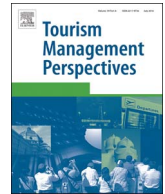


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Tourism Management Perspectives

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tmp

The future of gender studies in tourism

Paolo Mura

Faculty of Hospitality, Food and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Malaysia

What is the future of gender studies in tourism? As I stare at this question placed at the top of an empty white page I have to admit that I have never liked attempts of predicting the future. The future is unknown and I am not a fortune teller or someone who can claim to have paranormal powers. As such, I am writing this opinion piece with the intent of discussing how I would like the future of gender studies in tourism to be, regardless of whether my predictions/desires/fantasies will come true. More specifically, drawing from some of my students' essays, which were submitted in the last five years as assignments for a class on sociology of tourism I was teaching, I will reflect upon the nexus between gender and tourism and how future studies on gender in tourism should/could be.

My parents do not allow me to travel by myself, they think it is dangerous for a girl to travel by herself... They often ask my brother to accompany me (female student from India)

If my dad approves my travelling plan, I will go...otherwise I will feel bad (female student from Iran)

Initially they did not want me to study tourism... it is not for women (female student from the Maldives)

An Indian female student who was advised not to travel solo because it is “dangerous for women”, an Iranian woman who needed approval from “male guardians” to travel, and a Maldivian girl who had to fight to enrol in a tourism course as this field was perceived by her parents and significant others as “not appropriate for a woman”. By reflecting upon the first three excerpts from the students' essays I presented above, I feel the need to reiterate that patriarchal structures of power unfortunately are still dominant in most of contemporary societies and influence every aspect of women's lives, including their tourist experiences. In this respect, I urge everyone to keep in mind that although narratives in the literature and in the media trying to minimise or confute women's subordination to men abound, several studies, such as that conducted by [Munar et al. \(2015\)](#), surely remind us of the patriarchal inequalities of power that still dominate the global arena and our academic realities (including the tourism academy, see also [Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, Chambers, & Biran, 2017](#)). Therefore, before I move to the next matter I would like to discuss in this opinion piece, let me reiterate an obvious, yet crucial, point – patriarchy and sexism are not myths and do not affect only women. Patriarchy and sexism still exist in society. It is just that these power structures are so ingrained in our

socially constructed existences that sometimes we take them for granted and/or ‘normal’. Therefore, future gender studies in tourism will have to continue the battle against patriarchal power structures in both tourist and non-tourist settings. To do so, we have to remember that “gender imbalances are not self-correcting, and proactive policies and initiatives need to be implemented to tackle the gender gap and to avoid the perpetuation of unequal opportunities” ([Munar et al., 2015](#); p. iii). In other words, future studies in tourism will need to address gendered inequalities in effective, proactive, theoretical, and practical terms.

However, the nexus between gender and tourism should not only be confined to women's constraints to travel under the frame of patriarchy. Importantly, even male tourist experiences often need to conform to gendered roles.

Sometimes my friends love to do all these boyish things on holiday...I am not sure it is what I like (male student from Malaysia)

I would be scared if I had to travel by myself... but as a man I shouldn't (male student from the Maldives).

Some of my male students, as expressed in the last two excerpts presented above, felt constrained by stereotypical expectations of performing ‘alpha male’ roles on holiday. In this regard, drawing from [Connell's \(1995\)](#) work on hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, in the future we should be able to have a better understanding of gender not only from the perspective of women's experiences but also from the men's viewpoints and practices. Indeed, the way gender and power intersect goes beyond women's oppression. ‘Other’ masculinities, namely those who do not conform to the socially and politically constructed ‘ideal’ of man, may feel oppressed and constrained by gender stereotypes and expectations as much as women do. In this respect, the existing literature on gender in tourism tends to neglect the experiences of masculinities on holiday. During an ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2007 on the island of Ios, Greece, to explore young tourists' emotions/perceptions of fear, both male and female participants expressed their difficulties to perform their expected gendered roles properly. As such, we need to undertake more studies to have a better understanding of male tourists/travellers without assuming that all men can easily accommodate ‘ideal’ forms of masculinity and/or be in a position of power.

Overall, I believe that future studies in tourism should continue to

E-mail address: paolo.mura@taylors.edu.my.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.020>

Received 21 November 2017; Accepted 22 November 2017

2211-9736/ © 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

explore the role of gender in tourism by focusing on how different femininities and masculinities perform on/experience holiday. Rather than focusing on women/men and female/male experiences, future studies will explore how different femininities and masculinities perform gender on holiday. But who are these multiple femininities and masculinities I am referring to? They are not just women and men – they are women/men who could be Western, Asian, African, North/South American, homosexual, heterosexual, black, white, from a low economic and socio-cultural background, from a middle class context, just to cite some examples. Based on this diverse scenario, future studies should go beyond the reductive label ‘men’/‘women’ and explore the possible intersections between gender and the above mentioned characteristics. In other words, future studies on gender in tourism will need to focus on *genders* (as plural) rather than gender (Kho-Lattimore & Mura, 2016). This will facilitate the possibility of giving voice to those genders who have been relatively neglected in the tourism literature (e.g. Asian female tourists, gay male/female travellers, Black women on holiday) and pave the way for studies on gendered experiences of groups that have been almost totally forgotten by the tourism academy (e.g. transgendered travellers or bisexual tourists).

It is also important to highlight that future studies on gender in tourism should be more attentive of the role of the tourism experience on our gendered performances and experiences. Gendered identities, namely societal constructions and representations of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’, are performed in different contexts, including tourist spaces. What is tourism? A contrived experience/pseudo-event as Boorstin (1964) argued? A ritual in a liminal/liminoid space where everyday life rules and regulations are suspended (Turner, 1967)? Or just a mere continuation of our leisure experiences/activities (Carr, 2002)? And importantly, how these different conceptualizations of tourism affect the way we perform our genders? These questions, which have only been partially answered, are important as they remind us that not only do we need to study how genders are performed in tourism/hospitality spaces but also whether and how being on holiday affects our gendered identities and performances. As tourism spaces and experiences are constructed out of gendered societies (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994), certainly we do carry our genders and their related performances (or part of them) when we travel. Indeed, the fact that holiday may be perceived as a liminoid/free-from-obligations experience for some individuals does not imply that we totally forget previously acquired gendered roles and expectations outside our mundane environments. However, whether and how the experience of ‘holiday taking’ and the act of ‘holiday making’ shape our gendered identities surely deserve more attention by tourism scholars in future studies.

Another point about future studies on gender in tourism concerns the methodologies that will be employed by scholars to explore such a challenging, yet interesting, topic. In the last 15 years, there has been much debate on paradigms, methodologies and methods among social scientists. More specifically, there have been multiple calls for forms of research that can challenge the positivist tradition and embrace more critical and reflective ways of knowing. These calls have been prominent in the social sciences in general (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) and in tourism studies in particular (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). Within the context of gender studies in tourism, whether and how non-positivist paradigms and/or qualitative methodologies/methods have been fully recognised by scholars is still a subject of debate. In reviewing the current state of tourism gender research, Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, and Villacé-Molinero (2015) found that quantitative approaches to research (often driven by positivist ontologies and epistemologies) are still rather dominant. Interestingly, Yang and Tavakoli's (2016) study on tourism gender research in Asia seems to contradict this trend as it shows that qualitative methods were privileged over quantitative approaches. Despite this, they also claimed that “although the authors appear to have embraced novel approaches in doing qualitative research, the representations appear to be fairly orthodox” (Yang & Tavakoli, 2016; p. 33). In other words, although

qualitative research is gaining momentum in tourism gender research, it still seems to be anchored to traditional positivist frames of inquiry. In this regard, as a scholar who privileges non-positivist/qualitative approaches to research, I hope that in the future an increasing number of tourism scholars will embrace non-positivist (or even new) paradigms to study genders. Indeed, rather than considering gender as an anonymous variable/label placed on a questionnaire, we need to explore methodological avenues that allow us to understand gendered structures of power and performances in greater detail. This will lead us to mobilise existing paradigms/methodologies/methods but also to conceive new ways of knowing. While some commentators may argue that non-positivist ontologies and epistemologies have already been legitimized by the tourism academy, I contend that positivist ways of knowing are still predominant in tourism academic circles, especially in non-western academic systems (Mura & Pahlevan Sharif, 2015). Although my intention here is not to reignite past paradigm wars, I believe that future studies on gender in tourism should be less impersonal and more reflective, they should benefit disadvantaged groups, such as subordinated femininities and masculinities, and promote social justice. To many this may sound as an old agenda. Yet, I believe that it is still very actual in the current academic scenario.

A final provocatory question about future studies on gender in tourism – How should we explore gendered inequalities within the wider universe of inequalities? Contemporary capitalist realities are constructed within pronounced frames of disparity, not only propelled by gendered structures but also by social, political, cultural, and financial discrepancies. Class, social position, religion, sexual orientation and income (just to cite some examples) segregate us. Importantly, tourism spaces and experiences often tend to reproduce power structures. For example, the way local (often non-western/indigenous) cultures are commodified for tourist (often Western) consumption cannot transcend thoughts about postcolonial/cultural/social power structures. In this respect, although I am passionate about understanding gendered inequalities, I believe that the focus on genders should not transcend the broader spectrum of inequalities. In other words, too often the focus on the ‘tree’ (gender) leads us to miss the ‘forest’ (the complex array of inequalities in which we are socialised). I have no doubt that the future challenge for tourism scholars is to be able to explore the nexus between the multiple trees constituting genders (as plural) within the intricate forest of social disparities.

References

- Boorstin, D. J. (1964). *The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Carr, N. (2002). The tourism–leisure behavioural continuum. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(4), 972–986.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2017). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Figueroa-Domecq, C., Pritchard, A., Segovia-Pérez, M., Morgan, N., & Villacé-Molinero, T. (2015). Tourism gender research: A critical accounting. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 52, 87–103.
- Kho-Lattimore, C., & Mura, P. (Vol. Eds.), (2016). *Asian genders in tourism*. Vol. 75Chanel View Publications.
- Kinnaird, V., & Hall, D. R. (Eds.). (1994). *Tourism: A gender analysis*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Munar, A. M., Biran, A., Budeanu, A., Caton, K., Chambers, D., Dredge, D., ... Ram, Y. (2015). The gender gap in the tourism academy: Statistics and indicators of gender equality. Retrieved from http://openarchive.cbs.dk/bitstream/handle/10398/9178/gendergapreport_final_wwf-2_copy.pdf?sequence=1.
- Munar, A. M., Kho-Lattimore, C., Chambers, D., & Biran, A. (2017). The academia we have and the one we want: On the centrality of gender equality. *Anatolia*, 1–10.
- Mura, P., & Pahlevan Sharif, S. (2015). The crisis of the ‘crisis of representation’: Mapping qualitative tourism research in Southeast Asia. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(9), 828–844. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2015.1045459>.
- Turner, V. W. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Wilson, E., & Hollinshead, K. (2015). Qualitative tourism research: Opportunities in the emergent soft sciences. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 54, 30–47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.06.001>.
- Yang, C. L., & Tavakoli, R. (2016). ‘Doing’ tourism gender research in Asia: An analysis of

authorship, research topic and methodology. In C. Khoo-Lattimore, & P. Mura (Eds.). *Asian genders in tourism* (pp. 23–39). Bristol: Channel View Publications.



Paolo Mura holds a PhD in Tourism from the University of Otago, New Zealand. An Italian by passport, he has lived in Germany, Greece, the USA, New Zealand and Malaysia. He is currently an Associate Professor and Programme Director of the Postgraduate Programmes in the Faculty of Hospitality, Food and Leisure Management at Taylor's University, Malaysia. He is also the Head of the *Center for Research and Innovation in Tourism, Hospitality & Food Studies (CRiT)*. Overall, his research interests are on tourist behaviour, with a focus on young tourists' experiences, gender, qualitative methodologies, and Asia/ASEAN. Paolo serves on the editorial board of *Current Issues in Tourism*, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, and the *Annals of Leisure Research*. He is the

Editor-in-Chief of *Asia Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism (APJIHT)*.

His scholarly work has been published in top tourism journals, including *Tourism Management*, the *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Current Issues in Tourism*. Paolo enjoys supervising postgraduate students and so far he has supervised to completion 3 PhD students (2 as principal supervisor and 1 as co-supervisor), and more than 20 master's students.