

The Folks as Hosts: The Grassroots View of Tourism

Panel: CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES AND U.S. POLICY

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Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Studies Association May 1991,
Havana Cuba

From the very moment of the "Discovery", conquerors and travellers alike are at awe of the tremendous beauty of palm and beach, mountain and plain of the Caribbean. Supposedly Columbus himself felt he had found the Terrestrial Paradise (Lewis 1968:16). The romantic saga of tropical paradise, sex, piracy and slave revolts and contemporary images of sex, sand, sea and temporarily lost inhibitions annually lure millions of tourists to the region. Governments, tourist boards, multinational corporations and allied industries spend fortunes promoting the saga and the image to potential visitors - the consumers of tourism. A part of tourism, the act of leisurely activities, are the people who provide services for the visitor. They are the ones who produce and are themselves tourist commodities, and who also happen to be citizens of the country or locale the guest visits. It is the folk/hosts who have the direct or indirect contact with guests. And for many whose livelihoods depend on tourism, it is up to them whether or not a visitor "has a good time." Hosts/folk, tourist sector workers, share their towns, villages and countries with paying guests, and their own health, education, water, electricity etc. needs are often put aside or are inadequate because of the necessity of the satisfied customer.

Of the three sets of actors generating, receiving, and accommodating tourism - hosts, guests and tourists the one category most neglected in research, study and policy are the hosts/folk. In particular, compared to economic analyses, there is relatively little study of the hosts who live in tourist areas. Residents, of communities which are economically dependent or seasonally dependent, are critical agents in analyzing how tourism works on whatever level of adequacy, and in understanding the social relations between hosts and guests. Community residents who work in the tourist sector have the greatest impact on the success rate of the business. And interestingly, the majority of tourist sector workers are women.

Cynthia Enloe, in her book *Beaches, Bananas and Bases* mentions (1990:34) that certain Caribbean nationalists have criticized their governments promotion of tourism as turning their society into a "nation of busboys." Putting aside the sexism of the statement for a moment, the image of the declaration is powerful. Independence, national autonomy and the end of colonial rule should not equate with the reconstitution of subservience for anyone. In reality however, tourism is turning Caribbean

societies into "nations of chambermaids." Not only does the categorization of domestic service underscore the division of labor within the industry, but it also indicates the nature of social relations within the industry, the evaluation of various kinds of labor which constitute such enterprises, and the actual benefits accrued by workers, their communities and their countries.

The objective of this paper is to identify, in a general manner, the ways Caribbean women workers and their communities are effected by tourism. Here the analysis focuses on the relations of production of women's wage labor and unpaid domestic labor in their households, and in other aspects of their lives. First I discuss tourism in a general way, using a regional perspective. Second, case study materials are presented to illustrate how women hosts as workers view visitors, their interactions, the various modes of behavior and how tourism effects their productive, familial and community life. Finally, the discussion raises questions which will inform a proposed study in Jamaica. What are the salient issues facing women in the sector? Can tourism be made accountable to workers and their communities as they share locale? Women workers in the Caribbean tourist sector are not alone. They represent just one location in the tremendously expanding global tourist trade.

General Overview

Worldwide, the tourist industry employed more people than the oil industry by the mid 1980s (Enloe 1990:20). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (WTO) is hard pressed to provide up-to-date materials and information on the sector to its 108 nation membership. By the year 2000, the WTO predicts that tourism will be the single most global economic activity (Attix 1986). In the Caribbean, the sector is ahead of that time frame. Since 1985, tourism is the single most important economic activity and major source of foreign exchange for many Caribbean countries, generating approximately \$4.6 billion in revenues regionally in that year alone (Deere et.al. 1990:29). Clearly, a great deal of attention is paid to tourism, as an economic sector, and to its consumers tourists. As Deere et.al. state (Ibid.) it would not be an exaggeration to say that Caribbean economies are being sustained by tourist dollars. In certain countries, such as

Barbados, if visitors did not come, perhaps three quarters of the national work force would be put out of work (Dann 1984:107). Tourism is an important source of employment, but it suffers from relatively weak domestic linkages, particularly to the agricultural sectors (Deere et.al. 1990:30). Multinational corporate hoteliers dominate the sector in the region. This is not a product of local policies, as C.Y. Thomas reminds us (1989:147), but a reflection of an overall world trend. The links between airlines, cruise ship lines, hotel chains and tour packages illustrate vertical and horizontal positioning within corporate structures. MNC domination further weakens the foreign exchange potential of tourism because fully paid bookings go directly to tour agencies located in the US, Europe and Canada. Gayle (1990:6) mentions other ways that the tourist industry in the region remains vulnerable, such as frequent environmental degradation and extreme fluctuations in visitor volume as well as high expenditures.

The Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid captures the situation in her novel *A Small Place*. She writes:

....You (the tourist) must not wonder what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it. You must not wonder where your bath water went when you pulled out the stopper. You must not wonder what happened when you brushed your teeth.. Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in; the contents of your lavatory might just graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua, there is not proper sewage disposal system. .

The Caribbean Sea absorbs the sewage of its 30 million residents and millions of visitors, plus the uncounted tons of waste dumped at sea by cruise ships and yachts (Barry et.al. 1984:84).

Further on in the novel Kincaid writes (again addressing the tourist):

Your delicious meal: its better that you don't know that most of what you are eating came off a plane from Miami. ...and before it got on a plane in Miami, who knows where it came from? A good guess is that it comes from a place like Antigua first, where it was grown dirt-cheap, went to Miami and came back. (1984:14).

Barry et.al. (1984:85) speak of the wining and dining Caribbean tourists. They are likely to enjoy food and beverages from their home countries. The less diversified an economy, the higher the import content of the tourism industry. Large hotels cater to the tastes of their clientele, not to the constraints of local food supply. Along with the food, all hotel equipment and furniture comes from foreign distributors.

Jamaica is one of the major players in the Caribbean tourist industry. Despite the destruction caused by hurricane Gilbert in 1988, just over one million tourists visited the island (Gayle 1990:16). The million figure represented a 2.5% decrease. Reasons for the decline stem from the Jamaica Tourist Board relaxing its promotional efforts in the United States and Canada and the competition by cheap package tours to "new" tourists spots, such as Cancun Mexico. With fewer visitors, other indicators of the industry showed a decline: the average room occupancy declined and tourism receipts decreased. Following Gilbert, the Government enacted the Tourism Action Plan which included inputs from both public and private sectors with designs of increasing tourist expenditures from \$77.00 for stopover visitors and \$50.00 for cruise ship passengers. The Jamaica Tourist Board developed a new product for the U.S. market at the expense of \$37.6 million. In 1989, 1.6 million tourists spent \$590 million in Jamaica (Gayle 1990:17).

On the other side of this positive picture were Jamaica's small hotels. These businesses were unable to refurbish their properties in the aftermath of Gilbert. The situation was complicated by the Government's agreement with the International Monetary Fund. IMF policy called for increases in loan interest rates (+ 35%), electricity rates (+32%), consumer goods tax (+50%), and food prices (+20%). Such increments in the cost of doing business for the small hotels have driven many into bankruptcy or forced them to suspend operations until they can afford to open again. And of course when businesses close employees are laid off and join the ranks of the unemployed.

The overall scenario of tourism, in Jamaica and elsewhere in the region, is that revenues from the sector are vital to the national economy but are exacted from the society at a high price. As the post Gilbert situation shows, tourism succeeds when it is heavily promoted by all interested parties - MNCs, government and private concerns. But the economy of scale is in operation too. It is not only the small hotel owners who are in a

precarious position, but also the workers in those establishments, in restaurants, in bars, and who sell beads, straw baskets and braid hair on the beach.

When the Folk are Women and Workers

You've seen the advertisements. A Caucasian man and woman sit on a white sandy beach taking in the sun. Juxtapositioned to the couple are two sets of pictures. One is of tourists (re white couples) shopping, swimming, dining, viewing the panorama. The other photos are of the folk, perhaps men dressed in military garb reminiscent of the colonial past. But always there are images of smiling faces of Black or Brown women as a nanny, a flower vendor, a exotically costumed female entertainer bending under a "calypso" bar, camera angle focussed on the area between her legs. The men are manly and the women are welcoming and available in their femininity (Enloe 1990:32). Not only are women the majority of workers in the tourist industry, but without their image, visitors would not be lured to these "exotic" locales.

Tourism is a labor-intensive industry. It requires a high ratio of employees to paying customers; people who came as tourists need and expect a lot of service (Ibid.). Furthermore, the kinds of jobs typed as labor-intensive are also unskilled, low skilled and low cost in terms of wages and benefits. Unskilled, low skilled work categories assumes that the worker already knows how to perform the task required by the job. Most of the jobs in the tourist sector are viewed, in most societies and definitely in the Caribbean, as the ones that women not only know how to do, but that they come "naturally" to them. Therefore, housekeeping, doing laundry, cooking, serving and so forth, are female dominated jobs. Located in a labor market already rife with gender inequality, the tourist sector low skilled, no skill female jobs receive low pay. It should come to no surprise then that since the early 1980s, three-quarters of Caribbean tourism workers are women (Barry et.al. 1984:85). The Jamaican Government (1990:16:5) reports employment gains in "other services" for the year 1989. The growth in this employment sub-sector was related to the positive performance in tourism, which is "traditionally" female dominated.

A Dann (n.d.) reviewed the literature on the socio-cultural impact of tourism in reference to the Caribbean. The author notes that the disproportionate number of women implies low levels of pay and sexual harassment. Moving further on this point, being on the bottom of the hotel hierarchy, women face racism and sexism on the part of European or Euroamerican managers and racism, sexism and classism on the part of the local manager.

In her work in Negril, Jamaica, Deborah D'Amico-Samuels provides one of the few studies on tourism and its impact on women and economic development. It represents research done from the grassroots woman's point of view. Most of the working class women, whose lives informed this study, were vendors in the Negril Crafts Market. D'Amico-Samuels (1986:xxi) expressed the sentiments of this group.

U.S. tourists were associated with money, valued material items (such as jeans and cassette recorders), with "softness" (inability to sustain hard physical labor), and loose morals (casual sex, venereal disease, and drug use), all of which contrast sharply with the ideal Jamaican working class character.

There were few or no other choices of wage labor but working in a hotel, restaurant or informal sector work. Market vending was working for yourself which implied a sense of self-sufficiency which was considered the ideal.

Most Jamaican working class women have the sole responsibility of raising and financially supporting their children and other dependents (Bolles 1987). The notion of financial autonomy, "independence" (which includes fulfilling obligations to a domestic network), and authority figures importantly in women's position in relation to men in Jamaica. Women who head households provide for themselves and children, meet their physical and emotional needs and work full-time or as best as possible. Many women workers in the tourist areas are seasonally employed and/or must rely on informal sector tourist work. Under the broiling sun, the vendor walks up and down the beach, trying to sell crafts, fruit, or braid the hair of visitors, while being harassed by hotel security guards. Seven days a week for many hours per day, women do this kind of work with no guarantees of meeting expenses. Small children tag along with their mothers; work and day care

are located in one place. For women hotel workers with small children, day care is a problem, but it is usually organized via a domestic network of family and friends. Often items left by guests in their rooms find their way to workers' homes. What is discarded or of little consequence to carry back to the States is valued among those who work is bounded by Dec 15th and April 15th (the high tourist season).

According to the D'Amico-Samuels study, the vendors in Negril market are engaged in creating economic opportunity in the narrow space between the "rock" of doing poorly paid scarcely available wage labor and the "hard place" of living in poverty. Considering these options, selling for oneself becomes attractive.

Negril's tourist sector includes a cottage sector, as well as large tourist enclaves. Historically, the economic activities of Negril were fishing, small scale farming, and coconut producing and processing. When the yellowing disease destroyed the coconut trees, the beach was devoid of the village's major enterprise. But the barren beach became valuable for land speculation and tourism development. The social stratification of the community by class, color and gender already in place was compounded by this unique situation. The group which benefitted most from tourism, owned land or had access to capital. Negril's "First Families" reaped the rewards of selling their holdings at the premium price or developed it themselves. And the composition of this group depended a great deal on its privileged class/color position in the past. A number of working class Negrillians were also able to become upwardly mobile especially through the cottage sector tourism. However, women in all groups, across class and race did not receive their equitable share in the economically positive experiences, and perhaps bore more of the negative consequences of tourism in Negril.

Proposed Study

As mentioned earlier, little of the research on tourism focuses on the folk and their communities. One area where the folk become the center of attention is their noted resentment of tourists, crime against visitors, and rudeness. Of course this has to do with the industry's insistence on providing a pleasurable time for their guests with hopes of encouraging them to return. Included in the list of problem with the natives is

prostitution. Somewhere beyond the religious appeal for morality does prostitution receive attention, except when military shore leaves etc. are of concern. However, sex tourism is a global issue. It requires women in the "Third World" to be economically desperate enough to enter prostitution; having done so makes it difficult to leave (Enloe 1990:35). In the Caribbean context, the male visitor, (read white) views certain women, usually women of color, as more available and more sexually exotic than his white female counterpart at home. There is a sense of excitement of "forbidden fruit" and carnal lust in these sexual encounters. Sex for sale is a predominantly woman's occupation, but in Jamaica and perhaps throughout the region, men are engaged in these same economic activities. In Jamaica it is called "rent-a-Dread." Here the white women visitors definitely fulfill her fantasy of forbidden fruit viz the seething Black brute stud/prowess.

The following are some issues to be incorporated in a study from a woman folk perspective located on the north coast of Jamaica:

1. The economic activities of women workers have to be looked at in terms of all sub-sectors of the industry, including perhaps most importantly allied informal sector ventures and prostitution. Employment histories are critical.
2. Since most Jamaican working class women are sole supporters of their families, materials collected must include a variety of people within and outside of the residential unit, plus household composition, life cycle data, domestic network structures and migratory patterns.
3. The place where women tourist sector residents or workers encounter tourists is important in understanding their perception of them. Resentment and hostility are located on a two way street of racism, sexism, classism and national chauvinism.
4. Has the Government intervened in enclave tourism and has the community in question had any input in the decision-making?
5. What infrastructure improvements were put in place prior to tourist development or at the expense of the community?
6. What kinds of relations does the MNC hotelier demand which smack of racism and sexism from North America or Europe?
7. What are the institutions in the community - church, schools etc. which reinforce inequality between guests and folk or is there commitment for recasting the relationship?

8. In the tourist sector accountable for its actions? Is there dialog between community, local government, workers, residents, etc. How about the role of local elites?
9. Is there organized labor representation and how effective is it?
10. What are the community's/tourist sector provisions for the future? How are children dealt with by all parties?

Research from a folk perspective turns these "normal" issues and problems about tourism around to focus not on the visitor, but on the people who remain when everyone else has gone back home.

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