



Kent Academic Repository

Theodossopoulos, Dimitrios (2019) *A vision for Emberá tourism: Graphic art in the service of publicly engaged ethnography*. *Entanglements: Experiments in Multimodal Ethnography*. ISSN 2516-5860.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75946/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://entanglementsjournal.org/a-vision-for-embera-tourism/>

This document version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

A VISION FOR EMBERÁ TOURISM

GRAPHIC ART IN THE SERVICE OF

PUBLICLY ENGAGED ETHNOGRAPHY



DIMITRIOS THEODOSSOPOULOS

THIS GRAPHIC PROVIDES A VISION OF INDIGENOUS TOURISM THAT DOES NOT STEREOTYPE THE TOURISTS AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO WORK FOR IT..



IT DRAWS INSPIRATION FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE EMBERÁ IN CHAGRES, PANAMA, A SMALL CLUSTER OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE DEVELOPED A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL..



IN OUR COMMUNITY, PARARA PURU, WE HAD BEEN RECEIVING TOURISTS SINCE THE 1990S..

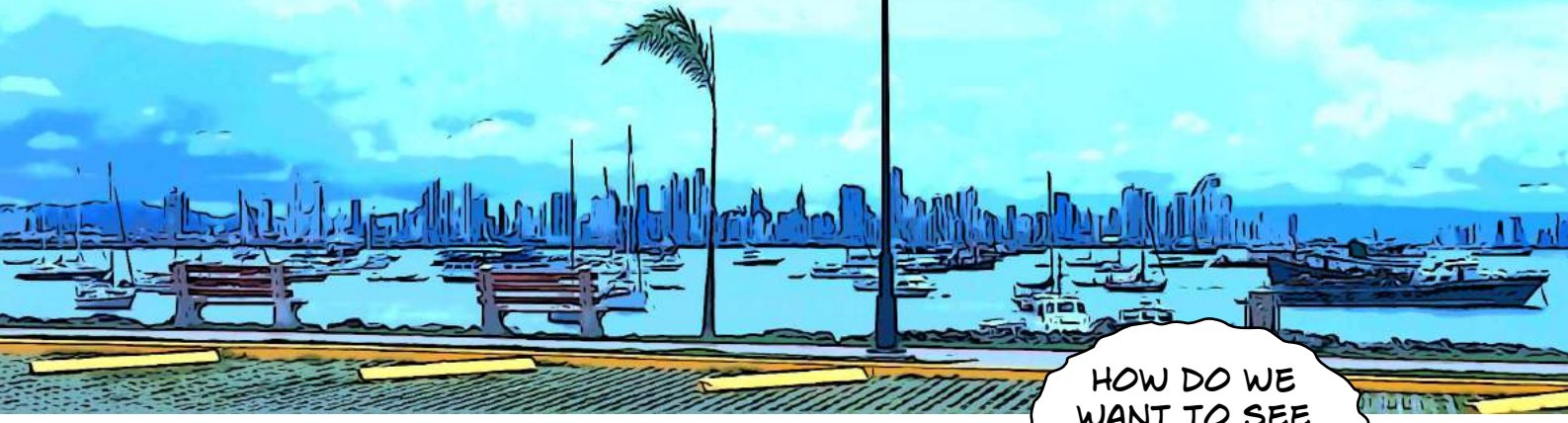
INDIGENOUS TOURISM, AS PRACTICED BY THE EMBERÁ AT GHAGRES NATIONAL PARK IS DEVELOPED WITH RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES..

COME AND SEE HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES..



THERE IS SCOPE, HOWEVER, FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CURRENT MODEL OF INDIGENOUS TOURISM AT CHAGRES..

IMPROVEMENTS THAT EMERGE FROM THE FOLLOWING DILEMMA:



HOW DO WE WANT TO SEE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?



THE EMBERÁ ARE MODERN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.. THIS IS HOW THE EMBERÁ FEEL..

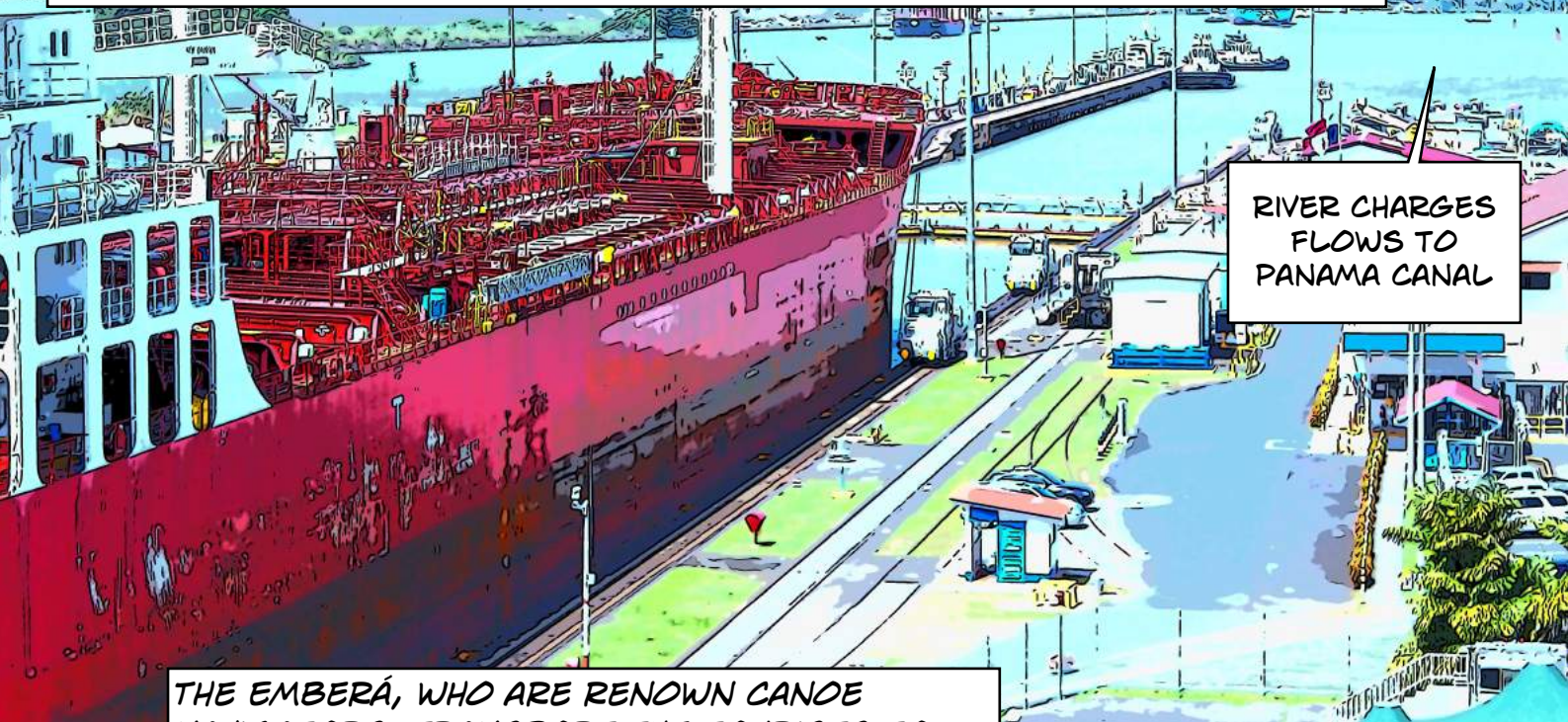
.. MOST TOURISTS TOO WANT TO SEE THE EMBERÁ AS REAL PEOPLE, LIVING IN THE REAL WORLD – ALTHOUGH SOME PREFER TO SEE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AS IMAGES OF A MUSEUM!



CAN YOU SEE ME AS A MODERN PERSON, BUT ALSO TRUE TO MY INDIGENOUS IDENTITY?

WE CAN TEACH YOU HOW, IF YOU WANT TO TRY..

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR MANY GROUPS OF TOURISTS --FROM CRUISE SHIPS AND HOTELS IN PANAMA CITY-- COME TO CHAGRES TO SEE THE EMBERÁ..



RIVER CHARGES FLOWS TO PANAMA CANAL

THE EMBERÁ, WHO ARE RENOWN CANOE NAVIGATORS, TRANSPORT THE TOURISTS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES IN THE RAINFOREST..



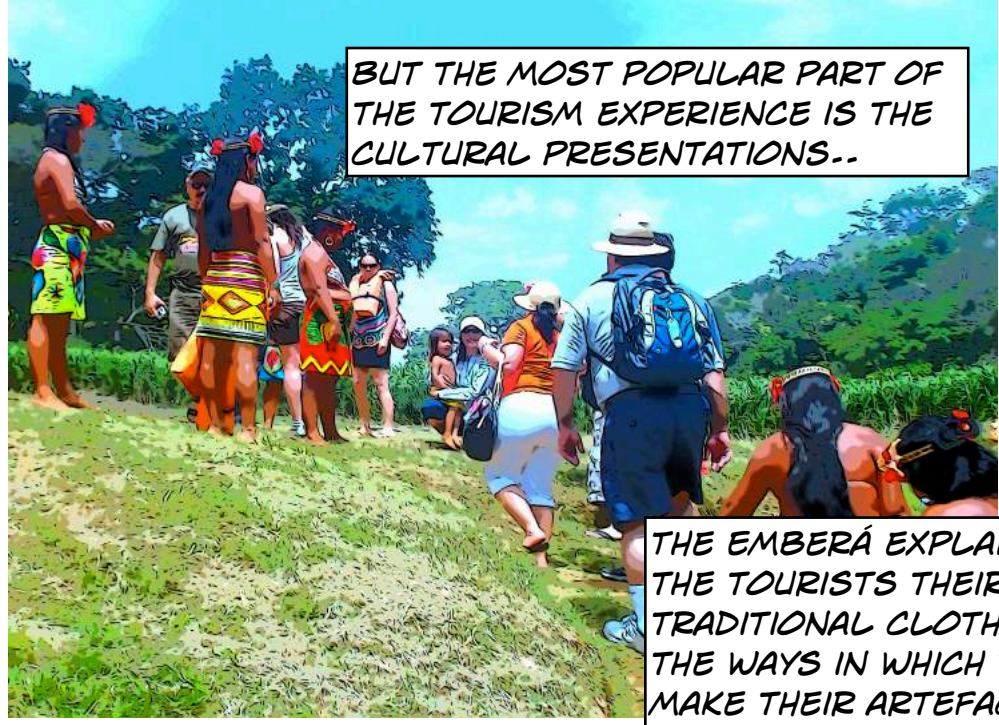
UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE EMBERÁ THE TOURISTS ENJOY THE RAINFOREST,

THE ANIMALS OF THE RIVER..

THE WATERFALLS..

THEY LEARN ABOUT THE MEDICINAL PROPERTIES OF PLANTS AND HOW THE EMBERÁ HAVE SURVIVE FOR CENTURIES IN THIS ENVIRONMENT..





BUT THE MOST POPULAR PART OF THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE IS THE CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS..



THE EMBERÁ EXPLAIN TO THE TOURISTS THEIR TRADITIONAL CLOTHES AND THE WAYS IN WHICH THEY MAKE THEIR ARTEFACTS..

FOR, EXAMPLE BASKETRY, AN ART THAT PROVIDES WOMEN WITH VALUABLE INCOME..



THE EMBERÁ SHARE WITH THEIR VISITORS THE ART OF BODY PAINTING



WHICH IS HAS COMPLEX SYMBOLISM AND HEALING PROPERTIES ..



NOW THAT YOU ARE PAINTED YOU ARE LIKE OURSELVES..

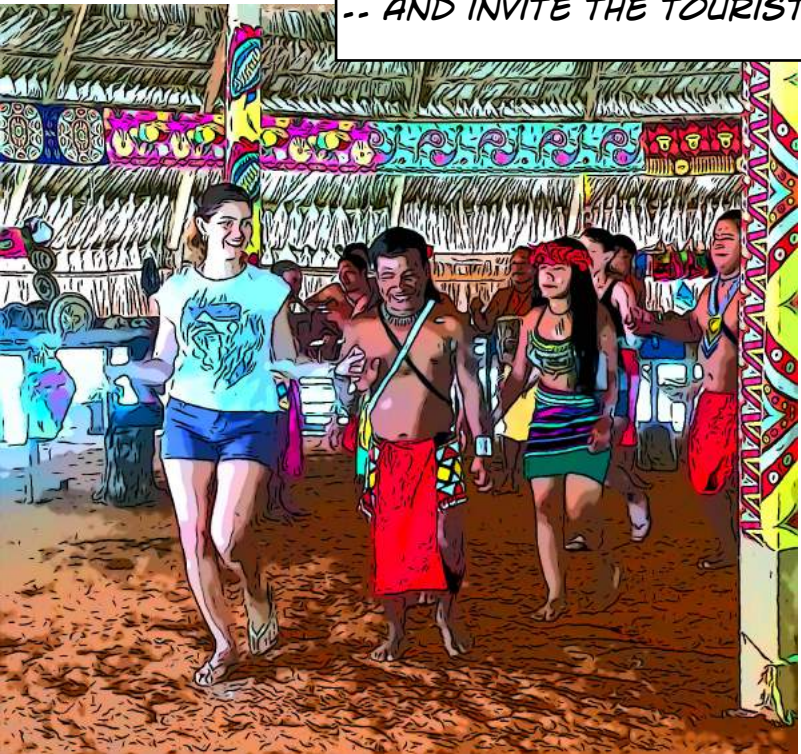


THE EMBERÁ DANCE FOR THE TOURISTS TRADITIONAL DANCES NAMED AFTER ANIMAL SPIRITS..

AND PLAY MUSIC.. THEIR DISTINCTIVE VERSION OF CUMBIA AND RUMBA..



-- AND INVITE THE TOURISTS TO DANCE WITH THEM..





MOST TOURISTS ARE OVERWHELMED BY HAVING A FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE OF AN INDIGENOUS CULTURE..

WHAT AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE!

BUT SOME ARE LEFT WONDERING IF WHAT THEY SEE IS TRUE AND REPRESENTATIVE OF EMBERÁ CULTURE...



IT SEEMS TOO PERFECT TO BE REALLY AUTHENTIC...



IS THIS A STAGED PERFORMANCE ?

DO THEY DANCE WHEN WE ARE NOT AROUND?



VERY GOOD!
VERY GOOD!

IT IS GREAT!
BUT IS THIS A REAL COMMUNITY?

THE EMBERÁ ARE SOMETIMES OFFENDED BY THE QUESTIONS OF THE TOURISTS..



DO YOU LIVE HERE IN THE FOREST EVERY DAY?

WE DON'T LIVE IN THE 'FOREST'..

HOW THEY THINK OF US, THOSE TOURISTS!..

THIS IS OUR COMMUNITY..



ARE YOU DRESSED LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME?

DO YOUR CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL?

DO YOU GO TO THE HOSPITAL WHEN YOU ARE ILL?

DO THEY THINK WE LIVE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD?

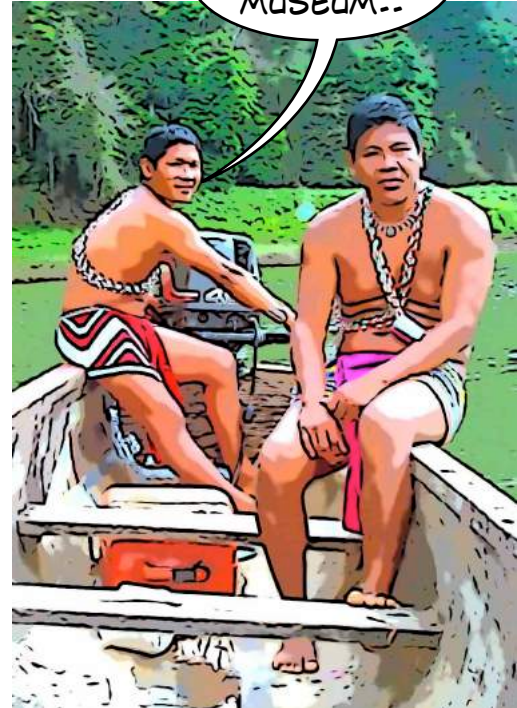
THEY TREAT US AS PRIMITIVE..



NOT PICTURES IN A MUSEUM..



WE ARE PANAMANIAN CITIZENS, WITH AN IDENTITY CARD..



HOW THESE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OCCUR?



MANY WESTERN VISITORS SEE TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS CULTURE AS ISOLATED FROM THE MODERN WORLD..



.. AN IDEALISATION..



THIS IS A CERTAIN WESTERN POINT OF VIEW..



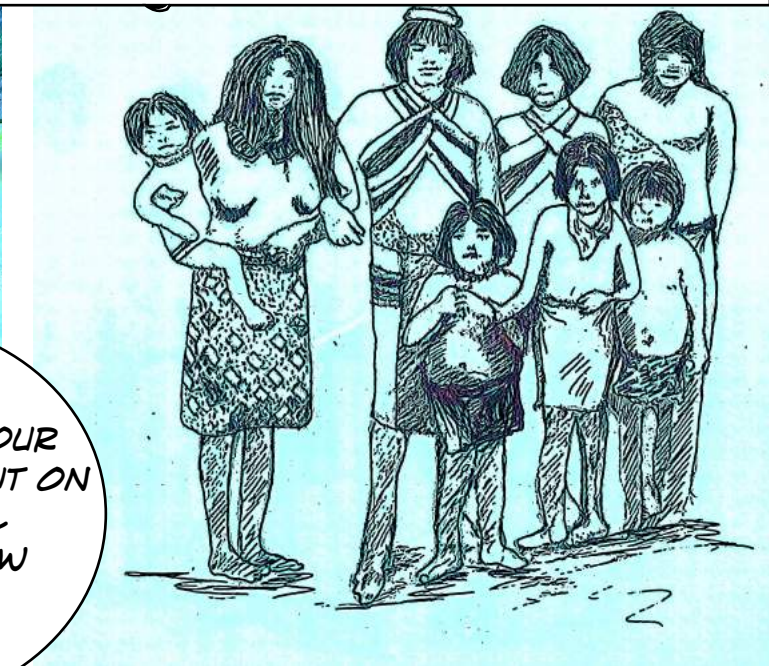
WE ARE MORE LIKE YOU THAN YOU THINK..

THE EMBERÁ USE MODERN TECHNOLOGIES, GO TO CHURCH, TO SCHOOL, TO THE MARKETS OF THE BIG CITY..



LETS TAKE THE EXAMPLE OF INDIGENOUS CLOTHES..

THIS IS HOW THE EMBERÁ DRESSED UNTIL THE 1960S, AS THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWING OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND TRAVELLERS DEMONSTRATE..



WHEN THE TOURISTS VISIT OUR COMMUNITY WE PUT ON OUR TRADITIONAL CLOTHES, TO SHOW THEM OUR CULTURE..

IN OUR CULTURE THIS IS THE WAY TO HONOUR ONE'S VISITORS..



WE USE SOME OF THE TRADITIONAL ITEMS OF CLOTHING IN OUR DAILY LIVES, FOR EXAMPLE, THE BODY PAINTING, AND THE 'PARUMA', THE SKIRT OF THE WOMEN..


.. SOME DAYS WE COVER OUR BODY PAINTING UNDER OUR MODERN CLOTHES..

OR USE MODERN DESIGNS, THAT YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE ..




BUT WHEN WE GO TO THE TOWN WE WEAR OUR MODERN CLOTHES..






WE DRESS AS OTHER
YOUNG PANAMANIAN
PEOPLE..



-- WHICH DOES NOT
MEAN WE ARE NOT
EMBERÁ..




-- FOR SOME
TYPES OF WORK WE
PREFER MODERN
CLOTHES..



-- BUT SOMETIMES
WE ALSO WORK IN OUR
TRADITIONAL CLOTHES,
AFTER THE TOURISTS ARE
GONE..



-- IT
DEPENDS ON
THE TYPE OF
WORK..



-- AT SCHOOL WE
WEAR A UNIFORM LIKE
ALL OTHER CHILDREN IN
PANAMA..



WE USE MODERN
TECHNOLOGIES..



-- AND HERE IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE..

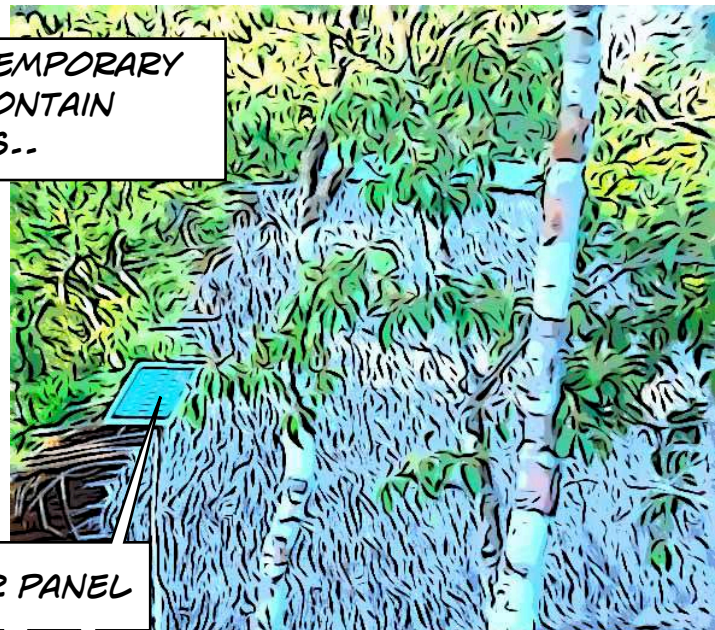
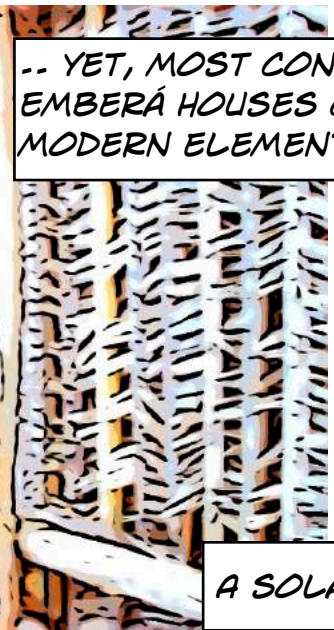
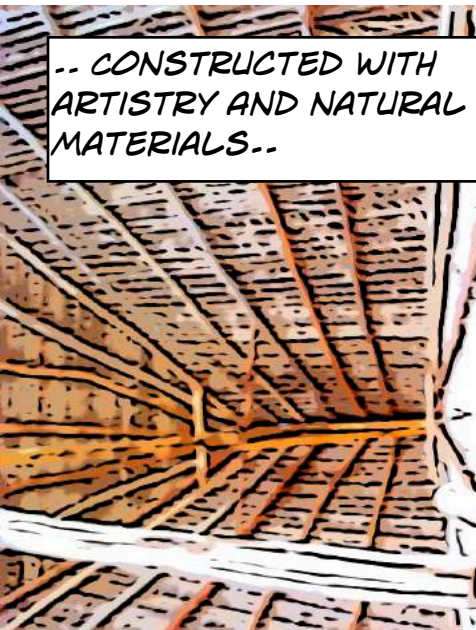
EMBERÁ HOUSES FOLLOW THE RULES OF AN INDIGENOUS ARCHITECTURE..



-- AND SOME ARE ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS..

-- CONSTRUCTED WITH ARTISTRY AND NATURAL MATERIALS..

-- YET, MOST CONTEMPORARY EMBERÁ HOUSES CONTAIN MODERN ELEMENTS..



A SOLAR PANEL



-- AND CONTAIN ELECTRONIC DEVICES, FIT FOR A LIFE IN THE MODERN WORLD..

A COMBINATION OF THATCHED AND TIN ROOF..



WHY DO WE HIDE FROM THE TOURISTS
INDIGENOUS MODERNITY?



THE ITALIAN TOURISTS
WHO VISIT THE EMBERÁ
ARE NOT DRESSED LIKE
ANCIENT ROMANS.. AND
THEY DON'T BELIEVE IN
ANCIENT GODS.. THEIR
MODERNITY DOES NOT
MAKE THEM LESS
ITALIAN..

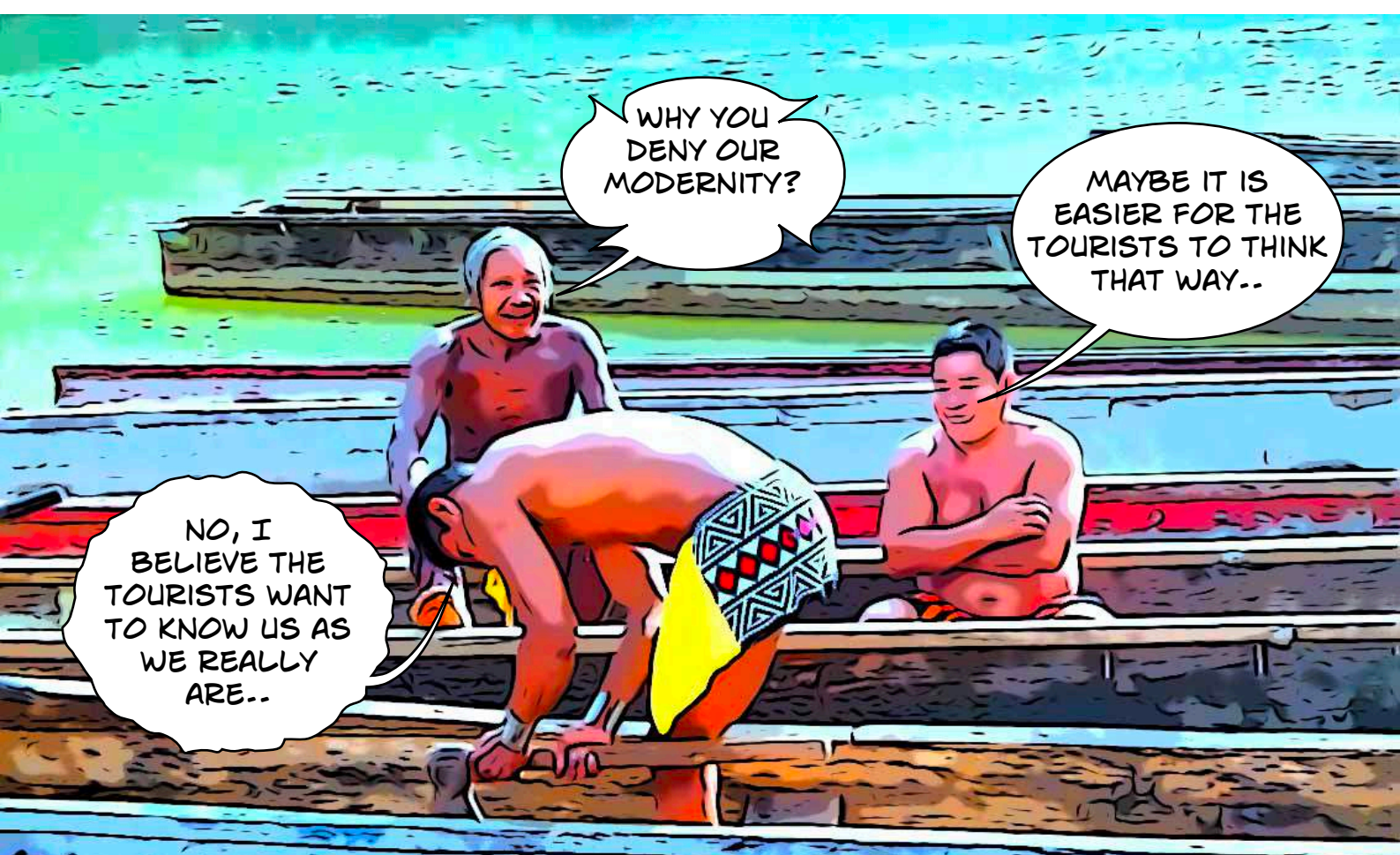
AND THE SWEDISH OR
NORWEGIAN TOURISTS DO
NOT BEHAVE LIKE VIKINGS..



WHY YOU
DENY OUR
MODERNITY?

MAYBE IT IS
EASIER FOR THE
TOURISTS TO THINK
THAT WAY..

NO, I
BELIEVE THE
TOURISTS WANT
TO KNOW US AS
WE REALLY
ARE..



-- IN FACT, MANY TOURISTS ARGUE THAT THEY WANT TO MEET THE EMBERÁ AS THE EMBERÁ REALLY ARE..



TO PROVIDE SUCH A NUANCE VIEW WE DON'T NEED TO CHANGE VERY MUCH..

-- BUT WE CAN MAKE MODERNITY A BIT MORE VISIBLE WHEN WE TALK ABOUT TRADITION..



THE DANCES, THE CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS, ARE PART OF THE TRUTH, THE LIFE OF THE EMBERÁ..



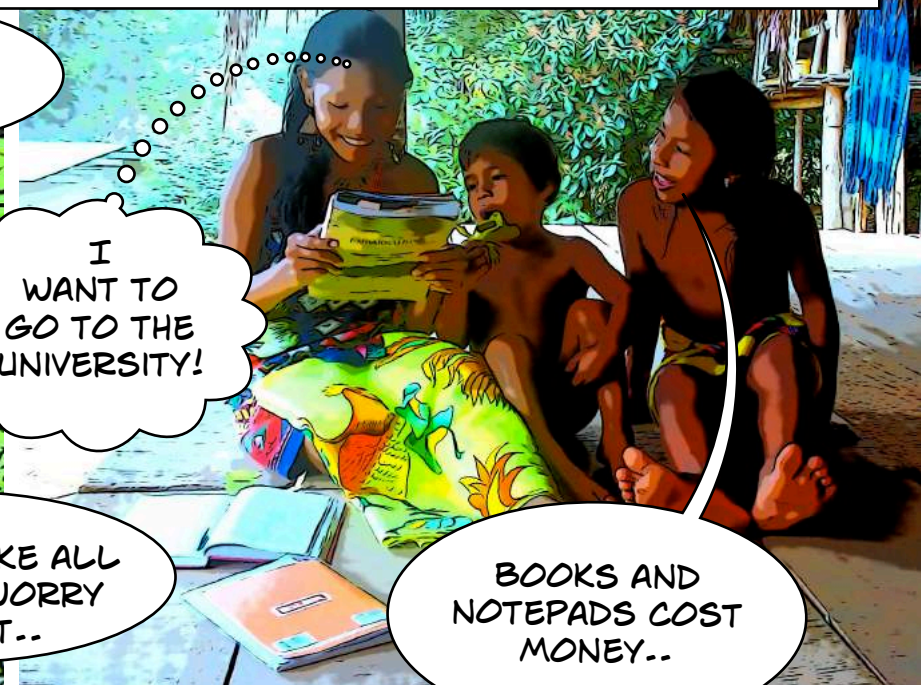
-- BUT WE SHOULD ALSO REMIND THE TOURISTS THAT THE EMBERÁ ARE MODERN-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.. WHO HAVE WORRIES SIMILAR TO THESE OF THE TOURISTS THEMSELVES.. PROBLEMS THAT ARE PART OF OUR GLOBAL WORLD..



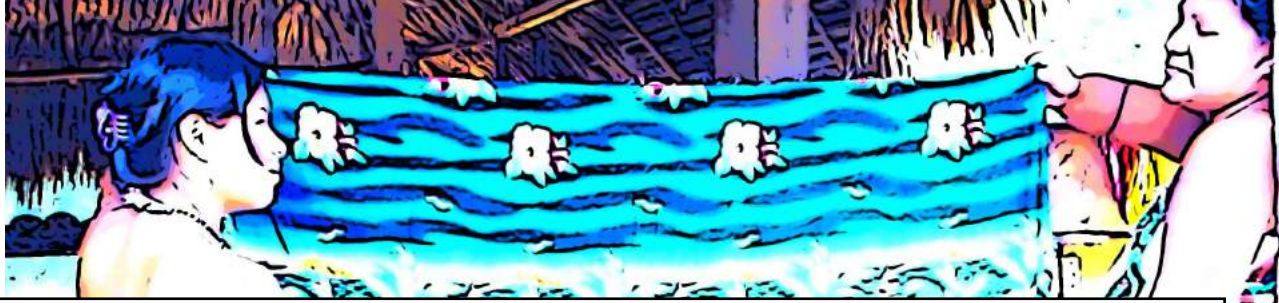
OUR EDUCATION IS EXPENSIVE..

I WANT TO GO TO THE UNIVERSITY!

OUR PARENTS, LIKE ALL PARENTS, WORRY ABOUT IT..



BOOKS AND NOTEPADS COST MONEY..



THE TOURISTS WOULD BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT THE FABRICS OF THE PARUMA-SKIRTS ARE MADE IN ASIA, SPECIFICALLY FOR THE EMBERÁ AND ACCORDING TO EMBERÁ SPECIFICATIONS?



THE EMBERÁ, AN INDIGENOUS GROUP, ARE PART OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY..



WE LIVE IN THE SAME GLOBAL WORLD..

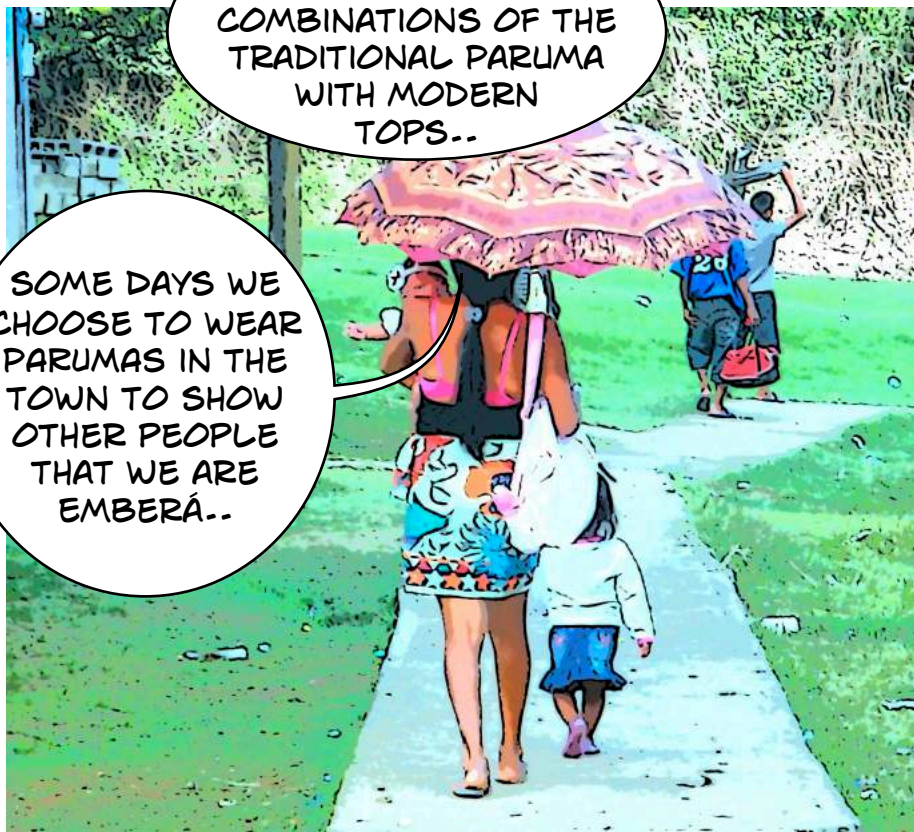
..BUT FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW THE 'PARUMAS' ARE AN INDIGENOUS TYPE OF DRESS..



WE CAN MAKE BEAUTIFUL COMBINATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL PARUMA WITH MODERN TOPS..



SOME DAYS WE CHOOSE TO WEAR PARUMAS IN THE TOWN TO SHOW OTHER PEOPLE THAT WE ARE EMBERÁ..





WE USE ALL SORTS OF MODERN TOOLS TO MAKE OUR CANOES, ACCORDING TO AN ANCIENT AND WELL-TESTED DESIGN..



THEY ARE BEAUTIFUL!

THE EMBERÁ USE THEIR SMART PHONES --YES, THEY HAVE CELLULAR PHONES TOO-- TO SEARCH FOR NEWS AND INFORMATION, ENTERTAIN THEMSELVES, AND COMMUNICATE WITH THE WORLD..

CHILDREN NOW USE CELLULAR PHONES FROM A YOUNG AGE AND LEARN HOW TO NAVIGATE TECHNOLOGY..



WHAT WOULD OUR CHILDREN INHERIT?



INDIGENOUS LEADERS USE CELLULAR PHONES TO ORGANISE AND REPRESENT THEIR COMMUNITIES..



-- AND UNITE IN COMMON PROJECTS WITH OTHER PANAMANIAN PEOPLE..



WOULD THE TOURISTS LIKE TO KNOW THAT..

..I USE THIS HIGH TECH CAMERA TO HELP CONSERVATIONISTS STUDY THE BIRDS IN THE RAINFOREST ..



WE ADMIRE YOUR DISTINCTIVE CULTURE..



.. BUT I CAN ALSO TELL HOW SIMILAR TO YOU WE ARE..

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

MAYBE WE CAN TELL THE TOURISTS HOW THE EMBERÁ NAVIGATE BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY..



..WE SHOULD GUIDE OUR VISITORS TO OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD..



KEEP IN TOUCH!

Gracias por su Visita !

..IT WILL NOT COST ANYTHING TO SHOW THE TOURISTS THE COMPLEXITY OF EMBERÁ LIFE..



THIS IS ABOUT THE AUTHENTICITY THE TOURIST DESIRE..



AND THE EDUCATION THE EMBERÁ WISH TO PROVIDE..



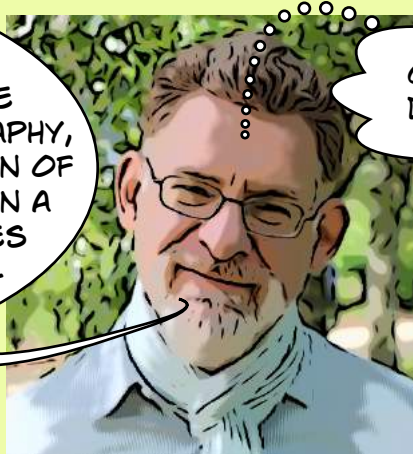
REPRESENTATIONAL TOOLS

THE MESSAGE:

Authenticity here does not limit itself in the performance of tradition, but embraces the complexity and challenges of contemporary indigenous life.

GRAPHIC ETHNOGRAPHY FACILITATING INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION

TO COMMUNICATE THIS MESSAGE, I HAVE USED THE MEDIUM OF GRAPHIC ETHNOGRAPHY, WHICH INVOLVES A COMBINATION OF IMAGES AND TEXT--IDEALLY IN A MANNER THAT DE-STABILISES STATIC REPRESENTATIONS.



GRAPHIC ART CAN BE PLAYFUL, DISARMING AND SELF-REFLEXIVE...

MY EXPERIMENTATION CAN PROVIDE INSPIRATION ABOUT HOW TO POPULARISE ACADEMIC WORK, WITHOUT STRIPPING AWAY ITS ANALYTIC POTENTIAL...

THE GRAPHIC MEDIUM PROVIDED MANY SOLUTIONS:

IT WORKED AS A VISUALLY COMPELLING MEDIUM, THROUGH WHICH WE CAN COMMUNICATE COMPLEX IDEAS IN FEWER WORDS.


ALTHOUGH THE EMBERÁ DO NOT ENJOY READING LONG TEXTS, SEVERAL OF THEM HAVE ALREADY READ THE SPANISH VERSION OF THIS GRAPHIC. TOURIST AGENTS, BUT ALSO MEMBERS OF THE NON-INDIGENOUS PANAMANIAN PUBLIC READ THE GRAPHIC TOO...

THEIR WILLINGNESS TO READ IS RELATED TO GRAPHIC ETHNOGRAPHY'S DOUBLE NATURE, AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL AND ART...

READ IT TO ME...



OBVIOUSLY HERE THE ART DIMENSION OF GRAPHIC ETHNOGRAPHY DID THE TRICK. IT FACILITATED THE DISSEMINATION OF A POINTED MESSAGE IN A LESS PATRONISING AND MORE EASILY APPROACHABLE FORMAT.



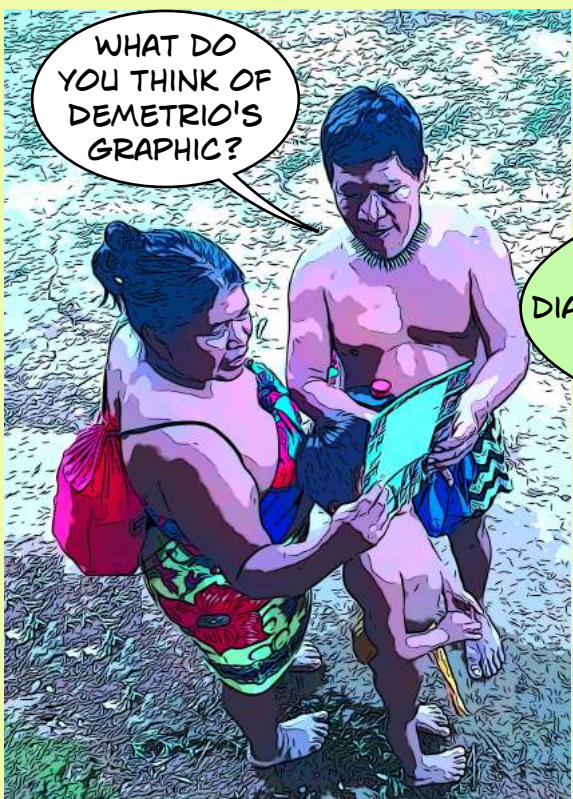
GRAPHIC ART CAN CONVEY CRITICAL IRONY WITH SUBTLE REPRESENTATIONAL POLITENESS. WHICH ALLOWS THE RECEIVING AUDIENCE TO DISAGREE OR DEBATE THE MESSAGE PROMOTED.

THE CONCERNS OF THE EMBERÁ GENERATED ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION IN THE FIELD, WHICH ALLOWED ME TO PROBLEMATISE THE HIERARCHICAL VIEW ABOUT KNOWLEDGE—E.G. THAT ACADEMICS KNOW BETTER...

I AGREE, BUT...

TOURISM IS HOW WE MAKE OUR LIVING. LETS BE CAREFUL ABOUT HOW WE MAKE CHANGES...

ALTHOUGH MANY EMBERÁ AND NON-INDIGENOUS PANAMANIAN ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECEIVED THE VISION FOR A LESS EXOTICISING REPRESENTATION IN TOURISM, THERE WERE ALSO THOSE WHO DEFENDED THE OLDER, FOLKLORESTIC MODEL OF TOURISM PRESENTATIONS, RAISING ARGUMENTS ABOUT MARKETABILITY, SUCH AS TARGETING AND PLEASING EXOTICISING TOURIST AUDIENCES.

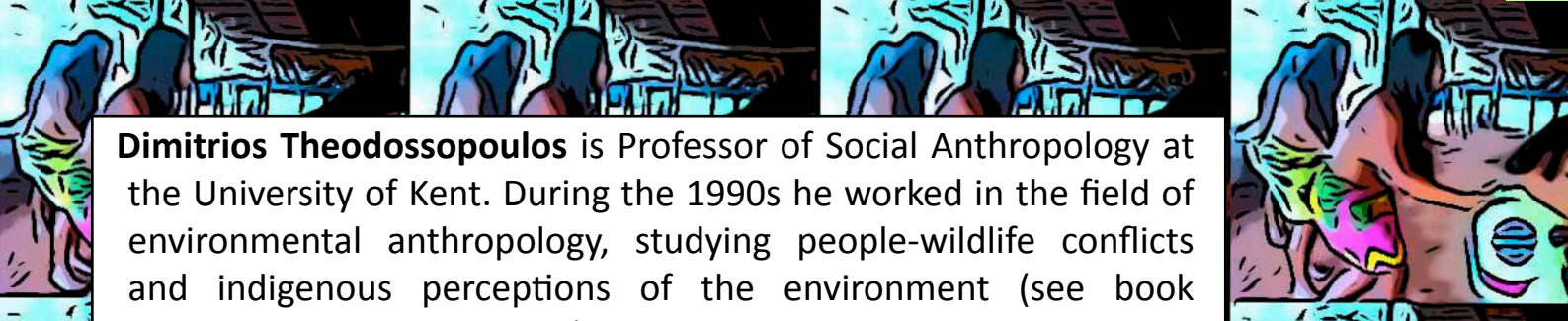


WHAT DO YOU THINK OF DEMETRIO'S GRAPHIC?

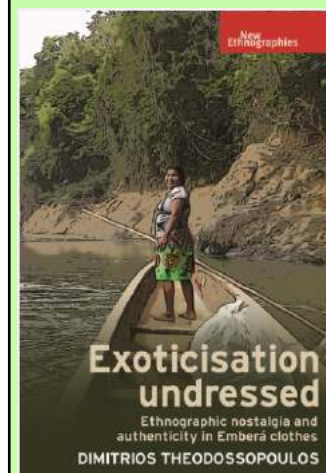
PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS PART OF AN ONGOING DIALOGUE, WHICH HAS TO REMAIN OPEN... THE GRAPHIC MEDIUM FACILITATES THIS DIALOGUE.

Acknowledgements

The Emberá community of Parara Puru has inspired the ideas presented here. Special thanks are dedicated to them and the other Emberá communities in Chagres National Park. The anthropological research that supported this project was provided by the University of Kent and the ESRC (grant RES-000-22-3733).



Dimitrios Theodossopoulos is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Kent. During the 1990s he worked in the field of environmental anthropology, studying people-wildlife conflicts and indigenous perceptions of the environment (see book *Troubles with Turtles* 2003). Later in his career he started new research in Panama focusing on indigenous tourism among the Emberá. This work led him to write about cultural authenticity, exoticisation, cultural representation and the nostalgia of the ethnographic project (see books *Exoticisation Undressed* 2016, *Against Exoticism* 2016, *Great Expectations* 2011). Beyond his work in Panama, Theodossopoulos is known for his anthropological studies of resistance, protest, austerity and populism (see books *United in Discontent* 2010, *De-Pathologising Resistance* 2015, and *Democracy's Paradox* 2019).



The graphic ethnography presented here has drawn ideas from academic research; for example, work by the author on the Emberá:

2018. 'Indigenous tourism as a transformative process: the case of the Emberá in Panama.' In *Cultural Tourism Movements* (eds) A. Bunten, J. Chio, and N. Graburn. Chicago: University of Toronto Press.
- 2016 *Exoticisation Undressed: Ethnographic Nostalgia and Authenticity in Emberá Clothes*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
2016. On ethnographic nostalgia: exoticising and de-exoticising Emberá culture, for example. In *Against Exoticism* (eds) B. Kapferer and D. Theodossopoulos, 24-43. Oxford: Berghahn.
2015. 'Embera indigeneity and cultural representation: a view from engaged anthropology.' In *Indigenous Studies and Engaged Anthropology* (ed.) P. Sillitoe, 33-54. Surrey: Ashgate.
2014. 'Scorn or Idealization? Tourism Imaginaries, Exoticisation and Ambivalence in Emberá Indigenous Tourism.' In *Tourism Imaginaries* (eds) N. Graburn and N. Salazar, 57-79. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
2013. 'Dance, visibility, and representational self-awareness in an Embera community in Panama.' In *Dancing Cultures* (eds) H. Neveu Kringelbach and J. Skinner, 121-140. Oxford: Berghahn.
2013. 'Emberá indigenous tourism and the trap of authenticity: beyond in-authenticity and invention.' *Anthropological Quarterly* 86(2), 397-426.
2012. 'Indigenous attire, exoticisation and social change: dressing and undressing among the Emberá of Panama.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (3), 591-612.
2011. "Emberá indigenous tourism and the world of expectations." In *Great Expectations* (eds) J. Skinner and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, pp. 40-60. Oxford: Berghahn.
2010. "Tourism and indigenous culture as resources: lessons from Emberá cultural tourism in Panama." In *Tourism, Power and Culture* (eds) D. Macleod and J. Carrier, pp. 115-133. Bristol: Channel View.