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The Beautiful Sight - Yours and Others. Anthropology of Tourism Photography

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This paper explores the practice of tourism photography based on my fieldwork conducted around St Andrews Castle. Involving my personal experience of doing photography while migrating from country to country and demonstrating some of the experiences of tourists taking photos next to the castle, I reflect on tourism photography as a social practice through the aspects of 'tourist gaze', the power of controlling vision and knowledge, memory practice as well as 'play' and 'performance'. What different meanings could individuals acquire about themselves while taking photos next to famous sights? To what ends do they use these materials?

The tall black thick tripod with the phone on top is looking into the young tourist girl who occupies the place in the centre of the gates that lead to the castle ruins. The several-second timer set on the camera phone seems eternal, reaffirming the tension between an almost falling metal black creature through the wind and the constant stable smile of the tourist, directed in front. After the 'click', the time and space are captured, producing another set of possible 'selves'. The smile disappears, and the girl, squinting from the sun, tries to take a look at the photos made. The tripod is taken under the shoulder and departs on another journey with the tourist, who roams around each unknown corner of the castle, producing multiple photos of herself 'for fun'. It seems like each area of

these ruins is a separate scene, where completely different stories are enacted, and relationships are formed with new characters. And I am, in a similar constant process of roaming, trying to capture myself in such different places to me. In my own selfie pictures in front of mountains, at museums, in castles, or after submitting my application for study at the college, through which I try to experience the transition between different countries, people, loss, and hopes. Similarly, standing for the first time somewhere in the snowy bushes of the Alps mountains, scared of getting lost, but with straight hands, I am photographing myself smiling. Every time my mother tries to take a photo of me, I become confused and irritated, not knowing where to put myself, and often just

spread my hands into the sides as I did in my childhood all the time. Almost like a sign of flying over the places, or feeling welcomed, or just being desperate of what to do in front of the camera and a photographer. I am in flux between being a tall tripod with the camera, trying to fix everything around, and the posing individual, looking into the camera around surroundings that I never knew before and which will never be the same.

Does the camera and photography help to reassure me about my existence and familiarity with a specific place or people? What am I paying attention to the most? Who am I taking these photos to, and will I ever come back to them again?

The advancements of global travel in the Renaissance period shaped the need to document the exploration of new cultures and territories, trying to process and give meanings to new realities at the same time demonstrating the difference between 'us' and 'them'. The recording which happened through oral, textual, or visual practices helped to curate specific versions of the world, creating representations about others to present it to the people 'at home' (Boorstin 1985 as cited in Robinson and Picard 2009:2). The development of photography in the mid 19th century shaped new opportunities for closer and more immediate, objective representation of reality, particularly for tourists for whom the camera became the main guide and frame of the world. Walter Benjamin's concept of 'here and now' exemplifies this immediate aspect of photography, particularly how aspects of accessibility and fast production of the camera allow the producer and the viewer to approach the subject represented in a much closer look (as cited in Robinson and Picard 2009:3). With the active spread of photographs in the popular

media like books, TV, social media, they created a sense of 'imaginative mobility', through which it is possible to project a sense of any place without travelling to it as well as overcome uniqueness of new realities by such active reproduction of them (Larsen 2006:244). Observing such a 'passive' experience of consumption of photographs, the question arises of how the medium perpetuates the modern notions of 'consumerism' and consequently destroys the 'authentic experience' of environments and social relations produced there (Larsen 2006). Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1990) has argued how photography works as a machine and practice to naturalise rather than disrupt larger social conventions, sustaining specific subjectivities and ideologies (as cited in Crang 1997:364). Alongside considering photography as a medium of reproducibility and 'passive' consumption of reality, it is interesting to reflect on how it involves creative aspects, allowing social agents to shape different understandings of reality and form various social relationships. With the technologically manipulative capabilities of the camera, photography works not towards knowing the surface of reality or its truth but towards transforming its surface and controlling it (Slater 1995:230). In this essay, I would like to explore the practice of tourism photography based on my fieldwork conducted around St Andrews Castle. Involving my personal experience of doing photography while migrating from country to country and demonstrating some of the experiences of tourists taking photos next to the castle, I am interested in reflecting on tourism photography as a social practice through the aspects of 'tourist gaze' and the power of controlling vision and knowledge, memory practice as well as the 'play' and 'performance'. What different meanings could individuals acquire about

themselves while taking photos next to the famous sights? To what ends do they use these materials?

The topic of tourism photography was selected because of personal curiosity to understand how people differently self-represent themselves and connect it to my practice of taking photographs while being in new places. The fieldwork was conducted involving the primary focus on qualitative methodologies of participant observation as well as the improvisatory practice of asking passerby tourists to take photos of me in front of the castle. Being photographed by others helped me to establish a more direct and spontaneous connection with the participants while paying attention to the details each individual places importance on and understanding the ambiguity felt while being in the frame of others. Throughout the whole process of fieldwork, I felt a particular tension in asking others to take a photo of me, sometimes standing in front of the castle for half an hour, passively looking into the eyes of people, and promising myself that for sure I will approach the next person walking by. Probably, I did not have enough trust in others, or I just was not ready to be in a vulnerable position in front of strangers who were actively looking at me. It is interesting to assume that I would feel freer if I were placed within a group of other people for a photo, or if the photo was taken by a familiar person to me. After such short photo sessions, I asked photographers a couple of questions, being curious for what purposes they take photographs next to tourist sights, on what aspect they focus on, and to what ends they use these materials. Alongside these methodologies, I conducted a couple of short interviews with museum coworkers around the town to understand their responses to tourism photography observed daily, their connection to

it, and to reflect on the general practice of preservation and memory making. I am holding my hand straight or in my pockets, gently smiling at the camera in front. I should probably always be smiling. Another 'click', and...

Three young Polish tourists take a photo of one another at the same spot, almost not changing poses and composition. Later on, while taking the photo of me, they started negotiating between themselves and trying to choose the best angle and perspective for my photo next to the castle. The photo ended up featuring a close-up of my face with a blurry background of the castle's small part. As they said, the photograph serves as historical evidence which produces further discussions and as a confirmation that

'I have been there'.

Intently looking into the camera of the photographer while two other friends were navigating his hands, I felt that it was also a confirmation of my existence, our communal looking, seeing, and acknowledging each other. It is also a specific type of confirmation that depends on the view and always movable perspectives of the photographer. In the moment of the 'click,' I become like a plastic or plasticine, the form of which is regulated by the stranger. In such moments specific interaction is established between the 'I' of the photographer and the 'other', the photographed subject, promoting the attitude of 'ethno-topia' with the feeling of power and epistemological possession of the subject in the frame (Nichols 1991 as cited in Panakova 2019). This idea of power and 'possession' could be associated with the larger Western epistemology of equating knowledge with visual representation, thus seeing means knowing (Larsen 2006). Moreover, the practice of looking within tourism photography involves

the whole technology of production which depends on larger social standards of representation. John Urry, who widely researched tourist practices, introduced the term 'tourist gaze', arguing that our vision is socio-culturally constructed and depends on our beliefs, norms, and values acquired from previous experiences (Larsen 2006). We are living in a bubble of shared meanings and representations, being in a relational network of tourists, sights, and markers (MacCannell 1999 as cited in Larsen 2006:246). Markers involve us in the journey, through which we try to identify the authentic symbolic elements of specific tourist sights to conventionally reproduce them further. The tourist gaze is further influenced by the belief in 'expert' photographic knowledge, acquiring an understanding of collective representations within popular media like social networks, postcards, and newspapers (Yeh Hsiu-Yen 2009:205).

'I do like observing these professionals, I am not as bold as some of these photographers, I am taking pictures of the buildings or myself only',

added the old man after taking a photo of me. Professionalism could be acquired through knowing the grid rules, placing people in the right spots (e.g. golden ratio), or knowing how to appeal to the audience, as shared with me by an Italian tourist, trying to take multiple photos of me from different perspectives. Thus, tourism photography is a confirmation that involves the differentiation of 'I' from 'other' and familiarization with the subject framed, promoting different power dynamics and structuring based on wider aesthetic, and socio-cultural conventions. Who becomes the bold 'professional' and how come?

Standing on top of the public terrasse with a

view of the Eiffel Tower in Paris together with my girlfriend, one couple approached us asking to take a photo of them. Teasing me, my girlfriend said that I am professional and that I shall take a photo, emphasising my experience studying anthropology and film. The couple praised my photo, after which several other people approached me asking to take the same 'beautiful' photo of them. For most of my life I did not have a passion for being photographed or doing photos for others in such a staged way, rather through my interest in street/documentary photography I try to explore the conditions around me, making certain meanings of who I am and what is my relation to surroundings. Tourism photography allows one not only to frame and 'possess others' but also confront various possible 'selves', or through interactions with new environments to explore individual desires and dreams (Robinson and Picard 2009:10). By looking at and confirming the 'other' through the camera, be it a castle or a person selling ice cream next to it, it is possible to reformulate the understanding of oneself and own influence. These observations connect with larger tendencies in studies of tourism called 'practice turn', which pays attention to embodied, performative practices of tourists rather than looking at representation and meaning (Larsen 2006:254). The process of photographing unknown settings allows me to engage in the form of play or performance (Crang 1997:362). This perspective encourages us to think of what stands beyond the reproduction of tourist 'markers' or conventional motifs 'I have been there', looking into new unexpected roles that may arise through such staged photographic play. Why did the couple want the 'beautiful' photo exactly from me, and what did they experience as the couple photographed by me 'professional' with the background of the Eiffel Tower? Integrating

Gell's theory (1999) of art as enchantment technology, it is interesting to reflect on how the photographic process through the mutual technical coproduction and play between the producer and the subject could become a vehicle for reimagining the reality (as cited in Hoskins 2009:161). While my experience of migrating from country to country after the war began in my Motherland, I found the process of actively photographing my new environment as the desire to find new meanings and recreate particular stories, consequently processing my unique version of a new reality and my place in it. In the case of photographing the couple in Paris, being in the position of tourists, I was still involved in the production of a specific mode of reality, reflecting the individual presentation of the 'ideal' couple and being in Paris in front of strangers smiling at me. In turn, the couple, while reproducing the common tourist patterns of being photographed in front of the Eiffel Tower (smiling, hugging each other), were able to experience the unique performance of love to each other. In this process they might feel and trust my 'professionalism' based on observed experience of how I behaved with my girlfriend before the photographic encounter, further producing personal understandings of love directly interacting with my photographic gaze. The tourism photography practice builds 'emotional geographies' for its practitioners, which enables them to produce their 'desired togetherness, wholeness, and intimacy' (Robinson and Picard 2009:16). Even by engaging in the active reproduction of 'markers', tourists are involved in the act of self-production. Both producers and subjects initiate improvisatory performance, through which they explore the various social roles and relations.

How and who will remember such moments?

Meanwhile, the tall tripod continues its travel

around the castle with the running tourist, taking photos only for 'close people', as putting photos on social media 'adds additional pressure and a side of overthinking the content being shared'. The tourist believes that her family members are fond of getting photos of her in unusual places where they have never been themselves. Indeed, most tourists take photos for the sake of preservation or sharing, particularly with close people. Remember the last time your grandparents asked you for nice photos from your recent trips or your friends who missed the last group holiday and are desperate to see how it went? It is interesting to think about how we choose the photos and the people with whom we would like to share them. As an object, the photograph could be recontextualised and filled with emotional significance, depending on the people who are dealing with such materials (Robinson and Picard 2009:24). It acts as a central prompt for memories and the creation of further stories, allowing to observe what is significant to the producer and creating specific narratives that could support the development of social relations (Crang 1997:368). The museum worker from St Andrews shared with me that she has the tradition of selecting specific family travel photos once a year and making a collection, being involved in the process of curation. She further prints them and adds various titles and notes to them, sometimes sending these physical collections to her dad in Canada. She receives the photos from other family members too, but she emphasised that the photographs of others are mostly focused on 'daily lives' only. It becomes interesting to reflect on how individuals create a significance of every 'worthy' picture to share through material framing, settings where the photo is taken, and people involved, and how this significance is further being used as a tool to develop relationships with others. Furthermore, the

question of power over who gets to decide what to share and who is responsible for this becomes prominent. Standing outside of the castle area, I noticed the group of people where the two ladies were photographed by the older man. It was a family, where presumably the father was taking photos of daughters for the sake of 'recalling this memory in the future'. They shared that they sent all of the photos later on to the family Whatsapp group chat, and in most cases, it was done by this older man. In this case, the family performs itself, allowing the vision of the 'father' to structure its specific understanding and reproduce it for a future as a 'carrier' of that understanding. Using popular conventions and 'markers' around tourism photography, we orient ourselves toward the future to preserve specific meanings and create a 'base' that could serve for the creative production of further dreams, stories, and relations. We come back to the same tourist famous sights, year by year, taking similar smiling photos, so in the future, we could notice the change 'how fat I have become'. Another 'click' to remind us how different we could possibly be.

but a full-height photo of me next to the castle, I could call my new home. Photo of myself, confirmed by the strangers, who are similarly exploring this castle.

It is a question if we ever come back to these almost similar photos with repetitive poses, views, buildings, and smiles. If not, we definitely engaged in the process, performance, or 'play', recognising the difference between oneself and others, building connections or lines of separation, understanding unknown aspects of the self, or finally feeling an intimate connection with others. And also we created the material attribute which could not only remind us about our past but also encourage us to dream, creating new realities we have never imagined before. Despite the tension, I produced multiple photos of myself next to the famous castle in Scotland with the help of others. It's not a single selfie of myself in the snowy Alps, being scary,

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