Defining globalization may encompass many facets (economics, political science, popular culture and social movements, just to name a few), all of which involve “the reorganization of human experience...taking into account both time and space” (Roudometof and Robertson 1998: 184). When an underrepresented minority, such as the Isleños of south Louisiana, attempts to recover its position in the state, it does so with an idea of strengthening the number of participants in its networks of influence, cementing relationships of interdependence inside and outside the traditional territory, and preserving the history and culture which have made it a separate, authentic and valued entity. In particular, the ancestral ethnic enclave of the Isleños is no longer isolated geographically, so the Isleños are able to look outward for their efforts. Rather than reaching for a worldwide presence, the Isleños aim for “subglobalization,” as defined by Berger and Huntington: “movements with a regional rather than a global reach that nevertheless are instrumental in connecting the societies on which they impinge with the emerging global culture” (2002: 14). Allying themselves with Irish- and Italian-Americans in New Orleans is one action that the Isleños anticipate will bolster the solidarity, authenticity, and authority of their group. This discussion will examine the “selective” association of Isleños with other ethnic groups in Louisiana and their reluctance to form alliances with some groups that they perceive to be dissimilar in history and culture. The aim of this examination is to describe how the Isleños, as a people who refuse to be marginalized any longer, want to matter in sociofunctional domains outside their own “little” world. As they incorporate what they learn and express to others what they know, they will both be more involved and more respected in larger arenas of power and prestige. The result, hope the Isleños, will not only be some measure of globalization of their community but also the localization of their culture in the spheres of influence in the state.

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The Isleños are not unique in their efforts at globality. They are representative of many minorities in the U.S. who struggle to survive and be recognized in the global arena as valuable members of societies larger than themselves. Isleños are like other communities, both immigrant and indigenous, who wish their voices to be heard as they participate in the life of the United States and beyond. Isleños are contemporary pioneers who venture outside their enclave to embrace their evolving position in society and who strive to show themselves as people who matter. As they educate
others about what they know, perhaps the globalizing world will also be changed to understand their wisdom and accept the diverse knowledge of all the populations who participate in its life.

History and Culture of the Isleño Community

![Isleño Communities in Louisiana](www.mapsofworld.com/usa/states/louisiana/louisiana-road-map.html)

The Isleños of Louisiana have lived in the southeastern marshlands of St. Bernard and Plaquemine Parishes since 1778, after France ceded Louisiana to Spain in 1764 (DeConde 1976: 30). Intending to repopulate the newly acquired territory with Spanish speakers, the Spanish government recruited soldiers and farmers from the Canary Islands (hence *isleño* ‘islander’), but after it sold the territory back to France in 1803, the Isleños were abandoned and largely forgotten by the European sovereign.

The Isleños in their territory served as a buffer among the French, British, and American forces vying for predominance in and around New Orleans in the 19th century. The Isleño dialect of Spanish, a rural, archaic variety (Lipski 1990) provided a hard linguistic boundary (Giles 1979) which separated them from the growing number of English speakers flooding into Louisiana. The geographic and social isolation of the Isleños allowed their dialect to flourish in a supportive community, which linked the language to the history of the Canary Islands before the 18th century. The Isleños’ residence in the coastal marshlands created a sense of a “complete, separate, historically deep cultural collectivity” (Fishman et al. 1985). Relic words from Spanish (*ansina* ‘thus’), relevant terms from the Canary Islands (*chipía* ‘light rain’), borrowings from Caribbean varieties (*jaiba* ‘crab’) and some Latin Americanisms (*nutria* ‘nutria’) composed a “popular, uneducated variety representative of the rural speech of southern Spain and the Canary Islands” (Lipski 1990). The unique dialect was emblematic of the community, as members spoke it naturally and spontaneously.

When the Americans finally took over New Orleans on November 30, 1803 (DeConde 1976: 95), the Isleños retreated to their enclave, Delacroix Island. As the Isleños flourished, many families welcomed immigrants from the Caribbean and Central America, and the Isleños exerted sufficient social pressure to impel these people to speak Isleño Spanish while incorporating some lexical items. Within their ancestral homesite, it was possible for the Isleños to maintain their dialect as a vital, responsive means of communication because the “social, spatial and ritual environments” (Noy 2009) of the group were nearby. Isleño customs include hospitality to visitors and to display to them the beauty and value of the Isleño territory. In a complementary fashion, Isleños adapted those customs that suited their lifestyle into their own culture. For example, Isleños borrowed whole sets of words from the Louisiana Acadian French, their nearest neighbors, for unfamiliar household items (*garsolé* ‘sunbonnet’) that they put into use for themselves. Isleños were “hybridized” (Berger 2002: 10) by absorbing Spanish speakers, and in turn localized these immigrants by teaching them Isleño Spanish.

The Isleños lived a relatively peaceful and anonymous existence until the 20th
Hurricane Katrina. The circumstance, which had curtailed Isleño activity, at least in the short term, was that the Isleños will continue to evolve, no matter the circumstances. And the biggest refuse to die. The ongoing process of their globality is described here, with the caution represents many small communities of minority residents who want to matter and share what they know and have. The Isleño enclave workshops as a framework of description for an ethnic group that has persisted for centuries and wants to preserve its linguistic structure and its social context. As the community looked to preservation and was recognized as authentic, valuable members of a long, proud Louisiana heritage. In short, they mattered.

Engaging with the Isleños

As my family and I had resided in New Orleans from 1971 to 2005, I became aware of the Isleños as the local newspaper, the New Orleans Times-Picayune, reported the events that the group had organized (festivals, blessings of the fishing and shrimping fleets, workshops, presentations) and their activities (historical reenactments, arts and crafts fairs, parades) with other groups in the area. While studying Hispanic sociolinguistics, I became intrigued by the Isleño dialect as an example of 18th century Canary Island Spanish linked to the Western Hemisphere through the Caribbean. When the Isleño Museum opened, my mother and I went to see if the language was like a Caribbean creole and how it was used in the community. Because the Isleños had always been welcoming to speakers of other languages, they allowed me to interview both young and old, fluent and nonfluent, confident that their dialect would stand as a proud emblem of their identity and heritage. The Isleños had never been shy or recalcitrant about their language, using the décimas as examples of its beauty and value. As a sociolinguist, I have documented the Isleño dialect of Spanish in both its linguistic structure and its social context. As the community looked to preservation by solidifying its position in the world, the dialect obsolesced as Isleños interacted in American English with other Louisiana residents. I undertook this particular project as an optimistic outgrowth of my linguistic investigations and my participation in the University of Mississippi Global South workshops, a two-year series of lectures and discussions about globalization and its effects on underrepresented communities of interest.

Although the Isleño dialect may be on the wane, the Isleños themselves were determined not to be left behind in the evolving society in and around New Orleans. They expressed their desire to be heard as voices of reason and wisdom in politics, business, environmental concerns, and leisure activities in Louisiana. I witnessed the ways in which the Isleño community learned the routines of interaction in these arenas and how they shifted away from Isleño Spanish, except in the sociofunctional domains of home and family, where they protected it as a detail of intimate life. I also witnessed how the Isleños promoted their own points of view to others, thus changing the perspective of those around them. The Isleños, who had always absorbed and adapted without losing their identity, were selectively evolving to accommodate others. I used the information and discussions from the 18 months of the Global South workshops as a framework of description for an ethnic group that has persisted for centuries and wants to share what they know and have. The Isleño enclave represents many small communities of minority residents who want to matter and refuse to die. The ongoing process of their globality is described here, with the caution that the Isleños will continue to evolve, no matter the circumstances. And the biggest circumstance, which had curtailed Isleño activity, at least in the short term, was Hurricane Katrina.
Twenty-First Century Efforts

After Hurricane Katrina forced the evacuation of most Isleños in 2005, the community became reluctantly subglobal: living outside the enclave, interacting with American English and Spanish speakers, and waiting to go home. They resisted what Giddens calls the “dismembering of social life from local context” (1990: 21) but recognized that they had limited funds, time, or space in which to revitalize their group. Their reluctant globalization through forced evacuation has made some community members determined to be selective once again. Those who have returned to the New Orleans area want to connect with other sympathetic minorities who claim the area as their legitimate territory (Kamenitz 2008).

In the 21st century, the Isleño community seeks to revitalize itself through social action (participation in cultural activities for the members of the community) and political action (promotion of the group to others in larger political arenas). Both of these social actions are designed to produce “a contrastive and positive sense” (Silverstein 1998: 404) of Isleño identity in Louisiana. Because their original means of distinguishing themselves (dialect use, residence in the ethnic enclave) are obsolescing, the Isleños are “increasingly challenged to have newly active, positive cultural processes emanating from centering institutions” (Silverstein 1998: 404) in which their local heritage and traditions are legitimized and celebrated as both important and authentic. The Isleño Museum is a physical place that serves as a geographical focus for the activities of two organizations, the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society and the Canary Island Descendants Association. Of course, these institutions require capital to support and publicize Isleño events, and although the Isleños do possess enough to maintain their activities, they would like to have more “presence” (Sassen 2005) in the state power structure.

The Isleños can be front-page news of the local newspaper (The St. Bernard News), but they see the need to have a voice in the activities that affect them outside their territory. Klein states, “A lot of what happens in politics is, unfortunately, the result of moneyed, organized interests who lobby strategically and patiently to get their way” (2011: 18). Thus, the Isleños have allied themselves with the Irish- and Italian-Americans in the suburbs of New Orleans out of solidarity, and for the purpose of strength in numbers for minorities in the city, a respected presence in the region, and fund-raising for activities and projects. Although the dialect is unlikely to be revitalized by the connection with Irish or Italians, the Isleños persevere in their efforts to maintain other indicators of their culture in their territory, such as colorful traditional costumes and delicious food, which display the Isleño distinctiveness in accessible ways. The Isleños practice “globalization” (Roudometof and Robertson 1998: 187) in preserving, creating, and recreating cultural practices in a local setting for global consumption. These kinds of strategies, say Robertson and Holzner (1979: 16) are ways of changing the perceptions of others, rather than changing themselves to be more cosmopolitan.

Selective Globality

The Isleños have been selectively global for years. During the height of their ethnic revitalization movement (1976–2005), the Isleños looked to their historic antecedents to establish modern contacts. Steinberg argues, “American society provided only a weak structural basis for ethnic preservation. The very circumstances under which ethnic groups entered American society virtually predestined them to a gradual but inexorable decline” (1981: 43). Even though the Isleños settled in their territory prior to U.S. colonization, their obligatory contacts with American society (public education, military service) led to their integration into the larger society. One of the most famous (or infamous) Louisiana politicians, Leander Perez, was most likely Isleño (Din 1988: 149). Leander Perez had a profound influence on Louisiana and U.S. politics for years, an unusual occurrence for the Isleño community.

Isleños were happy to be of service and to join in American life, but mainstream American politics and business did not include them in decision-making, planning, or assistance. Taffaro (2011: 3) mentions the efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav, and the conflicts with Murphy Oil, British Petroleum (BP), and Provident as instances in which global corporations have disappointed residents of St. Bernard Parish in achieving positive outcomes such as clean-up and restoration. When these global agencies paid them scant attention, the Isleños realized that their efforts would necessarily start locally and end up globally.

Extending the Isleño social network to other groups for the most part does not include the Louisiana Acadian French, the “Cajuns.” The Isleños and Cajuns, who settled in Louisiana starting in 1770 (Din 1988: 28), have lived together for so long that there is hardly a boundary “outward” from which to extend. As an example, the lexicon of the Isleño dialect contains many loanwords for flora, fauna, household items, and food (huancunú ‘hackberry tree’, canar noir ‘black jack duck’, romanau ‘dress’), indicating a long and intense contact with Cajun French. Finding allies with the Cajuns of St. Bernard Parish is hardly necessary, as their histories and life patterns are inextricably
The Isleños are reaching out to other spaces as steps to participating in the global social network. First, the Canary Islands are the Isleños’ “ancestral homeland” with all the connotations of history and identity. Unfortunately, the Canary Islands are not, and never have been, a paradise, according to Din: in the 15th century, the Spanish nobility “seized the best agricultural lands, holding them in large estates while the common people provided the labor. The system of land tenure produced a stratified society that hurt the lower classes” (1988: 6), which comprised the ancestors of the Louisiana Isleños. The islands also suffered from numerous natural disasters and man-made calamities, including “drought, epidemics, volcanic eruptions, plagues of locusts,” a shortage of manual labor, intermittent warfare, and governmental trade restrictions. Emigration from this area, then, seems a likely way for almost 2,000 Canary Islanders to improve their lives in 1778 (Din 1988: 25).

Even though the Canary Islands suffered from depressing economic conditions and rampant oppression, which caused the Isleños’ ancestors to flee, “their love for a homeland which failed them was romantic and blind” (Niehaus 1965: 155). Contemporary members of the community have organized trips since 1992 to the Canary Islands. The Isleños remember happily that their own traditional foods are also eaten in the Canary Islands (Bourj 2001). Dignitaries from the Canary Islands have visited the Isleño Museum in Louisiana for ceremonies and special events, including a former prime minister of Spain (Guillotte 1981: 18). One early highlight of the transatlantic connection occurred on February 17, 1991, when the Canary Island delegation registered the Isleño Museum as an international Canarian historic site (Turni 1991). Another, more recent highlight, was the appearance of the prestigious folkloric band La Parranda de Teror from the Canary Islands at the 35th annual Los Isleños Fiesta (The St. Bernard Parish News 2011).

Second, the Caribbean, especially Cuba, has historic ties to the Isleños of Louisiana. Because Havana was the first port of entry in the Spanish Caribbean, many Spanish ships stopped to await the end of the war between Spain and Britain, to allow ill passengers to disembark or to replenish supplies (Din 1988: 19). “Unfortunately,” according to Din, “there is no complete accounting of the Canarians from the ships... who stayed in Cuba. Spanish officials did not compile a full explanation of what happened to them” (1988: 22). During the era of Prohibition, boat trips to and from Cuba were common to earn extra income (Kammer 1941: 60). The affinity of dialect and history has lured some Isleños to seek genealogical ties to Cuba, reports Coen (1996): “Don Marrero, for instance, knew a Cuban Marrero from church. One day they shared genealogy and found a related ancestor who left Louisiana to raise sugar cane in Cuba.” The Isleños look to connect with Cubans who are not recent immigrants to the U.S. but whose ancestry in Cuba counts in the centuries. New Orleans gained a Cuban presence in the 1960s from the refugees escaping Cuba through Florida, but by that decade the Isleños had already become more insular in their contacts (Garvey and Widmer 1982: 41), extending family ties to first cousins (Din 1988: 199) as “genuine Isleños” (Guillotte 1982: 88).

The Canary Islanders of San Antonio, Texas, also share a heritage (Monzón 1995), and since 1991 active Isleños have traveled to the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio to observe and mingle with their Texas counterparts. The San Antonio group and the St. Bernard Isleños have listed each other’s clubs on their respective web sites (www.friendsofthecanaryislands.org, www.losisleños.org) as links to like-minded organizations. Because the Texas community is much more bilingually oriented than the Louisiana enclave, the Isleños of St. Bernard compare historical records and folk art but little else.

Isleños have also led genealogy workshops to connect kinship relations in the region. A goal of the Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana is to promote genealogy. The flyer for the organization distributed at the Los Isleños Fiesta in March 2011 states, “On becoming a member of CIHS, many persons discover family connections that were previously unknown to them.” One of the leaders of the Canary Island community says of including more people into the social network, “They might be carrying a German last name or an Italian last name, as far as the girls go...” (Warner 1991). Finding family connections is a good way to expand Isleño influence in a concrete, rather than abstract or haphazard, way. Appadurai asserts that “genealogies reveal the cultural spaces within which new forms can become indigenized... the histories of these forms may lead outward to transnational sources and structures” (1996: 64). As the Isleños extend their social network outside the ethnic enclave through genealogical connections, they hope to include others with similar traditions and values. Segura (1987) describes the process romantically, saying, “Their [the genealogy workshop participants] surnames were French, Irish, Spanish, Scottish, and one or two of mysterious origin. The one thing that they all had in common was that somewhere in the mists of their collective pasts, their ancestors shared residency on the Iberian Peninsula.” Giddens calls the process of finding others in an extended social network a facet of modernity through “the reordering of social relations in light
of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups” (1990: 16).

20 Since 2007, Isleños have joined forces with Italian- and Irish-Americans in New Orleans for celebrations and events. The benefit of linking to these two other groups is apparent if we consider that the Isleños put their trust in the similarities of Italian- and Irish-American cultures in four areas outlined by Giddens (1990: 102).

21 First, kinship – several contemporary Isleño families have had marriage ties with the Italians in New Orleans since the 1950s. Informally, intermarriage with Italians and Irish is nothing new to the urban Isleños. Describing one Isleño family, Bourg reports, “Louise is Sicilian-American but has been immersed in Isleño culture since she married Irvan at 17... and is known as one of the best traditional cooks in the community. ‘She’s not really Italian anymore,’ says Irvan, with a grin. ‘We sort of adopted her as an Isleña’” (2001: 39). Margavio and Salomone assert that strong family ties and loyalties are essential to the Italians of Louisiana: “Cooperation regularly extended beyond the nuclear family to include a much larger network of blood and fictive kin” (2002: 114). The Isleños, then, need not campaign very hard to join the extended Italian network.

22 Second, a local community – the Irish and Italians settled in middle- and working-class neighborhoods in New Orleans suburbs, providing a familiar milieu. Even in the rural areas outside the New Orleans area, “in Louisiana’s plantation parishes, economic cooperation was established among persons who were already related by the multiple bonds of blood, marriage, friendship and community,” say Margavio and Salomone (2002: 112). The DeReggio family founded the town of Reggio in the Isleño territory in 1803. Hintz notes of the Italians, “From humble beginnings, they have become well-known in the community for years of service” (1995: 95). At one time, New Orleans had the largest Italian community in the U.S. (Hintz 1995), which was comprised of middle-class professionals and agriculturalists.

23 In a similar fashion, the Irish have explored the environs of south Louisiana since 1730 (Hintz 1995: 63). Irish veterans of the American Revolution settled in New Orleans after 1781. Niehaus states, “The Irish immigrants of the early 19th century seem to have been men of high quality, capable of taking advantage of opportunities in a growing port city” (1965: 12). In their neighborhood, the “Irish Channel,” reside families of former laborers who have become successful in Louisiana. Their neighborhood is a precious commodity. Appadurai asserts that “Locality is an inherently fragile social achievement,” which “must be maintained carefully against various kinds of odds” (1996: 179). The Irish value their neighborhood in New Orleans: “It was close to work, close to church and close to friends. So who needed more?” (Hintz 1995: 70). Isleños respect the desire to keep close to one’s “land,” understanding that a geographical locality is an anchor to family traditions and social life. The Irish and the Italians have deep historical roots in the area, an aspect of authenticity that is very important to the Isleños.

24 Third, religion – most Isleños, Italians, and Irish are Catholic, keeping the rituals and practices familiar to the Isleños. Hintz (1995) says that the first Irish in Louisiana were “Catholic landed gentry” avoiding English repression. Irish-speaking priests also volunteered for the Louisiana missions. Niehaus states, “Before 1803 the Spanish authorities sent to the Louisiana province from the Irish College at the University of Salamanca all Irish priests willing to go to this American mission. Spain hoped that these English-speaking priests might effect the conversion of Americans to the Catholic faith” (1965: 16). Margavio and Salomone discovered that “The English-speaking Irish clergy became the church’s main instrument of Americanization. Thus, Americanization was first accomplished by the Hibernization of the immigrants. They were to become somewhat Irish before they could be characteristically American” (2002: 230).

25 Not being the first Catholic group in New Orleans, the Irish were not the early leaders of the community. Italians, on the other hand, were Roman Catholics who assimilated into the “already well-established brand” of French-Creole Catholicism, which was less austere, less rigid and less authoritarian (Dooley 2001: 39). They set up benevolent societies, a “religious orphanage” and schools dedicated to their regional patron saints (Garvey and Widmer 1982: 170). By the year 1990, say Margavio and Salomone (2002: 261), Italian American Catholics were second only to Irish Catholics in earnings. That kind of economic presence in Louisiana is a benefit to the Isleños, who have always been actively Catholic.

26 Fourth, traditions – all three groups have lived in and around New Orleans for more than a century, connecting them as “authentic” residents of a colorful and historically rich city. Margavio and Salomone described the Italian community as possessing “a set of strongly held values that comprised what amounts to a philosophy of life – an all-embracing way to view themselves, others and all else in the universe” (2002: 16): the need for work, respect, security, justice and beauty. The Irish, as many immigrant groups in American manifesting and preserving their ethnicity in various
The three groups share religious holidays and ceremonies of the Catholic Church. Taking pride in large families, having a sense of place, and participating in local events (Mardi Gras, the Jazz Festival), has given the Isleños a sense of trust in the other groups. Leach (1965) states, “In any geographical area which lacks fundamental natural frontiers, the human beings in adjacent areas of the map are likely to have relations with one another – at least to some extent – no matter what their cultural attributes may be.” The Irish and Italians formed the Irish-Italian Association in 1983 for social gatherings and “friendly relations” (Hintz 1995: 99). Margavio and Salomone believe that “marginality was less destructive in Louisiana than elsewhere in America” (2002: 91), leading to collaboration and sharing among groups. Hintz remarks that today the Irish and Italians work closely together in all aspects of city life, from politics to law enforcement to cultural activities” (1995: 68), and the Isleños are happy to join in the Irish-Italian-Islaño parade held every year in the spring.

Why are the Isleños selective in expanding their social relations outward? The region has a multitude of ethnic groups, including African-American, Asian, Australian/New Zealander, Croatian, German, Greek, Jewish, Middle Eastern and Yugoslav (Hintz 1995). However, these groups may be too small in numbers, too different in culture, or the “wrong” religion. Isleño customs and social mores permit embracing other Christianities and Western cultures, but the community prefers not to venture too far afield from their inherited consensual laws.

Why do the Isleños eschew joining forces with other Spanish speakers in the area, focusing instead on minorities, which do not share an ethnic mother tongue? Warner (1991) reports that “Isleño leaders caution that many descendants of Spanish settlers may have answered ‘no’ to census queries about Spanish or Hispanic origin. The reason: a dilution of Isleño identity caused by intermarriage with other ethnic groups, as well as the vanishing use of Spanish in daily affairs.”

On a sociohistoric level, Isleños ally themselves with other historically deep, middle class residents of New Orleans who embody the trustworthiness, the probity, and the respectability that the Isleños claim for themselves. Contemporary Latin American immigrants, rightly or wrongly, are not characterized in this way. Hintz states, “After the Spanish administrators departed, it was not until the late 19th century, when Hondurans were recruited to administer the banana warehouses for the United Fruit Company, that Spanish was again heard regularly...” (1995: 163). After 2005, the majority of Spanish speakers in the New Orleans area has been recent immigrants and migrant laborers of the working and lower classes from Central and South America, groups with which the Isleños do not care to associate too closely. One Isleño says, “Now they have signs saying ‘Aquí se habla español’ again, and they have Spanish in the voting machines too, but that’s for Latinos, not us” (Segura 1986: 47). The assessments by the Isleños, called “folk measurements” by Robertson and Holzner (1979: 12), are evaluations of the qualities that are important to the community. A long-standing historical connection to Louisiana is of particular importance, which most Spanish-speaking immigrants arriving post-Hurricane Katrina do not possess.

Reaching out to Irish and Italians for the purposes of pooling economic resources, political empowerment and social revitalization suits the Isleños’ needs. The Isleños are a financially stable and socially respected group in St. Bernard Parish who would like that respect to carry over into the larger political arena. Without giving up their own identity, the Isleños look to positive and respectable alliances with other established groups in the area.

Globalization and Globality

The Isleños’ connection to other groups is the sort of globalization process expressed by Giddens: “local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space” (1990: 64). Unfortunately, states Berger, the term “globalization” has come to be emotionally charged in public discourse (2002: 2). For some, it implies the promise of an international civil society, conducive to a new era of peace and democratization. For others, it implies the threat of an American economic and political hegemony with its cultural consequence of being a homogenized world.” Vellinga adds another dimension: “Globalizing tendencies interact constantly with localizing processes. On the sociocultural level these tendencies and processes will produce a complex synthesis of universalistic and particularistic values” (2000: 287). Viewed as “globality” (Beck 2000) rather than the globalization of Wallerstein (the institutionalization of the world market), of Rosenau (irreversibly polycentric world politics) or Held (the internationalization of political decision-making), the Isleños’ mobility in joining other cultures is a result of recognizing that “no country or group can shut itself off from others” (Beck 2000: 10). The Isleños connect with others in the region in order to have strength in numbers
and to affiliate with the like-minded. Vellinga contends, “The mobilizations in support of this regional project are often community oriented and operate...based on ethnic, linguistic or historical factors added to a territorial reference” (2000: 288).

33 Isleños in their territory form a “neighborhood” in Appadurai’s term (1996: 191). They maintain their ideology of a situated community constituted by stable associations as well as shared history and social practices. Isleños may not care about the nation-state system, a world capitalist economy, military order or the international division of labor (all dimensions of globalization, according to Giddens1990), but they do care about their cultural inheritance and how future generations will continue with it.

Reluctant Globality

34 Why are the Isleños reluctant to globalize, to “disembed” (Giddens 1990: 21) themselves from their locality and restructure their identity across time and space? Indeed, some Isleños are hesitant to expand socially and increase transnational interaction, fearing homogenization and/or fragmentation of their familiar way of life. Historical appropriation of their land by the U.S. government for public roads, power plants and shipping channels, urbanization, and abuse of the natural resources in the fragile wetlands by outside corporations have made the Isleños wary of embracing deruralization into large-scale social systems. Kuriłow (2001) reports that “for planners and residents alike, the influx [of outsiders] was troubling. In addition to cultural concerns, any new developments encroach on the fragile wetlands. Sewage and drainage present immediate concerns. So do water supplies and environmental impacts.” Since 1970, the “endless escalation of speculative activity which is, of course, very profitable for a relatively small group of people” (Wallertser 2000: 253) did not benefit the Isleños as much as exploit them. Cooper (1991), researching the ecology of southeastern Louisiana, discovered that “by the 1950s big projects were under way that changed the marsh forever. Oil companies moved in and dug canals, cutting land up into chunks. The government sealed off the Mississippi River with levees, cutting the flow of fresh water into the marsh. The Army Corps of Engineers built a shipping channel that let saltwater flow inland, driving away the game and killing many of the plants.” On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig of BP exploded and began spilling oil into the Gulf of Mexico. After 170 million gallons of oil contaminated the water, the wildlife, the coastline and the marshlands, BP hired some Isleños for clean-up and provided some funds for compensation, but allegations of improper conduct and corruption dogged the efforts (Kirkham 2010). Perez asserts, “As in the many crises of the past, Isleños’ distrust for government continued into this latest event” (2011: 118).

35 The Isleños were never consulted or forewarned of the encroaching actions of any of these national or international entities and lost trust in the “experts.” Giddens defines trust as “confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles” (1990: 34). Many Isleños prefer “facework commitments,” which are, according to Giddens, relations of trust “sustained by or expressed in social connections established in circumstances of copresence” rather than “faceless commitments” of trust in abstract systems (1990: 80). Historically, when the Isleños were abandoned by Spain in 1803, they were generally ignored or treated as “colonists” on the margins of American society (Mignolo 2007: 450), with its consequent attribution of inferiority. Estopinal believes that the Spanish and French colonists were an unexpected residual of the Louisiana Purchase: “The Americans were looking to buy New Orleans and wound up with all the Louisiana territories...” (2010: 12). The Isleño population was marginalized into insignificance as part of the purchase price. However, as one Isleño said, “We’re not on the borders of anybody! We’re the center of ourselves!” However, it is precisely this classification of “inconsequential” that spurred the Isleños to connect with other minority groups in New Orleans in order to gain capital, “resources (possession of land, buildings, tools, money) necessary for the production and distribution of commodities as well as for political interventions and control of authority” (Mignolo 2007: 480). The Isleños wish to gain “presence in their engagement with power” (Sassen 2005: 91) in order to participate in the decision-making and innovation in their parish and their state.

36 The Isleños have already been changed by their efforts at selective globalization. They have shifted their attention away from language preservation and toward historical recognition and cultural documentation. Louisiana society is also changing because of Isleño participation in society. The history textbook for the K-12 school system in the state now includes a section on Isleño life, in recognition of the value of ethnic minorities in shaping Louisiana history. The New Orleans festivals and parades depend upon Irish-Italian-Isleño participation to draw crowds and support the economy. New Orleans, as a foremost vacation destination in the South, enjoys the results of the “exotic” appeal of these groups for its tourist attractions. New Orleans has always been a multicultural urban center and with the inclusion of the Isleños, attracts Spanish-speaking tourists interested in the ancient as well as the modern
Hispanic presence. The Isleños are advancing in making others (locally, regionally, nationally) aware of their status.

Conclusion

The Isleños look to the future with optimism and caution. Wallerstein states, “We do indeed stand at a moment of transformation... The future, far from being inevitable and one to which there is no alternative, is being determined in this transition that has an extremely uncertain outcome” (2000: 250). The Isleños recognize that the future will be different from their past, but that they must make changes now in order to continue to be “Isleños” in the future. Robertson asserts that “People live under the weight of the perceived future” and make adjustments to that burden “where it is perceived as being excessively heavy” (1978: 17). The Isleños know that their small numbers and their lack of political presence as an ethnic group require them to seek out connections, to “globalize” their activities in order to face the future with success.

Beck indicates that success is measured in three parameters: stability over time, extension in space, and social density of “networks, relationships and image-flows” (2000: 12). The Isleños have certainly withstood the test of time. For over two centuries, they have thrived in south Louisiana, living, working, and maintaining their culture in St. Bernard Parish. They have constructed two museums and a 30-acre complex of seven historic or replica buildings for “living history demonstrations” (St. Bernard Parish Tourist Commission) and host an annual festival in celebration of their heritage. The density of the Isleño social network was once sustained by geographic isolation, but in modern times, as the Isleños seek to expand their presence, they must preserve their ties through activities and events in the region, such as the Isleños Fiesta and Isleños Christmas. The publicity from these events will increase their “image flow” as well. Participating in the Irish-Italian-Isleño parade and other events in New Orleans will extend their social space in which they can be noticed and heard in political, economic, and social matters that concern them.

The Isleños who wish to achieve success look outward to other prosperous ethnic groups in Louisiana – the Irish- and Italian-Americans – to see if they can accomplish their goals together. The Isleños aim for a small boost in visibility by joining the Irish-Italian-Isleño parade in New Orleans while still preserving their distinct community. For the most part, the Isleños are not interested in joining the Latin American coalition of Spanish speakers, as they would be “swallowed up” by a larger, more recent, minority whose cultures they do not share. Instead of being subject to “natural and political forces beyond their control” (Perez 2011: 120), the Isleños want to manage their territory, govern their own lives, preserve their legacy and maintain their way of life. They aim to accomplish this by strengthening ties to the Canary Islands, by expanding their social network to other Canary Island-heritage groups, and by hosting and participating in activities in the New Orleans area. With these strategies, the Isleños hope to increase their presence as a historically rich, authentic, and knowledgeable ethnic group in Louisiana.

The Isleños are not unique in their efforts at globality. They are representative of many minorities in the U.S. who struggle to survive and be recognized in the global arena as valuable members of societies larger than themselves. Isleños are like other communities, both immigrant and indigenous, who wish their voices to be heard as they participate in the life of the United States and beyond. Isleños, in their little world, are contemporary pioneers who venture outside their enclave to embrace their evolving position in society and who strive to show themselves as people who matter. As they educate others about what they know (and they are truly “masters of the marsh,” according to Joseph Guillote), perhaps the globalizing world will also be changed to understand their wisdom and accept the diverse knowledge of all the populations who participate in its life. Why should Isleños matter? If they, situated in their world, would not matter, then none of us, situated in our own worlds, would matter either. The Isleños should not be a quaint, anecdotal footnote in the evolution of human society but a lesson and a model for how a persistent culture adapts and strives to retain its identity and offer its knowledge to others. Rather than obsoleting in a corner of the world, the Isleños search, as do many other communities, to be relevant and active in the world.

References


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