

Living in our Globalized World: Notes 2

Cannibal tours – A first look

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- A documentary that follows a boat of tourists visiting villages along the Sepik river in Papua New Guinea around 1987 (released in 1989)
- This is a very extreme case of cultures in contact. Few of the cases in this course will involve this obvious a contrast, but the film raises a lot of interesting issues that are relevant to other cases, too
- by Dennis O'Rourke
 - born in Brisbane, Australia
 - Lived in Papua New Guinea (PNG) from 1974-1979, working with the new government before and after independence from Britain
 - speaks Tok Pisin, the pidgin language spoken there
 - a pidgin language is a simplified language that arises to facilitate communication in situations of trade or other contact between people speaking two or more different languages
 - pidgins combine words and simplified grammar from the two or more languages, and are generally not anyone's native language
 - you can pick up some basically English words in the Tok Pisin that you hear in the film
- The tourists come from Germany, Italy, the US, and apparently other places
- Very brief history of Papua New Guinea
 - large, indigenous population of farmers and fishers on the many islands, on the coast of the large main island, and in the highlands in the interior of the main island
 - little contact with people of other regions until the late 1800s
 - some two million farming people in the highlands were only contacted by outsiders in the 1930s, when people began flying over the often cloud-covered highlands in hopes of finding mining opportunities
 - these are the main “stone age people” that the classic stereotypes of 20th-century exploration are based on
 - coastal and inland Papuans spoke many languages, had settled farming economies and villages, and were notable for their very complex and somewhat familiar-seeming practices concerning money (they used strings of shells), loans, interest, contracts, and so on
 - they were also involved in frequent, serious wars between neighboring groups
 - very soon after they were first contacted, they were heavily missionized
 - and also harshly exploited by gold and uranium mining and other interests
 - and only slightly later, visited by numerous anthropologists, including Bronislaw Malinowski (especially in the Trobriand Islands), Leopold Pospisil (later, in the highlands), and many others
 - 1883: the southern side of the main island of Papua was annexed by Australia, passing through several administrative stages as a British colony
 - obviously, the Papuans had no say in this

- 1884-1914: the northern side of the main island was claimed by Germany as “Kaiser-Wilhelmsland”
 - again, unilaterally
 - the Sepik river is on the north side, so people in the film mention the Germans as the first colonial power to dominate PNG
- in WWI, Australia occupied the whole island (at least as far as the colonial powers were concerned), and all of PNG fell under Australia and the British empire until 1947
- 1975: PNG achieved full independence, establishing a parliamentary system that has worked pretty well
- Useful background: in the film, you will hear prices being negotiated. The PNG currency was (and is) the Kina.
 - In 1989, two years after the film was shot, 1 Kina = US\$ 1.16
 - so the prices are roughly the same as in dollars
 - O’Rourke noted elsewhere that the tourists would bargain down prices for carved sculptures that cost less than a gin and tonic on their boat.
- This is a very rich film
 - it is a classic in documentary filmmaking, for its reflexivity as well as its content
 - it has stirred up a lot of discussion and writing
 - check out the article by O’Rourke posted on the class website
 - it may seem slow and irritating, but give it a chance. I found that I picked up a lot more on a second viewing.
 - think about why it seems annoying or makes you a little uncomfortable
 - also, the seeming hodge-podge of shots is not random at all. Notice what follows what. O’Rourke put different shots next to each other to encourage you to make comparisons, notice parallels, and see contradictions
 - look over the posted thought questions before watching it, and again afterwards
 - we may return to this film later in the class, when you might see still more in it