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Troublesome Tourism: Informal Guiding in Yogyakarta by Fermin Suter

by KUNCI on Feb 12, 2016 • 2:22 pm >

It is troublesome to be a tourist. If one is not entirely naïve – or cynical – he will eventually doubt the nature of his experiences. Do these people fool me, cheat on me, do they lie to me, alter certain things or events to please me, protect me from undesirable events? How would people behave 'normally', how would it have been, if I had not been around? What is staged, draped, exhibited for the only purpose that is me – us, the tourists – to see it? And, of course, finally: How much of a genuine reality can I actually grasp? But then again: how presumptuous is it to desire such a thing? Doubting the authentic nature of tourist experiences is indeed part and parcel of any touristic reflexivity: the presence of the foreigner (the traveller) inevitably changes the attention, the dynamics of any situation. In this respect, tourism faces 'problems' comparable to the ones anthropology has been dealing with for decades. Anthropology has institutionalised questions of how the presence of the researcher in the events, situations, communities, he is interested in is inevitable for any informed perspective while at the same time altering them.

Tourism, on the other hand, by tradition builds upon the promise and premise, that what the tourist experiences is uniquely authentic. Therefore, unlike anthropologists, for tourists there is no 'safe haven' of a well known problem *everyone* has to deal with, allowing at least partially to self-reflectively resort to modes of conduct. As a tourist, one does not perceive such insecurities about the authentic nature of events as explicit problem. The underlying assumption of an authentic reality that is not staged casts the tourist into a state where he perceives of his doubts as a feeling, feeling alienated, troubled, exhibited, and insecure. Or, to speak with Jonathan Culler, "Tourism reveals difficulties of appreciating otherness except through signifying structures that mark and reduce it" (1988: 10). One either adapts reassuring patterns of touristic standardization, or the tourist will end up in the borderlands of misapprehension and doubt. But this mainly refers to a certain notion of tourism: mass tourism, which typically derives touristic value of sites, objects, practices etc. from their proper and somewhat 'extraordinary' qualities (e.g. size, artistry and historicity of a building). However, there are forms of tourism like individual and eco-tourism that rely to a bigger extent on immediate interaction with the environment and with tourist guides as agents who enable the tourist to feel a certain proximity to the observed or visited phenomena and sites. In such contexts, opportunities of play, masquerade, interpersonal and 'intercultural' exchange, situational and less standardised events, are more important. Unlike mass tourism's sightseeing and gazing at organized performances of cultural heritage like dance- or music-shows, individual tourism insists on an active and mutually understanding behaviour from both sides, tourist and guide.



Participant observation on informal tourism, film still: Emanuel Mathias.

I will scrutinize this latter form of interactions between guide and tourist in the framework of individual tourism. Maybe one can look at the production of tourist images differently (and less 'static' than semiotician Culler does), when emphasizing lived experience and the reciprocity of those experiences. I wish to argue that in individual tourism, personal, less standardized relationships (although they might be

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just as short-termed and superficial as in mass tourism) are the very basis of tourist-guide encounters. I want to tentatively question theories of tourism like Jonathan Culler's (and many of those who studied tourism critically), namely that tourists encounter and contribute to pre-existing patterns of signification and representations of 'alien cultures', and that therefore the tourist's world is first and foremost a symbolically mediated one. Instead, I will stress the importance of situated encounters and the processes of aesthetics or knowledge as joint performance of symbolic systems. My interest aims at less standardized forms of guiding, where cooperation and interaction can be observed on a micro-level. For this purpose of studying the production of tourist experience, informal tourist-guiding seems particularly interesting.

Tourism is – let aside it's obvious joys and amenities – profoundly troublesome; at least to me. One feels exposed way more than the local people are exposed to you, or, to put it differently: to myself, the foreignness I steadily experience stems not primarily from the foreign nature of the place I visit, but from my own strangeness. This feeling of alienation, both rewarding and unsettling, constitute the emotional arena, where tourist-guide encounters happen. Anyone approaching me – be that *becak* drivers, sellers, young people that wish to take dozens of pictures with me, or informal guides – needs to deal with this if he wants to successfully reach out to me with a story, a message, a request, any kind of concern or interest. And although I am not heavily but slightly sceptical, I need to be persuaded that my scepticism is unnecessary. How do tourist guides handle this emotionally grounded constitution of mine?

Guides have a repertoire of skills that allow them to relate to me, empathic skills, rhetorical skills, skills in entertainment, and, of course, knowledge. If they wish to be 'successful' (whatever that means to them) they will also have deliberated on what kind of interaction I feel comfortable with. As a researcher, I am especially interested in the ways in which tourist guides and I interact *emotionally*, how they handle my insecurity and curiosity, in order to establish a shared touristic experience. But the questions of inquiry are manifold for I intend to grasp the various aspects that constitute the situations, in which these emotional interactions take place. How do they perceive of me? What different strategies do they pursue to establish a desired situation or interaction (make money, make friends, take pictures, give information, give advice, make an impression, kill time)? And how do they know to do so? Do they perform their informal guiding 'professionally', occasionally, indifferently or passionately; do they draw from experience, do they give advice amongst each other, do they get a sort of training, although they are not 'professionals'? And on account of this as well: how do they perceive of themselves and their role? And as I will only hear about those things, that the guides are willing to tell *me*, I wish to value them for what they are: personal (although maybe routine) enunciations and actions directed at me and who I am considered to be. Therefore, I wish to explore not only how guides enable my touristic experience, but also how this might offer a possibility to them to express discontent, demonstrate pride, practice certain strategies, or whether it is simply a routinely executed job to them.

While officially regulated and commodified tourism works a great deal in order to representing 'Indonesia', there is another side to the tourist experience that I shall focus on: informal tourist guiding. Taking place in the shade of official statistics, tourist offices and guidebooks, there is nothing shady about what is locally termed 'wild guiding' (*guide liar*). Rather, it is one of the predominant modes of interaction amongst tourists and the people present, an everyday implicitness of seeing, hearing, learning, knowing and undergoing experiences, that one will take home as Yogyakarta memories.

1. On Interests and Methods: Playing Bait

Originally my interest was related to tourism in general. I planned on investigating the matter of shared tourist experience in a framework of succeeding participations in officially guided touristic tours to prominent Yogyakarta sights like the Borobudur temple area. As an integral part of the research process and preparation, the research idea and method was discussed at the initial 'Ethnolab'-workshop at KUNCI. Rather quickly, I was dissatisfied with my somewhat abstract idea. From a literary scholar's point of view, it seemed like a feasible plan to focus on the experiential part of the so-called encounter of the foreign. What I did not account for was concrete implementation. How was I going to find out about the motivation and skills of official tourist guides, when I would not only be part of a touristic group, but also be a paying customer? I would have had to pay money continually to go on tours and to gain field access (but at the same time: how could I be an ordinary tourist, if was inquiring more on the tour guides than on the sites we would be visiting?), or I would have had to renounce the situated experience, if I was to rely on a privileged access to guides via their organization or people related to them. Either way, in terms of my own researcher-status, I would have had to decide whether I wanted to do be a researcher *or* a tourist, whilst it seemed necessary to be both at the same time.



Yogya Tourist Map, image: Fermin Suter.

This discontent finally moulded into the idea of doing research on informal guiding. As I learned, there are many places and many groups of people – such as the notoriously famous water castle *Taman Sari* and *becak*– or cycle-rickshaw-drivers – providing informal guidance for tourists. Sceptical towards organized tourism's all-encompassing commodification of sites, informal guiding transpired as an interesting shift in focus. Informal guiding is not unburdened from the obvious inequalities of tourist encounters: a (mostly) wealthy leisure-traveller meets a working 'local'; a well-informed, habituated local meets an uninformed, 'troubled' tourist. But as it builds on more private encounters, less restricted by institutionally contoured social roles, it offers ample opportunities of individual, spontaneous actions and conjointly enacted situations whose functions and implications I am more likely to understand than in a group of twenty.

Resulting from my professional background in literary and postcolonial studies I am prone to feelings of unease when writing about how I got to 'understand tourist guides'. By researching informal variations of touristic relations, I wished to configure the unease of the troubled tourist into something a little more refined than a self-referential confession of my own inadequate position as a traveller and researcher. Trying to understand if and how this role is being perceived and dealt with, how it offers opportunities of interaction, seemed like an epistemological cornerstone to do research on tourism. In this sense, this is an auto-ethnographic undertaking as well, not even trying to move away from the integral part played by personal points of view and personal experience.

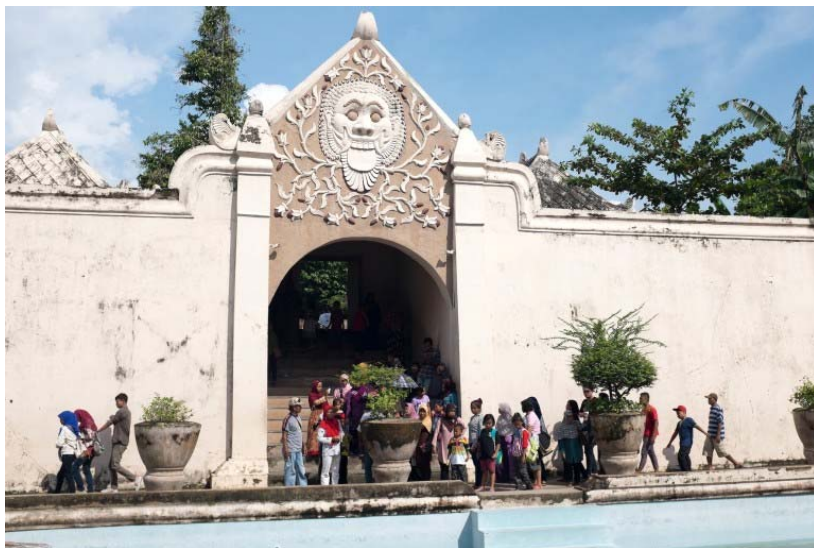
The research was conducted during the second half of January 2015. Informed by the participants of the 'Ethnolab' workshop I could identify areas, where informal guides were most likely to be found. It was especially two places that were said to be promising, as they are known sites of the preferred tourist activities sightseeing and shopping: the water castle area and the crowded *Malioboro* Road. Since I did not want to do 'investigative' research, I aspired to be approached by informal guides. So I spent as much time as possible at these places, walking and sitting around, following what I figured to be an ordinary tourist itinerary. After a few excursions, it became clear that I had to perform my role as a tourist more 'sincerely'. My desire to visit those places (over and again) had faded, but I wanted to hang myself out on the streets as bait, waiting for someone to pick his opportunity. Playing bait might indeed have changed not only my perception of certain events, but also people's attitude towards me. But ultimately, the role of a bored tourist at work also offered critical insight into the skills necessary to please such a demanding being.

While the encounters I had were usually pleasing, and I sometimes was blithely stating that I was conducting a personal research project and that the approaching guides were somehow part of it themselves, I was never really able to take out my notebook and jot down things memorable. Not because of moral scruples or scepticism, but because those encounters were socially and affectively intense. So I decided to let my memory do the work and sort out those events that were most memorable to me, and write them down as soon as possible in the aftermath of those meetings. Apart from my notes, I had my camera, although this was less of a documentary but a performative tool, as it offered (not only to me) ample possibilities of interaction with sights, other people, or the guides themselves.

2. Yogyakarta Tourism

Although formal guiding in Yogyakarta has been a research topic before, e.g. Salazar (2005) and Sörensson (2015), this work focuses on touristic work as a mode of empowerment by acquiring status and capital – be that professional skills, money, or social capital. To add a more social interactional and affective dimension to this profound body of research, I intend to focus on informal guiding as practice of

mutual symbolic and emotional work (Hochschild 1979) as a probably peripheral activity in my interlocutors' lives, who might not even think of themselves as 'guides'. Yogyakarta seems a place fairly convenient to study the various facets of tourism. It is, after Bali, the most demanded site for tourism in Indonesia (Sörensson 2008: 52–55), and compared to the former, the variety of potential tourist attractions is vast. Yogya attracts people interested in traditional artisanal and contemporary art work; people looking for 'culture', 'adventure', 'nature', and ecological responsibility. They can find walking tours through the city of Yogya, bike tours through surrounding villages, tours to caves, forests and mountains, palaces, or tours to art spaces and local markets.



Taman Sari Complex; Yogyakarta, image: Fermin Suter.

As a historical attraction, the water castle *Taman Sari* is amongst the touristically most visited place inside the city of Yogya. It is located inside the *kraton*, the sultan palace area, and entails not only several dozens of different buildings such as swimming pools, gardens, pagodas, and a mosque, but these are also arranged in different areas, somewhat separated from each other. These various areas allure the visitor to wander around, and they are often corralled by trees or massive walls, they house temples or meditation rooms, food stalls, and shaded benches, they are built around places of different shapes, sometimes have only one, sometimes several entrances, so that each of them has its unique appearance. And while the visitor walks the gates, stairs and alleys that connect those different areas, he unconsciously enters the surrounding neighbourhoods and residential areas. That makes the place an exceptionally, diverse and interesting place not only to walk around, but also to learn about the manifold aspects of the place and the people living there. And as the place is advertised in every tourist guidebook, many formal and informal tourist guides hang out there.

The *kraton* area is vast. Surrounded by massive walls, but publically accessible at any time through numerous entrance gates, the sultan's palace is its symbolic heart. *Taman Sari* is in the west, while in the north and south, there each is one immense square. Outside the *kraton*, the south-north-axis is carried northwards by *Malioboro* Street. Stretching along 1.5 kilometres, there are markets, shopping malls, souvenir shops, food stalls, restaurants, and, extending to its left and right, countless bars and backpackers hostels. On a busy day, to walk up *Malioboro* seems like an unbearably annoying endeavour. But as one of the hot spot tourist areas in Yogya many people have specialized in making business with tourists around the area.

There are, of course, several other places, like the animal market or certain roads filled with batik and jewellery shops, but there is no place in Yogya where the tourist- and tourist-guide-density is as high as in and around that *kraton* and *Malioboro* area.

3. *Batik*, *becak* and alert guides

Comparing different touristic areas inside Yogyakarta, the area of the palace (*kraton*) of the Sultan (who reigns in the political function of a governor) has proven to be somewhat special. It seems that particular tourist places, as they are embedded in the history and geography of the city, produce particular informal tourist guides. Around touristic attractions like the animal market (*pasar ngasem*) or the *kraton's* southern square (*alun-alun kidul*), *becak*-drivers frequently offer both transport with their bicycle-rickshaws and their services as guides to passing tourists. In general, this can mean that you will visit 'traditional silver handicraft schools', 'traditional Batik artisanry', or 'exhibitions of young contemporary artists' on your way to the actual tourist destinations. Most probably, you will end up in a shop, either with a short visit of the workshops in the back of the buildings, or you will be presented beautiful fabrics, jewellery, and paintings you might want to purchase as a present for mothers, sisters and wives. The driver typically tries to score high on empathy – usually those are blunt attempts at fraternisation, mainly because pedalling through crowded streets in the back of a tourist, who is most probably ignorant of any Indonesian language but instead is longing for some insights into local artisanry, is quite a task. As information is not actually the main purpose of those 'tours' covering the scope of traditional handicraft in Yogyakarta (silver, *batik*, *wayang* puppets, jewellery in general), this more or less obvious business

routinely leads to mutual dissatisfaction: *becak*-drivers covertly checking with the sellers inside the stores before leaving, interrogating their tourists, whether they did not like the beautiful work of art and if they really didn't need a *sarong* – and tourists, annoyed but meekly remaining squished into a chair in a corner of a store, trying to come up with the right wording to express appreciation without intentions of buying. Usually, *becak*-drivers 'sell' their guiding services in advance by promising ridiculously low prices for driving one around town for hours.

The tourist that I am and that I willingly impersonate engages in those buying-tours without buying anything. He will soon learn to appreciate the troubling economics of feeling guilt and indebtedness. Once it becomes clear, that no one, neither guide nor tourist, will get one's money's and time's worth out of these involuntary 'shopping sprees', the stabilizing effect of this double-sided 'loss' kicks in: the tourist, maybe feeling guilty for getting cab rides way too cheap, can easily justify such underpay in the face of his own waste of precious time. For the same reason, a *becak*-guide will only very rarely ask for more money than initially agreed. It is not until I tried to research these encounters, a way of 'wasting' time without actually falling short of a personal (touristic) time-table, that the transformation of felt guilt into a relieving extra payment appears to be rather convenient and reasonable. The fact that those 'informative tours' try to retain the appearance of genuine guiding-service and tourist-interest, while actually there is ample frustration and desperation involved, indicates tourism's immense potential for not just enabling such microeconomic constellations, but also to serve as a cloak, covering personal interests with a semblance of cooperative cultural exchange. And by doing so, both tourists and *becak*-drivers allow for some entirely unromantic but mutual understanding and cooperation. It happened more than once after a tour, that by paying a little more money than the amount previously agreed upon the somewhat tense vibe amongst us dissolved into the cautious satisfaction of a successful and mutually acknowledged economic transaction.

That this co-dependency frequently leads to the discomfort of tourists is a well-known issue in Yogyakarta. Especially *Malioboro* Street does not have a particularly good reputation when it comes to tourism and tourist-guide encounters. This is also related to the fact that the area southwest of the train station, *Pasar Kembang* Street, is known to be a centre for prostitution (Sörensson 2008: 61–65). But also the rapid growth of western consumerist culture and the rise of a vast informal sector have been judged by tourist officials to be a setback in the course of tourist development (Salazar 2005: 635 f.). Tourist activities rely heavily on bars, nightlife, and shopping. So-called *batik*-guides are up and down, searching for willing customers, whom they can sell overpriced *batik* products of lesser quality at stores, from which these guides will get commissioned. In this respect, they work the same way as *becak*-drivers, offering to show production sites for silver-work and other traditional artisanal workshops. This might sound rather harsh, but surprisingly, such a view is vehemently represented by a lot of local people, fitting another type of guide who acts as 'alert advisor'.



A city-street view in South of Yogya, image: Fermin Suter.

Briefly after arriving at *Malioboro*, a random man approached me, elaborating on where to eat, where not, whom to follow, whom not, but especially, that one shall not be fooled by self-appointed guides that want to lure you into *batik* shops. There have long been and still are joint efforts to enhance tourist security, especially by overriding overpricing. That man is dedicated to such awareness raising, as he regards it to be some kind of welcoming service to tourists in Yogyakarta. Repeatedly, people engage in short conversations with me for no other reason than to warn me about *batik*-guides and overpriced *batik*. One man, presenting himself as a teacher at a nearby school, is aroused by the bad impression overpricing *batik* guides make on tourists about the area he works and lives in. Random people on the *kraton*'s other side, around the southern square, whom I wish to get rid of quickly by stating that I want to walk on until Malioboro, tell me to 'be careful about the *batik*'. One evening, when two *becak* drivers and I try to beat our boredom by communicating in defiance of the barriers of my illiteracy in Bahasa Indonesia and theirs in English, the words 'Malioboro' and 'batik' evoke a fist smashing on a palm and fingers holding the nose closed while a hand waves in front of it. Yes, for a tourist, the combination of

Malioboro and *batik* is not considered to be pleasant, it stinks.

Such a protective collective attitude might come, one might think, with an unforgiving attitude towards such guides. But although the street-guide *phenomenon*, that is the collaboration of street guides with vendors and hotels, disadvantaging 'regular' establishments, has been an issue tackled in the past (Dahles 2001: 108–110) and still seems to get condemned by public voice, no negative verdicts on the *people* engaged in that business are spoken. Conversely, when asking whether these people do something wrong, everyone guiding me towards precaution seems reluctant to render a judgment, and rather emphasizes the need for raising tourist awareness and supporting 'regular' businesses. There is one side: people telling me to be alert for the sake of information itself, enabling a positive tourist experience and supporting preferred forms of local business. But there also is, of course, a deceptive version, another side of the coin: people who imitate an alert guides' behaviour, using it as an opportunity to get in contact with you in a favourable manner. Protecting you from the 'scammers' and guiding you to the 'real place' instead is a widespread practice – and a continuous nuisance to tourists according to innumerable accounts on touristic online platforms like 'Tripadvisor', when researching terms like 'Malioboro' and 'Batik'.

With regards to the fact, that, indeed, tourism appears to be troublesome in some respect, with those instances of 'guilty tourism' and a 'tourist-alerting guidance', there seem to be three very successful practices of handling tourism-trouble at work. The work in an economy of guilt, purchases and price levels, mediated between guide and tourist; a socially and morally motivated form of enlightenment aiming at the empowerment of the unaware tourist, which conversely consolidates 'regular' local business; and the *staged* role of the alerting guide that plays on the well-known problem of overpriced/low quality *batik*, a refined and dissimulating version of the *batik* guide. Apart from that, there is one area in Yogyakarta, the *Kraton*, where tourists-guide encounters work in very different ways.

4. The *kraton* guide

It is a dive into the glaring afternoon heat that immediately lets my motivation fade away. I am heading towards the water castle (*Taman Sari*) inside the *Kraton* area, besides the palace itself probably the most advertised touristic site in the city. I would most probably find someone willing to show me around, at least that is what I have been told. But now, I realize somewhat amused, that my first step was my first mistake. I should have known better and left earlier that day: nobody is walking (everybody is driving) on the streets, even *becak*-drivers prefer sitting in the shadows of tall green Banyan trees and whitewashed walls – or so it seems to me, probably because that is what I would like to do now, too. I keep on walking to get to know the area in between my homestay and the *Kraton* as well as *Malioboro* Street; the sites of my research extend perfectly along one axis facing north from the main road near my place. As I try to find my way through the labyrinthine streets and alleys, that lure me into aimlessly strolling around, I decide on catching a *becak*. We drive around a corner and 50 meters straight, and there, to the left, is *Taman Sari*, slight embarrassment. But joining the herds of camera-slinging and water-bottle-equipped tourists at the Water Castle I enter a weirdly comforting atmosphere. I meander around the place, shielded by walls and shaded by trees, I am amongst other tourists that all walk around so relaxed and aimlessly, as in this zone, there are no compelling highlights to look at or down from: the view from the left side of the ancient swimming pool for example is as good as from the right side. The pressure of having a goal and finding my way is gone immediately.

After some time I feel exhausted, so I withdraw into a side alley to get some rest besides a small shop; but as soon as I wish to take notes on the place's atmosphere and the group of school kids that interviewed me about my stay in Yogya, a guy, presenting himself as Leo, maybe in his early fifties, starts talking to me. At the beginning, I feel reluctant to engage too much in a conversation. I do not want to get too involved with people trying to sell things – a reaction not only to the stories I heard about *batik* guides on *Malioboro*, but also an individual behaviour resulting from my experiences in countries like India, where importunate vendors were the normal case. But quickly I find out that Leo is not working at that shop; he tells me that he is taking classes at university every afternoon, he emphasizes the importance of education, about the struggle of fighting corruption in Indonesia, about recently elected president Joko Widodo, who will have to prove himself to him, and so forth. I nod and agree, ask minor questions, entertained brilliantly because I like his attitude towards things. I am remotely familiar with some of the topics like the president's election, but first and foremost because Leo is talking with verve, from time to time asking me back – yes, I would like to see the underground mosque later on – just to quickly keep on speaking cheerfully about anything and nothing. Once the conversation (which actually was a monologue) starts to lose momentum, he asks, whether I had seen the *musang*. I don't understand, which seems outright outrageous to him – the *musang* over there, the thing, the drink, the animal. I understand, I have to see the *luwak* (Asian palm civet), he tells me (and I agree), the coffee-beans-eating cat that tourists like to see, and whose intestinally fermented coffee sells for good money – it's just over there, ten meters.

At a small café he introduces me to his wife, offers a bottle of cooled water, and, in a small cage, the *luwak*. He is sick; Leo tries to feed him, then leaves, his wife stays, trying to feed the *luwak*, too, telling me stories about how funny it was to watch him just until recently before he got ill, and then she leaves too and Leo comes back with some herbs. They are completely absorbed by their care, and I enjoy myself, being left aside. No touristic amusement like 'touch him', 'feed him', 'take a picture' is offered. I am just a sweaty tourist and, as I have to tell a slightly disappointed Leo, unfortunately no veterinarian – my insightful gazing, nodding and grunting during their talk sparked false hopes. They have to help him with medicine, Leo states, and starts to apply the mashed medicinal herbs to the cat's anus, slightly disgusted. I'm surprised. His wife is giggling and bubbling over from laughter. That is somewhat uncomfortable, I don't know whether I intruded on that situation or if I was invited to it – but why would

someone invite me to such an event?! Leo engages in a long talk with his wife, I sit aside, watch them, from time to time they tell me something in English, but although I appreciate this situation with these two friendly, funny, and caring persons a lot, it is uncommon to be involved that way without actually actively partaking. An hour later, the main entrance to the water castle is officially about to close soon, I announce that I will go on looking around the area. Leo reacts like this was a full-blown sensation. Don't I want to see the mosque and the defensive walls, they are beautiful, historically revealing, pieces of art, religion, divine leadership?! Of course I do, I didn't know... apparently I was not just 'left aside'... what about my blinkered standards of hospitality? After that cat-intermezzo I feel the surprising ease of non-obligation. Although he was willing to show me around the area from the beginning, this did not override his private concerns – but what are these then, why is he guiding me around?

On our way he talks about the areal partitioning of his neighbourhood – he lives nearby and apparently knows anybody crossing our way –, at the mosque he tells me about the symbolic of the architecture, its construction and usage, throwing in some jokes here and there, he talks about his opinion on the place, a mixture of aesthetic admiration, pleasure and pride derived from its popularity with tourists and others (he tells me the story of a Jakartan agency arriving for a photo-shoot for some magazine), as well as his own attachment to the place: only when few people are around he likes to come here by himself. His pace fits me perfectly, slightly faster than the average current of peoples, every now and then he waits at stairs and warns me with a raised arm from falling down or hitting my head – not just in a protective sense but as a means of quicker advancement. To me, being stuck in a dawdling mass of people bears almost infinite amounts of frustration. Therefore, I welcome Leo's expediting methods a lot. He is unobtrusive and seems to enjoy himself, too, when he imitates the Imam's call in one of the prayer-alcoves and asks me to do so as well, to get a feeling of the extraordinary acoustics of that place. It does not strike me at that moment that his reassuring and seemingly naturally coming way of showing me round might stem from routine. But right now I just think about the fact that his services are of professional quality and that I would be willing to pay him an adequate fee. As we walk further, he playfully joins the group pictures other people like to take with me, again in an unobtrusive but cheerful manner.



The labyrinth inside kampung Jeron Benteng, image: Fermin Suter.

I am hesitant about asking him explicitly why he does that – guiding me around –, whether he does this regularly and all the other questions. It remains unclear whether he avoids answering or if it is due to my cautiously vague questions that I don't find out anything about that. He then wants to present me to his brother – who is remarkably younger, bulkier and does not look like him at all, no way! But, interestingly,

that brother works in a *batik* shop, we are about to enter now. From the 'brother's' blunt face, eyes are peering into nowhere, stock-still, that person's presence alone casts out any liveliness from this dark room draped with cloth. I wish to spark a conversation, but my words are useless, he is inaccessible and instead of telling me his name he recommends me to buy a Sarong for my mother – and the cheerful atmosphere from before ultimately deteriorates into that numb and painfully futile sales talks people have to perform in such situations. I am occupied with the question, what kind of distant kinship- or strategic relation those two might have – I have, all around the *kraton*, not seen that kind of *batik* shops, but only very neatly maintained, official-looking shops –, and what is in for Leo in that? It makes no sense to me that he would spend hours with me just for the purpose of getting commissioned by the shop-owning 'brother' for those two (horribly overpriced) postcards I end up buying to be set free from the '*batik*-talk'. As it is about to start raining, Leo accompanies me to a gate from where I know where to go. He clearly feels a certain responsibility here, and we separate on cordial terms, with him telling me, I should come back the days to come. I could find him around that spot we met today.

It was not until another incident that I grasped something of that troubling mixture of hospitality, non-observance, pride and business sense, and, accordingly, the mélange of my felt comforts, discomforting distrust, as well as guilt, obligation and gratitude.

On another day, Mira, my colleague, and I are on our way to the Sultan's Palace, where we meet 'Wibawa'. Leading us into the pagoda-like wedding ceremony temple, we hear the building's history in every detail. Wibawa is a far travelled man, a teacher, coquette about his excellent English, leader of a *Gamelan* Orchestra (traditional percussive instruments ensemble), but he does not sing, because women's voices simply sound better, he grins. The back of the building seems locked or blocked by walls and tables, but he leads us inside, and the complex turns accessible, now appears to be a public space although it makes the impression of a ceremonial hall for private and royal events. He walks casually, like someone who strolls through his home, shows and tells us about wood-carved details, historical backgrounds, he chatters with employees cleaning. Showing us the matrimonial bed backstage we realize that he thinks of us as a couple – and to stick to the role, nobody interferes, which proves to be fruitful, as we engage in a lengthy conversation not only on his own marriage, but also on marriage practices in Germany and Indonesia in general. We remain equally ambivalent about that comparison as he emphasizes the advantage in Europe, that one is not obliged to throw a big wedding party with everyone invited and everything offered. On the downside, when he attended a wedding in Germany, people stood all in black and white and silent in a huge church, an atmosphere more depressing than joyous, very different from the crowded, extravagant and merry Indonesian weddings he knew. As we go on, explaining which of the buildings of the complex are publicly accessible, he starts joking about the heavy drinking Australian tourists you will find on Bali; we should avoid that, he advises cheerfully, or, if not, we should just go to Mallorca, which is closer to Europe. But inside the *kraton*, people, tourists, know how to behave, and he, so I deduct from his words, naturally plays his part in this order. Wibawa lives nearby. He knows a lot about the place, he feels proud, but with a sense of decency and humility. He avoids talking about specific duties, instead emphasizing the will of a general *kraton*-collective to enable an appropriate mode of conduct with and historical information for tourists. He represents this place, as a subject as well as a guide, and, if necessary, he defends it (against drunken tourists). To guide us appears to be a responsible and entertaining task to him; to us it is a comforting way of handing oneself over to the plans of others.

The pit-stop at a *batik* shop is short; with cascades of words of appreciation and awe I try to push myself outside as subtly as possible. Wibawa awaits us outside to continue that tour with us and to show us traditional artisanry, the cultural heritage that is actively performed inside the *kraton* and publicly mediated, as he states. He tells us about the ritual/game on the southern square, where one tries to reach the middle of two Banyan trees blindfolded (from a distance of around fifty metres) to bring fortune to one's life. Despite dozens of attempts he never managed to do so, there was too much turmoil inside him, he thinks, so he solved this problem by stopping to believe in it. In general, some people are not entirely happy inside the *kraton*, he adds. He might be one of them but prefers to state this as a general fact. People don't earn well inside *kraton*. As little evidence there is about that, it is a restraint complaint I hear repeatedly. To Wibawa, playing the *gamelan* is family tradition, and only once he follows in those footsteps, he is allowed to live in the house the *kraton* provides. Like this, cultural heritage is practically conserved and renewed, traditions built. He mentions a lot of work (what kind of work?) and little happiness – but that does not apply to him, he says. He is talking personal in a not strictly personal sense, about things preoccupying him, things that he identified in other peoples' life, too, things that trouble him, although maybe less than others. And although I have difficulties to follow his wordings, I get the trouble he wishes to express, whose ever it may be, how serious they might be. And he states: Unlike many Indonesians, to whom breeding and grooming singing birds is a common practice, he does not wish to have singing birds. They are not free, he says lightly.

On yet another day, I talk to a man picking garbage, and who offers to show me around the stretch at *Taman Sari*. And he, too, appreciates the house he can live in, but, yes, he would very much like to work outside of the *kraton*. Unfortunately, this is impossible for him, he says, as he does not wish to put his accommodation at risk. When I asked whether it was true that people get housing offered and what he thought about it, we were taking the same route as with Leo, but this time, I got to ask a lot and received more detailed information, an extra effort from my guide whose English is rudimentary and whose name I never recalled, because he didn't emphasize it as much as others did. Now he is hesitant to talk about his discontent with *kraton* rules, and he gives me an abashed smile, my question discomforts him. That mixture of dedication, pride, moderate critique and consciousness of dependency seems rather strange. People living here are seemingly just as proud as they feel bound. According to him, people are gathered by the *kraton* administration on a regular basis, to get schooling. They learn

about the historical significance of certain buildings, about the finesses of woodcarving works on temples, about the procedure of sultanate ceremonies, or about historical sources of *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre) stories. Unlike these, the less prestigious and 'subordinate' occupations like garbage picking or vending, that grant a certain financial and social security, cannot make up for the ligation to the *kraton's* social-economic structure that aims at proffering cultural heritage as a means of touristic attraction and self-sustainability. In this context, prestige and, it seems, contentment are especially derived from partaking in cultural/traditional and artisanal practices like playing in a *Gamelan* orchestra or working at official work centres for *batik* or *wayang* puppets – repeatedly I notice the importance that a shop, an activity, policy is 'officially' certified, initiated or welcomed. And associated with such representative duties inside the *kraton*, self-confidence arises and allows not only for pride, but also for connecting with tourists based on mutual interest. Mutual interest in each other as individuals, but also for example the tourist's urge to learn about traditional music or artisanry, and the guide's will to elaborate on such things in relation to his own profession and the *kraton's* culture-politics, thereby exhibiting and performing cultural capital by 'teaching' a tourist.

On the other hand, to my nameless guide, guiding is to fulfill a duty. Once we are back at the entrance I ask him, whether people guiding tourists free of charge are allowed to accept payment. His answer starts as a 'yes-no' and ends with an explanation that it is possible, but must never be asked for – he tried to avoid even insinuating payment, which would be the same as requesting it. I'm happy to compensate him for his services, but he does not leave, although the tour clearly is finished and we ran out of conversational topics. It is not until I thank him very formally and tell him not to feel obliged to stay with me any longer, that he leaves me with the impression of tremendous commitment and obligation, if not obedience. It is integral part of people's collective duty inside the *kraton* – or at least to some of them – to offer tourists their guiding services. The modes of conduct of such tourism work as well as its significance for individuals are diverse: on the one hand, they are virtually empowering by offering a representative social role, schooling, a position of self-confidence and the role of a cultural mediator, while on the other hand, they appear to fit into a pattern of strict rule and alignment.

5. Conclusion: Troubled After All

There is a concomitance observable: the informal local guides at the *kraton* seem to experience reassurance and pride as well as discomforting dependency. An ambivalence one can experience as a tourist, but one that is not supposed to be a visible part of the *kraton* lifestyle enterprise. When practicing the emotional labour (Hochschild 2003: 137–161) of tourist-guiding, they have to align their personal feelings with the *kraton* rules. Their pride of impersonating the *kraton* ideals of cultural heritage evokes my joy and admiration; their sense of duty and their discomfort when realizing their 'inferior' role and dependency triggers my feelings of gratefulness and indebtedness. It feels, after all, ambivalent.

This individual ambivalence of the tourist is, although probably fundamentally different from the existential dimensions of, for example, the 'nameless guide's' anxiety, structurally linked to the ambivalence grounding the different representatives of '*kraton* guides' I have met. At a *wayang* puppet manufactory where my colleague and I were guided to, we get the whole treat of technical details, symbolism, and individual application: the elderly man in front of us speaks restlessly and energetically as we sit on the tiny chairs opposite the rickety working desk, where puppets get perforated, carved, painted. He tells us about the symbolic of *wayang* puppets, which apply universally to anybody, also to us, regardless of race or gender, he says; about attributes of body and nature, needs, judgments and responsibility. The complexity of significations of ornamental details is immense, too much to follow, but as he speaks, I cannot take my eyes from his face and the puppet, his happy smile. Again I see the pride of the artisan, the representative and conservator of a tradition. What he does in order to explain to us is an elaborate performance. His wording is refined, he modulates his voice dramatically according to the topics, he leans towards us, holds the puppets against the light, and repeatedly relates to us as welcome visitors from far away. He talks about harmony, open-mindedness and mutual recognition. Ultimately, to him, *wayang* symbolism is about openness of heart and mind, best practiced when 'offering' one's cultural background to a foreigner, to us. To him, sharing those things is the ultimate essence of hospitality. Listening to his words, the room, the atmosphere becomes intense and tight, it constrains my senses and occupies my attention, drawing me towards that world of *wayang* symbolism. His meta-performative appreciation of tradition, moulded into a philosophy of hospitality, is welcoming in the very best sense, working as he wishes. But at the same time I remain hesitant about its somewhat esoteric content. Although I feel admiration and appreciation for such traditional-artisanal wisdom, I feel bound and tied. It is a vague discomfort, which reminds me of the nameless guide's discomfort enunciating his critique. In here, it seems, all that matters are those puppets, the culture they represent, and ultimately the place where all this is preserved and cultivated: the *kraton*.

Being more intense, more refined as a practice, this guiding is fundamentally different from anything that manifests at other Yogyakarta tourist sites. On *Malioboro* there are various purposes of informal guiding. *Batik* and *becak* guides are entangled in a very specific form of tourist-guiding, working as affective brokers, playing on guilt and sympathy in a economically driven system. To the tourist, this offers ultimately only economically relevant actions. Not only for the guide but also for the tourist, guiding and being guided is a common practice fundamentally rooted in economic exchange, which allows for side-excursions. These visits into backstage areas are at the same time, depending on your perspective, insights into the process of manufacturing goods and insights into the social production of 'staged backdoor regions' (MacCannell 1973) of tourist experience. When shop owners who show you the production sites of jewellery in an adjacent building first have to inwardly call in some workers to sit at their tables and do some demonstrative working, before you enter the backdoor, this clearly transpires as a measure to create an authentic atmosphere, where the tourist is 'closer' to the origins of goods and

probably more willing to purchase those auratic gems. 'Ideally' both, guide and tourist, walk away from such encounters with a feeling of having made a good deal.

The alerting guide on the other hand, is driven either by values and a deep understanding of economic profit. His guidance occurs, although spatially at the same spots as the *batik* guides', in a different place. He refers to places, people, actions absent, guiding the tourist towards a critical notion of his surrounding, ideally resulting in an 'enlightened' state of mind comparable to the one of the locals. Such protective and integrative guiding works emotionally in the opposite direction from what *batik* guides do: whilst these most likely wish to create emotionally tense situations, be that overwhelming comfort and amicability or feeling indebted, as well as moralized situations of high pressure to act (maybe resulting in an absolving purchase), the alerting guide pursues the tourist's emotional appeasement and preventive action so she or he will not become troubled in the first place.



Following the tour guide, film still: Emanuel Mathias.

Interestingly enough, the dissimulated *batik* guide, the one that imitates an alerting guide, seems to learn his practices from both types. He understands how to serve the troubled tourist's longing for explanation and explicitly exhibited honesty. Combining personal empathic skills and displays of care, as well as concrete but hidden economic motivation, he establishes a relation of guide and tourist unlike any other, enabling for unpleasant tourist surprises, especially insights into one's own lacking insights, but also into the power of ascribed and presupposed roles tourists and locals might play in their 'strange encounters'.

All three types have in common, that they know how to deal with the troublesome tourist's affective state. They comfort, they shame, they surprise, and they rely on the tourist being troubled because of unawareness, pressing interests, guilt, feelings of indebtedness and proximity. And they are in control of the role they want to play – just as the tourist is free to walk away anytime. Making him wishing not do so is their common immediate goal, independent of their different interests.

Compared to that, the homogenizing effects of the *kraton's* culture/tourism/guiding policy are remarkable. Once we enter the *kraton*, we all are, somehow, part of an overarching *kraton* politics, in which cultural practice and touristic experience can create a double bind. To the guides, the reassurance of cultural representation implies obedience to rules that eventually might tilt into discomfort. And to the trouble-expecting tourist the most 'successful' guiding performances spark doubts about his own liberty and whether he is partaking in a discomfortingly successful *kraton* tourism-machine. Emotional contagion, aesthetic admiration and gratefulness about the *kraton* guides' overwhelming hospitality mix up with a vague unease about staged authenticity, self-exoticization and a *kraton* identity politics. Just as the tourist won't escape his embedment in an overarching tourism machinery, the *kraton* guide can't leave the *kraton* and its culture politics. The overlap of those two areas at a point, where guides and tourists interact, creates both an immensely rich, joyful, informative, empowering and mutually beneficial opportunity for strangers (and one could indeed say 'cultures' meeting), and an unsettling system of all-embracing co-dependency of *kraton* identity and tourist politics, where individuals are being subjugated as servants of tourists' needs for information and the *kraton's* needs for representation. In this respect, there is a discomforting side to the Yogyakarta *kraton*-tourism which both affects – although in very different ways – tourists and informal guides in mutually reinforcing and alleviating interactive patterns of troublesome tourism.

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