

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Title of the dissertation

Envisioning Eden: A glocal ethnography of tour guiding

Supervisor

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Using international tourism as an analytical and ethnographic entry, this study explores the intricate ways in which local to global processes intersect, overlap, and clash. Destinations worldwide are adapting themselves to the homogenizing standards of global tourism while at the same time trying to maintain, or even increase, their local distinctiveness. Central to these deeply intertwined processes are tourism imaginaries, understood as representational systems that mediate reality and form identities, and their (re)production by local tour guides, key agents in the selling and telling of natural and cultural heritage. This study addresses the following issues: (1) the representation of peoples and places in globally circulating tourism imaginaries; (2) the perceived, officially sanctioned, and actual roles of local tour guides in this representational practice; (3) the formal schooling and informal learning of guides to appropriate

images and discourses of tourism; (4) the (re)production and contestation of fashionable tourism imagery in guiding narratives and practices; and (5) the ways in which dominant imaginaries and personal imaginations of tourism stakeholders are (dis)connected.

Methodology

This study draws on 25 months of multi-sited and multi-temporal fieldwork in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and Arusha, Tanzania. The methodology used, labelled as “glocal ethnography”, involves a mixed-methods approach including extensive observation, interviews, questionnaires, and the collection of secondary data.

Results

The comparative and discourse-centred analysis of the data reveals how local guides in Yogyakarta and Arusha act as “mechanics of glocalization”, assuring the continued circulation and localization of tourism fantasies, but also using the encounter with foreigners to foment their own imaginations of “paradise on earth” and to accumulate cosmopolitan knowledge.

Theoretical conclusions

This study exemplifies how a combination of discourse-centred and grounded ethnographic analysis allows us to go beyond mere description, and unpack some of the mechanics behind complex global processes. Tourism, for instance, embodies not only physical phenomena but relates also to imagination, social contexts, and to the process of making sense of practice and place. Local tour guides, key actors in facilitating the tourist experience, act as mechanics of glocalization, performing partially as actors of hegemonic forces well beyond their reach. They are part of an expansive but loosely structured system of global tourism that represents peoples and places in predefined and scripted ways. Guides in destinations as diverse as Jogja and Arusha are facing converging professional roles, rules, and regulations and standardized planned curricula. However, local guides are also able to use their privileged contact with foreigners to nourish their dreams of escape from the harsh local life and to enhance their cosmopolitan status. They do not physically travel “abroad”, giving the traditional idea of cosmopolitanism a new meaning and making them much less ‘local’ than their name tag suggests.

Practical application of the dissertation

This research is not a mere case study illustrating or developing certain theoretical points about globalization, transnationalism, or cosmopolitanism in the context of tourism. The findings add not only to the current theorizing on tour guiding and tourism, they demonstrate the potential of glocal ethnography as a methodology to

move global studies from mere description or critique to grounded holistic analyses that unravel the complex human mechanisms underlying processes of glocalization. The study's focus on the human aspects of globalization, on cosmopolitanism, and on the role of the imaginary in giving people's lives meaning, illustrates some creative ways in which anthropologies of tourism and travel can contribute to ongoing theoretical and methodological debates about the local-to-global nexus.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

Anthropology going glocal: Preparing the roadmap

This introductory chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research. It critically reviews the existing scholarship on the plural phenomena we inadequately denote by the term "globalization". I define and contextualize the core theoretical concepts (globalization, localization, imaginaries, tourism, and circulation), explain the rationale behind glocal ethnography, and describe the methods used.

Abstract of chapter two

Worlds apart or together? Two destinations, one destiny

In this chapter, I present a detailed sketch of the ethnographic settings in which I conducted the fieldwork: Yogyakarta (Indonesia) and Arusha (Tanzania). I develop the concept of tourism imaginaries to zoom in on the remarkable links and similarities as well as contrasts between these two established destinations. This sets the broader context in which local tour guides are operating.

Abstract of chapter three

The shifting roles and rules of local tour guiding

This chapter discusses the key role of local guides in representing and selling destinations. After reviewing the history and theory of guiding, I focus on the reality on the ground and analyze the intricate politics of guiding in Indonesia and Tanzania. I contextualize the politics of tour guiding by comparing how guides are locally, nationally, regionally, and globally regulated and controlled. In the final discussion, I draw some general lines on the profession of guiding and its changing scales of organization and control.

Abstract of chapter four:

"Seduction", or learning the art of telling tourism tales

In this chapter, I describe how and by whom guides are trained, what kind of information sources they rely on to prepare their tours, and where they get their information. I give a detailed analysis of how the process of becoming a guide in two very different socio-cultural contexts is shaped by similar information resources and

widely circulating imaginaries and discourses. This helps us understand how the latter flow, in what directions they flow, why they flow, what the incentives are for making them flow, and what they tell us about what guides are after.

Abstract of chapter five

On tour: Imaging and imagining other worlds

This chapter analyzes the interaction between guides and tourists. It offers a detailed ethnographic and discourse-centred investigation of actual tour guide practices and narratives. Describing the terms, tools, and functions of expression, I pay special attention to the types of linguistic and other semiotic devices guides employ while selling heritage and culture. I also assess how they use globally circulating tourism imaginaries (e.g. the romanticized idea of Africa as a 'wild Eden') in their own representations of local natural and cultural heritage.

Abstract of chapter six

Discord and disaster: When fantasy meets reality

In this chapter, I study how tourismified narratives intersect, overlap, and conflict with 'the local' as it is currently being lived and imagined by its autochthonous population. I explore the power dynamics between guides, local people, tour operators, and tourists, and the mediating role guides play in these relations. I also describe to what degree guides are aware of the various political economy scales of tourism and how tourism service providers perpetuate, negotiate, or contest the powerful social and material forces in which their daily work is embedded.

Abstract of chapter seven

Coming home

The concluding chapter summarizes the main findings from the previous ones and tries to formulate a synthesis of the accumulated knowledge. After discussing the implications for the particular ethnographic settings of my research, I extrapolate insights for the humanities and social sciences at large. I further elaborate on the possibilities of new methodological pathways to grasp the intricacies of the rapidly evolving globalized world in which we currently live and travel.

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