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Working Class Men's Masculinities on the Spanish Costas: Watching ITV's *Benidorm*

Mark Casey

Popular images of working class tourism on the Spanish costas as presented in *ITVI*'s successful comedy *Benidorm*, and the wider media, have represented the typical British tourist through images of sunburnt white bodies. Such bodies are often visibly marked as heterosexual, working class and gender appropriate in behaviour, dress and style. This imagery is underpinned through hegemonic notions of the masculine or feminine working class body at play. The recent work of Andrews (2005, 2011a/b) has been some of the first to theorise the mass working class tourist and their gendered identities in mass tourist resorts in Spain. Imagery used in *Benidorm* and the experiences of Andrews (2010) during her research, reflect that tourism is an embodied leisure activity that is built and sustained through human relations, which are impacted by both global and local gender relations. Such imagery reminds the viewer or tourist present that there are expected ways of 'doing gender' on holiday, that are informed by notions of how one 'does' masculinity or femininity back home. Although tourism may offer some tourists a liminoid state away from home, where daily realities can be forgotten (see Shaw and Williams, 2004), the centrality of gender to contemporary understandings of self and identity has the consequence that gender roles, expectations and performance are sustained by or even intensified within tourist sites and spaces. For example, both women and men face very different societal pressures of how they should prepare their bodies for partial nudity 'on the beach' and just how much of their body they are able to display whilst on holiday (Obrador Pons, 2007; Small, 2007).

The daily embodied experience of masculinity for men (and women), and the worth and value given to it for men's identities has the consequence that understandings of masculinity have to engage with everyday quotidian spaces 'at home'. However this chapter

argues that understandings of *masculinities* must also theorise how everyday ‘foreign spaces and sites’, that are experienced whilst on holiday, inform and are informed by men and their multiple ways in which they do masculinity. Multiple tourist sites require a plurality of performances of masculinity, bringing various masculinities into contact, and at times into conflict (see Ward this volume). Gender is critical to the construction and experience of tourist sites, attractions, landmarks, spaces and places. Tourism itself has been created, sustained and consumed within societies that are gendered. Because of this it follows that ‘tourism processes are gendered in their construction, presentation and consumption’ (Pritchard and Morgan, 2000a: 116). As Wearing and Wearing remind us, tourism involves gendered tourists, gendered hosts, gendered tourism marketing and gendered tourism objects that each reveal power differences between women and men and privilege the (heterosexual) male gaze above others (1996: 231).

One of the key thinkers on tourism, John Urry (1990) has been critiqued for the privileging of the male gaze within his writing (Pritchard and Morgan, 2000b). In particular Urry’s ‘tourist gaze’, although initially very influential in thinking, can be understood as problematic in a number of assumptions it makes that appear to be underpinned through a centrality of (heterosexual) male values and men’s relationships with the everyday and with tourism. The centrality given to the world of paid employment within the tourist gaze centres the realities of middle class men as defining what tourism practices and sites should be valued. Through the importance given to paid employment for men’s identities and masculinity (Connell, 2002), the positioning of work as the other to tourism centres male values and norms within this binary relationship. As Urry (2002: 2) suggests, ‘tourism is a leisure activity that presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organised work’. He goes on to claim that ‘it is one manifestation of how work and leisure are organised as separate and regulated spheres of social practice in ‘modern’ societies’ (p. 2). In contrast, the world of unpaid domestic chores

or child care that is often the domain of women (Silver and Goldscheider, 1994) is not positioned as 'the other' to tourism and touristic practice (see Costa, this volume). Even with new technologies allowing the world of paid work to creep into holiday time (BBCNews.co.uk, 22.08.11), the world of paid employment is still likely to stay at a geographical distance at least. However child care, cooking and cleaning is a reality that will follow most women with children across the globe on their travels. Urry's 'gaze' has also witnessed critique for not examining embodied experiences of tourism, and how these are likely to be different for men and women (Pritchard et al., 2007). As both Edwards (2006) and Ahmed (2007) have suggested, the study of masculinities in tourism studies has not only been absent, but tourism studies have taken a white, middle class, heterosexual, hegemonic position. This position has assumed what identities, lifestyles and ways of doing tourism require explanation or investigation by researchers, and in turn, which ones require little or no explanation at all.

This chapter will first move to discuss the resort of Benidorm before outlining the television show itself and the key characters that can be found within the series. The chapter then draws on a number of these characters in examining how multiple masculinities are presented within the show that allows the viewer to witness the diverse ways that working class men are portrayed as 'doing masculinity' when on holiday by the popular media. The chapter will conclude by suggesting that more work needs to be undertaken on the intersection of social class, masculinity and tourism.

Benidorm

Benidorm and the wider coastal areas of Spain attract millions of tourists in search of low cost tourism. The arrival of mass tourism onto the Spanish coasts during the 1950s brought overseas travel to both the working and middle class masses in the UK, and was to transform the lives of Spanish citizens and the wider culture of Spain. In 1951 there were around 1.2 million

overseas visitors to Spain exploring a relatively ‘undeveloped’ country that was slowly recovering from its civil war, one in which the Franco regime emerged successful (Turner and Ash, 1975). During the 1950s, in what was the then ‘Costa Azul’, the small fishing village of Benidorm sat within its large sweeping bay, surrounded by the homes of fishermen and farmland (Tremlett, 2006). The then Mayor of Benidorm, Pedro Zaragoza was to become the father of modern tourism in Spain. It was through his drive to develop Benidorm into a tourist destination (underpinned through the personal support of General Franco himself), which was to transform this small fishing village into one of the largest tourist resorts in the world (Tremlett, 2006).

The latent resources of Benidorm, from its coves, beaches and its old town, tied together with the very low cost of living for foreign visitors and three hundred days of sunshine, created a perfect setting for the new tourist (Busby and Meethan, 2008). The vision of Zaragoza was central in the creation of the Benidorm that is known today. Not only did the ‘Costa Azul’ become the ‘Costa Blanca’ to appeal more to foreign tourists, Zaragoza gave support for the easy planning of tourist accommodation. Developers were quick to build new properties on the beaches edge, before moving inland and turning orange groves into sites of swimming pools, bars and palm trees. Benidorm has a relatively small resident population of just 50,000 inhabitants and yet by the turn of this century, the town had more than half the hotel places of New York. Benidorm and its immediate environment receive three times more tourists than Cuba, and half as many as visit the whole of Greece (Modrego et al., 2000). The high rise and crowded skyline of Benidorm is present in the opening credits of *Benidorm*, a familiar sight to millions of tourists. The imagery reminds the viewer that Benidorm is more familiar in size to a city. As I have suggested elsewhere (Casey, 2013), the crowded skyline of Benidorm presents an image of an unsophisticated high-rise city. Indeed throughout the television show the hotel’s rooms are presented as cramped, dated, dirty, hot ‘foreign’ and uncomfortable. As O’Reilly

(2000: 19) observes, such mass tourist resorts are portrayed by the media as representing 'pollution, decay, overcrowding'.

Benidorm continues in its popularity, but it is a popularity held by working class, low income and low spending tourists, who seek out 'others like them'. For example, a weeks holiday in Benidorm can be purchased in the UK for as little as £121 per person (Travelsupermarket.com, 2013), which is relatively accessible even for those on the UK's minimum wage of £6.31 per hour (BBCNews.co.uk, 15.04.13). However, as Sheerin (2011) notes, Benidorm has become something of a 'nightmare resort' due to its large geographical spread. The looming, decaying figures of some of the earlier high rise hotels, tied in with overcrowded beaches, drunken tourists and litter presents the resort as rather downmarket (Ritchie, 1993; Robinson, 1996). The resorts latent resources of the 1950s, from its beautiful cove, sandy beaches, unspoilt waters and village atmosphere can no longer be utilised to secure higher spending middle class tourists in search of the 'authentic Spain'. It is questionable if Benidorm's recent attempts to regenerate its sea front and attract more upmarket hotels have been successful. For Tremlett (2006) the Benidorm of the early 21st century has echoes of the British working class resort of Blackpool (see Webb, 2005), a common claim made by one of the shows key characters Mick Garvey: 'it's Blackpool with sun'. In a resort like Benidorm it is difficult to avoid 'others like you'¹, with its crowded streets and beaches allowing working class British tourists to meet other working class British tourists, creating a sense of belonging and British ownership both in the resort and in the show. These claims have been echoed in work by Andrews (2005, 2010, 2011a/b) in the Mallorcan resort of Magaluf. Due to Magaluf's appeal to working class British tourists it is ridiculed by the British press and middle class travellers alike, earning the nicknames 'Megaruff' and 'Shagaluf'². Similar complaints have been made against Benidorm with it becoming 'a huge joke', where the British press go to sneer at the working class at play (Tremlett, 2006: 109).

Laughing with *Benidorm*?

The TV show *Benidorm* first aired on British television in 2007. The show follows a tradition of other fictitious British television programmes and films set in and around the Spanish costas (see Casey, 2010a). The television show, created by Derren Litten, secured high ratings with it being aired at prime time on Friday evenings on British terrestrial channel *ITVI*. Its success was mirrored in the increase in running time of each episode from 30 minutes in series one to an hour in series two to six. For Beeton (2005) and Kim et al. (2009) television series that run for several seasons, such as *Benidorm*, allow viewers to develop strong attachments to characters and locations, often wanting to visit filming locations themselves. Both the inside and outside filming of *Benidorm* is undertaken on location within a real hotel (that is given the fictional name '*the Solanas Hotel*'). The setting and filming of the show in Spain may have less to do with a celebration of the 'exotic' or the difference Spain may offer to the viewer, and more to do with its familiarity. Both the show and resort offer familiar elements of low cost package holidays, from arrival on the lowcost airline easyJet, high rise/low cost hotels, crowded beaches, all inclusive food and drink that is not too foreign, nightly British themed entertainment and of course the Spanish sun. As Casey (2010b) has argued elsewhere, the advent of low cost air travel in Europe has made the distant and exotic, increasingly familiar.

Tourism and the draw of (once) exotic locations have had an important place in British television history. Earlier travel programmes such as *Wickers World* (1959-1990), *Wish You Were Here?* (1974-2003) and *Holiday* (1969-2007) have been theorised as prioritising a scopic approach that has privileged sightseeing over other elements of how people 'do' holidays. More recent reality television programmes such as *Ibiza Uncovered* (2004-7), *Geordie Shore: Magaluf Madness* (2011), *Benidorm ER* (2011-), *Holiday ER* (2012-) and *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents* (2011-), along with the fictional *Benidorm*, have shifted the focus onto the mass package holiday and the working class tourist body at play. Both positive and negative

embodied experiences of working class package tourism are presented for the viewer to enjoy, from characters getting a tan, binge drinking, having sex, fighting, getting food poisoning or breaking a bone. Such television may remind the viewer that ‘the world is grasped through the body’ (Crouch, 2002: 217), but for Skeggs (2009) reality television can present working class bodies as deficient, lacking, inadequate and requiring improvement. The middle class viewer can tune into such programmes whilst gazing upon a distant and somewhat problematic ‘other’, who is safely removed from their own quotidian realities.

Central to the show is ‘The Garvey’ family, who appear to fit the stereotype of the British urban underclass (Murray, 1996; Jones, 2011). This characterisation draws on imagery in which The Garvey’s have a reliance on state benefits, have little intention of working and whose 15 year old daughter has had a baby to an unknown father (see Willis, 1977; Jones, 2011, Sparrow, 2011). In series one the father of the family ‘Mick’ funds the family holiday to Benidorm from illegally gained state benefits. As each series develops Mick Garvey is presented as a big hearted husband and father, who often utilises bravado and comedy in his attempts to mask his inability to hold down secure employment. Mick is out of time and place in an economy that is witnessing the loss of low paid manual jobs, with a continued shift to service sector employment. Within the show he willingly undertakes the role of the primary entertainer for his children (‘Chantelle’ and ‘Michael’), whilst his wife ‘Janice’ tries to manage her unruly mother (‘Madge’) and her offensive views. Schanzel and Smith (2011) have shown how fathers often take on the primary responsibility of children’s entertainer in holiday settings, and also facilitate the mother’s activities and interests. Mick’s actions within the series vary from benefit fraud, long term unemployment, defending and being supportive of his daughter’s unexpected pregnancy, running a successful business to losing the business and all its inherited wealth. His take on the world is reminiscent of Willis’s working class lads in his study ‘*Learning to Labour*’ (1977). Mick, as with Willis’ lads, is aware that he is on the periphery of

society, with bravado and humour empowering him in his management of the his daily struggles. As with Mac an Ghail's (2000) more recent study, there is now very little 'shop floor' work left in the UK in which Mick's humour and skills could have a place. Instead, he finds temporary use, value and belonging in the working class setting of the Solanas Hotel.

Initially the middle class couple 'Martin and Kate' serve as a stark contrast to The Garvey family. Through their desire to access 'authentic Spain' away from Benidorm, they are marked out as 'the outsiders'. Their discomfort from having to stay at the Solanas Hotel presents them out as the 'uninvited other', their middle class values spoiling the fun of the working class tourists. Although middle class, Martin, as with Mick, is presented as an example of failing manhood in the early twenty-first century (Hayward and Mac an Ghail, 2003). Both characters fail to live up to hegemonic notions of masculinity, with key women in their lives reminding them of their failures *as men*. Throughout each series Mick has to manage Madge's comments that he has 'failed as a man, husband and father' through his inability to provide financially for his family. For Martin, his failure to provide a middle class holiday in Spain for Kate, to his inability to make her pregnant due to his very low sperm count, are utilised to present Martin as a weak man. The ability for men to father children, and thus indicate to other men that they have a 'normal' sperm count and are not homosexual (through their sexual encounter with a woman), serves as a key indicator of perceived masculinity and virility (Daniels, 2006; Schanzel and Smith, 2011). For Martin, his low sperm count suggests that he is not a 'real man'. His character is presented as subordinate to his wife (series one – three), the waiter Mateo – who his wife has a sexual encounter with (series one – three), his girlfriend Brandy (series three) and his mother (series three). Through Martin's inability to make claims to markers of manliness and hegemonic masculinity he is presented as subordinate to female demands. As Flood (2002) asserts, it is deterministic to assume that the hegemonic form of masculinity always works in a manner that 'guarantees male dominance over females'.

'Geoff Maltby' is a regular to Benidorm and the Solanas Hotel. Like both Mick and Martin, Geoff is presented as an example of a failing man – an unmarried virgin, undertaking his holidays with his retired mum 'Noreen', with whom he lives (despite being in his mid-30s). Key to Geoff's failure in his manhood is his lack of clear employment 'back home', and initial inability to secure a girlfriend or lose his virginity. As Martin (2010) has shown, for many heterosexual men the loss of one's virginity and sexual experience with women is often utilised in making claims to being a 'real man' and dominant notions of heterosexual masculinity. In series three Geoff attempts to lose his virginity, which is presented as the character wishing to make claims to a sexually successful heterosexual male identity. However, in undertaking internet dating his actions are presented as desperate, with his attempts failing when he meets a transvestite named Lesley. His discomfort at meeting Lesley is in stark contrast to Lesley's own comfort as a transvestite living in Benidorm's old town. Through this experience Geoff is then assumed to be gay by his mother and other holiday makers at the Solanas Hotel. On the holding of a 'coming out party' for Geoff (one in which his mother and other characters dress up as 'The Village People' and perform 'YMCA'), he is horrified at the public assumption that he is gay. The actions of his mother and other tourists remind the viewer how tourists not only gaze at tourist sites, but can and do 'gaze' upon each other's actions and listen into other's conversations and holiday experiences across the pool. In series four and five Geoff's character is no longer present in the show, although Noreen is. Geoff's lack of presence in Benidorm is due to his own fatherhood, that presents him as moving on in his independence as a man and economically (there is little need to holiday with his mother in a low cost resort).

Although it is possible to theorise heterosexual sexual activity and its visibility through fatherhood as an indicator of successful male identities (Mallon, 2004), limits exist upon who can make claims to such notions of masculinity. For Taylor (2010), sexual virility and activity is often theorised as belonging to the young – older generations are presented as either non-

sexual or sexually threatening beings. The increasing use and access to Viagra however is challenging assumptions about the male body, its sexual abilities and ideas of maleness and masculinity in later life (see Daniels, 2006; Li, 2006). 'Donald and Jacqueline' are a white working class couple in their mid-50s from Northern England. Through their bloated and pale bodies neither Donald or Jacqueline fit the image of a sexually attractive couple, although both are highly sexually active. Unlike some of the other characters Donald is presented as a man who is secure in his masculinity and sexuality, fleeting homosexual encounters from his past or present do not trouble his masculinity in his eyes or those of his wife. In fact, by series five, Donald is presented as extremely virile. In his discussions with other characters he admits he may be the father of dozens of children that he has never met. His claims and confidence in his virility are at odds with those of Martin. Donald, as with the attractive Spanish bar tender Mateo (see below), is one of the most sexually successful characters in the show. As work on men and travel has shown, the ability to secure sexual experiences with others when travelling (tourists or local populations), is presented as key to experiences of holidaying and the ability to make successful claims to aspects of masculinity (see Waitt and Markwell, and Katsulis, this volume). Indeed those gay men in my research who could not secure sexual experiences whilst travelling were understood by other gay men as inferior in their claims to a gay male identities and as having failed in experiencing a successful holiday (Casey, 2009).

Gavin and Troy, a mixed class couple (Gavin being middle class in tastes and values and his dislike for Benidorm, with Troy being clearly identifiable as working class, partly through his love for the resort), are presented in stark contrast to Donald and Jacqueline. Both characters challenge earlier portrayals of gay men as exclusively affluent, handsome, urban and promiscuous. Their limited incomes, imperfect bodies and the love and flaws present in their relationship portray Gavin and Troy as refreshingly real. In series one and two, their arrival at the Solanas Hotel brings them into a dysfunctional heterosexualised space. The Solanas Hotel

and its poolside, although potentially homophobic, are settings in which Gavin and Troy are but one form of the diversity to be found in Benidorm. The characters ability and desire to leave the confines of the all-inclusive Solanas Hotel and to explore the queer and stylish streets of Benidorm's 'old town' present them as confident and adventurous, wishing to access a more authentic Spain away from the tourist crowds (Curtin, 2010). However, Gavin's continued concern with his weight in each series, particularly after he is called a 'fat puff' by another holiday maker, presents him as somewhat feminine in his traits and concerns (Davis et al., 2005; Alexiou, 2012). Gavin's concern is in striking contrast to that of the multiple over weight male characters and extras that are present in the show, that are confident in their shorts, with their large sunburnt stomachs spilling out. His concern is not presented as something a real man would consider. The heterosexual male working class body on holiday is presented as a sight of excess alcohol and food consumption (see Andrews, 2010), it is a body that is not concerned with attaining a feminised slim, toned and hairless torso as epitomised by the contemporary male metrosexual (Gill et al., 2005; Simpson, 2011). Although neither Gavin and Troy may not fit hegemonic ideals of masculinity, it is through their diverse portrayals in the show – as camp, funny, bitchy, brave, real, caring, independent and so on, that they remind the viewer that masculinities are multiple, social-historic constructions that are performed through diverse and distinct male bodies (Connell, 2002: 29).

'Mateo' is the only regular Spanish character in *Benidorm*, with his character initially supporting the stereotype of Spanish men – handsome, hyper-sexual and a little bit lazy (see Cleminson, 2004). Mateo is presented as successful not only through his role as a waiter, but as a matador, a flamenco dancer and a lifeguard which encompass representations of manliness, virility and successful heterosexual masculinity. As work on Spanish cinema and the Spanish male body has shown (Fouz-Hernandez and Martinez-Exposito, 2007), Spanish men have been presented as virile, hyper-sexual and attractive to the foreign female gaze. Their looks and

bodies are presented as at once threatening and sexually alluring. Although initially Mateo appears to confirm his masculinity and maleness, through his successful sexual activity with female tourists and his perfect body, his masculinity and sexuality becomes a source of questioning for the other characters present. In series one Mateo is found to be having sex with Troy (above). This indiscretion is presented as a one off event, although his encounter with Troy is used by other characters to label him a 'Spanish poof'. As the work of Malam (2008) has shown, male tourists will often perceive what qualities and traits they expect (male) bar staff to possess. If local male bar staff disrupt codes of behaviour (as perceived by other male tourists), conflict can occur. Mateo's and Troy's sexual encounter reminds the viewer that 'real (heterosexual) men' would not allow themselves to engage in sexual activity with other men (Hockey et al., 2007). Mateo's manliness is further cast into doubt when the infertile Martin beats him in an arm wrestle that develops over his wife Kate. Their arm wrestle is not only presented as a personal dual, but as a dual between Spain and the UK. Through Martin's win, the UK is presented as superior in its masculinised identity to that of a losing and effeminated Spain (Plain, 2006). In series four and five Mateo is increasingly perceived to be desperate in his sexual quests and threatening through his potential to spread sexually transmitted infections. As each series develops Mateo is not perceived to be the type of man who possesses traits associated with successful manhood – security, comfort, protection, career development, partnership or fatherhood (Schanzel and Smith, 2011).

Conclusion

Although a fictitious comedy, *Benidorm* and its diverse male characters represent to the viewer the distinct and multiple ways men's identities and masculinity are performed on holiday. In utilising popular images of mass tourism on the Spanish coasts, the show presents the known or imagined Benidorm landscape and bodies present. As with other similar mass (working class) tourist resorts in Spain, the male bodies present in *Benidorm* are either in place and belong

(such as Mick or Mateo) or they are potentially 'out of place' (such as Martin, Gavin and Troy). Initially the male working class heterosexual body is presented as having the most valid claims to a visibility and presence in the high rise streets of Benidorm. Mick Garvey's inability to work and to provide economic support for his family, along with his general childlike humour is not presented as problematic or that dissimilar to other tourists present. Although such male traits that were once characteristic on the factory floor (Willis, 1977) are increasingly out of time and place, in Benidorm they have worth and value, albeit for only a week or two. The presence of middle class Martin that is initially juxtaposed against working class Mick reflects that socio-economic factors are not the only ways in which men can fail *as men* in contemporary British society. Martin's low sperm count and his consequential weakened masculinity represent the importance of fertility and sexual prowess for male identities. Such limited sexual success is shared by Geoff, whose desire to prove himself to be heterosexual represents the continued positioning of homosexual identities as a distinct other to heterosexuality. As with the other male characters, Gavin and Troy represent the diverse ways that men do masculinity, with their gay male identities intersecting with the classed and (hetero)sexualised spaces of the Solanas Hotel. Through his age and his obese body, Donald is physically representative of the stereotypical male working class British tourist abroad (as portrayed in the programmes opening credits). However, his diverse sexual success and tastes, along with his strong, happy and successful relationship with his wife allow Donald to be seen as a man who is secure and comfortable in his masculinity. Finally there is Mateo, who through his handsome looks and sexual desires could be representative of hegemonic notions of (Spanish) masculinity as held by the British. But as with the other male characters he is flawed in his abilities. Mateo is a man who cannot maintain an honest long-term relationship or commit to his career as a waiter. His failing masculinity intersects with his identity as a 'shifty' foreign other, who is sexually dangerous to both women and men. As the diverse characters in the

show suggest, men's identities and the masculinities they make claims to whilst on holiday must be theorised alongside the other complex and shifting identities that they may possess, and the spaces and places they are performed within.

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¹ This paper would suggest that the positioning of the Spanish body in the TV show *Benidorm*, in particular the character Mateo, suggests that it is difficult to meet non-British individuals in the resort. If a Spanish person becomes visible within *Benidorm*, it is not through their claims to a visibility in a Spanish town as a resident, but through their role as an employee in the tourist industry. In fact, the Spanish body is presented as the other within Benidorm, out of place in a resort designed and maintained for the British tourist.

² The term 'Shagaluf' is drawn from the word 'Shag', a British colloquialism for sexual intercourse, which invokes uninhibited and gratuitous heterosexual activity in the resort.