

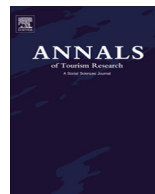


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The stigmatized tourist



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the tourism experience of the Arab and Muslim Tourist (AMT) visiting a (Western) developed country for tourism, from a critical socio-cultural perspective. Encapsulated in Goffman's theoretical underpinning of the study of stigma, and informed by Said's Orientalism, I used in-depth interviews to understand the tourism experience of the AMT in an immigration context, situated in what Goffman refers to as the 'normal-deviant drama'. In a contemporary climate of xeno/ethno-racism, The AMT is stigmatized by association with his/her nationals (or par default by semblance to those nationals), who constitute a visible ethnic immigrant group in the visited country. His/her actual social identity becomes confounded with an ascribed virtual identity. As a moral issue, stigmatization spoils the tourist identity of the AMT, resulting in feelings of shame, confusion, and anger. The rise of anti-immigrants discourse and sentiments, and the rise of religious extremism practices and sentiments in the world, begs for more attention in contemporary tourist studies.

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Introduction

Many European countries have problems with immigration. Framed in a sociological discourse, immigrants, especially those of visible ethnic minority groups, do exhibit cultural differences and a lifestyle different from the endogenous population. As a status, immigration engenders negative stereotypes and prejudice. What is normal to immigrants becomes labeled as abnormal by the 'mainstream other', and perceived as undesirable, since it deviates from the normalcy predicated by the 'host' society (Goffman, 1963). Cultural incongruity between in-group and out-group members can contribute to the formation of negative stereotypes and thereafter to stigma (Goffman, 1963). Stigma is an ensemble of stereotypes collated by members of a group about members of another group

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in the form of a virtual stamp, which visibly identifies group members in a particular, and mostly negative, way (Goffman, 1963).

Stigma can create tension between in-group and out-group members, which, in turn, can lead to certain animosities (Moufakkir, 2014). In its essence, stigma “is a devaluing social identity” (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998, p. 505), and is socially constructed (Major & O’Brien, 2005). The purpose of the study is to understand the effect that animosity between endogenous people and an immigrant ethnic minority group, and existential stigma, has on the tourist experience of the Arab and Muslim Tourist (AMT) visiting that country, and explore its implications for hospitality.

When studying hospitality in an immigration context (Moufakkir, 2008), it becomes necessary to locate it in the theories of stigma. As Goffman explains, it ‘is also possible to think that established minority groups like Negroes and Jews [in this case visible ethnic minorities in Europe] can provide the best objects for this kind of analysis [analysis of identity in relation to stigma]’ (p. 151). I will argue in this paper that since the immigrant is stigmatized in the ‘host’ country, his/her national visiting that country for pleasure becomes stigmatized by association. Goffman’s ‘stigma by association’ refers to the attribution of the same metastereotypes to *all* members of that community, ‘justly’ or ‘unjustly’, and their use to devalue the ‘other’ (Goffman, 1963). Metastereotypes, or the bundle of stereotypes attributed to the in-group, negatively stamp their social identity. The social identity of the AMT becomes engulfed in the social identity of the immigrant, by association.

It will become clear that the hospitality condition of the AMT is intrinsically dependent on the immigration discourse and immigrants’ condition in the host society, since they are both hostage to the stigmatizing host gaze. That is, it will be difficult to study the tourism motivations, attitudes, behaviors and experiences of the AMT independent from the study of stigma in relation to immigration.

I will focus on the Dutch situation. The Netherlands is host to some 392,000 people of a Moroccan origin (CBS, 2013). Media news, public opinion, political debates and rising attractiveness of populism attest to the unpopularity of the Moroccans (Moufakkir, 2013). Generally, positive news about immigrants is seldom given attention or showcased to the public (Horsti & Nikunen, 2013). Discussion of whether the stigma encountered in the present context can be upheld as legitimate or illegitimate (Corrigan & Watson, 2002) is too intricate and outside the scope of this study. That notwithstanding, it is undeniable that “the global context of Islamophobia has significant social repercussions for tourists of Muslim origin” (Stephenson & Ali, 2010, p. 236). The study is based on in-depth interviews I conducted with Moroccan tourists visiting The Netherlands. I asked them about their feelings as tourists. Four strong themes inductively emerged: general feelings, stigma consciousness, stigmatized tourist, and spoiled identity.

Study background

A conceptual framework

The study is ingrained in the theory of stigma, where it is posited that immigration and its relation to perceived integration has an impact on the experience of the AMT. Fig. 1 below may capture the interplay between stigma, host, immigrant, tourist and their probable effect on tourist experience. It is thus posited that the perception of being ‘falsely’ stigmatized can negatively influence tourist experience. It also depicts the four types of stigma (Pryor and Reeder, 2011, cited in Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013) that an individual may be subjected to. In the present paper, we focus on stigma by association, bearing in mind that all stigma types are interrelated (Bos et al., 2013). What Figure 1 proposes is that stigma by association spoils the identity of the AMT, which in turn results in a perceived unhostipable tourist experience.

‘Immigrant’ as stigma

In considering the concept of deviant communities, Goffman draws attention to two types of social category among many that have been studied: (a) groups of ethnic and racial minorities, and (b)

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