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'A beautiful mess': Reciprocity and positionality in gender and tourism research

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is now seen as a discursive area, and as such there is a call for a fresh angle on knowledge production in tourism studies. Addressing the theme of innovative methodologies that extend gender in tourism scholarship, the present study focuses on reflexivity in knowledge production in the context of tourism entrepreneurship and gender research. Reciprocity and positionality within tourism epistemology are also examined from a gender angle, using an intriguing first-hand account of a female ethnic insider/outsider researcher's experience. Basing the study on ethnographic research conducted in Greece in 2012 for six months, twenty female and male handicraft makers co-constructed knowledge with the researcher through the methods of participant observation and interviewing. Using empirical evidence, this paper explores the messier realities and dilemmas of gender in tourism labour fieldwork.

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1. Introduction

Exploring the complex ways in which contemporary discourses surrounding tourism work are transforming, this paper looks at how the methods used to investigate tourism work are influenced by gender roles. Gender norms which influence knowledge production are shaped by their context. In Greece, where this study takes place, an overhaul of the Family Law in 1981 abolished the dowry system and all discriminatory clauses against women. Despite a General Secretariat of Gender Equality being established in the 1980s (Kyriazis, 1998), no funding was given for university gender and equality projects until 2004, when EU funding started to support research proposals with a feminist focus (Vaiou, 2008). In Greece, gender stereotypes are seldom questioned and the meaning of 'gender' implies the existence of "a strong biological component" (Pantelidou Maloutas et al., 2008, p. 25).

Religion also defines gender roles and the values attached to them. The Greek Orthodox Church assigns women with dual religious roles – that of Eve which is connected with the root of all evil and justifies women's subordination to men and that of the Virgin Mary. If women fulfil their roles as mothers and wives, they are able to more closely resemble the divine archetype of the Virgin Mary (Du Boulay, 1986). With regards to the Church's ideals about how a 'correct' woman and a 'correct' man should be, many ethnographers have portrayed Greeks as being very much aware of the 'honour and shame' principle which governs their behavior. According to this principle, women are thought of as unable to control themselves, but with the power to seduce men. Hence, it is believed that women must restrict public activities, be chaste and cultivate a sense of shame in order to prevent themselves from doing something socially unacceptable (Tagopoulos, 2004). Men on the other hand are expected to protect the family's honour by controlling women's movement outside the house but are also seen as vulnerable to women's advances.

Entrepreneurial discourse is influenced by gender. Examining traditional definitions and theories of entrepreneurship reveals a male-dominated bias which is why 'female entrepreneurship' has emerged as a scientific area of research (Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Brush, DeBruin, & Welter, 2009; DeBruin, Brush, & Welter, 2007). Traditionally, entrepreneurship is embedded in neoclassical economic discourses that are based on perceiving entrepreneurs as economically active individuals operating independently from their environment and surroundings (Walby, 2000). However, this theorising tends to set unachievable goals of perfection for female entrepreneurs as they, more so than their male counterparts, are inextricably situated and bound within a network of relationships (e.g. caring for elderly relatives, children and neighbours). Gender investigations of entrepreneurship also reveal how gender influences reciprocity in research. For example, female tourism

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handicraft entrepreneurs in Greece stress how entrepreneurship is important to them as they can help both their family and others, thus incorporating notions of reciprocity as essential to their entrepreneurial roles (Bakas, 2014). This link between reciprocity and feminine conceptualisations of entrepreneurship leads to a questioning of how gender roles in entrepreneurship influence knowledge production.

This investigation is based on observations from the author's PhD fieldwork. The PhD research's main aim was to provide an empirical analysis of how household gender roles transform economic roles and vice versa, using tourism handicraft entrepreneurs as a data source. This meant that participants were asked about how their involvement in tourism handicraft entrepreneurship influenced the distribution of household tasks within their family. Entrepreneurs' answers regarding the distribution of household tasks were used to highlight how social reproductive gender roles were altering. Social reproduction refers to the tasks involved in the "maintenance of life on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 382) and is a dynamic, inclusive way of perceiving what feminists call the "care economy" (England & Folbre, 2003, p. 61).

The aim of this research paper is to investigate how the methods of researching tourism work and subsequent knowledge production, are influenced by gender roles. This investigation emerges from a larger study which focused on the relationship of tourism entrepreneurs' gender roles to their economic roles (Bakas, 2014) In order to complete the task of the present paper, a critical review of literature on how reflexivity, reciprocity and researcher positionality can influence tourism entrepreneurship research is provided, followed by an analysis of how these methodological nuances influence knowledge production using a gender angle to this study's empirical data.

2. Background

In tourism research, in particular, there is a rising wave taking critical approaches to tourism work, such as rethinking tourism labour knowledge itself (Costa et al., 2017), and its production (Lai, Li, & Scott, 2015). Qualitative methods allow for a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, economic and political interconnectivities within a subject area. Recent research shows that qualitative methods also allow for a questioning of the researcher's role in the construction of knowledge (Belhassen & Caton, 2009; Tribe, 2006, 2008). This instigates a move away from the orthodox, all-knowing researcher model to an embedded model and encourages complicity in research (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). Indicative of the increasing importance of the researcher's embodiment within the research process, is the leverage of restrictions on using the first person in leading tourism journals (Tribe & Xiao, 2011). Indeed, one of the particularly significant endeavours for contemporary qualitative researchers within tourism is to be "continually vigilant to the dangers of preconceiving the 'Other'" (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015, p. 33), which highlights the importance of reflexivity in knowledge production. The importance of a researcher's embodiment in terms of how the researcher's body is perceived by others, significantly influences the research process, as commented on by Cohen (2013) in ethnographic leisure research in Thailand and India.

In the process of catering for varied demands of a wide range of visitors, tourism creates opportunities for entrepreneurs and many small and micro enterprises. Indeed, tourism is primarily made up of small to medium businesses, with small to medium enterprises (SMEs) comprising 80% of the tourism sector globally (Baum, 2013). The plethora of SMEs in the tourism industry makes investigating tourism entrepreneurship, in particular, a significant endeavour.

In-depth qualitative research into tourism entrepreneurship requires the researcher's immersion into the entrepreneurs' lives, hence bringing into questioning how this close encounter of researcher/researched influences knowledge production. Using feminist methodologies is one of the ways in which tourism labour knowledge can progress, according to an account of novel tourism research methodologies compiled by Wilson and Hollinshead (2015). Often the messy, tangled aspects of completing empirical research are left out, favouring sanitised discussions of 'research methods' (Cohen, 2013; Huisman, 2008). In order to break this cycle of abhorring the messiness of research, the current paper aims to expose some of the ways in which the relationship between researcher and researched influences knowledge production. But first, some background on how this relationship has been framed to influence knowledge production within past tourism research is needed.

2.1. Reflexivity in tourism

Reflexivity is the acknowledgement of the agency of researchers, researched, academic audiences and others in producing knowledge (Tribe & Liburd, 2016). It is the idea that researchers should expose the *politics* of representation in order to represent their participants better (Pillow, 2003). Recent research suggests that a methodological necessity of social research is the recognition that tourism researchers are directly engaged and embedded in the community (Dredge, Hales, & Jamal, 2013). Researchers are not neutral as they bring with them their own world views to the inquiry. Reflexivity is essential as the researcher is the person who has chosen *what* to research and *how* to write about it and so it is necessary that her/his beliefs and background can be scrutinised as they are part of the research process of co-constructing knowledge with the participants. Hence reflexivity is crucial in validating and questioning research. Furthermore, research is "a co-constituted relationship" (Rosiek, 2013, p. 700), and so researcher positionality plays a role in knowledge production.

2.2. Researcher positionality

A researcher's positionality involves having a critical self-reflexive stance towards knowledge production. There are various types of positionality, one of which is an insider/outsider positionality. Discussions of insider/outsider status acknowledge that the boundaries between the two positions are not clearly delineated (Merriam et al., 2001). An example of insider/outsider positionality is that of researcher *versus* friend. When conducting ethnographic research the researcher enters the lives of their participants and spends a lot of time with them and so becomes 'a friend but not a friend', or as O'Reilly (2012) says '*one of us, but not one of us' (p. 36)*. This positionality can be advantageous as participants start to confide in the researcher, but simultaneously the researcher may feel impelled to withhold things entrusted to her as a 'friend'. In this way, positionality can affect the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, a researcher's positionality can enhance or mask certain observations. When a researcher has a hybrid insider and outsider perspective due to an insider cultural background and outsider appearance, this can also influence how the researcher is perceived by participants. This perceived positionality can in turn influence the amount and type of knowledge that participants share with the researcher.

2.3. Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a strategy used by feminist researchers to challenge hegemonic practices of hierarchical research and is important

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