CULTURAL REALIGNMENT, ISLANDS AND THE INFLUENCE OF TOURISM

A new conceptual approach

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Abstract

This article introduces a new concept: 'cultural realignment', which embraces phenomena such as cultural representation, interpretation, stereotyping and branding. Cultural realignment is the intentional depiction or interpretation of a culture (or part of one) for a specific preconceived purpose. It relates directly to power, and there is a need for this broad concept to help comprehend processes in an era of increasing globalisation, the growth of cultural commodification and the proliferation of representations in media including the internet. A prime concern of the article is the way that cultural realignment impacts on the identities of the communities subject to the realignment. The main examples given relate to island communities and their representation by anthropologists, and to island tourist destinations that have been subject to various descriptions, physical transformations and commodification driven by the tourism industry. A case study is examined as an example in the Canary Islands, using original research material related to recent and longitudinal fieldwork.

Keywords

Cultural realignment, identity, islands, tourism, anthropology, Canary Islands, La Gomera

Introduction

This article investigates processes and impacts that include and involve creating or changing a representation of a cultural group and associated place. These processes are to be denoted by a new overarching term *Cultural Realignment.* It can relate to the marketing of images and branding of a group of people, dwelling place or cultural site; the promotion or reorganisation of tangible and intangible heritage; as well as the written description of such phenomena where the specific intention is to realign the subject matter. As such it is a new concept that embraces others such as cultural representation, cultural interpretation and cultural commodification. Island communities provide the focus of the article as they make appropriate examples and have featured prominently throughout anthropological writings, the central disciplinary approach of this paper; additionally, they play a prominent part in the history and development of tourism.

The primary concerns of this article are the actual processes of cultural realignment, the actors involved and the impacts of the processes on inhabitants of the places. It will also explore the qualities of islands, especially in relation to anthropology, identity and tourism. It is argued that the process of realignment is growing rapidly in occurrence, especially because of tourism, and has major impacts. This new concept is suggested to help answer the question: how can we improve our understanding of cultural change, especially concerning tourism and island communities? The case study provided shows some of the processes and results of tourism-driven cultural realignment, which is able to impact on all levels of society from nation-state to villages and their inhabitants.

Anthropology is especially suited to investigate these influences due to its focus on ethnographic fieldwork and its holistic bias, as well as its method of comparative analysis and it will provide the main disciplinary approach, reflecting the researcher's background. Moreover, anthropologists have had a strong history of work on islands. The newly emerging multi-disciplinary study of islands (eg Baldacchino and Milne, 2000) suggests their potential for utilisation as models for other types of locations, implying that the improved understanding of the specific influences of tourism on islands has importance far beyond their shores.

Islands and Anthropology

Islands are good to think with. This statement paraphrases Levi-Strauss (1969) who noted that 'animals are good to think with' in relation to the way that different human cultures have used animals as symbols and as means of classification, creating boundaries and identities in human society. In a similar manner, writers and scholars have used islands (both real and fictional) as symbols and models to represent places and communities where distinct and unusual events happen, or to explain circumscribed communities, seemingly isolated, relatively untouched by other cultures. This attribute of islands is a cultural construction and has appeared in literature and art in western societies as well as others including Japan and Indonesia. More pertinent for this article however, is the fact that the island image of a self-contained homogeneous unit has been very appealing to anthropologists seeking distinctive groups of people. Indeed, for many anthropologists, islands have been very good to think with. This tendency has altered in time with the broadening of research interests, the general challenge to essentialism and a greater awareness of communication and acculturation. However, other groups in society continue to represent islands in a way that does not reflect their actual cultural composition, and one such group is the tourism industry.

Islands have featured prominently in anthropological work. Malinowski's experience in the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1922) was instrumental in the paradigm shift towards ethnographic fieldwork and a powerful model, especially in British Anthropology (Kuper, 1989). His focus on small, seemingly insular, discrete communities inspired others and preceded many influential anthropological outputs based on island experiences (eg Bateson, 1939; Firth, 1936; Geertz, 1963, Mead, 1928). This might be partially explained by a desire to research a discrete community, along functionalist lines, perhaps an isolated community which retains its culture and traditions, or demonstrates a unique pattern of social organisation, cosmology, kinship patterns, economic activity, and so on. In this the island represents or contains a 'whole' culture, one that is physically and metaphorically bound and relatively isolated from other influences. This was certainly a motivating factor for some anthropologists, and it has been criticised as leading to a

deliberate ignoring or diminishing of the socio-cultural variety of the island community, as well as intercultural impacts from overseas such as colonialism, missionary work, trading exchange and eventually, tourism when writing about the community (cf Eriksen, 1993; Kuper, 1989: 34). Perhaps the earlier writers were realigning the fieldwork material into a readable product suited to their own worldview or a particular intellectual theory.

More recently, anthropologists have continued to research on islands, sometimes with similar aims to the early pioneers (Herzfeld, 1991; Palsson, 1991) but also, and contrastingly, sometimes to investigate the strong influences of external phenomena: acculturation, trading, colonialism, migration, and tourism (eg Boissevain, 1993, 2010; Cohen, 1982; Crick, 1994; Mintz, 1960; Pickering, 2010; Sutherland, 1986; Waldren, 1996). The island often represents (sometimes erroneously) the notion of cultural uniqueness, a level of inaccessibility, with water as a physical and cultural boundary: all are factors especially pertinent for the examination of identity.

Islands, identity and the external market

Islands, because of their discrete, physically clear boundaries have often served well to describe the parameters of individual groups of people, even though there may have been strong communication networks by sea or air: again, they are good to think with. Consequently they also serve to act as models of impact analysis, whereby specific groups encounter other groups through various processes of acculturation. For some they have served almost as laboratories, bound and observable, for medical experiments as well as for isolating sectors of society. They have also been seen as repositories and examples of cultural survivals in terms of practices, arts, social organisation or systems of belief. Islands have been seen as distinct by artists, writers, natural scientists, governments, islanders themselves and by some social scientists. Anthropologists researching aspects of identity on islands have included Waldren (1996) on insider-outsider relationships, Cohen (1982) on belonging, Galvan Tudela (1987) on festivals and religion, and Macdonald (1997) on cultural heritage.

Despite the rich body of work described above, there has been little research by anthropologists into the market-oriented cultural realignment of island identity in terms of cultural heritage interpretation, and island branding, its actual process (actors and agency, structural relationships and power), as well as its impacts on local populations; although Selwyn (1996) provides a relevant collection on mythmaking in tourism. In recent years this type of representation has become a large part of island identity construction in terms of an image for consumption by outside parties. This may be combined with more local and specific image building and reinvention, such as new interpretations of cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible), all of which activities can be considered to be 'cultural realignment'. Islands are particularly vulnerable to this type of activity if they are tourist attractions because they need to distinguish themselves in the marketplace, and are likely to become commodified: increasingly, culture has become the differentiating factor, a product and an added attraction.

Other social scientists have worked in areas closely related to the cultural realignment of identity and place as oriented to an external market and these include the following: Urry (1990) who considered the way that tourists gaze at places, presuming the relevance of their home country experience in fashioning the way they see other places as tourists; MacCannell (1976) drawing attention to the iconic status of some assets

which come to represent a country, acting as major attractions (eg the Eifel Tower); Dann (1996) reviewing tourist brochures, analysing their content and their subsequent appeal to a specific market segment; Hall (1999) examining the branding of place as part of the touristification of a destination; Di Domenico (2001) who looked at the specific example of Dundee, which was branded as 'City of Discovery' after the ship built there, somewhat in contrast to its reputation for 'jute, jam and journalism'; and Sheller (2003) who explored the ways Europe and the USA 'consumed' numerous aspects of the Caribbean. These writers deal with the way tourism has influenced the manner in which a place and occasionally its inhabitants have been represented to others, with cultural commodification and stereotyping being the closest phenomena to the cultural realignment theme of this article. However, there are insufficient writers looking at the broader impact of such realignment on the inhabitants of the destination.

Macleod (2009) drew attention to the development of theme towns in Scotland, including Wigtown Book Town, and the obsession of people with the economic impact to the detriment of concern with socio-cultural impacts. In a thesis Press (2001) had suggested that the nascent 'Book Town' of Wigtown initially caused great disquiet among the inhabitants who thought that they and their town had no strong connections with the book trade: the new identity was not appropriate. These writings both deal with the agency of cultural realignment and its impact on the actual, individual inhabitants of the towns in question; they exemplify how the process can embrace some of the smallest collections of people, as well as the largest groups such as nations, especially where marketing promotion for tourism is concerned.

Cultural Realignment

The term 'cultural realignment' is a concept developed in order to describe numerous processes in which people deliberately, with particular intention, create, change, manipulate, or interpret a culture or aspects of a culture (both tangible and intangible) for a preconceived purpose; for example to market the culture, or translate it into their own personal framework in order to understand it. They seek to 'change something to a different position or state' in order to line it up with a set of objectives. It is a particularly appropriate term to describe activities observable in the study of tourism.

There is a strong link between cultural realignment and power in the sense of having the ability to portray a culture and publicise the realignment or more dramatically realign it with a view to changing the lives of the subject population through tourism development or national identity building. Furthermore, it has strong connections with other concepts and processes, aspects of which it can embrace as described below: interpretation, discourse, propaganda, commodification, marketing, cultural engineering and zoning. It can build on these concepts and offers a new overarching concept embracing certain shared aspects. Thus not all discourses fall into cultural realignment; but one that seeks to portray a culture in a particular way in order to promote it for tourism does so.

Cultural realignment occurs in the written description of a culture and its components, it relates to the work of many anthropologists, in the production of monographs for example, and the attempt to organise findings to fit a cognitive model that would be comprehended by a particular audience. This has resonances with the concept of 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) as well as 'interpretation of culture' (Geertz, 1973). It also relates directly to the work of others with political or economic interests, for example governments, journalists and marketing agencies when organising,

promoting and generally influencing aspects of a group of people or place with a definite aim and objective. I would argue that 'Orientalism' is an example of cultural realignment on a grand scale (see Said, 1978).

Furthermore, cultural realignment has similarities with the concept of a 'dominant discourse' (after Foucault) in the sense of accepted ways of talking and thinking about things promoted by an elite group; but discourse itself does not adequately describe the physical changing of material things such as buildings as heritage, or the marketing of a place which does not necessarily follow dominant representations. Similarly, the concept of 'hegemonic representation' (after Gramsci), which includes ideas promoted by the ruling class, has parallels with cultural realignment, but again does not always explain the realignment of a culture, or aspects of a culture, designed to please anticipated visitors, such as tourists, or the realignment promoted by a minority group.

One example of cultural realignment which relates to the above theories is nation building, in the sense of drawing together histories, events, folk and public heroes, symbols and so on in order to create a sense of nationality for the citizens; as well as developing an image to present to the external, international community, the island state of Singapore being a good example (see Anderson, 1983; Bhandari, 2011; McCrone *et al*, 1995).

> *Britain may be a relatively recent invention historically, but it is from the reconstruction of the past through stories, and symbols of island-living, of war and of empire that an idea of Britishness in the present is re-created* (Guiberanu and Goldblat, 2000: 135).

However, more pertinent to this article are examples of cultural realignment that include the commodification of culture (see Greenwood, 1989; Mckean, 1989) whereby culture, including performance and handicrafts becomes an object of exchange on the market. An awareness of the value of certain aspects of culture has led to the realisation that it can become a saleable commodity. This is a common development worldwide where tourism takes place. Another example is seen with the heritage industry: historical events and artefacts are packaged in a way to please a specific audience, often ignoring scholarly interpretation and authentic analysis in order to appeal or entertain (Hewison, 1987; Lowenthal, 1998; Stanton, 1989). Advertising media, including tourism brochures, are another example, in which descriptions, symbols and images are all marketed to appeal to a specific group of potential visitors concentrating on traits recognised by market analysis as being of interest to the targeted market segments (see Dann, 1996).

Not only is national identity subject to manipulation for the attention of possible visitors, but so is local identity on the smallest of scales. For example, a village might remain presented, portrayed and marketed as 'a fishing village' by the national tourism agency despite the fact that tourism has led to the fishers' demise, through offering alternative employment, purchasing beaches for hotel development, or driving fish away (Macleod 2001). New crops may be planted to give the landscape the look of a 'desert island', such as palm trees, or Mediterranean olive groves cultivated to appeal to visitors' desires, as they have been on Malta (see Billiard, 2011; Theuma, 2006). A destination may be culturally misrepresented for tourism purposes and attract a type of tourist or activity that the local people are not in favour of, or may be in stark contrast to their general tourism planning scenario, as was the case with Mafia Island (Tanzania) and a

proposed dance festival (Caplan, 2011) which was perceived as a threat to their customs and culture.

Cultural realignment can embrace the transformation of the built and natural environment to conform to the desire of the potential visitor (see Selwyn, 2004 on cultural appropriation). More prosaically, cultural realignment can lead to 'cultural engineering' (see Hannertz, 1992) resulting in physical manipulation for cultural goals: transforming fishing ports into marine leisure harbours and ferry terminals. The imposition of national objectives might lead to the transformation of a peripheral island and its physical appearance as well as economic profile, as tourism is privileged over fishing and agriculture (Macleod, 2002).

Cultural realignment becomes an aspect and manifestation of power that reveals the relationship between the agents of change and those subject to it. The island of Bali is an example: Picard (1995) explains that Bali risked becoming a 'living museum' after the encouragement of Dutch colonial powers. Agents of change such as governments (national and local) and business organisations are able to promote their ideas, advertise images, publish and act on them, imposing these concepts on others. It can lead to the actual suppression of culture, including languages, a specific part of history, or an ethnic group; or in contrast, it may lead to the exaggeration and emphasis of such traits (see Lowenthal, 1998). This may encourage the physical removal of unwanted people or material objects. The creation of some 'national parks' is an example, imposing a cultural concept on a place and its inhabitants, both human and non-human, and sometimes involving the removal of people from a zone (Macleod, 2001). More benign aspects include those intellectuals, such as anthropologists, who have ignored some facts and features of a social scenario in writing about cultures, minimising the impact and relevance of missionaries, colonial powers or tourists: see Kuper (1989) on Malinowski; also Clifford and Marcus (1986) on 'writing culture'.

Elite groups have been developing ideas and realigning culture for the purposes of the market, for example in the tourism sector: those employed by governments or large business organisations often have an education in marketing or business administration but not equivalent expertise in cultural heritage or the sociology of the community. Such groups have begun to realign the culture towards the demands of the actual market, such as potential tourists, enquiring into their desires using the internet as a research tool – a very new approach for this type of marketing – and place more emphasis on a demand-led and specifically nuanced image of the destination (Fedele et al, 2011).

Again, using the internet, a more democratic opportunity has developed for people to circulate widely their own opinions and image of a destination. This may be done by visitors as well as by inhabitants of a place. Moreover, a stronger awareness of heritage together with opportunities to promote it as a commodity (as well as for political objectives) has led the local populace to generate their own views on local heritage (Macleod, 2010). Cultural realignment, therefore, has become a possibility for a growing and diverse number of people, with varied repercussions for the actual population objectified.

Islands and tourism

Islands are particularly popular with tourists. This is related to the countries producing tourists, notably those in Northern Europe, where a search for sun, sea and sand has led to journeys to islands in the Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and latterly the Pacific Ocean. A body of literature has been produced in the UK alone celebrating islands or using them as the scene of activity (*Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Magus*). The glamorous image of the island paradise is promoted by the film industry (*Dr No*, *Thunderball*, *The Beach*, *Fantasy Island*), as well as being a staple feature of the advertising industry. All these media have fed into the popular public image of islands informing holidaymakers in Europe and North America, especially those indulging in cruise tourism visiting islands. As these are two of the most prominent regions producing tourists worldwide it is fair to say that the interest in islands is a dominant factor for the global tourism industry which accounted for around 940 million international travellers in 2010 spending US\$ 919 billion (UNWTO, 2011).

The impact of tourism on islands has been profound. It accounts for a very large proportion of the Gross Domestic Product for many (eg the Greek Islands, the Caribbean Islands, the Canary Islands, the Balaeric Islands, the Azores, the Maldives, the Seychelles, and the Hawaiian Islands). Tourism has influences on the local population in terms of cultural activity, work patterns (displacement), wealth and its distribution, property-values and style, land-use, attitudes to environment, behaviour (demonstration effect), kinship patterns, and gender roles with changing opportunities, wealth, jobs and freedom (see Apostolopoulos et al, 1996; Burns, 1999; Smith, 1989). Inevitably the type of tourism is highly relevant to the type of impact that the tourists have: alternative tourists such as backpackers who stay with local families will have different impacts from package tourists staying in all-inclusive hotels (see Macleod, 2004). Many of the above factors will impact on local, regional, professional, and personal identities.

In its broadest sense, the tourism industry (which includes tour operators, hotels, travel and transport companies, government tourist boards, and marketing departments) is especially aware of the value of tourism to the destination site and the need to market the product adequately.

> *Acknowledging that guidebooks are aimed at tourists and want to meet their expectations, narratives, image and identity elements respond to tourist needs, reflecting to a greater or lesser extent new trends, interests and established images.* (Marine-Roig, 2011: 122).

Media such as tourism brochures, internet sites, cinema and advertising, will attempt to appeal to the known desires of the potential tourist, promoting the popular image of islands in a generic fashion, oblivious to specific distinctions of the location, depending on the segment audience they seek to entice. This leads to stereotyping and bland generalisations, as with the opening statement on the Dominican Republic in a Thomson brochure: 'Fabulous beaches and plenty of Caribbean zest – this island does paradise escapes with aplomb' (Thomson, 2011).

Islands are often perceived as single, undifferentiated homogenous units in terms of destination site marketing, and are promoted as such. This perception of them as a 'whole' and unified culture is similar to some anthropological realignments of the idealised isolated insular community. Nevertheless, an increasingly sophisticated market, a changing demography of potential tourists, and the heightened need to offer

'added value' to the product with a inique selling point mean that in the twenty-first century markets have brought 'culture' into the mix as a feature of the total island product.

Because of their small size, isolation and limited resources both human and natural, many islands can be vulnerable to dependency on one or two particular industries or products. Tourism is one of these industries, occasionally referred to as a type of 'mono-crop' (Selwyn, 2004). Scholarly work on the Caribbean especially indicates this trait of dependency (Besson and Olwig, 2005; Mintz, 1960; Pattullo, 1996; Sheller, 2003). The risk of exploitation by powerful players including ex-colonial masters, international business and other organisations is ever present. Equally, because of its large influence on the economy, many islands acquiesce to the demands of the tourism industry and its agents, including the marketing and imaging of the island, its cultural realignment towards the (anticipated) desires of the potential tourists. This tendency to realign island culture for marketing purposes is growing, boosted by the internet. The tourism industry as a driver of cultural realignment will have impacts on the identity of local inhabitants of these destinations through the creation of images and narratives in brochures, the advertising media and the commodification of culture.

La Gomera

This case study explores some of the issues examined earlier[i]. La Gomera is one of the smallest of the seven habitable islands that form the Canary Island archipelago (see Figures 1 and 2). It is circular, with a diameter of about 25 km, and has a population of some 22,000. Agriculture and fishing were traditionally the main pillars of the island economy, with many people working on banana plantations supplemented by produce grown privately on tiny smallholdings. A fishing industry developed in the 20th Century supplying tuna for mainland Spain; it reached its peak in the 1970s, but is diminishing rapidly. Tourism has become an increasingly important economic force since the 1980s, especially in the popular destinations such as Valle Gran Rey (VGR), the focus of this section. The port of Vueltas in VGR has seen professional fishing replaced in economic importance by maritime leisure activities including dolphin watching and diving. Tourism is an increasingly important industry in the region and is therefore able to influence the image and presentation of the island, its cultural realignment, especially through the activities of government agencies such as the *Patronata Insular de La Gomera*, tourism organisations such as TUI, and local private businesses.

The types of visitors to VGR have been predominantly German backpackers, 'alternative tourists' (Duysen, 1989; Macleod, 2004), who have had distinct and wide-ranging impacts due to their propensity to mix and communicate with the local population who host them in their apartments or spare rooms. This visitor pattern has changed since the 1990s with more families, older package tourists, activity oriented tourists and different nationalities joining the original type due to internet usage, European Union (EU) membership, more bookable accommodation and an increasing awareness of the destination.
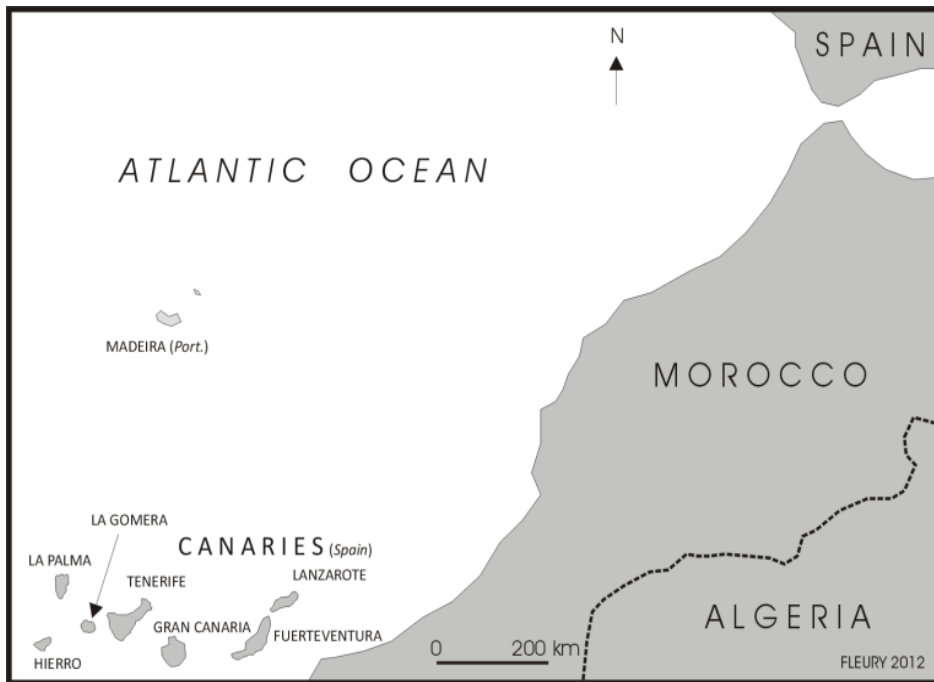
Figure 1. La Gomera, The Canary Islands and adjacent region (Christian Fleury, 2012)

Guanche heritage and the influence of Spain

The original inhabitants of La Gomera were the *Guanches*, said to be related to the Berbers from North Africa (Hernandez-Hernandez, 1986). The Spanish colonised the island during the 15th Century and eventually subjugated the indigenous people. Vestiges of pre-Hispanic traits remain in the form of arts, crafts, and agricultural practices, through, for example, music, dance and the whistling language (*silbo*) (see Carreno, 2004). The ancient arts are celebrated during the numerous fiestas every year, and historic traditional handicrafts provide products for a growing tourist market.

Many people encountered during my research in VGR had a strong sense of being different from the people of mainland Spain and, to explain this historically, some referred to *Guarapo* (directed by Santiago Rios and Teodoro Rios, 1987), a popular film that depicted life on La Gomera during the 1950s, in which the islanders attempt to escape from the grips of the Spanish administration (represented by the *Guardia Civil*) to a better economic future in Venezuela via illegal passage across the Atlantic Ocean in *barcos fantasma* (ghost boats). Moreover, the film alluded to the wealthy landlord and professional classes known as *caciques*, and the poor peasant, working class population: this division remained apparent in the 1990s, and my research was predominantly among the working class of the region.

Various aspects and figures from colonial history have been promoted by the island council (*Cabildo*) through the tourism agency: these include Christopher Columbus who

used the island as a final point for reparation before departing across the Atlantic Ocean. La Gomera is often marketed as *La Isla Columbina* ('The Island of Columbus'), especially through tourist brochures produced by the island government agency *Paronata Insular de Turismo de La Gomera*, and commemorative events such as the annual Columbus celebration, which itself has an arguably elitist character, including yacht racing. Links with colonial Spain are additionally emphasised through reference to, and the preservation of, built heritage in the port capital of San Sebastian. However, this had minimal resonance with those people of VGR encountered in this research, who saw themselves as descendents of the *Guanches*, as is also apparent in other records (see Concepcion, 1989; Hernandez Hernandez, 1986).

The promotion of La Gomera

As an archipelago, the Canary Islands became a recognised politically unified group only after conquest by Spain; beforehand the islands were separate independent political units governed by a system of kingship, in which communication between the islands was at a minimum (Hernandez Hernandez, 1986). Individual cultural traits remain idiosyncratic between the different islands: for example, La Gomera is home of the only whistling language in the archipelago. Unity has become increasingly vital following the conquest by Spain, and more recently with the islands as an autonomous region of Spain. This helps reduce weaknesses due to a relatively peripheral location and the associated economic resource problems of islands.

Despite their variety, the tourist industry historically promoted the Canary Islands as a single cultural entity until the early 1990s. Tenerife, with its long history of tourism, was highly promoted and has overshadowed its smaller sister island La Gomera with which it has strong political and social connections (many thousands of native Gomeros live in Tenerife). North European tour companies in particular established an image of Tenerife, making scant reference to La Gomera. With the increasing need to differentiate products in the market place, cultural factors have become very important to delineate one archipelago from another, and furthermore, at the level of the archipelago, to differentiate individual islands as well. Consequently, La Gomera has very recently been promoted for its cultural heritage, and money from the EU has been spent improving the built heritage in the capital port of San Sebastian. Colonial buildings have been completely renovated: those associated with Columbus (the Tower of the Count of Gomera, and a small museum dedicated to Columbus) greet the visitors as they disembark the ferry from Tenerife. At the port there is a tangible cultural realignment in progress: the physical preparation and popular promotion of La Gomera as a site of colonial Spanish heritage. One brochure produced by a tour company emphasises these features, but does not mention anything else about the culture of the islanders themselves:

> The capital and main port, San Sebastian, with numerous restaurants, bars and shops is famed for its links with Christopher Columbus and the small town is riddled with memorabilia and plaques denoting the places that he visited or stayed, and a week-long Columbus Festival is held annually (Classic Collection, 2011: 50).

Millions of Euros have been spent on the Spanish colonial heritage and the wider tourism development infrastructure by government bodies but far smaller amounts

spent on supporting artisanal fishing and farming or commemorating local fishing traditions, much to the frustration of some sectors of society (Guarapo, 1990). Examples of tourism development projects oriented to La Gomera include: the EcoPlan (1988); the PTE (2003) approved by the Canary Island Government to create zones relating to tourism development and delimiting land; and the plan entitled *Estrategia de Tourismo Sostenible de La Gomera* (2008-12) which has a focus on the World Heritage Site National Park 'Garajonay' and other key locations (see Bianchi 2004 on development plans).

Heritage commemoration and cultural realignment

A fascinating development has been the recent erection of a statue of the Guanche hero Huatacuperche on Canary Islands Day (May 30th) 2007. He was a local man who challenged the leadership of the Spanish count, who had broken agreements, in the 15th Century. Huatacuperche led a short-lived rebellion in 1488, killing the count, which was roundly and cruelly put down by the Spaniards, according to historians (Concepcion, 1989). Indeed, Beatriz de Borbadilla, who was the surviving wife of the count was instrumental in much of the retributions delivered to the Gomeros, and pertinently for this topic, she was alleged to have had an amorous relationship with Columbus.

A political grouping, *Coalición Canarias*, which controlled the local council of VGR for a period until 2011, sought to promote Huatacuperche as personifying the island's independent spirit. His image is currently boldly placed on the front of tourism brochures and may be regarded as strengthening the island's unique selling point (USP). This statue, some four metres high, has been placed in a prominent position overlooking a beach in front of the biggest hotel in VGR. Commemoration of the hero Huatacuperche, through a statue and the reproduction of his image on posters, pamphlets and brochures, illustrates – indirectly - the political scenario in the Canary Islands archipelago, wherein a coalition party promotes its own interests and those of this autonomous region of Spain (although this is not part of a move towards political independence). It has created an emblematic symbol in the figure of a heroic rebel, a son of La Gomera who is quickly becoming an iconic representation of qualities attractive to residents, and simultaneously becoming a beacon and iconic reference for visitors, similar to the Statue of Liberty in the USA. This is a tangible example of cultural realignment, involving history and built heritage, and supplies us with an interesting contrast to the other heavily promoted icon, Columbus.

Research undertaken by this author intermittently over a period since the early 1990s, shows that many of the alternative tourists visiting the island have not been attracted to the island because of its colonial heritage, but has shown that they do have an interest in the artisanal heritage related to agriculture and fishing, as well as a strong interest in the natural heritage manifest in the World Heritage Site (the National Park Garajonay, a temperate rain-forest) and the marine ecology exemplified through dolphin watching. This represents a mismatch with the way the island's cultural heritage is promoted through publicity material and investment, demonstrating a dissonance between the cultural realignment of the island by the governing organisations and the desires of many tourists.

One example of a local celebration of heritage is the commemoration of an historic event when people tried to escape the poverty of the island in the 1950s. Many islanders embarked on a dangerous journey across the Atlantic Ocean to Venezuela, in various types of craft, and some left in a yacht called 'Telemaco', crossing successfully. In the mid-1990s a fishing boat belonging to a local family was placed on a prominent road roundabout in the small port of Vueltas, as a memorial, together with a descriptive metal sign secured to a boulder. This story, and the entire period of poverty and misery known as *La Miseria* is very well known and dear to many of the island inhabitants; indeed, it forms the backdrop to the 1987 film *Guarapo*, much recommended to this researcher. The memorial demonstrates the values, priorities and concerns of this close-knit community, which contrast with the celebration of Columbus in San Sebastian.

Repercussions of realignment

Through their experience of tourism, Gomeros have been introduced to other ethnicities, especially from Northern Europe; this has given them a direct insight into the culture and behaviour of others, as well as placing their own culture into a stronger comparative light. Their heightened awareness of their own individual culture has led in some areas to the increased commodification of activities that they can profit from (cultural heritage: pre-Hispanic and colonial). However, with commercialisation comes a certain loss of authenticity and meaning, as for example with the *Fiesta Del Carmen*, which celebrates the saint and protector of people at sea. This fiesta once took place over two days in 1991, dominated by the procession around the village boundary of the statue of the *Virgin del Carmen*, followed by the Catholic mass. By 2009 the fiesta was running for five days and nights, the majority of which were devoted to dancing and drinking with a fair held at the port harbour: religious celebration and local identity marking have become overshadowed by commercial interests.

Some people have complained to me about the loss of their culture in the sense of the commercialisation of fiestas such as *Del Carmen* described above, and *San Marco* during which, in the past, locals would build numerous bonfires in celebration. Furthermore, they complain about the difficulty of finding a quiet place on beaches which were once empty and are now overrun by tourists; the intensity of competitiveness between people in their working lives; and the lack of time to converse with friends. Although it must be added that there has been a reinvigorated interest in some aspects of cultural heritage among local people, regenerating traditional dancing and music, as well as the whistling language and interest in historic places and figures such as Huatacuperche. This may be thought of as a form of cultural involution (cf McKean, 1989).

Fishermen have been especially vocal about the dominance of recreational interests over fishing in the re-organisation and massive enlargement of the harbour, ongoing in 2011, which has come to favour leisure craft and ferries over fishing boats. One of my research informants, an elderly fisherman, furiously challenged the reorganisation of mooring places in the harbour bemoaning the fact that fishermen who grew up and helped develop the village and harbour were now being moved aside to make way for leisure craft. Moreover, a huge new extended harbour doubles the size of the original in order to contain a car-ferry. These are all repercussions, direct and indirect, of the cultural realignment of La Gomera along tourist destination lines.

Conclusion

Islands are excellent examples that demonstrate where cultural realignment has been happening, and continues to happen; whether driven by intellectuals such as anthropologists, writers and artists, or powerful groups such as governments and most pertinent to this article, the tourism industry. As such they are models for examination and provide comparative material for different types of geographical regions, nations and cities. Moreover, the use of islands forces us to reflect on why they have been so popularly employed and what insular attributes are so appealing.

Examples given have shown how cultural realignment may be driven by international organisations, national governments and local councils, as well as (more rarely) grassroots organisations. They demonstrate the far-reaching and major consequences of such processes on people's lives, changing livelihoods, environments and identities. Rapid globalisation and the growing pervasiveness of the internet impact on marketing and the democratic ability of people from all walks of life to promote personal, business and community interests. This has led the means of representation, interpretation and communication to transform quickly, enabling more groups and individuals to become active agents in the process of cultural realignment, with different degrees of influence depending on power. Nevertheless, we remain aware that cultures have always changed, albeit at different paces and in many ways: but their deliberate alignment towards an external market, especially for tourism, is new for many.

Cultural realignment is a new concept which has helped us to understand and link the various processes involved in cultural change, especially those involving images, representations and interpretations of islands through tourism, and by extension, other places. It embraces numerous concepts and processes including cultural representation, commodification, interpretation, stereotyping and branding; it has a distinct element of intentional agency with a predetermined objective, and can be manifest in physical heritage transformation as well as written and spoken forms.

This article draws attention to the way that individuals and groups have sought to develop, interpret or market aspects of a culture with a view to influencing others, usually external to the culture. Those others may be potential tourists, or a group of intellectuals, or even the international political community. So they realign a collection of experiences, facts, or descriptions and orient them into a discourse palatable to a preconceived audience. They may even be realigning buildings, monuments or entire areas (different types of 'texts') for similar reasons. These processes are growing in occurrence, especially with the tourism industry, itself expanding and moving into new territory, encouraging change. There is a necessity to come to terms with these developments, the processes and their repercussions. This article seeks to place research findings and other work in a new light, helping scholars to comprehend the huge cultural manipulation that tourism encourages. It is hoped that this stimulates further research and discussion on the impacts and the processes of cultural realignment, as well as the importance of islands as the sites of social processes.

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