

Examiner's commentary

This excellent essay presents an in-depth study with a sharply focused research question, within a broad understanding of the topic in the context of the discipline of social and cultural anthropology. The essay discusses an interesting question within a growing anthropological area, the study of tourism. Contextualized within the tensions of the global arena and supported by relevant conceptual and theoretical frames – the Marxist concept of commodification and constructivist approaches to culture – the student puts forward a strong argument. This anthropological essay challenges cultural assumptions about the notion of culture understood as authentic and the dynamics of cultural contexts, and challenges current ethnocentric views, questioning the exoticism of media portrayal and the tourism industry. In this well-informed discussion and analysis of primitivism, the essay shows the case of an egalitarian culture – the Korowai – which transforms its practices and values as it is incorporated into the Western capitalist economic system. A well-organized essay, with some critical evaluation of methods and a selection of sources that show evidence of a nuanced and sensitive approach to this contemporary world issue.

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TOPIC: The Cultural Commodification of the Korowai Tribe

Research Question: Do tourist encounters with the Korowai tribe constitute commodification, and what does that classification imply about shifting Korowai ideologies?

Social and Cultural Anthropology

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INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals all anthropologists seek to fulfill is to understand and observe a culture without imposing their personal beliefs or attempting to change the traditions in practice.¹ However, anthropological reports often draw in curious crowds compelled by the exotic, and genuine attempts to appreciate and comprehend uncontacted tribes can lead to their romanticization in mass media portrayal. Recently, more have engaged in “primitive tourism,” a type of travel advertised as a spiritual connection to nature and the past.² I became interested in how these solitary tribes refashion their belief systems when exposed to globalization. I wondered how our world of interconnected cultures would expand to include the cultures of these tribes, and how they in return imbue our “modern” culture into theirs. My paper aims to examine the interchange of traditional tribes with modern world interactions, which remains a topic of fascination among anthropologists. To do so, I will focus on the Korowai Tribe of West Papua. Through this paper, I seek to answer the following: do tourist encounters with the Korowai tribe constitute commodification, and what does that classification imply about shifting Korowai ideologies? Using specific examples and anthropological terms, I will argue that Korowai culture has been commodified, resulting in a shift from egalitarian to Western practices.

Dutch missionary Johannes Veldhuizen, on behalf of the Mission of the Reformed Churches, first made contact with the Korowai Tribe in 1978.³ They are a scattered and small

¹ Gmelch, Sharon. *Tourists and Tourism: a Reader*. Waveland Press, 2004.

² Stasch, Rupert. “Primitivist Tourism and Romantic Individualism: On the Values in Exotic Stereotypy about Cultural Others.” *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 192., doi:10.1177/1463499614534114.

³ Enk, Gerrit J. van., and Lourens de. Vries. *The Korowai of Irian Jaya: Their Language in Its Cultural Context*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1997.

group of about 3,000 and are famous in mass media as the “Stone Age Tribe.”⁴ Over the last 25 years, Korowai have been visited by upwards of five thousand tourists and fifty television crews.⁵ I chose the Korowai specifically because they offer a good example of a recently contacted tribe that has been forced to rapidly adapt to tourism. As they become a more popular tourist attraction, they must adjust their worldview to the influx of new cultures, ethnicities, and technology, as well as the introduction of a foreign monetary system. In order to understand the impact of tourism, I will apply general anthropological terms to specific ethnographic accounts. Specifically, I will look at Rupert Stasch’s fieldwork with the Korowai and draw on anthropological study of tourism, commodification, and authenticity.

TOURISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, in 2015, tourism alone accounted for 9% of the global GDP, and one in eleven jobs worldwide. Tourism contributes about 70% of export of services for least developed countries, and international tourist arrivals are expected to reach an estimated 1.6 billion by 2020.⁶ Through globalization, tourism is becoming increasingly more central to the discussion of anthropology.

The relationship between anthropology and tourism is complicated and often fraught with controversy. The problem lies in the various implications of tourism on the constantly changing face of people groups around the world. The mere act of publishing information about

⁴ Stasch, Rupert. “Primitivist Tourism and Romantic Individualism: On the Values in Exotic Stereotypy about Cultural Others.” *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 192., doi:10.1177/1463499614534114.

⁵ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. Pp. 66

⁶ “Communications.” *2017 International Tourism Results: the Highest in Seven Years | World Tourism Organization UNWTO*, media.unwto.org/.

uncontacted tribes - no matter how pure the intentions - takes tribes out of their sphere of isolation and into the spotlight of public curiosity. From that point it becomes easy and common for mass media portrayal to exoticize and reduce these diverse tribes to one or two defining stereotypes, leading to tourists who wish to engage in primitivist tourism. Consequently, anthropology becomes inextricably linked to tourism, and the study of tourism from an anthropological standpoint becomes invaluable.

Overview of Commodification

First coined in 1975 by Karl Marx, commodification refers to the commercialization of a non-commercial good. Commodification carries significantly negative undertones relating to power dynamics, exploitation, and loss of culture. Marx himself severely criticized commodification as a corruption by commerce.⁷ When tourists visit tribes, they give money for tour guides, translators, and souvenirs. In other words, they pay money in exchange for experiencing “culture,” whether it be traditional dances and village sports or jewelry and bamboo knives. Yet a monetary exchange does not necessarily constitute cultural commodification. Instead, it is often the only way for foreigners to barter and return a good for the goods and services they receive. What, then, determines when exchanges become commodified?

In Adam Kaul’s studies of traditional Irish music sessions, he makes the seeks to understand which practices can truly be considered commodified. According to Kaul, the crucial distinction between commodification and commercialization is the element of control. In Kaul’s words,

⁷ Ziółkowski, Marek. “Commodification of Social Life.” *Polish Sociological Review*, No. 148, 1 Jan. 2004, pp. 387.

“Commodification occurs when individuals lose control over the process of determining how value is assigned to the activities and things that they produce, when functional values are overridden by commensurable exchange-values.”⁸

In his example, because Irish musicians in sessions still have nearly complete control over the music they play, they have not lost agency or control, and by extension have not been commodified.

Tourism and Authenticity

Inherently tied to the discussion of commodification is authenticity. Dean MacCannell, one of the first to venture into the study of tourism through the lens of anthropology, posits that the modern tourist is motivated by a search for the authentic.⁹ According to MacCannell, “modern man has been condemned to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity, or purity of others.”¹⁰ MacCannell borrows Goffman’s theory of “front” and “back” by creating levels to authenticity. When authenticity is far too obviously staged, tourists feel they only receive a front for authenticity. Tourists continually search for the “back,” where culture is truly authentic and they can see “life as it was.” For tourists, authenticity is the key to experiencing a spiritual rebirth.¹¹

⁸ Kaul, Adam R. “The Limits of Commodification in Traditional Irish Music Sessions.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1 Sept. 2007, pp. 200

⁹ Kontogeorgopoulos, N. (2004). Ecotourism and mass tourism in Southern Thailand: Spatial interdependence, structural connections, and staged authenticity. *GeoJournal*, 61(1), pp. 6

¹⁰ Maccannell, Dean. “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1973, University of California Press, pp. 589–603., doi:10.1086/225585.

¹¹ Maccannell, Dean. “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1973, University of California Press, pp. 589–603., doi:10.1086/225585.

In Andrew Alan Johnson's study of the Chiang Mai in Thailand,¹² Johnson notes a particularly telling advertisement aired by the Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT): a robot is dancing awkwardly in a nightclub, visiting a Buddhist temple, and steering a canoe. Eventually, the robot puts its hands together and bows its head in a traditional Thai greeting, and the robot is transformed into a white man with a content expression. The screen cuts to black with only the words "Amazing Thailand."¹³ The ad reinforces the belief that only tourists with authentic engagement with cultures can truly understand what it means to be human, and that "touristic shame is not based on being a tourist but on not being tourist enough... on a failure to see everything the way it ought to be seen."¹⁴ Johnson observes:

"The white tourist, alienated from his human identity back at home ... escapes the other automatons and discovers a hidden world whose inhabitants are human and help him to become truly human... The tourist must find authenticity and respond appropriately."¹⁵

Thus, the obligation falls on the culture visited to present a face of authenticity, even though one might not truly exist. However, the tourist's quest for authenticity can never truly be realized and what they consume instead is a 'staged authenticity.'¹⁶

¹² Johnson, A. (2007). Authenticity, Tourism, and Self-discovery in Thailand: Self-creation and the Discerning Gaze of Trekkers and Old Hands. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 22(2), pp. 153

¹³ Johnson, A. (2007). Authenticity, Tourism, and Self-discovery in Thailand: Self-creation and the Discerning Gaze of Trekkers and Old Hands. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 22(2), pp. 154

¹⁴ Maccannell, Dean. "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1973, University of California Press, pp. 589–603., doi:10.1086/225585.

¹⁵ Johnson, A. (2007). Authenticity, Tourism, and Self-discovery in Thailand: Self-creation and the Discerning Gaze of Trekkers and Old Hands. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 22(2), pp. 156

¹⁶ Kontogeorgopoulos, N. (2004). Ecotourism and mass tourism in Southern Thailand: Spatial interdependence, structural connections, and staged authenticity. *GeoJournal*, 61(1), pp. 9

Anthropologists no longer believe that there is truly an “authentic culture.” Many adhere to constructivism instead, believing that authenticity and reality are woven together from social constructions. Others are more radical, abiding to the postmodern interpretation which debates the existence of “reality” itself.¹⁷ Still, the debated existence of authenticity does not inhibit thousands from travelling in search of it.

PRIMITIVISM TOURISM IN AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY

Background on Rupert Stasch

Rupert Stasch is a cultural anthropologist who received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and currently teaches at the University of Cambridge in England. He has done extensive fieldwork with the Korowai, where he has seen first-hand the influence of tourism on the community.¹⁸ He studied specifically tourism’s impact on the society and how Korowai view themselves in relation with cultural others. While he does have strong academic credentials, as a British American, he inherently has cultural biases that influence his account of the Korowai.

Stasch’s Interpretation

The Korowai group all tourists together in one classification and as one ethnicity under the umbrella term *tulis*,¹⁹ emphasizing the sense of otherness and revealing a “heightened attention to the *differences* between themselves and the others.”²⁰ The Korowai think that tourists

¹⁷ Chambers, D. and McIntosh, B. (2008). Using Authenticity to Achieve Competitive Advantage in Medical Tourism in the English-speaking Caribbean. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(5), pp.923

¹⁸ Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 9., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

¹⁹ Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 9., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

²⁰ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.63

come from a land where they never have to work, and food is just there (*xondup*).²¹ They refer to tourists with epithets including “*du-mux-man-anop*” (people with money) and “*misafi-man-anop*” (people with articles).²² These encounters “agitate participants’ relation to their own normativity.”²³ In response to these images of apparent wealth and fortune, Stasch argues that the Korowai purposefully place themselves in a lower position as a facet of their egalitarian society.²⁴

According to Stasch, the Korowai self-identify as primitive, and are able to use that label to their advantage. By painting themselves as weak and inferior, they hope to provoke pity and compassion from visitors, who will then bestow them with gifts such as money, tools, and food.²⁵ One Korowai woman said to Stasch: “He will see that these people live without money and he’ll divide it out,” referring to government officials who visit.²⁶ When visiting the Korowai, Bambang Darmono, a retired army Lieutenant General, stated: ‘I am so truly sad I am almost crying, that this nation has existed for almost seventy years and it turns out there are people who still live naked.’²⁷ As a result of this pity, travelers give Korowai goods in order to help usher them into modernity: “[The old men] went to Merauke in just leaf penis foreskin wrappers, and

²¹ Stasch, Rupert. “Primitivist Tourism and Romantic Individualism: On the Values in Exotic Stereotypy about Cultural Others.” *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 204., doi:10.1177/1463499614534114.

²² Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 18., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

²³ Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 10., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

²⁴ Stasch, Rupert. “How an Egalitarian Polity Structures Tourism and Restructures Itself Around It.” *Ethnos*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2014, pp. 527., doi:10.1080/00141844.2014.942226.

²⁵ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From ‘Stone-Age’ to ‘Real-Time’: Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.62

²⁶ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From ‘Stone-Age’ to ‘Real-Time’: Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.73

²⁷ Stasch, Rupert. “Primitivist Tourism and Romantic Individualism: On the Values in Exotic Stereotypy about Cultural Others.” *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 203., doi:10.1177/1463499614534114.

[the Bupati] was wracked by longing/sympathy and gave them two outboards.”²⁸ The image of ‘primitivism’ is purposefully propagated in order to manipulate outsiders into giving them money and goods. In fact, Korowai hurry to strip their clothes and hide away factory-made clothing and imported manufactured goods when visitors arrive. Knauff describes this paradoxical situation as ‘recessive agency,’ where groups “seek to bring about desired socio-cultural transformations by occupying positions of passivity relative to others.”²⁹ In line with egalitarian principles, the Korowai see an uneven distribution of wealth, and merely act modestly in order to cause a flow of goods that will result in a more even distribution. Stasch argues that the Korowai maintain control by “meeting others on their own transactional terms”, suggesting that the Korowai culture has not been commodified.³⁰ He also believes that tourism does not lead to the deterioration of Korowai egalitarianism, but rather strengthens and reaffirms the doctrine.

However, the Korowai tribe has indeed become commodified, because the meaning of their rituals have changed, and the emphasis has shifted to making money and performance for tourists. Their extension of stereotypical behaviors and engineered rituals are indications of commodification. And as a result of commodification, I will argue that the Korowai have begun to forgo egalitarian values in favor of western practices.

ANALYSIS

Extending Stereotypical Behaviors

²⁸ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.74

²⁹ Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 15., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

³⁰ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.70

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In Raffaele's article, he continues to portray the Korowai in an exotic and sometimes subhuman light. It is this mixture of fear and romanticization that pervades Korowai depiction in mass media. Instead of shying away from these descriptions, the Korowai actively embrace this "exotic stereotypy" as a means of encouraging tourism. However, the tourists are the ones who determine what is considered "authentic," which the Korowai must adhere to. In Christine Ballengee-Morris' study of Native American art in West Virginia and Guarani art in Brazil, groups have used their art and visual presentation to society to "sell a cultural image."³² This cultural image is determined not by the people, but by those in power - whether it be the government or tourists. The people in control become the "masters of authenticity," redefining what they consider authentic.

For the Korowai, tourists have deemed "authenticity" as nudity, violence, and stone-age tools. In order to discern the Korowai understanding of authenticity, it is valuable to look to the Korowai language itself. Korowai have begun to adapt Indonesian into their language as Indonesian and Korowai contact becomes more frequent. The Indonesian word *asli* refers to 'authentic, original, indigenous, primitive,' but the Korowai definition of *alsi* is simply 'nude.'³³ The Korowai define their interactions with tourists as a performance of primitiveness. Ironically,

[REDACTED]

³² Ballengee-Morris, Christine. "Cultures for Sale: Perspectives on Colonialism and Self-Determination and the Relationship to Authenticity and Tourism." *Canadian Social Science*, Canadian Research & Development Center of Sciences and Cultures; Canadian Academy of Oriental and Occidental Culture, 1 Apr. 2002. pp.239

³³ Stasch, Rupert. "Primitivist Tourism and Romantic Individualism: On the Values in Exotic Stereotypy about Cultural Others." *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 201., doi:10.1177/1463499614534114.

they have taken the word for authentic and translated it into nudity, a practice that is no longer authentic in their culture. The Korowai cannot choose the image they must present - that choice has already been decided by the photographers, advertisers, and journalists who display the Korowai as “primitive” in their guides. When they cater to the expectations of tourists for the specific purpose of getting money, these lose control.³⁴ In order to attract tourists and receive the same goods as other tribes who also engage in tourism, the Korowai must extend stereotypical behaviors defined by those in control - the tourists.

In addition to nudity, Korowai use the stereotype of primitive violence to further manipulate tourists and government officials. In the Korowai belief system, Korowai attribute death to *khakhua* or *xaxua*, who are “witches” that live among the population and murder people by imperceptibly eating their bodies.³⁵ The *khakhua* eat the victims from the inside out, replacing them with ash so that even the victim remains unaware of their slow deterioration. After the victim’s heart is devoured, the victim whispers the name of the *khakhua*, who the Korowai then hunt and devour in the same way that the *khakhua* devoured the victim.³⁶ Cannibalism is an exercise in revenge, but since foreign contact, the Indonesian government has employed police and placed laws prohibiting the act.³⁷ As a result, cannibalism is slowly fading in practice among the Korowai. For the Western world, cannibalism is perhaps the most foreign and stigmatized types of murder. It is no surprise, then, that the Korowai are touted as one of the last remaining cannibalistic tribes in order to add to their exotic representation. The Korowai use this

³⁴ Kaul, Adam R. “The Limits of Commodification in Traditional Irish Music Sessions.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1 Sept. 2007, pp. 200

³⁵ Raffaele, Paul. “Sleeping with Cannibals.” *Smithsonian Institution*, Smithsonian Institution, 1 Sept. 2006, www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/sleeping-with-cannibals-128958913/.

³⁶ Stasch, Rupert. “Giving Up Homicide: Korowai Experience of Witches and Police (West Papua).” *Oceania*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2001, pp. 38., doi:10.1002/j.1834-4461.2001.tb02763.x.

³⁷ Stasch, Rupert. “Giving Up Homicide: Korowai Experience of Witches and Police (West Papua).” *Oceania*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2001, pp. 37., doi:10.1002/j.1834-4461.2001.tb02763.x.

expectation of violence to receive more goods. In one of Stasch's accounts, a senior Korowai man gave up his weapons in hopes of receiving better replacements for cutting trees:

“He characterised the bow and arrow as signs of endemic violence and cannibalism, and their handover as an act of self-pacification: ‘This is for hunting, for shooting pigs and shooting cassowaries, and for killing people. If someone elopes with someone’s daughter, this is for fighting. And regularly when people want to eat someone, need to kill a witch, I routinely use this to kill. And feuding, here in the Korowai area, [we] use this all the time. What this arrow here is for is, I go on killing people and eating them. Up until now, when I give it up. I want to give it to Sir.’”³⁸

By first emphasizing the violent nature of the Korowai man and then relinquishing goods, the Korowai manipulates a government official to get better tools. The Korowai intentionally use an aspect of their culture - cannibalism - in order to get goods in return. In other words, when they “sell” an image of themselves as violent, they commodify their culture.

Engineered Rituals

Although there is not one “authentic” culture of the Korowai tribe, the Korowai still contrive a fictional authenticity through staged rituals. When an aircraft carrying the head of the Unit for the Acceleration of Development in the Provinces of Papua and West Papua came to the Korowai, they were greeted with 200 Korowai in a martial dance formation:

³⁸ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.60

“Korowai men performed cycles of synchronized ululation and snapping of bowstrings, a dance genre normally enacted during ceremonial feasting or feuds. Most Korowai on the scene wore no clothing except traditional-dress genital coverings and festive adornments, though the government party did not know that the performers had only removed their shirts and shorts earlier that morning.”³⁹

The Korowai repurposed traditional celebrations as performances in order to entertain tourists. They understand their responsibility as hosts is “hosting them [tourists] at tree houses and performing exhibitionary activities.”⁴⁰ In Edward Bruner’s study of the Maasai of Kenya, he notes that Kichwa Tembo employees “have in effect become performers in the tourism industry, display themselves for tourists, to be observed and photographed, and if asked, they reply that they do it for money. They play the primitive for profit.”⁴¹ Like the Maasai, Korowai engage in MacCannell’s theory of ‘staged authenticity’ by using tradition and rituals to turn a profit.

The Korowai are also notable for their elevated tree-houses. Because of their lean frames, they easily climb tree-houses that they build in order to protect them from mosquitoes, neighboring enemies, and evil spirits. Before moving in permanently, the Korowai beat the walls every night with a wooden stick to scare away evil spirits.⁴² Along with the traditional Korowai dress, these treehouses are the most immediately evident physical evidence that sets Korowai

³⁹ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.59

⁴⁰ Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 22., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

⁴¹ Bruner, Edward M. “The Maasai and the Lion King: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Globalization in African Tourism.” *American Ethnologist*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2001, pp. 224., doi:10.1525/ae.2001.28.4.881.

⁴² Stasch, Rupert. “Dramas of Otherness.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2016, pp. 33., doi:10.14318/hau6.3.003.

culture apart from our own, and therefore one of the most exoticized in popular culture. When tourists visit the Korowai, those with the highest treehouses and closest to tourist traffic are the most valued. Thus, building treehouses loses its practical meaning and becomes a competition for limited resources. Aunale, a popular tourist guide, “can build the tallest type of Korowai ‘tree houses’ ... and so he was now exceptionally well positioned to host tourists.”⁴³ The activities of tree-house building and traditional dances are changed into schemes for tourist attraction. As the meanings of the rituals change, the rituals become commodified.

LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS

Loss of Egalitarian Principles

Tourism and the introduction of a monetary system has caused wealth disparities that were not there before.⁴⁴ With the introduction of money, Korowai have begun to save for other resources, leading to a deterioration of the egalitarian principle of sharing. This, paired with spacial restrictions, has led to a loss of trust, one of the key principles of egalitarianism. Egalitarian societies - the Korowai included - only function when members live in small, dispersed groups usually no larger than 10-15 people. However, missionaries and Papuan helpers urged the Korowai to live in centralized villages, and “today about a third of Korowai live in these new settlements ... and a third alternate between the two residential forms.”⁴⁵ The lack of distance and the close clusters of large groups of people causes tensions to build and no way to relieve them through travelling to other families, as they would when there were issues before.

⁴³ Stasch, Rupert. “How an Egalitarian Polity Structures Tourism and Restructures Itself Around It.” *Ethnos*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2014, pp. 531., doi:10.1080/00141844.2014.942226.

⁴⁴ Stasch, Rupert. “How an Egalitarian Polity Structures Tourism and Restructures Itself Around It.” *Ethnos*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2014, pp. 531., doi:10.1080/00141844.2014.942226.

⁴⁵ Stasch, Rupert. “Primitivist Tourism and Romantic Individualism: On the Values in Exotic Stereotypy about Cultural Others.” *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 203., doi:10.1177/1463499614534114.

Richard B. Lee, a forensic anthropologist who studied the Dobe Ju/Hoansi of Namibia, noted that the introduction of a money and the creation of permanent living homes could, and did, result in jealousy, envy, and a lack of trust.⁴⁶ The jealousy was visualized in the documentary *N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman*, when other Dobe became jealous of her success and the money she received and as a result insulted and ostracized her.⁴⁷ In a similar manner, tourism has led to a mistrust within the Korowai. According to Stasch, some groups Korowai feel left out when tourists do not visit them, and “their feelings of deprivation lead to angry confrontations.”⁴⁸ The anger over wage inequality results in outbursts and hostility. The inequality is also a result of unequal opportunities based on proximity to gateway villages. Because of scarce resources - land and tourists - Korowai no longer cooperate as an egalitarian polity, and money and individual success becomes more important.

Adoption of Western Values

With the loss of egalitarian principles, the Korowai have begun to adopt Western values. Among these are a focus on education, a condemnation of violence, and a more capitalist approach to the economy. Korowai now believe that sending their children to school is the surest way of success, and are often desperate to send their children to school even to the point of enduring severe emotional and financial hardships.⁴⁹ A staple of Western culture, advancement through education is now a prevailing mindset in Korowai culture. In addition to education, Korowai “are presently reevaluating and renouncing their own regime of extraordinary

⁴⁶ Lee, Richard B. *The Dobe Ju/Hoansi*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013.

⁴⁷ Marshall, John, director. *N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman*. Documentary Educational Resources, 1980.

⁴⁸ Stasch, Rupert. “How an Egalitarian Polity Structures Tourism and Restructures Itself Around It.” *Ethnos*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2014, pp. 533., doi:10.1080/00141844.2014.942226.

⁴⁹ Stasch, Rupert. “From Primitive Other to Papuan Self: Korowai Engagement with Ideologies of Unequal Human Worth in Encounters with Tourists, State Officials and Education.” *From 'Stone-Age' to 'Real-Time': Exploring Papuan Temporalities, Mobilities and Religiosities*, 2015, doi:10.22459/fsart.04.2015.03. pp.78

endogenous violence.”⁵⁰ Cannibalism and tribal violence is reducing not only because of necessity, but because Korowai have experienced brutal violence at the hands of the Indonesian police.⁵¹ Lastly, Korowai have become dependent on supplies from a modern world and focus more on trading and buying than producing. According to anthropologist Palma Ingles, “as indigenous people intensify their involvement with a market economy, they are increasingly caught up in a cycle of progress and development.”⁵²

CONCLUSION

Limits of ethnography

While ethnography is often an attempt to correctly portray a culture without bias, there are inherent biases that are unavoidable for all ethnographers. Unconscious cultural biases may cause some ethnographers to emphasize certain aspects of culture over others, and apply personal judgements unintentionally through word choice or tone. Ethnographers are also only privy to the aspects of culture that the studied group chooses to present. Because they are required to inform the subjects that they are being studied, the group may act differently than they would have if they were not observed. In addition, groups that are closed and mistrustful of outsiders may be reluctant to participate or even intentionally give false information.

In my own research, I limited my argument by using only Rupert Stasch’s field work and data. I tried to incorporate theorems and research from multiple other anthropologists and

⁵⁰ Stasch, Rupert. “Giving Up Homicide: Korowai Experience of Witches and Police (West Papua).” *Oceania*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2001, pp. 43., doi:10.1002/j.1834-4461.2001.tb02763.x.

⁵¹ Stasch, Rupert. “Giving Up Homicide: Korowai Experience of Witches and Police (West Papua).” *Oceania*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2001, pp. 57., doi:10.1002/j.1834-4461.2001.tb02763.x.

⁵² Ingles, Palma. “Performing Traditional Dances for Modern Tourists in the Amazon.” *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, vol. 1, no. 3-4, 2001, pp. 246., doi:10.1300/j149v01n03_09.

societies to support my claim, but I could have used more varied data about the Korowai specifically. Given the recent nature of Korowai exposure to the Western world, there is not as much in depth research about the tribe as I would have liked, ignoring the short paragraph blurbs about the Korowai presented in tourist guides and websites. I also may have gone too far by saying that the Korowai culture is completely commodified; there are still many Korowai traditions that remain intact. It might be erroneous to say that they are no longer egalitarian. Tourism has simply led to a shift in their society's organization into one with elements of both Korowai and western ideology. If I were to undertake this assignment again, I would try to rely less on one source and diversify the accounts from which I am drawing. While I did want to keep the paper more simple by using only one ethnographer, I still cannot dismiss the value of comparing his methodology and conclusions with others who have studied the Korowai.

As I was researching, I found it very difficult to apply broad, conceptual terms to specific cases, especially when dealing with issues as nuanced as cultural commodification and authenticity. With such a wealth of often conflicting research on the topic, I was forced to pick and choose which accounts to use based on how closely they could be applied to the Korowai. I also struggled to condense all of the information into such a small space.

Why Commodification Matters

Like all complicated social phenomena, commodification cannot be baldly labelled as “bad” or “evil”. The question remains: does cultural commodification cause traditions to lose their value? Although introducing money to a society does not necessarily strip a culture of its core principles, it is important to keep in mind the impact that any exposure has on uncontacted tribes.

While it is unethical to force cultural values onto other groups, the common perception of an unchanging “Stone Age” tribe is just as ignorant. All culture changes - the argument centers around who is the impetus to that change. Is it the outsiders who force tribes into a Western framework and a dependence on a foreign economic system? Is it the members of the tribe who use tourism to their advantage to gain economic independence and express cultural pride? These questions are difficult to answer, but still worth exploring.

Commodification of culture matters because we need to be able to recognize when a simple and mutually beneficial transaction of goods and services turns into a parasitic relationship, with one group taking advantage over the other. Ultimately, however, while commodification brings economic livelihood to people groups, it is undeniable that something is lost when people capitalize on culture for profit.

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Candidate personal code

Extended essay - Reflections on planning and progress form

Candidate: This form is to be completed by the candidate during the course and completion of their EE. This document records reflections on your planning and progress, and the nature of your discussions with your supervisor. You must undertake three formal reflection sessions with your supervisor: The first formal reflection session should focus on your initial ideas and how you plan to undertake your research; the interim reflection session is once a significant amount of your research has been completed, and the final session will be in the form of a viva voce once you have completed and handed in your EE. This document acts as a record in supporting the authenticity of your work. The three reflections combined must amount to no more than 500 words.

The completion of this form is a mandatory requirement of the EE for first assessment May 2018. It must be submitted together with the completed EE for assessment under Criterion E.

Supervisor: You must have three reflection sessions with each candidate, one early on in the process, an interim meeting and then the final viva voce. Other check-in sessions are permitted but do not need to be recorded on this sheet. After each reflection session candidates must record their reflections and as the supervisor you must sign and date this form.

First reflection session

Candidate comments:

I think that I have a pretty solid foundation for my paper, and I have a very clear vision about the direction of my argument. However, I spent a long time setting up my argument because the terms themselves and the paper requires a long introduction, so I have yet to delve into my argument. My meeting with my supervisor was really useful because he offered me tips about how to restructure my paper in a manner that would better support my argument. He also advised me on what to include in my introduction and conclusion, such as why I became interested and why investigating commodification is so important. He was extremely helpful in guiding me to writing a strong conclusion, because previously I didn't know what to write without it being just summary. I know that I have a lot of research left but I think that if I manage my time I am equipped to finish my paper well before the deadline.

Date:

Supervisor initials: _____

Interim reflection

Candidate comments:

My paper is about 500 words over the word limit, so I have to cut things down. According to my supervisor, I have a strong argument, but because of the word limit I have to cut out the background and general terms sessions. I should also cut out the comparison case and add a section about the importance of commodification. I can take out my section about adopting Western values, which is the weakest part of my argument. I have to embed my research question and explicitly state how I will use and organize my paper answer my question. Lastly, I still have to put in my parenthetical citations. My biggest concern is that I focus too much on only one source. This could cause his account, and subsequently mine, to be biased. For my final steps of the paper, I will edit to create a more concise and cogent analysis.

Date: September 14, 2018

Supervisor initials

Final reflection - Viva voce

Candidate comments:

Through the EE I learned a lot of valuable skills about researching and writing an academic paper. I trained my ability to focus, and consider a wide range of perspectives. I also learned how to apply the concepts I learned in class to a real world setting. In the future, I would try to gain more resources so I could have a more complete understanding of the anthropological techniques I drew upon for my analysis. Reflecting on the actual content of the paper, it was difficult to apply general principles to a specific case. It is especially difficult when dealing with such a nuanced and sensitive topic as cultural loss and manipulation. One of the strengths I felt I accomplished in my paper was that I developed my own argument using general anthropological studies and theories, which was the most challenging aspect of the paper. Looking over the whole process, I am glad that I chose the topic that I did because I had a genuine interest in what I was researching, leading me to spend more time and energy crafting the EE.

Date: October 15, 2018

Supervisor initials