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Author(s)	高松, 郷子
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Community Based Tourism as a Potential Tool for Reducing the Impact of Borders in the Occupied Territories

Tourism Activity Initiatives by Local Communities in Palestine

TAKAMATSU Kuniko

This article examines tourism activities undertaken by residents of host communities, so-called Community Based Tourism (or CBT hereafter), as a tool for reducing the impact of the restrictive physical borders and barriers installed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories on the West Bank. The first part of the article analyzes barrier construction and its impact on local communities. The second part describes five examples of CBT in West Bank communities focusing on the innovative ways in which they have protected their communities from the impact of physical barriers encroaching on their communities.

In the twentieth century, the world has witnessed several drastic political regime changes in Palestine. The birth of Israel developed new border issues in the region. After the occupation of the Palestinian territories began, borders continued to extend into the Palestinian land. An originally transitional agreement of A, B, and C zoning became perpetual and left Palestine as a fragmented “archipelago” with nearly 60% of the land that contains major water and natural resources under the full control of Israel. More than 700 km of segregation walls, nearly 1,000 permanent and temporary checkpoints, and over 200 settlements containing an estimated 530,000 settlers have been constructed throughout the West Bank. Severe impacts due to such territorial fragmentation and the encroachment of barriers on Palestinian life have been reported. These impacts include the obstruction of movement, impediments to economic growth, increased difficulty in accessing medical and educational services, and restricted access to and deteriorated management of private agricultural land, as well as of water and of other natural resources.

The Palestinian tourism industry has shown a painstaking recovery from its nearly total collapse due to the Second Intifada, and it is now attracting around 2.25 million tourists a year. Eighty to ninety percent of Palestinian tourism is religious in nature (e.g., pilgrimage and non-pilgrimage tourists visiting archaeological and historical sites with religious affiliations). The industry has been monopolized predominantly by the mass tourism industry operated by Israeli tour operators. All entries of tourists to Palestine are under the full control of Israeli authorities, and the restricted

movements of Palestinian ID holders make the Palestinian tourism business very difficult to grow.

Residents of several communities on the West Bank attempt to promote several different kinds of CBT to accomplish different goals: 1) to share stories and perspectives on the real life experiences of contemporary Palestinians by providing direct cultural experiences and positive interactions with local communities (e.g., experiential tourism, solidarity tourism and alternative tourism); 2) to alleviate the unequal relationship between the guests and hosts and increase economic opportunities for the host communities (e.g., fair trade tourism); 3) to sustain and protect the environment through education (e.g., ecotourism and rural tourism); 4) to change the traditionally negative and grossly biased images of Palestinians as being “terrorists” and “uncultured,” therefore, sufficiently “justifying” and “reinforcing” the occupation mentality (e.g., responsible tourism and justice tourism).

This article examines five cases of CBT. 1) The Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), the first and oldest locally driven tourism organization, specializing in pilgrimage and justice tourism. ATG seeks to promote a positive image of Palestine and to contribute towards establishing peace in the region. 2) The Battir Landscape Eco Museum was established as a way to protect Battir’s ancient Roman irrigation system and terrace from the construction of segregation walls. The village of Battir submitted an application for world heritage inscription of their terrace last year. By walking on the trails of the Eco Museum, tourists can learn about the history, rich nature and archeology of Battir. 3) The Rozana Association focuses on rural development in the town of Birzeit and the surrounding areas through community based tours and cultural events and through networking and sharing skills with fellow organizations. The annual Birzeit Heritage Week is a major cultural event attracting more than 30,000 visitors. This sets an example for the development of other rural towns in Palestine. 4) Abraham’s Path, originally suggested by the Harvard Negotiation Team, is a long-distance walking trail across the Middle East which connects the sites visited by Abraham, the father of the three major monotheistic religions, as recorded in ancient religious texts and traditions. The Palestinian portion of the trail has been nominated as the No.1 New Walking Trail in the World by the magazine *National Geographic*. Tours help generate income for the communities along the trails and promote better and more realistic understanding of the region while encouraging tourists to appreciate the heritage and hospitable nature of the places Abraham visited. 5) The Network for Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations (NEPTO) is a network of 19 NGOs offering 51 community based tourism programs that offer tourists a chance to explore Palestinian culture, the people and their aspirations through the coordination of common efforts on humanistic, cultural, heritage, historic, solidarity, and environmental programs.

The five cases above demonstrate the innovative ways the local communities in Palestine

use tourism as a tool to protect their communities from both the impact of occupation and the encroachment of physical barriers.

Christianity in Palau

KONYA Akari

This paper aims to discuss the ambiguity between indigenous shamanism and Christianity in contemporary Palau through an examination of how people cross borders between two different religious spheres. It first describes the anthropological discourse on Christianity in Oceania since the nineteenth century to classify the differences in the way Christianity was received in Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. It then focuses on the case study of Micronesia, especially in Palau through an analysis of peoples' ordinary practices such as traditional chants, herbal treatment, and peculiar currency exchange which deeply concerns their indigenous shamanism to consider how they construct relations between several spheres in present time.

Palau started as a modern nation after gaining independence in 1994. Before independence, Palau had experienced over 100 years of colonial rule by four different countries, i.e. Spain (1891-1899), German (1899-1914), Japan (1914-1945) and the United States (1945-1994). Missionaries started to propagate Catholicism in Palau during the Spanish period, though it was under German administration that local people started to convert to Christianity. Based on the *International Religious Freedom Report 2007* published by the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, approximately 65 percent of the Palau's 20,000 population is Roman Catholic. Aside from Catholicism, there is also *Modekngei*, a new religion of Palau which was established under the early Japanese mandate, and includes indigenous shamanism and Catholicism. There has also been a recent upsurge among the SDA (Seventh-day Adventist) members in Palau as a Protestant Christian group.

Earlier studies on the history of the receptivity process of Christianity in Oceania tend to focus on how missionary works impacted the local politics and economy. Although such discussion facilitates significant understanding on the political culture of the local people, it treats the religious role—which is an important aspect for analysis of the polyphyletic world view in Oceania—as a secondary problem until the “Cargo cult” emerged in Melanesia in the 1970s. As one of the representative