



# THE MUTUAL GAZE

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**Abstract:** More than a decade has passed since the concept of “tourist gaze” at the “mad” locals behind bars was introduced. This paper argues that tourists too can become the “mad” behind bars, closely watched by the locals. This new concept outlines the local gaze, which is made up of images and stereotypes about the tourist. The former gaze is reflected in the tourists’ behavior, but it also influences the local gaze, a situation which in turn affects the behaviour of both the host and guest populations. The gazes interrelate and are thus termed “the mutual gaze”. The article will contribute to the discussion of host-guest relations in the under-researched area of backpacker tourism. **Keywords:** backpackers, gaze, staged authenticity, host and guest. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** Le regard mutuel. Plus de dix ans ont passé depuis l’introduction du concept du «regard touristique» envers les habitants «insensés» derrière les barreaux. Cet article soutient que les touristes peuvent aussi devenir les «insensés» derrière les barreaux, regardés de près par les habitants. Ce nouveau concept expose les grandes lignes du regard local, qui consiste en images et stéréotypes du touriste. Le premier regard se reflète dans le comportement des touristes, mais il influence aussi le regard local, une situation qui à son tour modifie le comportement des habitants et des visiteurs. Les regards s’entrelacent et s’appellent donc «le regard mutuel». L’article contribuera à la discussion des relations entre touristes et habitants dans un domaine peu documenté du tourisme de routard. **Mots-clés:** routards, regard, authenticité théâtrale, habitants et touristes. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

There are many factors to be taken into account when analyzing tourist–host contact, among them language, images (Kim 1999; Laxon 1991), cultural values (Sutton 1967), the stage of development (Butler 1980), and the type of tourism. Backpackers, drifters, wanderers, and working tourists are usually seen as people who have more opportunity for direct and meaningful encounters with hosts than do institutionalized mass tourists, ensconced in an “environmental bubble” (Cohen 1972; Heuman 2005; Uriely and Reichel 2000; Vogt 1976). The backpacker is assumed to be a young person who rejects home society and culture and travels in quest of “authentic”, “true”, and positive contact with the locals (Eadington and Smith 1992). However, the host-guest contact in the context of backpacker tourism has hardly been discussed (Hampton 1998; Scheyvens 2002; Wilson 1997). This

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paper is an attempt to widen the scope of backpacking study and to include the hosts as well. Describing the host–guest interaction between Israeli backpackers and locals in three enclaves in India, it concentrates on their reciprocal attitudes and behaviors, which stem from their mutual gaze.

A new term is introduced—the local gaze—to discuss the agency and the power of locals in Third World countries. The term offers a concept complementary to the well-discussed “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990). The latter sums up the attitude adopted by most tourism researchers; it describes the power and authority Western tourists hold and exercise over the inhabitants of the places they visit. The gaze, which has the potential to discipline and normalize the locals’ behavior, is said to lie within the power of the Western, well to do, heterosexual, capitalist, white male (Aramberri 2001:744; Pritchard and Morgan 2000; Urry 1992). All the others, and especially the locals in Third World countries, are influenced by this power and are objects of the gaze. By contrast, the local gaze is based on a more complex, two-sided picture, where both the tourist and local gazes exist, affecting and feeding each other, resulting in what is termed “the mutual gaze”.

The gaze is not necessarily ocular and is not concerned only with spectacle as some claim, but relies on mental perceptions. The discussion here includes the ways guests and hosts view, grasp, conceptualize, understand, imagine, and construct each other. Especially, it is not only about how “we” see “them” (Laxon 1991), but also about how “they” see “us”. Tourism studies mainly review the images tourists have of the locals (Bruner 1989; Dann 1996; MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990) and how these affect their behavior and attitude towards the hosts (Gallarza, Saura and Garcia 2002:56). Fewer studies have focused on the images the locals have of the tourists (Evans-Pritchard 1989; Kim 1999; Sweet 1989:70).

Much literature represents the relationship between hosts and guests in the Third World as severely asymmetrical in terms of power, and investigates the social and cultural impacts of tourism on communities (Haralambopoulos and Pizam 1996). Scholars trying to describe how communities adapt to manage tourism development (Wilson 1997) approach host adaptation to it mainly from the guest’s perceptive. According to those studies, the locals do not gaze, but tend to hide from the gaze cast upon them in a passive manner while frequently adjusting themselves to tourists’ needs and demands (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Nash 1977). The present study is about both how hosts respond to their guests and also vice versa.

### *Impacts of Backpacking on Hosts*

Tourism is often viewed as providing communities with employment opportunities, tax revenues, and economic diversity (de Kadt 1979). Researchers have also noted the significant negative social and economic impacts that this industry can have on the communities visited, including changes in value systems, individual behaviors, family rela-

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