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PORTRAIT

David Harrison: anthropologist, sociologist, and raconteur

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Introduction

Having been born in Blackpool, UK (1941), the seaside resort on the Irish Sea coast of England, there is a certain portent that David Harrison would become a Professor of Tourism focusing, among other issues, tourism as a development tool. But like many well-known tourism scholars, David's trajectory of his contribution of tourism academia wasn't always clear at the start of his career. He has contributed widely through his writing, editorial duties, teaching, and student thesis supervision over many decades. He has done this all with a sense of purpose and a good sense of humour. It is an honour to write this profile about David, as he was my Head of School, colleague, and (hopefully, still at the end of this piece) friend. We first met when I was appointed as a new Lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, based in Suva, Fiji.

After leaving school at the age of 16, his first role was as a clerk at Lloyds Bank – very different from a university Professor. I can image David's attention to detail would have been useful at this financial institution, but his way with words and writing skills may have been wasted. Needing further stimulation, David worked as an Assistant Preventative Officer, for H.M. Customs and Excise (Waterguard) for two years, first at London docks (when they were still docks) and then at Heathrow. This role would have some interaction with tourists and developing an understanding of tourist behaviour but assessing what types of goods enter the UK and collecting import duties is, again, very different from David's latter contribution to the field. That, too, was not too stimulating (though in David's words, "the social life was great.") From here, for reasons he still doesn't fully understand, we see a shift towards higher education. David attained a certificate in Education from Coventry Teachers' Training College (from 1962 to 1965). It was during this period that he developed a love of reading and even thinking; the pressure was not great and he had time to explore all kinds of ideas. In 1965, I took up a teaching job in a secondary boys' school in Southall, London; at the time, mass immigration from India was under way.

Sociology and anthropology

Often, romance determines people's career choices and employment locations. David was no exception. He got involved with someone from Trinidad, and over the next two years, they decided (a) that it was a long-term relationship and (b) he needed more than a teaching qualification to progress, so he signed up for a sociology course at Goldsmiths college in London. Tragically, in his first year of university studies, Valerie died. His motivation to complete his university studies was the idea he could go and do research in Trinidad, which he subsequently did. So his response to a period of personal crisis was to become a scholar. From here, David had no doubt he'd stay an academic.

Hence, the shift towards Sociology and Anthropology came with an undergraduate degree in Sociology at Goldsmith' College, University of London at the beginning of the 1970s followed by a PhD in Social Anthropology at University College London. His topic was "Social relations in a Trinidadian village" where David examined the role of relationships and gossip with this Caribbean village. While he was writing up his thesis, David had the opportunity to take up a year's research fellowship offered by Department for International Development with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology University College Swansea to research the impacts of tourism in the Eastern Caribbean – a foretaste of things to come. During his fieldwork, mainly in St. Vincent, he met Greta, who was to be his first wife. He was awarded a PhD in 1975. A lectureship in Sociology at the University of Sussex followed where he taught undergraduate courses in Sociological Theory, Race Relations, and Sociology of Development. After some years of teaching theory and sociology generally, David opted for a more empirical bent and went back to tourism. He still sees tourism studies as applied sociology/anthropology and it still enthuses him.

His 23 years at the University of Sussex were marked with several visiting scholar stints in developing countries. There were short stints enabled through British Council grants to the University of Swaziland for one month in 1987, Humboldt University, Leipzig, East Germany, and, in December 1989, to Bulgaria, when his visit coincided with the revolution. In 1982–1983, David took up a Senior Lecturer in Sociology position at Bendel State University, Nigeria, while at the end of 1990s, David took up a temporary position for two years as Coordinator of Tourism Studies, School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji – the institution he would return to a decade later. In 2005, David also made short visits to the University of Ghana and the University of the Balearics, Spain.

Tourism

David's move in 1998 to the Business School of London Metropolitan University as Professor of Tourism, Culture and Development sees him focus more on the application of tourism than more mainstream sociology. Interestingly, as recognition of his academic contribution on the field, David was promoted from Lecturer to full Professor, albeit via the temporary position of Coordinator of Tourism Studies, which was akin to a kind of Reader – something that rarely occurs and is increasing unlikely to with today's university structures, bureaucracy, and publication metrics.

From 2008 to 2014, David returned to the University of the South Pacific as Professor of Tourism and Head of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management. After six years in the Pacific, David returned to the UK, with Senimili, his second wife. For those who know David, there is no slowing down. The Pacific's loss is the UK's gain. In fact, he exchanged the one position in Fiji with four in the UK, taking up a fractional position at Middlesex University, London (Professor of Tourism), and also visiting positions in the Department of Geography, King's College London (Visiting Senior Research Fellow), and Visiting Professorships of Tourism at the University of Surrey and St. Mary's University College in Twickenham. He also remained Adjunct Professor of Tourism at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.

David is a practical researcher. Stints in 2006 and 2007 as a Research Fellow with Overseas Development Institute, UK and several consultancies including show David to think about how tourism as a development tool works (or doesn't work as the case maybe) in practice.

Career and scholarly influences

When asked about his influences over his academic career, David nominated his PhD supervisor at UCL, Professor Michael Garfield Smith as well as his lecturers earlier at Goldsmiths. In fact, David was the only successful PhD student in Professor Garfield Smith's entire career, though David admits an initially difficult relationship with him. His supervisor's rigor, attention to detail, and refusal to compromise standards were hugely influential. Those characteristics of rigor, attention to detail, and

no-shortcuts are equally true of David, as his students, colleagues, and those who have had their papers reviewed, theses examined, and book chapters edited by David can easily testify.

In terms of schools of thought, at Goldsmiths, the sociology in favour was very much phenomenology, though they also had a grounding in standard functionalist and systems approaches. Initially, David was very sold on phenomenological approaches but later came to see the value of taking a variety of stances. This balanced approach was driven by the fact David was brought up in a fundamentalist Christian background and in his teens rebelled very much against the dogmatism it involved. As a result, first, he studied religious Education at training college (later moving away from much of this) and, secondly, he developed a lasting horror of any approach that, its adherents insisted, was THE approach. David notes he finds much of the debates in social science to be reminiscent of theological debates, so those earlier years of religion and rebellion stood him in good stead when faced with Marxism and its alternatives. This comes out in discussions and, of course, his writing.

Academic works

David “burst” onto the scene with his 1988 book *The Sociology of Modernization and Development*, which at the time provided an overview and critique of various modernization and development theories. The review in the Times Higher Education Supplement commented “David Harrison writes very well, and presents a good, well-balanced and perceptive appraisal of current perspectives.” – a quote you could probably apply to all of David’s writing. Apart from his lucid writing, David likes to discuss tourism, politics, economic development, the arts, anything really accompanied with a local beverage... Fiji Bitter while in the Pacific and a cleansing ale when back in the UK. After this book, David’s academic focus shifted to the relationship between tourism and development.

Several well-known edited books followed at regular intervals: *Tourism and the Less Developed Countries* (1992), one of the volumes of *Sustainable Tourism in Islands and Small States* with Briguglio, Butler, Harrison, and Filho (1996), another tome of *Tourism and the Less Developed World: Issues and Case Studies* (Harrison, 2001b), and *Pacific Island Tourism* (2003). He was also a co-editor of *The Politics of World Heritage: Negotiating Tourism and Conservation* (2005).

As a social anthropologist and sociologist, David has been influenced by Marx and Durkheim among an eclectic range of scholars but most prominently by Weber. He notes in the preface of *The Sociology of Modernization and Development* that he tries to understand the society and its interaction with modernity and development with a healthy dose of scepticism and a degree of humility. David sees the sociological attempt to understand what is happening in the social world as based on a worthy aim.

Taking a critical view, much of David’s work involves examining both the positives and negatives of tourism development. As such, he enjoys publishing in those outlets that provide more room for informed opinion, such as book chapters or journals like *Current Issues in Tourism* or those journals that provide for stimulating academic debate, such as *Tourism Recreation Research*. Much of David’s work is single-authored. While he doesn’t mind working with others and is collaborative in nature, once he gets on a roll, it is difficult to find an area in the work where potential co-authors can contribute.

Apart from critically analysing the broader issue of “sustainability and tourism” and “heritage and tourism,” David has a keen eye for observing the social phenomena around him. This has provided him with the impetus for much of his work. His time in Africa saw David look at the issue of tourism and prostitution (1994). The consultancies he has completed in south-east Asia provided a close-up look and subsequent publications on pro-poor tourism (Harrison, 2008, 2009, 2013), while teaching in the Pacific and engaging closely with the tourism industry in Fiji led to publications in the area of service quality and culture(s) (Harrison, 2014; Harrison & Lugosi, 2013).

One offshoot of his academic research that attracted David’s interest is the role visual images play in portraying people, society, and culture. As a hobby, David collects vintage postcards, mainly of the South Pacific and of West London, and has in his collection (of some two thousand) many that are now very difficult to obtain. His collection and interest in this area have resulted in several pieces of work, namely “Tourism in Fiji: Who Communicates What, to Whom?” (1999) in *Tourism, Culture and*

Communication, 1(2), 129–138, “Islands, Image and Tourism” (Harrison, 2001a) in *Tourism Recreation Research*, 26(3), 9–14, and a book chapter “Tourism and postcards from the colonial periphery: vintage postcards from Fiji” in a book we edited together, *Tourism in Pacific Islands: Current issues and future challenges* (Harrison, 2015).

One of the areas David has made the greatest contribution is in the area of student supervision and thesis examination. David’s excellent writing skills and, at times, former school teacher manner, mean that students’ work that comes under David’s tutelage gets a thorough examination and rigorous feedback. There is no easy ride which only benefits the student in the long run and the academic community as a whole. Notable PhD examinations include Raoul Bianchi, currently Reader in International Tourism and Development at University of East London, Barry Mak and Wantanee Suntikul at the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Joseph Cheer at Monash University, and Patrick L’Espoir Decosta at the Stockholm University School of Business. David has supervised 20 PhD and possibly hundreds of Masters theses across all the institutions he has worked. Notable students include Stroma Cole, currently Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of England, and Hyung Yu Park, currently Senior Lecturer at the Middlesex University.

Another of David’s DPhil students, Clemen Aquino, now Professor of Sociology at the University of the Philippines, recounts several episodes which epitomize David’s impact and style:

The rigorous training I got from David may be evidenced by the bright red notes he scribbled on my drafts. The impact of this experience may have led me to avoid red ink for any form of writing. And I use question marks (??) more often, preferring this more subtle symbol to the expressive “yuk!” which David did not hesitate to use to call attention to an idea I so very carelessly expressed. Unlike David, I am not so lucky to have that easy, pleasant smile which can be put to good use while delivering some powerful blows.

Among my students, I have a reputation for being particularly strict about proper referencing and citations. When asked why, I say that I had the good fortune of having had a supervisor who noticed that the edition of a book I cited in the text was not the same as the edition of the same title listed in my references. David asked me to account for the discrepancy. A singular experience like this could not but be passed on to hundreds of other students.

I asked several students for a comment or two about David. A common theme that came through about David was his fairness and principled ethics. Despite his old-school English headmaster manner, his students remember him for always being fair, and giving students the opportunity to do the right thing and improve themselves. He always pushes students to think critically and his infamous *Record of Study* assessment is well renowned. The *Record of Study* requires students to engage with academic literature by keeping a diary, the reading students have done on the course. The written task is to undertake a précis of the article and to write a reflection of how the article relates to other literatures and the industry. Many students claimed to hate doing it at the time but later realize the benefits of critically thinking and succinctly summarizing their opinions only after they graduate and joined the workforce or continued further studies. Other students reminisced about the field trips to various Fijian resorts where David would enjoy a leisurely beer but was clearly less than taken with the obligatory *kava* at the Fijian village.

David has also contributed to the wider academic community through his involvement as external examiner for various programmes at different institutions. These institutions include University of Surrey, University of London, Middlesex University, Bournemouth University, Napier University, and University of Hertfordshire, to name just a few. As Head of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at USP, he guided the school to Full Membership of the International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE) in 2010.

In recognition of his contribution to tourism and its mainstream disciplines, David was made a Fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism in 2007 (though he did pass on the chance, in the mid-1970s, to be a founder member), a Fellow of the Tourism Society (1994), a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (2001), and a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute (2014). In sum, you could argue he is a jolly good fellow (and so say all of us).

David loves the theatre, including Shakespeare, and London, and while in Fiji, David’s Skype account included a quote from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*: “Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give

all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety.” (Act 3 Scene 2. Line 13). Being in a pub in London (or the Defense Club in Suva), discussing the vagaries of tourism and development, or virtually anything else, even the success or otherwise of the English cricket team or his beloved Chelsea Football Club is how David would like to while away his time.

Conclusion

Leaving high school at 16 years of age to work in a bank to being a Professor of Tourism is not the natural path of a through-and-through academic. However, there were earlier omens that tourism would end up being his subject of choice, albeit somewhat serendipitously. For me, the two things that stand out about David's contribution to the academe. Firstly, his rigor, attention to detail, and refusal to compromise standards, as noted above, especially in his student supervision, thesis examinations, and teaching. Nevertheless, for all his uncompromising standards, David has never taken himself too seriously. He shares his dry wit easily and frequently. Secondly, in his eloquent writing; the readability; and his ability to be critical yet balanced. As he enjoys his time continuing to research, teach, and supervise students back in the UK, I hope this brief biography will stimulate others to read his work. Cheers, David.

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