in comparison to those of the tourist, a situation that characterizes Nepal. The Nepali term for development, *bikash*, has become a powerful symbol, conferring higher status to those who can claim it. It also marks the inferiority of Nepalese vis-à-vis bideshis, who are nearly always seen as more developed (Bista 1991). In much the same way, anthropologist Akhil Gupta (1998) has noted that development is used by farmers in India to identify their internally- and externally-recognized social status. However, Gupta notes there are cross-currents in assessments of the value of developed versus traditional. Simply put, in both India and Nepal, developed things have advantages of efficiency, but traditional things have advantages of morality.

Whether tourism fosters or requires development is at the core of what we mean by the phrase tourism as development (Nash 1996). In Gambia, tourism required training a labor force, development of sewerage systems and electricity and other things that can also benefit the local population (Harrel-Bond 1978). On the other hand development can result from tourist activities, like when it helps to create new jobs in tourism or perhaps in newly introduced health, commercial or educational institutions. Instructive examples of such situations are common in Nepal. Tourism resulted in the well-known introduction of western-style primary schools and of mountaineering schools for Sherpas in the wake of the conquest of Mount Everest (Fisher 1990, 2004). A more complex relationship than simple the cause and effect of tourism and development exists in Sirubari. The building of a green (environmentally and culturally friendly) road was instigated not by tourism itself, but fostered by it. The route the road takes around Sirubari reflects how political power is concentrated as well as symbolic aspects of the VTP, such as its identification with only one *jat* (caste or ethnic group), the Gurung. This identification depends on the active exclusion of another *jat*, the Damai, Dalit musicians who are key to the program. Damais are made invisible to tourists partially by the location of the road, which passes between Damai and Gurung (the ethnic group in charge of the VTP) hamlets that make up Sirubari. Furthermore, the continuous maintenance of the road benefits from tourism income and is expected to affect tourist traffic in potentially ambivalent ways. Although the number of tourists may increase, they may stay for shorter periods of time. There are yet other social concerns about the road, such as how it consumes the entire landholding (minus the *jaga*) or the land upon which the house is built, of Dalit farmers who lack the clout to prevent appropriation of their farmland.

Stronza (2001) decries the overly simplistic view fostered by an emphasis on the negative impact of tourism on host communities. Of course, hosts suffer the undesirable commodification of culture (Babcock xx, Parezo xx, Greenwood 1989), stress on local ecosystems (e.g., Sharma 2000) and economic dependency on the more powerful West, to name just a few of the problems associated with tourism. The converse however also happens. Philip McKean (1976), an anthropologist, has documented positive counter currents in how tourism affects host communities, such as the rejuvenation of certain aspects of "tradition" that result from tourists' interests in them and the development of new occupations that are related to tourism. Close ethnographic investigation reveals that there is a subtle combination of both positives and negatives. The impact of tourism among the Sherpa of Nepal is again illustrative. A number of anthropologists, most prominently Vincanne Adams (1992), James Fisher (1990, 2004) and Stanley Stevens (1993) examine a multitude of effects, from which it must be concluded that tourism's impact is mixed and depends on the particular context in which it is found.

The economic issues involved in tourism are many and cannot be ignored, but are too numerous to deal with exhaustively here. To the degree that the economy represents a part of culture rather than an entity separate from it, two economic factors in particular enter into a careful treatment of how tourism affects social structure: the retention of funds by local communities and their equitable distribution therein. Both of these aspects bear on what are considered to be the most likely of the social effects of tourism, how they affect internal social structure and the degree of dependency low status groups have on high status ones.

On larger scales of inquiry there is interest in how powerful economic centers marginalize peripheral, dependent communities. Sociologists Helen Lewis and Edward Knipe (1978) argue that the weight of development in Appalachia was born on the backs of locals who were "colonized" by powerful outsiders. Ironically when insiders also took advantage of the system, rather than being more understanding toward their community members, they were more ruthless. A similar situation prevails in the development of Pokhara, Nepal where there was a progressive concentration of power and wealth in the city and the sapping of resources and wealth from surrounding hill communities (Seddon, Cameron and Blaikie 2001). Distribution of income within tourism communities plays out much the same scenario on a smaller scale. Local elites control tourism and less powerful groups become marginalized by it. H. Michael Erisman (1983), a tourism anthropologist, argues that the development of centers and peripheries is part of the process of tourism development. The only way to counteract such tendencies is to promote local control and equitable distribution of income, both of which have been tagged as necessary components for sustaining tourism as a development industry (Zeppel 1998).

How sustainability relates to tourism is another complex issue. A term first used in relation to the environment, sustainability refers to development that, "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future gen-

erations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 43) by conserving shared resources rather than depleting them for individual ends (Hardin 1968). This teach-a-man-to-fish approach, now the hallmark of development, advocates that projects should carry on using resources generated from within the culture rather than being supported from without. Since the 1970s, the ethic of preserving the environment has been linked to cultural preservation. Although considered laudable because it emphasizes the maintenance of existing traditions this interpretation of sustainability also promotes an image of peasant cultures as static. While economic "progress" is desirable, "culture" change is not. This stance is controversial in that it involves a paradox; becoming modern can only occur by somehow clinging to a past that needs to be changed.

Ideas of sustainability have now been inserted into the language of tourism, e.g., the sustainability of tourism is examined in a volume edited by geographers, C. Michael Hall and Alan A. Lew (1998). In that volume, Simon Milne (1998) argues that sustaining tourism may be even more problematic than sustaining the environment or culture because of the many aspects of economy and society that tourism touches, all of which would have to be sustainable for tourism to be so. Nonetheless sustainability remains not only part of the rhetoric of tourism, but figures into its planning and implementation and is, in fact, a cornerstone upon which ecotourism and 'village tourism' in Nepal are based. Efforts to sustain these initiatives also depend on regulating the flow of tourists and getting them to buy into the behaviors, not just the philosophy that preserves the environment. Attitudes of tourists (Pobacik and Butalla 1998) and hosts (Gurung and De Coursey 2000) must be compatible with environmental and cultural conservation in order for tourism to be sustainable. Ecotourism principles underpin tourism in areas like ACAP in Nepal and influences the design of village tourism in areas like Sirubari, where litter control, organic farming, building a green road and other techniques are employed in efforts to minimize the impact of tourists on the local environment. To the extent that the host community meets the needs of the tourists, tourism is difficult to sustain, but to the extent that tourists meet the needs of the community, there is potential for sustainability.

Tourism and Social Structure

The relative lack of theory on tourism noted by Nash (1996) may be more accurately described as a lack of unified theory. One of the many factors retarding theoretical development is tourism's low status as a subject of inquiry (e.g., Crick 1989, Nash and Smith 1991, Lanfant 1993) although that situation has improved recently. Anthropologist Sharon Gmelch (2004), for example, amply demonstrates the worthiness of tourism as a topic of academic interest, particularly for anthropologists, for whom the intersection of cultures, which is facilitated by tourism, is of central interest. The tourist thus becomes an emissary for economic advancement and cultural change; "an agent for the dissemination of an economic and

cultural model,” (Lanfant 1980, 36) areas of deep concern to anthropology. Nash (1996) further attributes the theoretical sluggishness in tourism research to the case study approach to fieldwork, which focuses on highly particular, contextual aspects of each situation to the detriment of seeking of generalizable principles that apply across contexts. Generalizable theory also has the potential to guide applied efforts to design culturally, economically and environmentally responsive tourism programs as is frequently called for by our colleagues who work in tourism related occupations.²

Principally because of its economic importance, tourism is one of the most researched of modern social phenomena. Earlier tourism studies focus on macro-level processes, particularly the sweeping economic and social changes that are believed to be inevitable as a result of massive numbers of wealthy Westerners visiting poorer Third-World countries. Indeed, tourism represents a significant portion of the world’s economy, particularly in Third World nations where the world’s leisure classes find inexpensive opportunities to engage in a rich variety of leisure experiences. Not only does tourism represent a major vehicle for the foreign exchange of economic resources, but because of its magnitude, tourism deals with “an all-embracing social phenomenon characterized by the introduction of new systems of relationships in all sectors of activity, bringing about structural changes at all levels of social life,” (Lanfant 1980, 36).

In a similar vein, John Forster (1964), one of the first sociologists to study tourism, predicts that mass tourism alters the standard of living and the life style of local communities, with the secularization of their cultural performances, increased cash, and new occupations, being among the most important. Cultural consequences amount to three basic changes that:

- (1) are brought about by the intrusion of an external, usually superordinate sociocultural system into a weaker, receiving culture; (2) are generally destructive to the indigenous traditions; and (3) are leading to a homogenization of cultures, in which ethnic and local identity is subsumed under the aegis of a technocratic bureaucracy, postindustrial economy, and jet-age life-style (McKean 1976, 239).

Lanfant concurs with Forster on the first two points, but departs with him on the third. Tourism fosters the emergence of a technostructure, made up of the “techno-bureaucratic social class” and the “newly emerging propertied social class” described above (1980, 39). This elaborated social structure is also at odds with the oft-stated development goal of equitable distribution of income, which would be compatible with Forster’s prediction of an equalization of social structure. These positions rest on opposing premises, for Forster a heterogeneous society that becomes more egalitarian, for Lanfant a homogeneous one that becomes more differentiated. The assumed homogeneity of host cultures (Stronza 2001) has been an issue in the anthropology of tourism for quite some time because it ignores internal divisions that predate the introduction of tourism. Malcolm Crick (1989),

a tourism anthropologist, proposes an intermediate position, which is borne out in this paper; that tourism is developed via pre-existing structures, which I argue are hierarchical in nature and become more differentiated as a result of tourism.

A pivotal mechanism by which tourism affects host communities' social structures is the interactive process that occurs at the micro-level, when tourists meet hosts. Focusing on the tourist, Graburn (1977, 1983, 2004) and his student, Jafar Jafari (1987) liken the experience to a rite of passage (van Gennep 1960), in which tourists move in and out of a liminal state (Turner 1974; Turner and Turner 1978) and experience a kind of *communitas* with fellow travelers. Tourists' quests for transformative experiences help shape how they interface with hosts. These concerns dovetail with the pursuit of the exotic, the chance to experience "authentic" cultures from the past that paradoxically exist in the present. How deeply tourists *perceive* that they experience the authentic is more important than the experience itself. Perception of authenticity is shaped by processing the experience within environmental bubbles, where experiences are transformed into memories compatible with world views that reject the contradictions that actually exist in host communities.

On the other side of this equation is the host community, which consists of the people whose culture the tourists come to see. Anything but stereotypically passive, hosts construct authentic experiences for tourists beginning with the creation of the tourist site itself. Sites undergo ritual-like transitions (MacCannell 2004) parallel to those that tourist experience. They become sacralized, standing in for "ultimate values" thus compelling tourists to see or even revere them. Places become sacred in a four-phase process, first being named, then framed and symbolically elevated, next mechanically reproduced and finally socially reproduced. Sacralization is related to the cultural construction of the authentic, the stronger the image of tradition, the more deeply sacred it becomes. The process hinges on hosts' manipulating reality so that modern features or less desirable aspects of the past recede into the background or are transformed into desirable characteristics of these time-capsule ways of life. Tourists are complicit in the ease to which hosts find this achievable. Although the former seek out knowledge of the cultures they visit, they do not want their images of tradition challenged or their pursuit of leisure to be inconvenienced by the learning process (Erisman 1983).

Foreground and background features must be kept somewhat separate in order to achieve an image of authenticity. The social transformations posited by Forster and Lanfant, for example, are antithetical to tourists' deeply-felt, personal views of the egalitarianism of past, primitive communities which they believe to exist in the Third World. And so the tendencies to create new elites or even the existence of hierarchical social structures in traditional reality are pushed into the background, out of the view of the tourist. Examples of this are replete in the Sirubari VTP where Damais constitute one of the most visible aspects of the tourist's experience. They are, however, made invisible by the careful use of many techniques. They are excluded from advertisements, no mention is made of them in

the village tours, they are not identified as a political minority when they play for hosts and their hamlet is beyond the tourists' view, situated beyond the road, past a sign that inaccurately marks the village border. Since tourists are made (agreeably) unaware of the Damais' existence, the social and economic inequalities fostered by the VTP also become invisible. Yet, behind the scenes, old ways of doing business are magnified and tradition ironically becomes a heavier yoke of servitude than it would be in the absence of tourism.

Village Tourism in Nepal

Tourism has been a cornerstone of the Nepalese economy since shortly after the kingdom opened its borders to the West in 1951. A key event that spurred a near-immediate explosion in tourism was the summiting of Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953. Mountaineers and trekkers began flocking to Nepal and tourists interested in exotic culture began discovering Kathmandu Valley and its rich cultural and religious history. Records on tourism indicate that the number of tourists visiting Nepal reached 493,000 by 1999 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2001). Promoting tourism remains high on the development agenda of His Majesty's Government.

Nepal's increasing dependence on tourism is integral to its development strategy (Sharma 2000). The importance of tourism to the Nepalese economy would be difficult to overestimate; it represents the major source of foreign currency, accounting for as much as one third of its export income in 1999 (Ministry of Finance 2002) and is a major source of foreign exchange (Rogers and Atchison 1998), second only to foreign aid. Nepal is of course most famous for being home to the Himalayas, so mountaineering and trekking have been the foundations of the tourist industry in Nepal since it opened its borders to the West. Over time, Nepal's tourism industry has diversified to keep it a growth industry. Of the many new initiatives, village tourism, the subject of the following case study, is one upon which many hopes are attached.

The village of Sirubari is the pioneer of village tourism in Nepal. Although it is considered a Gurung village, Sirubari actually contains a populace of numerous jats, which also have internal subdivisions. Gurungs make up the majority of the population and reside in two hamlets. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language of their own as well as Nepali, practice Buddhism and run their own family farms that are, for the most part, self sufficient. Gurung men from Sirubari have a long history of serving in foreign armies from which older generations receive substantial pensions. Gurungs also run the VTP described below.

Living a brief walk along the main footpath from the Gurung hamlets are members of three Dalit (or low-caste) jats, who speak Nepali. Dalits are practicing Hindus and are subdivided according to social status and a mix of service occupations they perform. Damais are ranked as the lowest in status of these jats locally and have traditionally supplied the occupations of musician/dancer, tailor and

town crier to serve mainly upper castes and local ethnic groups. They perform other occupations that are less closely identified with specific jats, such as agricultural labor or porter, just as do Kamis and Sarkis, who enjoy somewhat higher status. Kamis are closely identified with being ironsmiths and shamans, Sarkis as cobblers. Neither of these jats performs services that could be tapped as visibly as the music the Damai perform. The Damai provide the data on the contribution of Dalits to tourism for the following discussion.

Sirubari's tourism program was the brainchild of an ex-Gurkha Army Major and an Australian businessman, who modified Australia's farmstead tourism into what is now known as village tourism. Its sacralization follows in textbook fashion the process anthropologist Dean MacCannell (2004) describes for "must-see" tourist attractions. From its inception as a new spot on the 1998 Visit Nepal marketing campaign, the tourism program in Sirubari has been touted as a "model" because it offered a "high quality" program consistent with the development goals of His Majesty's Government (Dhungana 2000). In 2001, Sirubari's fame grew to an international scale when the VTP won the prestigious Gold Medal Award of the Pacific Area Travel Association. The VTP has been the subject of cursory evaluations by native development experts Prakash Raj (2003) and Pitamber Sharma (2000). Results of these studies have now been widely reported, thus adding to the prestige of the VTP, but, although there are many laudable aspects of this project, a number of the conclusions reached by Raj and Sharma cannot be supported. Nonetheless, the Sirubari VTP is visited by village leaders interested in replicating village tourism in numbers that exceed visits by foreigners. As many as 100 such tourism organizers from eight Village Development Committees visited Sirubari en masse (Kathmandu Post 2001); the Gurung village of Ghalegaun of Lamjung District has now launched a replica program, and hoteliers from other villages have been trained in Sirubari. Sirubari's story of success has exceeded all expectations, and is held up as an example of tourism as development, of successful reforestation, and of conserving biodiversity.

Despite preconceptions that tourism in Sirubari was organized formally to pursue economic development, residents of the village present a picture that ties its initiation into social goals. Sirubari is home also to a demographic anomaly created by the past military service of the majority of the Gurung men who lived there. While serving mainly in the Indian and British armies, most men now over the age of 40 prospered economically while they raised their children in Kathmandu and in cities in India and other parts of Asia. Those children, now grown, no longer consider Sirubari home in the same way their parents did. They also have the financial resources to live in cities that more closely resemble the ones in which they spent their childhoods. The flight of young men and their families from Sirubari has left a social vacuum. Many residents now consider Sirubari to be *namailo chaina*, or not pleasant, because there are so few young children. Tourism organizers confirm this notion when they point out that tourism is a "side business," from which they do not expect to earn much. Brochures attempt to turn the situation into a

marketing advantage by highlighting the pleasantness of the village, which is created in good measure by the quiet of having so few young children there.

Nor has tourism been the pretext for other economic or infrastructural development, except for those related to public health. Education, communication and transportation in the area have all witnessed notable or even dramatic change in recent decades. Education represents the earliest of these, with the construction or improvement of primary and secondary schools in Sirubari and other nearby villages. Significantly, the primary school in Sirubari is located in the bazaar, which shapes the daily routine of the adjacent Dalit hamlets more than it does the Gurung hamlets. Because of its location, the Sirubari primary school thus serves Dalit children almost exclusively. Nearly all Gurung children attend school in other nearby villages. The tourism program does not appear to have affected education in any significant way.

The introduction of electricity and communication has also been independent of tourism. Even though the tourism program would have promoted the penetration of power lines and communications towers, there was enough of a groundswell of need and support for electricity and telephone to be introduced independently. The distribution of electricity conforms to caste status, as would be expected. Nearly all Gurung houses have electricity with multiple outlets into which they connect cooking appliances, radios and televisions. Dalit households are another matter. Owing to their poverty, only half the Damai households have electricity and few have more than one outlet. The telephone has not yet proliferated in Sirubari, even among the wealthier Gurungs. At present, the nearest working phone is 20 minutes away.

Another significant development project is the construction of a road from Naudanda up through Sirubari and other hill villages in that region. In 2001, the road bed reached Sirubari, but was not navigable yet. By the following summer, my assistant and I were able to reach Sirubari via a jolting jeep ride. The next year witnessed increasing levels of traffic as the still-unpaved road drew more traffic, including large busses. Tourism organizers were ambivalent about the benefit of the road to tourism in Sirubari. When I asked if it would not convey more people to the village, organizers agreed but worried that fewer tourists would stay overnight because of the ease of returning to Pokhara.

The VTP is more closely connected to health than these other developments. When the tourism initiative began in the mid 1990s, organizers attempted to improve general hygiene, the availability of potable water and of toileting facilities. They recognized that tourist flow would be directly related to comfort and health concerns related to infectious diseases. Organizers promoted hand washing after toileting and before preparing food in order to decrease infection among villagers and tourists alike. They put similar emphasis on water filtration, maintenance of the piped water system and proliferation of "modern" toilets.

As noted above, the overt goals of the program are economic, even though informally they compete with other, social goals. The main economic benefit of

tourism is to offset the costs of acquiring the material goods necessary to host tourists. Many of these items are considered desirable and would be difficult to afford without tourism income. At the lower end of the economic spectrum, some people do hope that tourism will increase their overall income. Collectively, income from the tourism program is used to fund the activities of at least three committees, the Tourism Development and Management Committee (TDMC) and the *ama samitis* (women's committees) of the Gurung and Damai hamlets. The TDMC and the *ama samiti* of Gurung Gaun use income from tourism mainly to support the activities of the program itself, for example to pay for costs associated with its operation. The Damai *ama samiti* receives occasional donations, which support tourism and community needs.

Income from tourism derives from two sources of tourists, the lucrative *bideshi*, or foreign, tourists and the less profitable *swadeshi*, or Nepali tourists. *Bideshi* tourists arrive in small to large groups, via arrangements with a trekking company and the Village Tourism Office (VTO). Thus, the proportion of expenditures staying in Sirubari depends on whether one considers the income of the trekking agency and the VTO. Although estimates range from about \$40 U.S. to \$130 U.S., my experience suggests that a typical *bideshi* pays roughly \$45/day. When all expenses are accounted, clearly less than 50% of tourism expenditures are retained by Sirubari. The TDMC estimates that only about \$8 of the \$45 or 18% represents village-retained income.

In order to become a host, a household must invest considerably to improve the guest room and furnish it, to acquire appropriate dining furnishings, a water filtration tank and, most costly of all, to construct a separate building as a toilet/bathroom. These two-room structures are stone and cement and have indoor plumbing and a septic tank, which is either brought in as a unit or constructed separately of stone and cement. Raj's (2003) estimate of an initial cash outlay of Rs. 22,400 per guest bed is quite reasonable. It must be kept in mind, however, that households equip themselves to host two (or more) guests, thus doubling the costs to 44,800 per household. Locals reported that the approximate cost of building a toilet/bathroom was Rs. 40,000 or more and bearing the other costs ran between Rs. 5,000 and 10,000.³

Making these purchases and improvements does not guarantee that a family can host *bideshi* tourists initially, however. Household members also undergo training in hygiene and cooking for tourists and, if they do not adhere to standards, the TDMC only permits them to host *swadeshis* or no one at all. Thus there is a three-tiered system of participation as host family, *bideshi*-hosting, *swadeshi*-hosting and non-participating. Control over the level of participation rests firmly with the TDMC, effectively making it a powerful body governing a new layer of social hierarchy brought in by tourism.

Whether a Gurung family hosts guests or not, its members may also perform music and/or dance for guests or provide *malla*, garlands of flowers, or other artifacts like the knit, black *topis* (caps) presented to tourists when they depart. Neither

making garlands nor knitting topis represents appreciable income, but singing and/or dancing is remunerated, although quite meagerly. The main musical performances are the welcoming procession and the infrequent parting recession. Damai musician groups conduct these performances and individual performers receive only Rs. 20 per tour group, regardless of whether there is also a recessional performance.

Tourism organizers provided data not only on the costs necessary to become hosts and income from tourists, but also on tourist flow. Net profits to date have yet to be realized by host families. Under the most optimistic of scenarios, an average family might have had a net income of approximately Rs. 25,000 after the first 7 years of the tourism project, if only 20 households have shared in hosting the bideshi tourists. Assuming none of these visits involved additional expense, a household still must earn from Rs. 20,000 to 25,000 in order to profit from hosting tourists.

In the case of the Damai musicians, participation in the tourism project involves only an investment in traditional Nepali clothing and the time it takes to conduct their performances. They net an income of about Rs. 20 per tourist group resulting in a total income of approximately Rs. 800 in the peak year. This "profit" is so meager that Damais see no advantage in investing or saving it. They prefer to buy a glass or two (at the most) of *rakshi*, millet wine made locally.

Tourism in Nepal and in Sirubari is often tied symbolically to the promotion of political and social equality and the elimination of caste. Conversations with TDMC members and others in the Gurung community were often peppered with "one blood" symbolism and discussions of "uplifting" the Dalits so that they can enjoy economic and social status "equal" to other jats. As we have seen, an unstated, social goal of the VTP includes the infusion of high-status, modern tourists into Sirubari as a way of compensating for the flight of young people. Tourists create an opportunity for social interaction and with them come expectations that good government is based on political equality which is incompatible with the caste system.

Running directly counter to the overt efforts to bring a measure of equality to the social structure of Nepal, however, tourism promotes social hierarchy in two ways. Tourism, because of its promotion of tradition, also encourages the stagnation of the jats as hierarchically organized social components. Traditional hierarchy is buttressed by the manner in which services are arranged, using time-honored relations of production consistent with the focus on "tradition." The *bali ghar bista* system of economic service provision is predicated on arrangements between families of one jat performing services for other jats as part of long-standing obligations. Dalits perform service in return for reciprocal service or payment in kind or cash. Damais traditionally played auspicious music, tailored clothes and spread official town news, for which families would pay them set amounts of grain and/or other agricultural products seasonally. Critical to this process is the *obligation* to perform such services with very little recourse, because they had too little power to

resist or to renegotiate effectively. Consequently, increases in services do not necessarily result in like increases in compensation. Promoters of tourism call on this system of inter-jat obligations to solicit participation by Damais as musicians, thus acting as an effective counterweight to the impetus for change toward greater social equality.

Moreover, the way that the TDMC structures participation by Gurungs as host families simultaneously substitutes for a level of social hierarchy absent in Gurung Gaun and, as a result, further elaborates the social structure of the Gurung community. Traditionally, Gurung social structure was characterized by clan affiliation in which there was a basic division between the *char jat* (four clans) and the *sora jat* (sixteen clans), with the former group enjoying the higher status. Sirubari, unlike most Gurung villages, is populated entirely of *char jat* clans, leaving a social vacuum at the bottom of the hierarchy. Social stratification is now being encouraged, however, by the introduction of the three-tiered system of participation in hosting tourists at the *bideshi*, *swadeshi* and non-participating levels.

Tourism in Sirubari embodies many of the social, symbolic and political contradictions that accompany jat-based hierarchy in a modernizing social context. The contradictions of cultural tourism as an agent of development are readily apparent. The central two paradoxes in tourism in Sirubari concern 1) social reality and 2) the process of tourism as development. The first exists when the rhetoric of equality further solidifies hierarchy by providing a narrative that holds out the false promise of social advancement of Dalits, and is tied to participating (in an unspecified future) in the actual hosting of tourists. Rather than attempting to resolve the social situation in favor of either hierarchy or equality, the two co-exist. Their contradiction is recognized, but accepted as necessary aspects of living in society. Therefore, there is potential for movement toward either hierarchy or equality, with a simultaneous moral justification for the reverse course of action.

This complex, dynamic social backdrop is the context in which the contradiction between development and tradition also exists. There are countless ways in which the people who work with tourists in Sirubari manipulate culture and tradition to present a consistent, non-contradictory image of Sirubari as culturally homogeneous, prosperous yet primitive, pristine yet progressive. Sirubari is promoted as a seamless cultural entity, a Gurung village that welcomes the tourist who can enjoy cultural programming and indulge momentarily in the lives of the villagers. No mention is made of the fact that Dalit, not Gurung musicians perform the music and dance at the welcoming ceremony, the moment which has perhaps the most impact on the tourist. Nor are tourists told that Dalits, living in their own hamlets, comprise an indispensable, though invisible (to the tourist) part of village life and indeed of the whole social fabric of Nepal. By making Dalits and their undesirable social position invisible, hosts are able to construct a consistent image of Sirubari as a remnant of a romantic past that is compatible with the preconceptions that tourists want left in tact. Perhaps the tourist is unwittingly or somewhat consciously complicit in the creation of this image because of her dis-

taste for the notion that hierarchy and equality can coexist. This was brought home to me in a presentation I wrote for a recent professional meeting. A learned colleague demanded that I drop the term equality from my description of the situation I elaborate in this paper, because equality contradicted the caste system! I argue that it is because of that very mindset, that equality and hierarchy cannot persist simultaneously, that tourism programs can comfortably contain both, by carefully crafting images that encourage tourists and others to believe that such social contradictions indeed do not exist.

To some extent, all tourism programs that offer traditional culture as their main attraction must deal with this conundrum successfully. Tourists are drawn to such attractions because of the portrait that is painted of tradition, a portrait that is somewhat false, like a façade that hides the engine of development which this false depiction fuels. In Sirubari, they do it so adeptly that other villages seek to replicate their success through mimicking this program. Almost from the time of its inception, developers at all levels began to consider copying the Sirubari experience. One evaluation asks rhetorically, “Do we need more Sirubari type of village tourism for sustainability (sic)?” (Raj 2003, 5). At least four similar projects have been planned, with the one in Ghalegaun in Lamjung District already under operation.

This situation presents another opportunity beyond the effort to capitalize on what is seen, both correctly and incorrectly, as a development success. It creates a situation in which it is possible to test the hypotheses suggested in this paper in replicable case studies. Three hypotheses regarding the effects of tourism on social structure come readily to mind: 1) cultural programming will portray host villages in symbolically consistent ways, minimizing cultural heterogeneity and social hierarchy; 2) Tourism management practices will use the existing hierarchical arrangement of jats to provide entertainment for tourists and will thus strengthen rather than weaken differences between them; and 3) Within the jat that manages tourism there will be a further elaboration of social structure reflecting degrees of participation.

Conclusion

The VTP in Sirubari is one example of several types of tourism upon which Nepal hinges hopes for economic development and social change, as other developing nations also do. This paper focuses on social outcomes of one kind of tourism program and attempts to offer a way to predict how tourism affects social structure across different situations without sacrificing an understanding of the unique social contexts of each situation. I contend that if we are to clarify how tourism and development affect the social structure of Nepalese villages, it is necessary to focus on the internal diversity of tourism villages, especially Dalits, with each jat recognized as a unique cultural entity. According to Teague (1997, 175), “the occupational monopoly exercised by groups within a caste system often has a limiting effect on

responses to social change.” Yet, like the ‘traditional’ metalworkers he worked with, Damais in Sirubari respond to the shifting winds of economic and social change. Because of factors inherent in the jat system of Nepal, there is potential for social change, either toward further social division or leveling of caste differences. The direction these social changes take depends on many things, some of which are related to tourism. Two of these are how tourism projects are conceived and implemented and whether they deal with the concerns of diverse internal interest groups, including Dalits. In order to predict better how tourism affects the social dynamic of host communities it will also be necessary to attempt to untangle how hosts symbolize and manipulate the dualism of things traditional yet modern.

Notes

1. See Duncan and Gregory’s (1999) interesting collection of writings about documenting travel.
2. At a panel on tourism at the meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Dallas, Texas in 2004, Thoric Cedarstrom of Counterpart, a Washington-based NGO, challenged the speakers to devise theory that facilitates efforts to develop tourism that responds to the needs of host communities in the Developing World.
3. In 2002/3, the exchange rate was approximately Rs. 75/\$1.

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