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Destroying the Ethnosphere? How Tourism Has Impacted the Sherpas of Nepal

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Abstract

Tourism is perhaps the most salient and impactful process of globalization today. As we are increasingly more mobile, traveling with endless comfort and ease, we explore the far reaches of the planet as ambassadors of our own culture and as agents of change. In this process we potentially threaten the cultural diversity of the planet. So how can we reduce the impact of tourism on the cultures of the world? In order to answer this question I examine the implications of cultural and adventure tourism, especially as they relate to the Sherpas of Nepal. Sherpas have been involved with both kinds of tourism for over 60 years, yet they have been successful in retaining much of their cultural identity and heritage. Because they have taken an active role in the tourism industry and have been the providers of the tourist experience, they have created a working relationship that fosters a cultural exchange and sharing, instead of one culture taking over the other. Through cultural and adventure touristic ventures in areas where the local community is the provider of the experience, we can better understand cultural diversity and improve cultural fluency for all people who travel the world. This is a reconsideration of tourism as a process of globalization as one for improving understanding, not for eliciting harmful change.

Keywords

Sherpa, tourism, globalization, Nepal

Disciplines

International and Area Studies | Regional Sociology | Sociology of Culture | South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies | Tourism

Comments

Globalization Studies Honors Thesis

Destroying the Ethnosphere? How Tourism Has Impacted the Sherpas of Nepal

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Globalization Studies Capstone
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Abstract: Tourism is perhaps the most salient and impactful process of globalization today. As we are increasingly more mobile, traveling with endless comfort and ease, we explore the far reaches of the planet as ambassadors of our own culture and as agents of change. In this process we potentially threaten the cultural diversity of the planet. So how can we reduce the impact of tourism on the cultures of the world? In order to answer this question I examine the implications of cultural and adventure tourism, especially as they relate to the Sherpas of Nepal. Sherpas have been involved with both kinds of tourism for over 60 years, yet they have been successful in retaining much of their cultural identity and heritage. Because they have taken an active role in the tourism industry and have been the providers of the tourist experience, they have created a working relationship that fosters a cultural exchange and sharing, instead of one culture taking over the other. Through cultural and adventure touristic ventures in areas where the local community is the provider of the experience, we can better understand cultural diversity and improve cultural fluency for all people who travel the world. This is a reconsideration of tourism as a process of globalization as one for improving understanding, not for eliciting harmful change.

Introduction

In each corner of the world resides a new culture with a language unto itself and a lifestyle entirely unique from anyone else. These myriad cultures come together to create the ethnosphere; a term coined by ethnobotanist and anthropologist Wade Davis, that is, “the full complexity and complement of human potential as brought into being by culture and adaptation since the dawn of consciousness” (Davis 2001: 5). Much like the biosphere, with its complexity, delicacy, and as yet unexplored potential, the ethnosphere is a fragile component of our world that is often undervalued and, in many ways, exploited. According to Davis, each culture has its own unique way in which to conceive of the world, particularly through their language. However as some cultures subsume others and as majority languages silence minority languages, we risk losing the ability to see the world from the eyes of someone else. Without this kaleidoscopic vision, we become narrow-minded and render the world effectively monochromatic. But is this the reality in which we live today, and is this the future we can expect to see?

As we are increasingly more mobile, globetrotting with endless comfort and ease, we explore the far reaches of the planet as ambassadors of our own culture and as agents of change. Tourism is perhaps the most salient and impactful process of globalization today. Encompassing movement and cultural mixing, fostering interconnectedness and acceleration, while rendering cultures and people more vulnerable than ever, tourism is the epitome of both the good and the bad that any process of globalization has to offer. Capital, culture, and technology converge on a single location with multiple players, providing equal opportunities for development and destruction. Thus, tourism becomes both the ethnosphere’s greatest threat and also potentially its greatest support.

Throughout this paper I intend to explore both possibilities with regard to two specific kinds of tourism: cultural and adventure tourism. I will do this by examining and analyzing

relevant literature on both, which will then become the framework within which I intend to situate the Sherpas of Nepal. Acting as a case study, the history of Sherpa's intimate involvement in the tourism industry over the last 100 years will serve as an example of how activities of both cultural and adventure tourism can be of great benefit to the host community in which they take place. I argue, ultimately, that cultural and adventure tourism are indeed the best way that an individual can travel the world in order to reinvigorate the life of the ethnosphere, specifically by encouraging an equal relationship between the tourist and the host. In such a circumstance, as the Sherpas have created, agency is granted – almost entirely – to the host community in creating the tourist experience. Through this interaction they can share their culture while engaging with a foreign culture; the tourists, in turn, can share their culture while taking part in the host culture. Change is then initiated through exchange, not through subversion or assimilation.

I will begin by describing tourism, in a general sense, so as to make clear its role as a process of globalization. Following this will be an examination of adventure tourism and the role it has played in the lives of Sherpas, with a subsequent examination of cultural tourism and its role in the lives of Sherpas. I will then utilize the established literature on Sherpas, supplemented by my own fieldwork in Nepal in order to contextualize how Sherpa's history is an example of how tourism can foster greater cultural understanding. The paper will conclude by reiterating the concept of the ethnosphere and how it is less in danger of disappearing, but simply being reshaped.

Tourism as a Process of Globalization

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), more than 1.5 billion people traveled the world in 2013 (UNWTO 2014: 11). This number is astonishing considering people only began traveling for pleasure midway through the 20th century. Today the

tourism industry is one of the largest and most profitable in the world, employing an estimated 230 million people as of the mid-1990s (Eriksen 2007: 97). In fact the only industries that surpass tourism in the global economy are the fossil fuel, chemical, automotive, and electronic equipment industries (Stasch 2014: 191). One should not be surprised, then, when Robert Stasch states, “if one was seeking a single activity exemplifying ‘globalization’, tourism would be a strong candidate” (Stasch 2014: 191). The movement of people, goods, cultures, and languages is certainly not a new phenomenon. However, the rate at which these and many other commodities, ideas, products, and services travel today is unprecedented. And the industry has not simply grown in economic stature, but it has also changed with regard to who can travel and where they are traveling.

The 1950s saw the growth of the Western middle class, a reduction in prices for flights and improved travel overall (Eriksen 2007: 97), and more leisure time, thus rendering international travel possible for many; travel for pleasure is no longer just a hobby of the wealthy, Western elites. Although Europe continues to be the top destination for tourists, Asia and the Pacific is becoming increasingly popular, growing relatively more in visitors this past year than did Europe (UNWTO 2014: 11). Therefore the number of places that are being globalized is also increasing. The more commonly globalized places, according to Frohlick, become global icons that serve as a universal symbol. For instance there are “global beaches” such as Laguna, Miami, as well as others. In the case of mountaineering, Everest, she claims, “has become a global icon of mountaineering tourism and popular vacationscape for elite, ‘extreme’ adventure seekers” (Frohlick 2003: 529). Certainly this is easy to comprehend, as the highest mountain in the world should be the epitome of mountaineering. However, her point is simpler than that; we all create these iconographies that permeate society, ultimately establishing

what is known as the global imaginary; a created global space in which we all live, at least theoretically. Within these spaces one finds those who imagine it most vividly, the cultural and adventure tourists.

Cultural tourism is arguably the most basic form of tourism, commonly called mass tourism. People have traveled for the sake of learning about other cultures and heritages since tourism really began. However when paired with adventure tourism, cultural tourism encourages the exploration of the more remote places in the world (Fernandes 2013: 28). Adventure tourism, on its own, took hold in the 1970s and has risen to prominence ever since. It involves spending time in nature, typically partaking in a strenuous – or relatively so – activity, and exposure to natural resources (of either environmental or cultural creation) all while in search of a certain austerity that mass tourism simply cannot offer quite so easily (Fletcher 2014: 9). White, Western, middle-class individuals are characteristically the patrons of both kinds of tourism, either as an escape from their daily lives or in search of the exotic other, and, in some cases, both.

Susan E. Frohlick, in her article discussing the global aspects of Mount Everest, states that anthropologists have a growing interest in tourism because “of tourism’s globalizing effects – global markets and tourism practices change the contours of the world map, turning more and more remote places into tourist destinations through global economic processes, and, at the same time, enabling tourists to become increasingly mobile, global subjects” (Frohlick 2003: 525-526). She makes two distinctions that are key to my argument and for understanding the impact tourism has: first, that the process of people traveling the world – bringing with them experiences, languages, goods, and cultural dispositions – is reshaping every aspect of the world in which we operate. Second, the people themselves, whether tourist or host, are both the agents

of change and the products of change, both imposing upon the other and absorbing from the other. This kind of cultural mixing and exchanging is the most significant impact of cultural tourism. There is often a duality of “us” versus “them,” “tourist” versus “host” that serves to impose neo-imperialistic pressures on both communities, but cultural and adventure tourism are progressively breaking this duality down. Nevertheless, these pressures can be felt in both cultural and adventure tourism, but the level of impact increases when both cultural and adventure tourists frequent the same area for the same reasons.

Sherpas and Mountaineering

Nepal received just over 800,000 tourists last year, and roughly 100,000 of those tourists specifically went to Nepal for mountaineering and trekking. Of those 100,000 or more, about 30,000 people visited the Khumbu region (Everest region) (Nepal 2013: 29), home to some of the highest mountains in the world, myriad small villages, pristine glacial lakes, and of course, Sherpas. Since the early decades of the 20th century, Sherpas have been an integral part of mountain expeditions in the foothills surrounding Mount Everest. They have, more than most, felt the impacts, both positive and negative, of cultural and adventure tourism over the course of 100 years.

In the early 1920s, British surveying expeditions went to Darjeeling, India in hopes of finding able-bodied porters to carry their gear throughout the Himalayas. Due to the potential for work in India while it was a British colony, Sherpas were flooding to Darjeeling to find better jobs. As their popularity as high altitude porters grew, more Sherpas filtered down to seek the same expeditionary work (Miller 1997: 18). Miller notes that in 1901 there was 3,450 Sherpas in Darjeeling, and over the next 50 years that number would almost triple to 8,995 (Miller 1997: 18). For many Sherpas it was an opportunity to make money, for others it was a chance to return

back home as they had been away in Darjeeling for years. Despite their reason for joining expeditions, Sherpas seemed to be the only capable people willing to accompany the mountaineers into Tibet and over the high Himalayan passes.

When Nepal finally opened its borders to the world in 1950, the tourists began to flood the medieval streets and trek into the mountains in search of scenic vistas. In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay made the first successful ascent of Mount Everest. In 1964 there were estimated to have been 20 tourists visiting Nepal, a number which increased greatly by 1979 to roughly 4,000 (Fisher 1990: 148), and is now up to over 800,000 per year. Much of this exponential growth, it could be argued, is due to the growing popularity of the Sherpas and of mountaineering and trekking in the Himalayas. Coincidentally, you cannot go to the Khumbu region of Nepal in search of one without being exposed to the other. The following subsections are devoted to exploring cultural and adventure tourism and the implications of each, situating the Sherpas within these frameworks in order to understand the potential changes that can be brought on by both kinds of tourists.

Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism – as well as the closely associated ecotourism – is perhaps the most rapidly growing sector of the tourist industry today (Fletcher 2014: 6). Although Fletcher does not specifically define adventure tourism, he does give a list of encompassing traits that I will use to define it myself for the remainder of this section. Adventure tourism is a kind of tourism focused on austerity and adventure (opposed to luxury and comfort) where the individual is self-propelled and active, typically involved in risky activity, ultimately in search of something that is altogether unattainable. It can, in certain cases, also be linked closely with conservation, but this is where ecotourism becomes the defining category (Fletcher 2014: 7). In order to understand the

globalizing effects of adventure tourism on the Sherpa community, we must examine both the perceptions of the Sherpa culture and the risk associated closely with the endeavors of trekking and mountaineering.

Nyaupane et al. used a photo-elicitation method to understand how Sherpas perceive the changing environment of the Khumbu region over the last 60 years. In 1964, 11 years after the first successful summit of Mount Everest, an airstrip was built in the more southern village of Lukla (Nyaupane 2014: 418), quite literally opening up the Khumbu region to the flood of tourists that it would see every year thereafter. In the following years, schools were built, better health care and facilities were established, and the overall infrastructure was improved (Nyaupane 2014: 418). These are the factors that Nyaupane et al. claim to be the greatest agents of change in the Khumbu region. However when using the photo-elicitation method they discovered many people reacted positively to these changes as they had provided them with a better standard of living. Sherpa children are now able to receive a proper education because of the schools that Sir Edmund Hillary had built in the region (Nyaupane 2014: 423). There is a greater variety of food, satellite dishes, Internet and electricity. Most Sherpas have ready access to Kathmandu or elsewhere in the world, not least through their interactions with tourists.

Nyaupane et al. wishes to suggest that trekkers/mountaineers and tourists are in fact different groups of people. Although I agree that they certainly can be, I would argue that mountaineers and trekkers contribute to the adventure tourism industry as much as their tourist counterparts. Both tourists and trekkers will explore the villages and numerous hiking trails that cut through the Khumbu region, bringing their capital and culture with them. And it is because of how pervasive the tourists (including mountaineers and trekkers) have been, that the Sherpas have become dependent upon tourism. Although many are involved directly – via teahouses,

trekking agencies, or as hired help along the way – tourism has become the backbone of the Sherpa economy and a great majority of the Sherpas have benefited. Some still express concerns about their culture, but as they perceive it, there is more good than bad being done in the region. They feel certain strength, “expressed by almost every Sherpa respondent, in their cultural identity and comfort in the perceived social and environmental success of the Khumbu” (Nyaupane 2014: 434) because of how involved they have become in the industry. They are not bystanders or the commodities themselves; they are the proprietors and providers.

On the other hand, there is considerable risk involved in Himalayan trekking and mountaineering, and certainly even casual touristic ventures in the Khumbu. Adventure tourists typically search for idyllic landscapes that are rugged enough to satisfy the more extreme side of their personality, and stand apart from typical tourist destinations (Bott 2010: 288). The Khumbu region, spreading from around 12,000 feet to 14,000 feet in elevation (Ortner 1999: 63), is a difficult place to trek through, let alone live. Thus any tourist would have difficulty with the terrain, the climate, and most importantly the lack of oxygen. Furthermore, climbing in the Himalaya is considered to be the riskiest form of adventure tourism (Bott 2010: 287) statistically claiming one in every five individuals who attempts to climb Everest. In one year, 115 people died trying to summit Mount Everest, and of those 115, 43 were Sherpas (Ortner 1999: 6). And this past April, 13 Sherpas died – alongside 3 other Nepalese climbers – while setting up ropes for their expeditions. Needless to say one must have strong motivations for pursuing a vacation in the Khumbu.

So why, then, do people voluntarily visit this region? Their motivations are two-fold; first, they seek an escape, both mentally and physically, from their lives at home. Second, they wish to gain something from the place they choose to visit. This plays a minor role in the risk

involved, but will become more apparent in the following section on cultural tourism. Fletcher notes the irony in their motivations, stating:

“in an attempt to escape the anxiety, alienation, and dissatisfaction commonly experienced in everyday work routines; to immerse oneself in a timeless wilderness where one can achieve a sense of peace and freedom ostensibly unattainable within the confines of (post) industrialist civilization” (Fletcher 2014: 4)

they partake in strenuous activities that require an embrace of hardship in order to satisfy a particular goal. In some cases these goals are that of spiritual enlightenment or cleansing. In others, it may manifest in peace and freedom, as noted above. Nevertheless, their goals are ones that they perceive – through the gaze of a tourist – can be attained by visiting a particular place, a global space, if you will, that they have deemed appropriate for providing such an experience. However this is not altogether foolish, as it is likely they understand there is no real way to attain these ends, but it is the pursuit of these ends that becomes the enjoyment of the trip.

Although, one cannot ignore the prestige and potential fame associated with successfully completing a difficult trek or summiting a massive mountain, both of which are offered in the Khumbu. Frohlick describes the Himalaya as a place of play and a place of serious games, where there can be trekkers enjoying the trails and villages and also the mountaineers conquering the most demanding peaks in the world. However prestige is not typically awarded equally between the participants (tourists) and the workers (usually Sherpas), and this serves to create a divide that is characteristic of most tourists/host relationships.

Sherpas, although largely successful in their own right as mountaineers, are hardly recognized as such. Frohlick recounts one story of a friend, Babu Chirri Sherpa, who held two world records in mountain climbing. When speaking at a conference in Banff, British Columbia,

Babu was constantly asked how many times he had made the summit of Everest, and what else he would do in the area, despite having already explained his experience outside of the Himalayas (Frohlick 2003: 539). What this signifies is that culturally defined categories limit people's expectations and concepts of each other, so that a tourist cannot be – to a Nepali – anyone other than a white Westerner, just as a Nepali or any other non-westerner cannot be a mountaineer (Frohlick 2003: 538). When mountaineering first took hold in the Himalayas, it was understandable that Sherpas were not considered mountaineers because they simply did not have the professional, technical experience. However, today Sherpas are receiving proper training both at home and around the world (Brower 1993), and many have become famous for a variety of reasons. But with a continued ignorance and lack of appreciation, Sherpas will have a difficult time breaking the mold of simply being the “local help.”

Making the summit of Everest has become a golden ticket to landing a spot on quality climbing expedition. Thus, many Sherpas push for this goal. However this accomplishment is one sought after by many, both Nepali and foreigner alike, making the attainment of this goal controversial, as well as a challenge against perceived identities and roles. While it appears to me that there is a better relationship and sense of mutual recognition between Sherpas and their paying clients today, it is still a concern for any host community that their services and even successes will be considered insignificant to the tourist and thus, the world.

Cultural Tourism

“Culture, traditions, heritage, and nature are the reasons for tourists to visit an area. Therefore, cultural tourism depends on these natural and cultural resources” (Fernandes 2013: 26). Culture has been of interests to travelers for centuries, and especially so when explorers, geographers, and not least, anthropologists, began reporting on what they saw while in the field.

Encountering the exotic was, and still is, exciting, and has grown in recent decades as the primary reason for international travel. This desire has drawn people to the remote corners of the world where many seek natural beauty and an authentic culture (Fernandes 2013: 27). The term authentic is problematic, in that it term is both subjective and simply wrought with ignorance of cultural change, but nonetheless enticing. This desire to see the authentic ultimately stems from the tourist's own sense of a lost past. By feeling distanced from their past, tourists seek to experience the past through these seemingly timeless cultures, unchanged over millennia, and they impose a standard upon the host community than can be, but often only partially, met in reality. This is, in many ways, the standard for cultural tourists. However, cultural tourism need not be so neo-colonialist.

As Fernandes suggests in his article *The Impact of Cultural Tourism on Host Communities*, cultural tourism can be used as a means of development that will, in the long run, benefit the local community. He evaluates the environmental, cultural, and economic impacts of tourism on a community, citing both positive and negative side effects. First and foremost, if a community is interested in establishing a tourist industry, they must collectively decide that the type of change they desire is actually the goal of the development (Fernandes 2013: 24). Often times, communities are eager to develop a tourist industry because they know the potential economic benefits that they overlook the negative implications. Such examples will consequently merit the intervention of an "expert" to help the community back onto its feet. However this is not the norm, thus it can be considered marginal in this discussion. More important is a community's engagement in the development of tourism that subsequently engenders a reinvigoration of cultural heritage.

In certain alternative development paradigms – as cited by Fernandes in his article – the community becomes the object of development, thus creating an encouraging atmosphere for the preservation of culture and historical traditions, and contributing to the continued protection of arts and crafts (Fernandes 2013: 28). This preservation is also incentivized by a growing interest in tourists to explore the historical buildings and places of cultures and to experience the ‘authentic’ cultural traditions of the host community. Likewise, host communities can take advantage “idyllic landscapes, agricultural products, local customs,” (Fernandes 2013: 28) and other unique traits that will continue to draw a crowd of eager tourists. Unfortunately, as the communities attempt to draw more people and continue to develop their traditional homes, they can easily slip into a form of acting and fabricating simply to satisfy the expectations of foreigners. Stasch develops this idea more thoroughly in his examination of the Korowai people of New Guinea.

Robert Stasch views tourism as “a type of globalization process in which exoticizing stereotypes about strange others figure very centrally, not only as a main channel through which people sharply express their basic value commitments, but also as channels through which they translate those commitments into concrete actions” (Stasch 2014: 193). Thus, he coins the term ‘primitivism’ to describe the form of tourism in which people visit the Korowai people, where “archaic humanity” is visited by the “global modernity” (Stasch 2014: 197). In this tourist experience, the Korowai people are quite literally put on display. A tour guide will take paying foreigners on expensive river boat rides into the depths of New Guinea, just to lead them to a place where they may encounter Korowai in traditional dress while they perform subsistence activities “for tourists to see and photograph” (Stasch 2014: 194). Ironically enough, the Korowai apparently act primitive so the tourists will buy their crafts and donate clothing and

gear – and they have learned that this will always happen – so that they can then be more like the foreign visitors. Certainly the Korowai are not an archaic people stuck in the past, but they indulge in over-emphasizing their traditions in order to please the foreigner. This is not uncommon, but in this instance there is no exchange (other than perhaps of money and goods), thus both parties leave the encounter feeling a sense of cultural accomplishment that is simply a misunderstanding of material gain.

Vincanne Adams, one of the few recognized anthropologists to study the Sherpas in-depth, explores this concept of fabricated identity in her deeply theoretical ethnography *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas*. She suggests that it is possibly the “very gaze of Westerners on the Sherpas [...] that prompts their success at being ‘typical’ Sherpas in all ways desired by the West” (Adams 1996: 55). What she is trying to elucidate is whether Sherpas are truly the people they appear to be when one encounters them, or if they are a mirror image, a projection, even, of the “virtual Sherpa” that is articulated through “tourism, mountaineering, anthropology, and the many cultural industries engaged in the production of representations of Himalayan life” (Adams 1996: 40). Just as with the Korowai, the question here is that of authenticity. Stasch explains that Korowai are in fact acting up to gain a certain reward, but I argue the Sherpas do not do this.

The discourse to which Adams is referring when she says, “cultural industries engaged in the production of representations” are typically travel journals which culminate in memoirs, anthropological reports, and most frequently, news articles and magazine publications. Since the first organized expeditions into the Everest region in the 1950s and 1960s, Sherpas have earned the title of Tigers of the Snow and a reputation for being fearless, strong, and impossibly kind individuals (Adams 1996: 42). Therefore, Sherpas must live up to this reputation and continue to

perpetuate it in order to continue success in the tourism industry. If the tourist does not particularly visit the Khumbu to see Sherpa strength and hospitality, then they are usually hoping to gain insights into life and perhaps absorb some of Sherpas' spiritual superiority as a pure community (Stasch 2014: 208).

Adams believes that when tourists or mountaineers write so highly of their experiences with Sherpas they are simply revealing their "desire to become like Sherpas themselves" (Adams 1996: 41). Sherpas are not only the heroes of the mountains – a title any respectable mountaineer would desire to embody – but also devout Buddhists with a seemingly incorruptible disposition. Sherpas then, like the Korowai, are marveled at because of an identity the tourist has already placed upon them. It matters not how spiritual or traditional the Sherpas are in reality, it only matters whether the Sherpas can live up to the expectations of the tourists visiting them. The tourists are only concerned with seeing what they want to see, nothing else.

In contrast, this allows the Sherpas to truly take hold of their identity and live up to it, so to speak, for their own cultural preservation. As Fernandes notes in his article, a proper tourism industry within a community encourages the community itself to reaffirm their cultural heritage. In the next section I will argue that this is precisely what I believe the Sherpas are doing. They are not, as Adams suggests, simply reifying identities placed upon them. Instead they are taking advantage of the opportunity to interact with people from all around the world in order to share what Sherpa culture is and why the Sherpas are the well respected people the world knows so well. Sherpas are a case in point as to how a close working relationship in tourism, a connection forged over 100 years, has served them better than most host communities in the world, and it is to this point that I turn to next.

Sherpas as the Example

Sherpas' history with mountaineering is long and eventful. They have gone from being "coolies," – a derogatory term for porters or local help – to heroes of the mountains and the epitome of hard work. But it is not simply because of their supposed innate ability to carry heavy loads, nor is it their Buddhist-philosophy-guided life that they are successful in tourism. These aspects are certainly the main reasons, in addition to the mountains, that tourists have flooded the Khumbu since the 1950s, but there is more to their success than just being Sherpa. They have proven resilient to the imposition of other cultures. They have faced public fame and scrutiny having been the subject of countless articles, academic works, and documentaries (my own being one of them). They have helped to create their own industry of tourism – one that was dropped in their laps - that benefits them in a number of capacities because they have been, and continue to be, active players in the business, not simply just the object of desire. The Sherpas are thus an example to host communities around the world, exemplifying the relationship and development that can yield benefits for both tourists and hosts, while keeping the culture and traditions of the host community in tact.

The Khumbu region has been a place of development ever since the first successful summit of Everest. Schools, hospitals, climbing clinics, and improved housing structures are all the result of donations and efforts made by members of mountaineering expeditions from the earlier years. The Sagarmatha National Park was established in 1976 for the purpose of promoting tourism while also preserving the natural environment and regulating the impact of tourists on the area (Brower 1993: 73). This impact is undeniable and arguably the most negative result of the more than 30,000 people that visit each year, but efforts continue to be made to ensure as little environmental degradation as possible. One example, which I learned from a

Sherpa friend in Nepal, is in the form of a security deposit when you first enter the national park to climb Everest. Each member of the expedition must pay a fee that promises they will bring back a certain weight in trash while on the expedition. If they do not meet this requirement, they will not receive their deposit upon exiting the park (Ginder 2014a). Although this is simple, with the number of people that travel through the region, this measure is certainly a step in the right direction.

Fernandes (2014) emphasizes the need for the local community to be an active part of the planning process to ensure the development is meeting the needs of the locals. They are the backbone of the tourist industry that brought about the development of schools, hospitals and better living conditions. Without Sherpas, expeditions would not run, there would be no tea houses to stay in, and food would be impossible to find and thus carried throughout the entire journey by each member of the expedition. Unlike Stasch's Korowai of New Guinea – who are effectively an attraction of the tour upon which tourists embark (2010) – Sherpas are both the reason for many to visit the Khumbu and the reason everyone is able to survive in the area. Furthermore they are able to exploit their knowledge of the land and monopolize the natural resources to their benefit.

Janice Sacherer conducted a field study on the Sherpas of Rolwaling (Sacherer 1981), a smaller valley community that lies due west of the Khumbu. These Sherpas have not felt the impact of tourism to the same degree as the Khumbu region, however plenty of tourists will visit this region as an alternative to the Khumbu. It is often less crowded and since 1974 it has been considered “the most traditional and beautiful of the Nepalese tourist spots” (Sacherer 1981: 160). Because of their location, they are able to take complete control of the tourist industry, accumulating all of the wealth and pumping it back into their community. Furthermore, these

Sherpas are able to work from “home,” like many Sherpas from Khumbu also do. In some cases they will have to travel to Kathmandu in order to find work or meet with an expedition, but usually they will be picked up along the way. Schools have also been established in the area that has produced Sherpas who are more adaptable and skilled than ever before (Sacherer 1981: 162). Their economy has grown, more goods are being imported from Kathmandu, and work wages have increased significantly. However this improvement in living standards has been met by a slight degrading of traditional festivals and practices. This is the second most concerning impact of tourists after environmental destruction.

James Fisher visited the Khumbu on the schoolhouse expedition with Sir Edmund Hillary in 1964. In his 1990-book *Sherpas: Reflections on Change in Himalayan Nepal*, he writes about his multiple trips to the Khumbu, ultimately concluding with conversations with Sherpas about what they think the future of the Khumbu looks like. Upon reflecting on this work, he wrote an article in 1991 entitled *Has Success Spoiled the Sherpas?* In it he cites a number of reasons why tourism has been good to the Sherpas, specifically stressing the improved educational system. Although Nepali language is used instead of Sherpa, they are learning about math, science, and English as well, preparing them for jobs that reach beyond their villages. In fact it is this education, Fisher asserts, that has enabled Sherpas to exploit the forces of change in their communities (Fisher 1991: 6).

He also comments on their relationship with tourists and mountaineers. “The Sherpas had a long tradition of dealing with, and profiting from, foreigners; tourists and mountaineers are just the latest variety of foreigner to do business with” (Fisher 1991: 5). Over the years they have had their own opinions about Western tourists, namely that they were technologically sophisticated, wealthy, generous and physically strong (Fisher 1991: 4). However after the Lukla airstrip was

built – thus ushering in greater numbers of tourists – they realized that the Westerners were actually on the same level as them, but rude, cheap, and arrogant (Fisher 1991: 4). But because Westerners had preconceived notions about who the Sherpas were, they were able to flaunt their “Sherpahood” (Fisher 1991: 4). This is in opposition to Vincanne Adams concept that they reflect the written portrayals of who they are. For Fisher, they simply live up to the standards they know Westerners will look for, thus becoming almost hyper-Sherpa. It is here that we find the closest element of “selling” their Sherpa-ness. I would agree, despite my discontent with the commoditization of a culture. Regardless, Sherpas, as Fisher notes, are still proud to be Sherpa, and this is an opportunity to be reinforced in everyway as being Sherpa (Fisher 1991: 4).

Through personal interviews conducted during my research in Nepal I learned even more about the ways in which the tourist industry has brought improvements to Sherpa life. Many of my informants were attending undergraduate institutions, and, much to my surprise, had future plans to become a part of the tourist industry. They were either studying Business and Management or Tourism and Hotel Management. In either case, they expressed a desire to improve the system that was already in place. Ngima, who had grown up in the Khumbu and whose parents still live and own a tea shop there, told me he wanted to receive a proper education in management so he can ensure that his family will make the profit they deserve. Often times money is lost because records are not well maintained, and he wants to work to improve this for his parents, as well as other tea shops and lodgings in the area (Ginder 2014).

Ngima is also part of the Khumbu Media Center (KMC), a radio station and cultural center with locations in the Khumbu and in Kathmandu. The Khumbu Media Center is one organization “dedicated to preserving the Sherpa language and culture” (Ginder 2014). He and his friends, all of who grew up in the Khumbu, make efforts every day to ensure that the next

generation is as familiar with and empowered by their culture as they are so that it will continue to be passed on. They did not feel that mountaineering has hurt their culture. In fact, just as Fisher relates, mountaineering and tourism has allow them to spread their culture and capitalize – literally and figuratively – on the name Sherpa and the qualities the name represents. However they do this voluntarily and in ways that are beneficial to Sherpas first and foremost, not to the foreign visitors.

Conclusion

The Sherpas of Nepal are one of the most well-recognized and well-studied ethnic groups in the world. Their presence on the world stage through media coverage and countless examples of mountaineering literature is indicative of not only their influence on those with whom they come into contact, but also a sign of their agency in the mountaineering and tourism industry in Khumbu. Although the history of their involvement has been nothing short of tumultuous, in the present day they are continuing to reap the benefits of the industry and tourists continue to flood the Khumbu in search of the strong, friendly, globalized Sherpa tucked away in the “global playscape” (Frohlick 2013) of Mount Everest. Because they have a working relationship with the adventure and cultural tourists who visit their homes, they have not faded from the cultural fabric of the world and, in fact, live on more vibrantly today than ever before.

Upon reflection, it may appear that the ethnosphere is not truly threatened by tourism itself. Cultural and adventure tourism, as I have attempted to show here, are the means by which the world can truly become a more interconnected place. It is not through cultural change, but cultural *exchange* that traditions will continue to permeate the lives of others. By the host community taking advantage of their location and rich cultural heritage, just as the Sherpas have, they can capitalize on the very reasons tourists will strive to visit their homes. But once the

tourists arrive, it is the host community that must ultimately dictate the experience the tourist has. The Sherpas had been providing this experience before they even realized they were able to, and it is because of this that we know Sherpas today. Tourists will always visit the Khumbu region to see the mountains and experience Sherpa culture. The cultural diversity of the planet does not have to be at risk because of people travelling. Instead it should be reinvigorated, reoriented, and shared through all those that travel, both Western and non-Western, as the tourists and the hosts are both agents of the exchange and thus active members in the process of globalization.

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