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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Annals of Tourism Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/atoures



The silence of the Kogi in front of tourists



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 February 2014

Revised 6 February 2015

Accepted 15 February 2015

Available online 11 March 2015

Coordinating Editor: David Harrison

Keywords:

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

Host community

Indigenous tourism

Critical tourism studies

Silence

Tourist-host encounters

ABSTRACT

This article sets out to explain the silent behavior of the indigenous Kogi people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta when in front of tourists. It was found that silence corresponds to indigenous cosmology, to Kogi behavioral protocol when faced with outsiders, and to a defense strategy in front of tourists. Understanding the interactions between tourists and indigenous peoples has practical implications for designing cultural policies in these territories. The work is original in its use of ethnography in place of quantitative methods for studying the factors that determine the behavior of the residents in front of tourists. Equally it constitutes a contribution to the few studies that exist on silence as a rhetorical strategy in power relations.

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Introduction

Tourism anthropology takes into account themes such as the processes of culture becoming heritage, identity construction, their social and economic impacts, cultural negotiations between residents and visitors, experiences of self-management and the images of tourists shaping their fates (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013; De Oliveira, da Silva, Costa Cavalcante, & Lima Fonteles, 2010; Nogués Pedregal, 2005; Sánchez Morales & Montoya Gómez, 2013). A recent balance in the studies on the relationships between tourists and local communities (Sharpley, 2014) indicates that much research has been carried out, but its contribution is limited for various reasons: many remain atheoretical or they draw on theoretical frameworks whose contribution to explaining the resident's perception remain unclear; they fail to take into account that for many residents any form of interaction with

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tourists may be involuntary and in many cases non-tangible interactions may occur; research focuses on resident's attitudes and not on the relationship between resident and tourist; and residents' perceptions cannot imply consequential actions on their part.

It is generally the local community that has received more attention and researchers insist on the negative impacts on it (Benthall, 1988; Costa Baber & Barreto, 2007; Mbaiwa, 2005; Nuñez, 1963; Ruiz, Hernández, Coca, Cantero, & del Campo, 2008). Some researchers maintain that the commercial aspect of interactions between tourists and guests in non-capitalist societies cannot be overlooked, saying that their relations are governed by reciprocity (Aramberri, 2001; MacCannell, 2003; Salazar, 2006a). However, the studies also outline positive impacts: tourism means that displacement of rural populations to cities is avoided, new opportunities are opened to them, social networks with the outside world are expanded, the skills of the local inhabitants can be developed and there is a greater feeling of personal growth (Costa Baber & Barreto, 2007; Stronza, 2008). Many authors think negative impacts can be overcome if economic, political, social and psychological empowerment is offered, and if development is promoted on a local scale in a way that respects the cultural norms of the host communities (Ochoa Fonseca, James, & Márquez, 2013; Ruiz et al., 2008; Scheyvens, 1999).

Tourist destinations are stages for social contradictions (Cordero Ulate, 2006; Nogués Pedregal, 2009). Joseph and Kavoori (2001) analyze, for example, the strategies used by a community in India to resist tourism, which allowed them to create the appearance of opposition without directly confronting the tourist, which ultimately created the conditions for accepting this cultural exchange (Joseph & Kavoori, 2001). Salazar (2006b) studied the discourse of Tanzanian guides by examining how they adopt a global discourse with tourists, but recreating it. The motivation for hosts to participate in knowledge transfers with tourists is primarily financial, although they may also be motivated by status, enjoyment and curiosity (Buckley & Allenburg, 2013). The work of van der Bergh and Flores Ochoa (2000) suggests that the nativistic ideology associated with tourism ultimately benefits the local bourgeoisie, while Erb's (2000) study in Flores, Indonesia, argues that by fitting tourists into a structural position that makes sense to the residents of a community, the hosts are attempting to find a way of controlling these disruptive strangers.

In contrast with community-focused studies, others have concentrated on tourists. Urry and Larsen (2011) speak of a tourist gaze that passes through the filter of the desires, expectations and abilities of the tourist, while framing their social class, nationality, age and education. Passariello (1983) compares the behaviors of domestic and international tourists at a Mexican location, while Ryan's research (2002) concerns the disinterest of domestic tourists in New Zealand towards the Maori culture, compared with a high level of international interest.

The aim of this paper is to explain why the Kogi so often remain silent with tourists. Tourists are not always interested in getting to know the local culture, yet traveling through indigenous land en route to the Lost City archeological site or whilst visiting Tayrona National Park obliges them on some level to interact with the Kogi. What reason could the Kogi have for this silence?

Interactions between the Kogi and tourists in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

In order to explain the silence, this text adopts the stance taken by a cluster of work that links anthropological, sociological and psychosocial perspectives (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013). The approach of this paper is more to highlight the unequal relationship between "guests" and "visitors", and to characterize the silence as part of a defensive strategy based in the Kogi's linguistic protocols, in their cosmology and in their historic experience of inter-ethnic contact. Silent behavior observed throughout the fieldwork was interpreted based on the knowledge accumulated by ethnographers on the Kogi culture. The approach employed in this work underlines the tensions between a cultural model that prizes the shedding of material wealth as an access road to the spiritual world, and the reality that offers economic opportunities derived from tourism.

Glenn argues that:

...silence—the unspoken—is a rhetorical art that can be as powerful as the spoken or written word: Like speech, the meaning of silence depends on a power differential that exists in every rhetorical

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