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## Valene Smith, tourism, and the remapping of anthropological terrain

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### ABSTRACT

This article argues that Valene Smith's contributions were fundamental for mapping out the terrain for what was envisioned as an 'anthropology of tourism.' As the first major collection of anthropological research on the topic of tourism, Smith's 1977 volume *Hosts and Guests* offered a wide geographical range of ethnographically grounded studies of tourism, charted typologies, and chronicled tourism impacts, much as one would map a 'field of ethnological study.' This article addresses the role of Smith's volume in legitimizing what had previously been an off-the-radar realm of anthropological study. It also traces one of the many legacies of Smith's landmark volume: the blossoming of a realm of tourism studies oriented toward examining the politics, performance, and negotiation of identities (including ethnicity, gender, nationalism, and heritage) in and beyond encounters between 'hosts' and 'guests.' Finally, the article addresses Smith's 2001 revised edition of the volume, *Hosts and Guests Revisited*, arguing that her essays in that volume presciently identified 21st-century realms of interest for tourism scholars, including space tourism, voluntourism, terrorism and tourism, and cyberspace.

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In reflecting on Valene Smith's legacy, I cannot help but recall the tattered, annotated photocopy I'd made of her 1977 edition of *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. When I first discovered Smith's edited volume on a dusty bottom shelf of the University of Washington's Suzzallo Library in 1980, I was a new graduate student hoping to research ethnic and artistic change in the context of tourism and modernization. My well-meaning advisors, however, had cautioned me to drop the term 'tourism' from my grant proposals lest I be considered a less-than-serious young scholar. Smith's volume immediately became my touchstone, a source of reassurance and inspiration. Its photocopied pages accompanied me to Indonesia for fieldwork and then on to my first teaching position at Beloit College, where it served as the bedrock for my 1980s-era Anthropology of Tourism seminars.

Smith's edited volume (in tandem with Nelson Graburn's 1976 *Ethnic and Tourist Arts*) opened the gateway to my and countless other anthropologists' imaginings of

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new possibilities for anthropology that transcended prior, narrower framings of the field. For younger scholars, it is perhaps difficult to fathom how much the terrain of anthropology has changed since that pre-*Hosts and Guests* era. In that earlier time, most anthropologists still tended to think of tourists as irksome beings whose intrusions periodically ruined their photo documentation of 'cultural traditions,' if they thought of tourists at all (e.g. Adams, 2016, p. 3; Crick, 1989, p. 311–12; Errington & Gewertz, 1989). Few anthropologists envisioned tourism as a cultural ritual worthy of serious investigation. Valene Smith's volume, however, changed all that and put tourists/guests and their hosts squarely in the center of the lens. *Hosts and Guests*, as well as her other pioneering writings on topics ranging from women as tourism's tastemakers (1979), to space tourism (2000) expanded the horizons of what constituted legitimate and productive realms for anthropological research.

Valene Smith's contributions were fundamental for mapping out the terrain for what was envisioned as an 'anthropology of tourism.' Her 1977 edited volume of *Hosts and Guests* was the first major collection of anthropological research on the topic. It not only presented a rich array of ethnographically grounded studies of tourism from diverse corners of the world but also chronicled tourism impacts and charted typologies, much as one would map a 'field of ethnological study,' to coin J.P.D. de Josselin de Jong's term (1980).<sup>1</sup> (In those days, it seemed possible that examining 'shades of difference and variation' (ibid) would ultimately reveal underlying unifying themes that would define a 'field of study:'). While many of the chapters in her path-breaking volume approached tourism from the perspective of its impacts on indigenous, rural, and postcolonial communities, Smith and many of her contributors also recognized local people's agency and placed tourism in the context of longer histories of socio-cultural changes. Moreover, the volume identified and examined questions that remain central to current-day tourism scholarship (Adams, 2014; Leite et al., 2019, p. 5).

Here I wish to briefly probe just one of the many legacies of Smith's 1977 volume: the blossoming of a sub-body of tourism studies offering rich insights into what I will dub the politics, performance, and negotiation of identities (including ethnicity, gender, nationalism, and heritage). In the introductory chapter, Smith highlights some of the economic and political variables at play in tourism. And, several of the volume's chapters offered provocative statements about tourism, social inequality, and local or global politics. This is particularly evident in Denison Nash's analysis of tourism as a form of neocolonialism, Davydd Greenwood's concern with tourism, local politics, and cultural commodification in a Spanish Basque town, and Eric Crystal's exploration of the ramifications of the Indonesian state's then-new-found interest in previously overlooked rural ethnic minority communities for tourism. These early threads running through the volume helped shape the fabric of subsequent tourism-related anthropological and sociological work. They were, for example, a direct influence on Picard & Wood, 1997 edited volume—on tourism, ethnicity, and the state in Asia and the Pacific—which advanced our appreciation of the complex ways in which state ethnic policies and tourism promotion intersect and contribute to reshaping ethnic relations.

While some have characterized most early studies as 'billiard ball models' of tourism, envisioning tourism as a force that hits stationary, passive populations, it is important to underscore that Smith and many of the other contributors to *Hosts and Guests* recognized locals' agency. Not only is the volume's introduction peppered with examples of individuals using tourism as an advancement strategy, but we also see this

theme in a number of the chapters. For instance, Phil McKean's chapter on tourism and cultural involution in Bali underscored Balinese use of tourism to fuel their own cultural rituals and traditions and to gain national status. Likewise, Margaret Swain's chapter chronicled how Kuna women's active leadership in a souvenir *mola*-making cooperative enabled them to move into previously male-dominated community leadership roles. These works laid the foundation for subsequent studies highlighting the active agency of locals in multi-ethnic and multicultural touristscapes, such as Denise Brennan's (2004) study of tourist sex workers in the Dominican Republic, and Natalia Bloch's (2021) research on how tourism in India's informal sector poses opportunities for members of displaced communities to advance their political and economic interests.

Yet another thread embedded in Smith's introduction to the volume as well as in several of the book's chapters is that of the interplay between tourism, identity, cultural creativity, performativity, and the arts. In addition to Swain's and McKean's chapters, Stanton's chapter on staging exotic elements of Polynesian cultures for tourists at the Polynesian culture for tourists, and Deitch's historical chapter on the tourism revival of Native American crafts underscored tourism's role in strengthening identity and pride in heritage. This work (in tandem with Graburn's volume (1976)), planted the seeds for a subsequent generation of anthropologists to examine how tourist arts and narratives about material culture are playfully and strategically deployed in various arenas and marketplaces (i.e. Causey's 2003 study of the tourism-prompted revival of Toba Batak (Indonesia) carvings). In a similar vein, for me, as a young graduate student, the volume offered thought-provoking observations about the interrelations between crafting tourist arts, the rethinking of heritage, and the revitalization of ethnic pride – observations that reverberated in my own scholarship (i.e. Adams, 2006).

While Valene Smith's first edition of *Hosts and Guests*, in tandem with her 1970s-era *Annals of Tourism Research* articles mapped out a vision for the anthropology of tourism, her 2001 *Hosts and Guests Revisited* was equally inspiring, identifying new research horizons that had largely lurked in the anthropological shadows. For instance, her final chapter on tourism issues of the twenty-first century addresses several realms that were already on her radar as worthy of scholarly attention, including volunteerism and tourism and terrorism and tourism (as well as the aforementioned space tourism). Moreover, already in 2001, Smith directed our attention to cyberspace, urging us to study virtual tourists who 'surf their way to a destination' (p. 348). In short, I think we can safely say that Valene Smith's *Hosts and Guests*, in its various incarnations, was instrumental in getting us where we are, and where we'll be going in the future.

While the existence of a coherent 'field' or 'anthropology of tourism' subdiscipline remains debatable (Leite & Graburn, 2009; Simoni, 2020)<sup>2</sup>, forty-six years later, the legacy of Valene Smith's foundational work is undeniable: anthropology of tourism courses are taught across the globe, textbooks on the topic have mushroomed (i.e. Burns, 1999; Chambers 2000; Gmelch 2004, 2010), and institutional frameworks are firmly-entrenched (i.e. the American Anthropological Association's Anthropology of Tourism Interest Group membership is so robust that it is transitioning to a full-fledged Section). As an educator and trailblazer, Valene Smith must be beaming from the great beyond.

## Notes

1. Josselin de Jong defined a field of ethnological study as 'certain areas of the earth's surface with a population whose culture appears to be sufficiently homogeneous and unique to form a separate object of ethnological study and which at the same time reveals sufficient local shades of difference to make internal comparable research worthwhile' (1980).
2. In their review article on the phenomenal growth of anthropological work on tourism over the past four decades, Naomi Leite and Nelson Graburn conclude there is 'little evidence of a coherent sub-discipline' that could be considered an 'anthropology of tourism' (2009:35). Rather they found a broad range of anthropological interests explored via tourism, including 'ethnicity, identity, local and global politics, development, social inequality, gender, material culture, globalization, diaspora, lived experience, discourse, representation and the objectification and commodification of culture' (ibid 2009:35). Many of these contemporary themes, however, were already afoot in Smith's landmark edited volume and her earliest work on the topic.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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