

Success and access to knowledge in the tourist-local encounter

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Abstract

That the meeting of tourists and local 'hosts' is a complex phenomenon raises questions both about how 'hosts' acquire knowledge concerning tourists' expectations and desires and about what occurs in their attempting to meet those desires. This paper discusses the gendered differentiation of these encounters in the touristed village of Goreme in central Turkey. The discussion begins by describing one particular encounter between a village woman, a German couple and me, a female New Zealand-based researcher with previous ethnographic research experience in the village. The Goreme woman, like other women in the village, regularly invites passing tourists in to look at her cave-house in the hope of selling them handicraft items. The problematic nature of the encounter exposes the limited ability of Goreme women to understand the desires and expectations of the tourist 'other', an understanding that would enable them to successfully meet the tourists', as well as their own, desires. The Goreme men, in their tourism entrepreneurial activities, have been interacting with tourists and each other in the tourism spaces of Goreme for twenty years and are thus rich in knowledge concerning tourists' imaginings of themselves. They are therefore not only highly competent in playing to those imaginings, but they are also able to play with them by engaging in ironic performances and caricatures of the tourists' images of them (Tucker 2002; 2003). In comparison, the women of Goreme are relatively isolated in the confinement of their tourism entrepreneurial activities to domestic space and hence are far less able to acquire knowledge of tourist culture. This discussion highlights the importance of access to 'touristic knowledge' and the associated ability to anticipate tourist desire. The paper thus raises issues concerning the politics of success in the tourist-local encounter, the commodification of tourist interaction and also the ethnographer's place in this touristic milieu.

Working paper

Late one morning I was sitting chatting to three women by the rubbish bins in the square beside the mosque. One of the women was our next door neighbour in the cave house that my family and I were renting during my fieldwork. Upon seeing a tourist couple walking by my neighbour called out to them, "Come, church". They didn't understand but came over to see what she was saying. I jumped in to help and translated "She's asking if you want to see a church". They said they did, so we all followed my neighbour; I hadn't actually seen this church even though it was situated on the short narrow street where I was living. We went through a doorway of an empty ruined cave house and inside was a dark church dug out of the rock. It was full of rubble and rubbish, and the German couple didn't seem very impressed. Hatice, my neighbour, looked a bit disappointed in that. She told me, in Turkish, that some of the

tourists she shows in here go “Ooh, aah” when they see it. The German man asked how old the church was and I translated the question to Hatice. I translated the reply that it was around a thousand years old.

Hatice then asked if they wanted to see her cave house. They said they did and I went too, at the request of Hatice, in order to translate. Through Hatice’s front door we came out onto the terrace and the German couple marvelled at the view over the village and the Goreme valley. Hatice then led us into a sort of make-shift cave kitchen and sat us down and offered us grapes, saying that they had come from her sister’s garden. A conversation about family then ensued with me translating. Hatice asked the Germans if they had any children and they replied that they had three. Hatice explained that she got divorced when her daughter was three years old and her parent’s said that she could come and live in the family’s old cave house. Her parents had died twelve and fifteen years ago. Hatice asked the couple if they liked Goreme and they said that they did. Hatice said that when she’s coming home from town on the dolmus sometimes there are tourists and she notices them being taken aback by the view as they come down into the Goreme valley. She said that the Goreme people were used to the views.

Tourism desire has been described as similar to a love affair (Lengkeek 2002), as a flirtatious encounter (Crouch 2005) and as being full of promise (Lippard 1999). Doing tourism, according to Crouch (2005), is a process of seductive encounter in which expectations, experiences and desires are continuously negotiated. Such seductive encounters between tourists and local ‘hosts’, moreover, are said to arise out of tourists’ search for the “authentically social” (Selwyn 1996; Tucker 2006). That this meeting is such a complex phenomenon raises important questions both about how hosts acquire knowledge concerning tourists’ expectations and desires and about what occurs in their attempts to meet those desires. If hosts seek to enchant their tourist guests, how do they come to know *how* to enchant them and thereby entrap them in their hosting intentionalities (Gell 1998; Thomas 2001)? Moreover, what enables some hosts to be successful in their attempts to anticipate the desires of their tourist guests whilst others remain unsuccessful? This paper addresses these questions by focussing on the gendered differentiation of tourist encounters in the village of Goreme in central Turkey. The discussion has begun and will continue by describing one particular encounter between a village woman, a German couple and me, a female New Zealand-based researcher with previous ethnographic research experience in the village. As well as focusing on issues concerning the gender politics of success in the tourist-local encounter, studying this encounter also relates to other issues that have been important to the anthropology of

tourism; issues of the commodification of tourist interaction and also the ethnographer's place in the touristic milieu.

As we sat in the cave kitchen eating grapes, the conversation, as well as my position, got difficult for a while. Hatice started talking at length about the Goreme mayors and how some had done a lot for tourism and some had not. I translated when I got a chance but was aware that it was too in-depth and boring for the Germans. The Germans tried to make conversation with me too by telling me where they had travelled in Australia. Hatice couldn't understand and she countered this with a long rant about local politics. The German couple began to look very bored. I jumped up and suggested to Hatice that we show the tourists some more rooms.

We went into a beautiful arched room, the room normally used for receiving guests. In there, Hatice immediately emptied the contents of a plastic bag onto the floor. She invited the German woman to sit down and have a look at the pile of headscarfs and knitted socks now on the floor. The couple suddenly became quieter, perhaps sensing now that the whole thing had been about selling. I felt embarrassed. I knew that Hatice would bring out some handicrafts at some point in the hope of selling them but she had done so entirely without grace and had not, I felt, yet given the tourist couple an 'experience' to draw them in and to balance the obligation to buy something; she had not succeeded in enchanting them yet. The German woman picked slowly through the pile and said to me "Well, I suppose I have to buy one now". I felt even more embarrassed: maybe the Germans were disappointed in me now as well and thought that I was colluding with Hatice and was going to get a cut for myself. I tried to make a middle ground for myself, between being a bit surprised at what Hatice had done, but also showing that I had semi-expected this to happen. I felt compelled to side with the tourists and to try to rescue their experience of Hatice and her house. I attempted to make the headscarves more interesting by asking Hatice how she had done the different designs of the croched and beaded borders and then translating for the Germans. Hatice then said that, because the borders had different levels of difficulty, they varied in price, and she listed the rather high prices of the different designs.

The German woman, seemingly reluctantly, chose one to buy – a light blue one costing fifteen lira. She took out a twenty lira note and Hatice went off to find change. Now that Hatice was out of the room the German woman turned me and said "Well, I suppose they have to make money somehow". I agreed and reiterated the fact that Hatice was divorced and had had to raise her daughter on her own. The Germans agreed but also laughed as if to show resignation to the fact that they had also been duped by Hatice.

Compelled to now take over the situation and try to help the Germans have more of an experience, in exchange for their purchase, I suggested that we look at more of the house and particularly the food storage cave as I thought that that would be of interest to them. This cave had some large waist-high storage pots inside. The Germans asked what was in the pots and so I showed them and explained that that is how the villagers store their dry products such as bulgur wheat and dried chickpeas throughout the winter. I asked Hatice if she had made the bulgur wheat herself and she replied that no, she had bought it. I tried to make it more interesting for the Germans by telling them that many of the village women make many of these food items themselves, growing and processing the bulgur wheat, making their own vinegar and then pickling the vegetable produce from their gardens to use throughout the winter. I told them how

women form groups to make huge piles of flatbread which they also store in the caves for use through the winter. The Germans were becoming more interested, and so I tried to engage Hatice with their interest by asking her when she would be making her bread this year and she said that she didn't make bread because it makes her back ache. I didn't translate her reply to the tourists.

Moving towards the exit of the house we went back out onto the terrace. The man took some photographs of the view and the house. He wanted a photo with Hatice so I took one of them all with his camera. The man's wife then asked him to go back inside and take a picture of the cave-kitchen. He did that and meanwhile Hatice showed the German woman how to wear her new headscarf Goreme-style. Just as we were leaving the house, Hatice's teenage daughter arrived home. Hatice pointed to her and said to the Germans 'This is my child' which I translated. The daughter protested and said 'I'm not a child'. I translated that also. Everyone laughed and for a brief moment there was a sense of mutual understanding, with the German's already having told us that they had three grown-up children themselves.

The German couple and I said goodbye and thank you and walked off down the lane. The man said "Very interesting, it's not often you get to see inside people's houses". The woman agreed with, "Yes, that was very interesting". As we passed the ruined church the man said that maybe Hatice should clean the church up a bit and put in some lights and then she could invite lots of tourists and charge them two lira entrance and then she would make much more money than with the headscarves. The man's wife and I laughed in agreement and then, as we reached the square by the mosque, the woman, still wearing the headscarf, looked at her reflection in a car window and gestured to acknowledge how silly she looked. I said "Yes, you look very Turkish", laughing. We exchanged pleasantries, wishing each other enjoyable travels, and then we parted.

Hatice, like some other women in the village, regularly invites passing tourists in to look at her cave-house in the hope of selling them handicraft items. However, the problematic nature of this encounter exposed the limited ability of Goreme women to understand the desires and expectations of the tourist 'other'. The fact that the encounter was serendipitous for the tourists meant that it held much promise right from the start (Tucker 2003). But Hatice did not seem to understand what it was the tourists might be seeking in their acceptance of her invitation and she seemed unable, on her own at least, to provide a satisfactory experience for them. She did well, it seemed, to bring out grapes rather than to offer tea, since Turkish tea takes a long time to brew and so is usually only offered to real *guests* and connotes the invitation to stay a long while. This encounter was never intended by any party to go on for too long. The hospitality in offering the grapes was received graciously by the tourists, but Hatice's inability to connect by making conversation more light-hearted than local politics alienated her guests. It also would

have been better if Hatice had approached the handicraft selling part of the encounter with more subtlety and more grace; perhaps more gradually and only after spending more time showing the aspects of her life that were suitably 'different' from the tourists' lives. But how can she know what those aspects are, and how can she know that, for the tourists, the staged (fake?) can be more real than the real, and so she perhaps should not let on that she buys her bulgur wheat and bread rather than making it herself. At the end of the encounter the tourists did seem to feel that they had achieved something in getting 'backstage' into a villager's house. However, the suggestion made by the man concerning Hatice selling tickets to enter the church implied that the couple had, after all, summarised the whole encounter as Hatice embarking primarily on a commercial transaction. Hatice had done little to enchant them into thinking otherwise.

In considering why women like Hatice are disempowered and lacking in success regarding their entrepreneurial encounters with tourists, it is useful to focus attention on the interaction of the spaces of tourism with the gendered socio-spatial relations in Goreme. My earlier case study research on tourism development in Göreme (Tucker 2003) outlined the powerful ideology of gender separation rendering tourism business and tourism space the male domain, whilst women, on the whole, were kept separate from tourism activity. That work also drew the general conclusion that the pattern of small and micro tourism business development in Goreme had led to positive local (male) entrepreneurship which in turn led to direct economic benefits for the local community as well as a positive host-guest relationship between villagers and tourists. In their tourism entrepreneurial activities, Goreme men have been interacting successfully with tourists and each other in the tourism spaces of Goreme for twenty years and are thus rich in knowledge concerning tourists' imaginings of themselves. They are therefore not only highly competent in playing to those imaginings, but they are also able to play with them by engaging in ironic performances and caricatures of the tourists' images of themselves (Tucker 2002; 2003).

In contrast, Goreme women were generally only able to access the tourism economy indirectly through the earnings of their husband or other male family members as they

remained separated from the 'tourist realm' and continued to engage in garden-agriculture and other 'household' and reproductive duties. During the past few years, however, increasing numbers of women have started to engage in informal 'entrepreneurial activity' by inviting tourists in to view their cave-house and attempting to sell them handicrafts. The cave-houses and the women themselves who live in these houses have come to represent the 'traditional' in Göreme (Tucker 2003) and increasing numbers are capitalizing on this point through their entrepreneurial endeavors in tourism. This process started with a few women who live on the outskirts of the village having arrangements with tour guides to bring their bus groups of international tourists to their house. The guide shows the group around the cave-house with the help of the woman as 'prop' and then the tourists are shown a selection of handicrafts in the hope that they will buy some. Such a scenario was described in Tucker (2003) as there were one or two women who started doing this in the 1990s. Now there are also many women living in the older more central *mahalles* of the village who have started inviting passing tourists in to view their "cave-house". The women engaging in this type of entrepreneurial activity acknowledge that they would not be able to work in tourism other than doing this sort of activity because they could not work in the 'public' sphere. Having their cave-house as an attraction and selling handicrafts from home therefore provides them with an opportunity to engage with the tourism economy and to earn some money of their own.

Moreover, this informal activity allows these women to 'craft new selves', as Cone (1995) has described in relation to informal female entrepreneurs in Chiapas in Mexico. Cone also adds a spatial reference to this process of crafting new selves in that she describes the women's participation in tourist craft production as 'stepping outside': 'They 'step outside' their domestic spheres – out onto public squares and thoroughfares, social settings that had previously been closed to them' (Cone, 1995:315). The Göreme women who engage in these entrepreneurial activities are also 'stepping outside', but rather than going out onto public squares and thoroughfares to do so, they are bringing the public realm *into* their cave homes. These entrepreneurial activities are thus working to reconfigure 'domestic' space in its use for economic gain and are also challenging the ways that gender identities are performed within that space.

However, it is precisely because these women, in contrast to Goreme men, remain relatively isolated in the confinement of their tourism entrepreneurial activities to 'domestic' space, that they are far less able to acquire knowledge of tourist culture and thus to learn the 'soft things' (Puwar 2004) that would enable them to successfully act in the spaces of tourism. Interactions such as the one described above involve these women negotiating the tourist 'Other' they encounter. The process of 'crafting the self' thus becomes a negotiation between *representing* a 'traditional' identity for tourists and yet at the same time *emerging from* that identity. If the tourist is seeking in such encounters an "authentic backstage" region, then the problematic nature of the Hatice encounter together with the general dissatisfaction of the tourists shows that the tourist seeking Goffman's and MacCannell's "backstage" is really seeking, after all, some sort of "staged authentic" rather than a real "back". But how do women like Hatice learn how to turn the 'prosaic space' of their homes into 'enchanted space' for their tourist guests (Anika Rabo, this conference)? As we have been reminded more recently, tourists do not necessarily require that "staged authentic" to represent a static cultural phenomenon; tourists are able to negotiate and adapt to the dynamic nature of culture, as Harrison (2003) identified in her close-up view of 'Being a Tourist' and as I discussed at length in my earlier work with tourists in Goreme (Tucker 2002, 2003). The seduction in the tourist encounter is in the expectations, experiences and desires being continuously, performatively negotiated (Crouch 2005). But, whilst the Goreme men have long since figured this point out and are now highly capable of charming, hosting and entertaining tourists with just the right blend of 'the traditional' and the dynamic, women like Hatice are cut off from this knowledge, cut off from the 'public' tourism spaces where the men are afforded more prolonged interactions with tourists in the *pansiyons* and where they are also able to share their knowledge with each other.

It is because of Goreme women's restricted access to the public tourism realm and thus tourist knowledge that they remain limited in their ability to form successful interactions with tourists. Consequently, many people in the village consider the tourism activities of these women to be problematic. A Goreme man who owns a cave hotel situated in the

street beyond Hatice's house has said that he wished Hatice and her neighbours would stop approaching *his* tourist guests in this way because it disturbs them and makes them feel uncomfortable. He frequently hears from his guests of stories similar to the one told above with the tourists pleased about having been into an 'authentic' village cave-house but also feeling duped by the woman who invited them in when she then clearly expected them to buy her handicraft items. I have also reported on tourists' experiences of such encounters in my previous work on tourism in Goreme (Tucker 2003). Moreover, other Goreme women in the same neighbourhoods, women who have enough financial security themselves to not need to try to sell handicrafts to tourists, criticise the women who invite tourists into their homes for giving a bad impression of the neighbourhood. Indeed, it has been noted elsewhere that women and their gendered activities invariably symbolise cultural identity and thus are positioned as cultural identity markers (Goddard 1989; Meethan 2001; Scott 1995). The gendered demarcation between a 'public' and a 'domestic' sphere discussed in feminist anthropology (e.g. Ardener 1981; Buitelaar 1998; Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974) and cultural geography (Blunt & Rose 1994; Massey 1994; Mills 2005) often plays an important part in this cultural boundary maintenance. Furthermore, consideration of this process of boundary maintenance prompts us to focus on what occurs when women engage in activities that are deemed *inappropriate* for their gender. The gossip and criticism that is levelled at Hatice and her neighbours is a good example.

That brings me to the important issue of my own role in this encounter. The uncomfortable nature of the encounter for me led to my positioning myself as go-between or 'culture broker' in an effort to ease my own discomfort and also to try to make the interaction a success for all parties. I was consequently drawn not only into considering the positions of the 'tourist guests' and the 'local hosts', but also into analysing my own subject position and my own role in this encounter. I felt that I had a reasonable grasp of what Hatice's needs and desires were from the interaction (she had been overjoyed when we moved into the house next door, expecting her close contact with us to be an opportunity to financially benefit by helping us out with cooking and cleaning). Similarly, I think I had a reasonable idea of the desires and expectations of the tourists

after having spent time with and interviewed so many tourists in Goreme during my previous fieldwork there (Tucker 2003). Moreover, my own desires and expectations in 'doing ethnography' in Goreme have most likely never been too far removed from 'doing tourism' in Goreme.

This is where I, and other outsiders like me, become potentially major players in this scenario. By having me as her neighbour and forming a friendship with me, Hatice's was able to use me and my relative knowledge of tourist desire to mediate the tourists' experience on this occasion. There are now also many other 'foreigners', and many of them women, staying long-term in Goreme, having bought and renovated a cave house for themselves and then living in it either permanently or for part of the year. Just as the Chiapas women described by Cone (1995:322), via their friendships with Cone, an anthropologist, and other resident expatriates, became expert at 'putting foreigners at ease' and providing 'ethnic tourists with entre into Mayan culture', perhaps by forming relationships with resident foreign (tourist) women the Goreme women can learn from them something of the art of tourist enchantment. Perhaps they can come not only to understanding the 'difference' that tourists are seeking, but also to be more reflexive in that understanding. This reflexive understanding is what would enable them to more successfully negotiate the tourists', as well as their own, desires.

By focusing in on one particular tourism encounter in Goreme, this discussion has highlighted the importance of access to 'touristic knowledge' and the associated ability to anticipate tourist desire. Moreover, beyond raising issues concerning the gender politics of success in the tourist-local encounter, analysis of this micro-encounter has prompted consideration not only of the ethnographer's position in relation to tourism and tourists in the touristic milieu, but also of what the ethnographer's role might be and might become in the politics of success in tourism.

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