‘Some Glimpses of an Asian PhD Journey in Tourism’ – An Ethnodrama

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Abstract
By combining three different genres – academic writing, theatrical playwriting and performing – this article presents different ways of knowing and representing realities for tourism scholars. More specifically, drawing upon social scientists’ influential work on performance texts and an ethnodramatic script written by the authors based on dramatized ethnographic and autoethnographic fieldwork, it portrays a tourism PhD journey in an Asian institution. As an attempt of representing the power structures underpinning academia (and tourism academia), namely postcolonial, gendered, global, regional, institutional, and socio-cultural forces, among others, the 8 scenes constituting the script (one of which is enacted and presented in a video) discuss how Asian PhD journeys are shaped by specific approaches to supervision, issues of authorship, gendered dynamics and postcolonial legacies. The main rationale behind this work lies in the recognition of the powerful/performative role of embodied texts and performances in producing, shaping and re-presenting realities. More specifically, the ethnodrama presented in this paper and its embodied representation act as vehicles that are both political and entertaining in producing meanings.

Keywords: Asian PhD Students; ethnodrama; ethnotheatre; performance texts; gender; postcolonial theory.

Introduction
We no longer just write culture. We perform culture. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; p. 14)
Performance makes and does things: materially, affectively, imaginatively. (Hamera, 2018; p. 636)

This article was conceived as an attempt to answer Denzin’s (2003, p. 187) ‘call to performance’, a manifesto declaring that ‘performance-based human disciplines can contribute to radical social change, to economic justice, to a cultural politics that extends critical race theory’. In his ‘call’,
Denzin (2003) envisions performances not as acts that merely reproduce and represent social realities but as embodied political performative practices that produce, challenge and reinvent the social world. Importantly, as political acts, performances can revolutionise ethnographic praxis by complementing and enhancing traditional ethnographic texts and suggesting embodied ways of conducting, presenting and representing fieldwork.

Despite Denzin’s (2003) ‘call’, social scientists’ influential work on performance texts (e.g. Barone & Eisner, 2012; Conquergood, 1998; Mienczakowski, 2001; Saldaña, 2008) and multiple examples of studies mobilising embodied performances as methodological avenues to disseminate research in various disciplines (Barone, 2002; Goldstein, 2001; Stephenson, 2018; Vanover & Saldaña, 2005), ways of knowing incorporating academic texts and theatrical representations have been neglected by tourism scholars. Indeed, examples of performance texts are almost inexistent in the tourism literature. Moreover, while studies employing performance texts and performances in other disciplines have explored the reactions of the audience to performances (see Brinkmann et al., 2019; Schneider et al., 2014; Sinding et al., 2002), similar examples are rarely found in the tourism literature. Since tourism stakeholders’ (e.g., tourists, locals, industry practitioners, scholars) experiences are multisensorial and complex, they cannot always be fully captured by traditional ways of representing realities (e.g., academic texts). In this regard, methodologies that encapsulate forms of embodied knowledge, such as performance texts, ethnodrama and ethnotheatre, could produce ethnographic (re)presentations that are more comprehensive and evocative of tourism realities (see Mura, 2020). As an attempt to fill in this knowledge gap and respond to various calls for epistemological and methodological plurality in tourism (see Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015), this article challenges traditional ways of knowing in academia by providing three different representational styles, namely academic writing, playwriting, and text performing. More specifically, it presents a traditional academic text, a theatrical script (an ethnodrama) and an embodied performance of the script (a video).

The play script—entitled ‘Some Glimpses of an Asian PhD Journey in Tourism’—was written by the three authors with the main aim of representing the power structures (driven by post/colonial, gendered, ethnicity-based, cultural, capitalist, and globalizing forces, among others) shaping the life of an Asian PhD scholar in an Asian institution. It is based on ethnographic and
autoethnographic fieldwork conducted by two of the authors, namely an Asian female scholar who completed a PhD in tourism in an Asian institution and a non-Asian male tourism scholar who has supervised PhD scholars and worked in an Asian university for ten years. The third author, a Middle Eastern scholar operating in the field of communication, is also a film producer and playwright. He plays a crucial role in this research project for two main reasons. First, his contribution supports Saldaña (2008) on the importance of collaborations between academicians and professionals to produce embodied forms of knowledge (e.g., theatrical scripts and representations) as the former (e.g., tourism scholars) may not have the technical skills necessary to mount theatrical productions. Second, by including perspectives from scholars operating in different disciplines, this collaboration contributes to bridge different fields of inquiry, such as tourism, communication, performance studies and theatre studies. By doing so, it fosters a form of post-disciplinary inquiry that goes ‘beyond disciplines’, an important point advocated by Coles, Hall and Duval (2006) to guarantee plurality and depth in tourism epistemological efforts.

Although some commentators may argue that many of the power structures raised by the playscript may not necessarily apply only to tourism scholars, we believe that its ‘alternative textuality’ and embodied performance both represent an important foundation for discussing and reflecting upon the methodological avenues that theatrical scripts and embodied performances can offer to tourism scholars. By presenting and discussing a script on a topic that may be of interest to both tourism and non-tourism scholars, we believe that the novelty of this work lies in its inclusion of ‘different types of texts’ complementing academic texts and an embodied performance. Producing ‘alternative texts’ alongside representations that go beyond texts may allow stakeholders (researchers, participants, audience) social scientists to understand social realities in general, and tourism experiences in particular, in greater detail and depth. Moreover, the co-construction and representation of tourism experiences through embodied/academically unconventional methodologies lead to highly participatory relationships between researchers and research participants, especially if the latter represent sensitive groups (Canosa et al., 2017). In this regard, the participatory nature of performance texts may pave the way to a more inclusive and democratic way to make and represent tourism academic knowledge, one in which participants can have access to ‘academic knowledge’ in a more entertaining and comprehensible fashion and express their opinion on how knowledge concerning themselves is assembled.
The article is structured over three main parts. First, a review of the literature concerning textuality and performance texts is presented, drawing upon relevant theoretical work about performance texts and embodied knowledge (e.g., Conquergood, 1998; Denzin, 2003; Mienczakowski, 2001; Pelias, 2008; Saldaña, 2005, 2008, 2018; Turner & Turner, 1982). Second, the existing published knowledge on performance texts in tourism alongside examples of tourism-related forms of arts-based research and ethnodramatic representations, as well as academic structures of power in the neoliberal institutional setting are assessed. Third, the playscript, consisting of eight scenes, alongside an embodied representation of one of the scenes (Scene 6), is presented and critically discussed within the context of the existing literature.

**Texts and performance texts**

*A traditional journal article in print may competently present the descriptive and analytic findings from fieldwork. But a performative approach of high aesthetic quality has the potential to engage audiences emotionally and communally through real-time theatrical immersion.* (Saldaña, 2018; p. 664)

In *Writing Culture – The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Clifford and Marcus (1986) discuss the centrality of writing as a practice producing and representing ethnographic fieldwork. As Marcus (1986, p. 263) points out, ‘textualization is at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise, both in the field and in university settings. In an important sense, fieldwork is synonymous with the activity of inscribing diverse contexts of oral discourse through field notes and recordings’. Importantly, a point emerging from the collection of essays edited by Clifford and Marcus (1986) concerns the power structures shaping and constraining academic forms of textuality, which have often accommodated and represented the ‘Other’ in questionable (ethnic, Eurocentric, colonial, gendered) forms. As such, it is important to note that rather than being a neutral practice traditionally academic writing has been delimited by specific conventions and styles of representation that only in the 1970s have begun to be challenged in the social sciences (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 2012, 2018) on the ‘blurred genres’ and the subsequent historical moments of qualitative research). Within this scenario, Nelson (2006, p. 105) has regarded writing as a
dominant and exclusive practice that ‘has long since established itself as the appropriate means of storage and distribution of knowledge’.

While performance texts do not intend to subvert the centrality of textuality in the social sciences, they disrupt current representational practices by introducing alternative ways of knowing and presenting knowledge. As acts decentering the textual paradigm dominating Western epistemological traditions (Conquergood, 1998), performance texts dramatize academic writings by turning fieldnotes, interview transcripts and other forms of textual and visual empirical material into playscripts. According to Saldaña (2018, p. 662), ‘an ethnodrama, a compound word joining ethnography and drama, is a written play script, teleplay, or screenplay consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and digital artifacts such as diaries, social media, email correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings, and historic documents’. Moreover, as ethnodramatic playscripts are turned into ethnotheatre, namely ‘a live or mediated performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of empirical material’ (Saldaña, 2018, p. 662), they constitute highly evocative embodied enactments of social realities.

When scholarly work is presented on stage through a bodily performance, it becomes more entertaining and accessible than traditional academic texts (Mienczakowski, 2001). It establishes ‘immediacy, involvement and intimacy’ (Conquergood, 1998; p. 26) with the audience by encapsulating simultaneously forms of mimesis (‘imitation’ as re-presentation of social realities), poiesis (‘making’ as the production of new meanings of events and social phenomena) and kinesis (‘movement’ as a socio-political act that strives to change crystallized power structures) (see Conquergood, 1998; Denzin, 2003). As performative and kinetic acts promoting ‘struggle’ and political activism, Conquergood (1998, p. 32) contends, performance texts propel ‘a move from cultural invention to intervention’. Also, since they allow the audience to comment on any aspect represented on stage during any phase of the research process (particularly at the close of a performance) (Mienczakowski, 2001), performance texts and their enacted embodiments are research endeavours that are more inclusive – and thus more democratic – than traditional academic inquiry practices (Denzin, 2003). Overall, as a form of arts-based research (see Barone
& Eisner, 2012), performance texts represent forms of inquiry that are highly dialogical, dialectical and participatory.

Despite this, employing performance texts may also involve challenges for social scientists. As embodied ways of knowing have emerged in academic environments traditionally dominated by written publications/journal articles (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), there exists uncertainty about the criteria to assess non-textual methodological approaches. In this regard, Finley (2003) contends that the various criteria currently used to assess quantitative and qualitative research cannot be applied to forms of research that combine ethnographic work and embodied performances. Rather, the assessment of performance texts can only occur through a re-evaluation and re-appreciation by social scientists of expressions and forms of art as assets to conduct research. More specifically, she proposes a set of questions to be asked to researchers and participants as ‘postfoundational rubric for assessing arts-based qualitative inquiry’ (Finley, 2003; p. 294). While the complete rubric is available in Finley (2003; p. 294), the main questions to assess forms of arts-based research include:

- Whose voices do I hear most clearly, those of the researchers or those of the participants?
- Have researchers been willing to experiment with form, both in their practice of research and in their representations? Are they limited by the hegemony of research discourse?
- Does the research (practice and representation) allow a heuristic, “open” text, in which there are spaces for multiple meanings to be constructed? Does the research provoke questions, rather than draw conclusions?
- Is the practice and the representation of research passionate and visceral? Does it involve activity that creates opportunities for communion among participants, researchers, and the various discourse communities who might be audiences of (and participants with) the research text?
- Is the reader/viewer, or participant, likely to be moved to some kind of action?

Other texts in tourism
Despite the prevalence of traditional methodological approaches in tourism (Wilson et al., 2020), studies embracing ‘other’ ways of knowing have been contemplated by tourism scholars. In this
regard, a rather conspicuous body of knowledge has reiterated the important role of visuality and visual methods to represent tourism realities (see Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Scarles, 2010; Feighey, 2003). Embodied forms of knowledge production and representations also exist in the tourism literature. Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgley (2013), for example, employ arts-based research to explore the experiences and identities of a group of Central and Eastern European migrant women working in the tourism industry in the UK. Through a project that required women to produce and exhibit pieces of artwork (e.g. paintings, photographs and poems) representative of their life experiences, the study shows how arts-based inquiry leads to creative, participative, empowering and transformative experiences for research participants. Similarly, Chatkaewnapanon and Kelly (2019) mobilise participatory community art practice to give voice to a group of young people in rural Thailand and promote more inclusive and sustainable forms of tourism. The participatory and empowering role of alternative/embodied methodologies is also reiterated by Canosa, et al. (2017), whose study involves children and young people growing in tourist areas in Byron Shire, Australia, through participatory film. More specifically, the research participants were guided in the production of animation movies representing their experiences of childhood as host community in an iconic tourist destination.

Although Canosa et al. (2017), Rydzik et al. (2013) and Chatkaewnapanon and Kelly (2019) represent meaningful examples of alternative texts and ways of knowing in tourism through participants’ embodied experiences and forms of art, they do not qualify as performance/theatrical texts. Conversely, within the context of critical sports event tourism research, an example of performance text is provided by Wright (2019), who produced an ethnodrama based on the responses received by industry experts on the possibility of New Zealand to host the 35th Summer Olympic Games in 2032. Importantly, Wright (2019, p. 15) emphasises the importance of representing the industry experts’ dialogues as a performance text ‘to produce something that would provoke a reaction, positive or negative’. In this regard, he contends, the presentation of the empirical material through ‘alternative texts’ encourages the audience to construct its own meanings and understandings in a more independent fashion (Wright, 2019).

Overall, the above-mentioned studies represent significant examples of work employing arts-based research and performance texts. Moreover, they are representative examples of what Ivanova,
Buda and Burrai (2020) have recently referred to as ‘creative and disruptive methodologies in tourism studies’, namely ways of knowing and methodological approaches that can both challenge existing methodological practices (which are based on – and reproduce – crystallised power structures) and create alternative, more just forms of inquiry. However, while aspects of alternative textuality have started to appear in the tourism literature (as the previous examples show), at the current time embodied, ethnotheatrical representations of tourism empirical material are still scarce. Within this scenario, this paper adds to the existing debate on creative and disruptive methodologies by presenting both an ethnodramatic script and its embodied representation.

**Academic power structures and the Generational Influence**

It is well established globally that higher education institutions today are fundamentally engrossed within the capitalist neoliberal ethos of conduct, obsessed with (and dependent on) metrics (Giroux, 2010; Hill & Kumar, 2012; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Indeed, the value system of academia nowadays mirrors the market economy, where quantity of output as per ‘globally set standards’ constitutes the quality of an institute as well as individuals (academics). A closer look at these so called ‘global standards’ presents an intricated web of global and local power structures, which govern the logic of science itself (Apple, 2000; Foucault, 1988; Canagarajah, 1996; Kleinman & Vallas, 2001). Social scientists have long argued on the (neo)colonial nature of such standards, where knowledge production worldwide is pursued according to norms imposed by Eurocentric and capitalist ideologies (see Bhambra, Gebrial & Nişancıoğlu, 2018; Grosfoguel, 2007; Joseph, Reddy, & Searle-Chatterjee, 1990; Mignolo, 2002; Spivak, 1991).

Within this scenario, certain elements, such as the predominant positivistic tradition of detached science, objectivity, universalism, dependency on western theories and knowledge praxis, and English language, for instance, have come to sit comfortably within generations of intellectuals trained within Westerncentric/Eurocentric scholarly structures. This phenomenon has been reiterated through perspectives like the ‘captive mind’ (Alatas, 1972), ‘West to the rest’ (Wallerstein, 1997), ‘intellectual hegemony’ (Mignolo, 2002), ‘epistemicide’ (de Sousa Santos, 2014), ‘academic decolonisation/decolonisation of the mind’ (wa Thiong'o, 1986) amongst others. In essence, they highlight the continuing forms of (neo)colonial hegemonic academic practices.
that continue to subjugate ‘other’ ways of knowing and being in the world. Indeed, higher education institutions have become the key sites of cultural and epistemological invasion.

Similarly, in tourism academia, narratives concerning the Euro/western-centric nature of its epistemic conduct have been gradually gaining momentum, with more critical scholars calling for (and also developing) inclusive ways of knowing and being that challenge the current status quo (i.e. Adams, 2020; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Chang, 2019; Hall, 2011; Tribe, 2010; Winter, 2009; Wijesinghe, et al., 2017). These debates have also brought to the fore the increasing effects of neoliberal ideologies on tourism research practices where economic-centric paradigms govern decisions within academia (and academics) and further the effects of coloniality in knowledge production and dissemination (Edelheim, 2020; Korstanje, 2018). This means that commercialised forms of research/knowledge, which are often perceived to have higher economic value than forms of research that attempt to address fundamental social and political questions, have become dominant.

However, despite concerns being raised, it remains a reality that tourism intellectual spaces in former colonies predominantly remain submerged in research beliefs and practices that are shaped by a complex interplay of past colonial/postcolonial and current neocolonial forces (see Chang, 2021; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2019). This is not surprising as most of the current Asian tourism scholars have been educated in systems that directly and indirectly have tended to promote Western values (Mura & Sharif, 2015). Such phenomenon still exists because each generation of tourism scholars has played – and continues to play – an active role in ‘tourism myth making’, where young/emerging academics are trained to internalise various institutional, philosophical, methodological cultural norms (see Wijesinghe, Mura & Culala, 2019). In this regard, exploring PhD students’ experiences becomes important as it represents a way to understand whether and how epistemological legacies from the past are still present in tourism academia and the ways in which academic myths propagate across time and space.

**Methodology**
The ethnodramatic script is mainly based on the autoethnographic and ethnographic work and experiences conducted by two of the authors as both PhD tourism students and tourism scholars in
Asia. More specifically, the dialogues and monologues constituting the play script were written based on semi-structured interviews conducted by one of the authors during her PhD fieldwork (carried out between 2015 and 2018 in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam) and a subsequent study conducted by the two authors on post-colonial power structures in Asian (Malaysia) tourism academia (completed and published in 2019). The participants of this study, in particular, stemmed from several countries within Asia, including India, Philippines, Indonesia, Iran and Malaysia. The fieldnotes collected by the two authors during several research projects, alongside recollected past experiences in academia, also contributed to shape the script’s characters, scenes and interactions. We acknowledge that the power structures discussed in the ethnodrama are limited to the ethnographic experiences of the researchers of the study spanning predominantly in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, India, Thailand, Vietnam, and Philippines. Hence, when we refer to Asia/Asian, the discussion particularly refers to the dynamic structures of power within the tourism academia in the above setting. As Ooi (2019) discusses, these experiences also entail cultural complexities as diverse manifestations exist within the tourism academia in Asia. As such, while some phenomena may be representative of power structures influencing academic practices elsewhere in Asia, and outside of Asia, including the West, we acknowledge the polylithic nature of influences, including the (neo)colonial legacies that remain present across varying academic settings. We do not thus promote a generalised/essentialist view of PhD students experiences as they remain non-monolithic, but rather bring to fore, via a creative method, the predominant social manifestations inherently present within academic settings heavily governed by colonial and neoliberal practices, as a way to open a dialogue on pressing issues.

Following Saldaña (2008), the formal empirical material was converted into a ‘dramatized’ script (see Appendix A). Here it is important to emphasise that, as dramatized representations of social realities, not necessarily the scenarios presented may be experienced by all the doctoral students in Asia. Also, in line with Saldaña (2008), who has often reiterated the entertaining nature of ethnodrama and ethnotheatre, some features of the characters and their endeavours at times were accentuated with the intent of making the script both humorous and thought-provoking. Despite this, the scenes represent the lived experiences of two of the authors during their routines as PhD scholars and supervisors in an Asian institution. In other words, we acknowledge that the ethnodrama is a representation of lived experiences that are partial and subjective (as any other
forms of representation). Yet, it displays a realistic and entertaining portrayal of an Asian PhD journey in an Asian university.

After finalising the plot of the ethnodrama, the authors decided to produce an embodied enactment of one of its scenes. Due to various financial and practical constraints (mainly related to the limitations imposed by the coronavirus outbreak), only scene 6 – ‘Disha’s proposal defence’ – was turned into an ethnotheatre. However, we believe that this scene is particularly representative of a scenario that several PhD students had to face during the pandemic. With one exception, all the characters of the story were enacted by tourism scholars (including two of the authors of this paper), who decided to participate in the project voluntarily. A copy of the script was shared with all the actors and various rehearsal sessions were held before recording the final version of the scene. The video of the scene can be accessed here [see Appendix B].

*Enacting scene 6 – A reflective note*
Enacting a scene of the script offered to the authors/producers and actors an opportunity to reflect upon their lived experiences and the multiple possible ways to use the body to represent them. From the first time the group met to review the script, read it aloud together and rehearse to the final stages when the various parts were recorded and staged, we became aware of the political and non-neutral nature of our bodily enactments, as advocated by Denzin (2003). For example, the awareness of our gendered bodies – alongside their representation of our ethnicities – became evident in the choice of the characters, their role in the play and their movements and gestures. Through several rehearsals and various discussions, producers and actors had to agree on how male, female, Asian and non-Asian bodies were supposed to be represented on stage (words, accents, movements, clothes, etc.). This brought to the fore moments of reflection upon socially constructed ways of being and behaving alongside possibilities to challenge expected representations. Importantly, we became aware of the performative aspect of our bodily enactments, which not only included acts of *mimesis* (‘imitation’) and *poiesis* (production of new meanings) but also *kinesis* (re-evaluation and reversal of previously acquired meanings) (Conquergood, 1998). Overall, we became aware of the power of our bodily performances in (re)producing and (re)inventing old and new meanings. This represented an empowering moment as researchers, which let us reflect upon the opportunities provided by creative and disruptive
forms of qualitative inquiry, such as arts-based research, in representing tourism realities and selves (Ivanova, Buda and Burrai, 2020).

**A critical analysis of the ethnodrama and its embodied representation**

The remaining parts of the paper provide a thematic analysis of the ethnodrama and its embodied representation, which represent the empirical material based on which the discussion is conducted. The ethnographic script, entitled ‘Some Glimpses of an Asian PhD Journey in Tourism’ (see Appendix A), portrays the story of Prakash and Disha, two Indian students who are pursuing their doctoral studies in tourism in a tertiary institution in Asia. Prakash is supervised by Prof. Kumar, a male professor who tends to be assertive and dominant with his students. Prof. Kumar’s research is grounded on positivist beliefs and quantitative methods, which he somehow ‘imposes’ on Prakash. He places more emphasis on pursuing his own research agenda and fostering governmental ties than discussing the PhD student’s research preferences and beliefs. Prakash accepts all the ideas expressed by Prof. Kumar as he believes that, as a PhD student, he does not have the right to express his own opinion. Conversely, Disha is a female student supervised by a scholar who gives her more freedom to explore her research possibilities and ideas. Disha is an interpretivist researcher whose scholarly work is based on non-positivist and qualitative methods. She is opinionated and open to new ideas.

The play script consists of eight scenes, which attempt to represent the various power structures PhD students may have to navigate through in the academic world. These include postcolonial, gendered, global, regional, institutional, and socio-cultural forces, among others. Table 1 provides an overview of the single scenes and the key questions/issues they may raise. In the following text, an analysis of the four main themes emerging from the script – namely approaches to supervision, issues of authorship, gendered dynamics and postcolonial legacies – are discussed by referring to excerpts from the ethnodrama.

In the main scene of the script – ‘Disha’s proposal defence’ (Scene 6) – Disha’s scholarly work is assessed by a jury constituted by two professors. The first, Prof. Balakrishnan or Juror 1, is a male professor who’s also the chair of the committee. He is the principal evaluator of Disha’s PhD proposal. He is a quantitative researcher with strong positivist beliefs. The second jury member,
Dr. Azita or Juror 2, is a qualitative female professor. The proposal defence is an important milestone for each PhD student, including Disha, to assess the student’s progress concerning her/his literature review and methodology. Although students usually are not failed at this stage (despite being formally possible), they may be asked to change the trajectories of their research work. Major changes, which could lead to longer completion times, represent sources of discouragement and psychological distress for students.

During the defence, Disha’s beliefs and research ideas are challenged by Prof. Balakrishnan, who tries to impose his own positivist beliefs on her. Disha attempts to defend her ideas; yet, she has to give up and accept rather negative feedback. However, Dr. Azita encourages her to stand for her non-positivist beliefs and reminds the audience of the plurality of research approaches in tourism. In the final part of the scene Prof. Balakrishnan seems to silence and minimise Dr Azita’s ideas.

Table 1. Scenes and key questions/issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Questions/Issues</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 1 – Prakash (he/him) meets Prof. Kumar (he/him)</td>
<td>The blurring line between Prof. Kumar’s research project and Prakash’s PhD. Should Prakash agree to fulfil all the tasks requested by Prof. Kumar? When should he say ‘yes’ and when should he say ‘no’?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 2 – Prakash meets Disha (she/her)</td>
<td>How should supervisors and PhD students write and publish together? Is Disha right when she claims that ‘we PhD students write the papers and then our supervisors help us’? How should the authorship of the papers written together be established?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3 and 4 – Prakash, Disha and Amelia (she/her) debate different research paradigms</td>
<td>Who has the right to choose PhD students’ paradigmatic beliefs? Should supervisors impose their beliefs on students? Is positivist research still privileged in tourism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5 – Disha and her proposal defence during COVID times</td>
<td>How has the outbreak of COVID affected PhD students’ journeys? How should universities support PhD students during COVID times?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6 – Disha’s proposal defence</td>
<td>Has Juror 1 (he/him) the right to question Disha’s paradigmatic beliefs? Is Dr. Azita (she/her) allowed to express her opinion freely?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 7 – Disha meets Ronnie (he/him)</td>
<td>Are Western and Asian values different? If so, how?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 8 – (Twenty years later) Prakash meets Ali (he/him)</td>
<td>How do we change academia? What is our role, as individual scholars, in changing academia?</td>
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**Theme 1**

**Approaches to supervision**

One of the main points emerging from the first scene of the ethnodrama concerns the relationship between Prakash (the PhD student) and Prof. Kumar (the supervisor).

**PROF. KUMAR**
Ok, let’s discuss my project and your PhD.

**PROF. KUMAR**
You will help me to collect the data, and I also need help to conduct a literature review, write reports....

**PRAKASH**
Yes Sir, yes Sir, sure Sir...

**PROF. KUMAR**
... and the great thing is that you can use all this work for your PhD. We will have to slightly change your PhD proposal but that’s normal...

**PRAKASH** keeps nodding and bowing.... (Scene 1)

As various excerpts from the dialogues in Scene 1 show, the line between Prof. Kumar’s project and Prakash’s PhD seems to be blurry. As Prof. Kumar lists all the tasks and outcomes expected from Prakash, the PhD student is not allowed to express his opinions and ideas about his own expectations and preferences related to his research work. This raises questions concerning student-supervisor relationships.

In assessing the various reasons affecting doctoral studies’ completion in Australian universities, Sinclair (2004) emphasises the crucial role of supervisory practices and student-supervisors relational dynamics. More specifically, he distinguishes between ‘hands off’ and ‘hands on’ supervisory approaches based on the level of involvement and guidance provided by supervisors to PhD students. The former approach – ‘hands off’ – prescribes minimal supervision as it assumes that doctoral candidates should develop critical research skills independently during their PhD journeys. According to this pedagogical method, students are left relatively free to choose their research topics and explore possible ways to develop their PhDs, even if this may lead to a higher
risk of delaying the completion of a PhD within the usual three-year time frame allowed. Conversely, the latter style – ‘hands on’ – is driven by the idea that supervisors should play a rather ‘present’ and ‘interventionist’ role in shaping PhD students’ theoretical and methodological choices. As such, this approach may contain the risk of PhD non-completion or delayed completion in a better fashion than the ‘hands off’ style (Sinclair, 2004).

While our ethnographic and autoethnographic work portrayed in the ethnodrama does not deny the co-existence of both ‘hands on’ and ‘hands off’ supervisors/approaches in Asian tertiary institutions, it wants to emphasise the predominance of the former over the latter. The reasons behind this status quo lie in both the global and local forces shaping the current academic scenarios in general and the tourism academy in particular, which are embodied and portrayed in the character of Prof. Kumar. Prof Kumar’s reference to the administrative procedures to be completed for a ‘big project for the government’, his over-emphasis on the number of publications to be delivered, his need to have support from PhD students to accomplish the project on time, his necessity to have PhD students graduated on time by forcing them to ‘work hard and until midnight’ are representative of the global, neo-liberalist and neo-capitalist forces that shape academia (Wijesinghe et al., 2019). As education is progressively conceived as another form of production/consumption – and universities are restructured and managed as business-like entities – Prof. Kumar is more concerned about ‘quantity’, administrative procedures and KPIs than ‘quality’ and the ‘human’ aspects of education (Hall, 1994). Within this scenario, Prakash’s voice (a PhD student’s voice) is silenced and/or forced to align to what is perceived as productive outcomes by capitalist systems.
As global power structures are also affected by local traditions and socio-cultural practices, Prof. Kumar and Prakash also represent the rather hierarchical structures characteristic of many Asian countries. While the ethnodrama does not intend to reiterate stereotypical and socially constructed portrayals of the Orient (see Bhabha, 1994) or spark debates about the meanings and limitations of considering ‘Asian’ identities in relation to ‘Western selves’ (Zhang, 2018), it purposely portrays Asian institutions as rather hierarchical academic environments, in which established practices and roles are seldom challenged (Wijesinghe et al., 2019). Besides echoing both global and local/Asian power structures, Prof. Kumar also portrays the idea that tourism should mainly be conceived as a business or a business-related field of inquiry framed within positivist ways of knowing and quantitative approaches to research. This idea is also depicted by different characters in other scenes (see Figure 1 & 2 & Scene 6 video, i.e. 1:53-4:20 & 5:25-5:35).

Figure 1.

“You need to write your report more objectively. There is too much of your opinion on the report. You have to avoid bias so you need to change your writing style to make it more objective like a research and not a novel. You have to make it more systematic & structured” Prof. Dr. Balakrishnan
In this respect, while epistemological debates concerning the nature of tourism knowledge in/from Western academic circles have challenged this idea and discussed alternative ways of conceptualising and knowing tourism (see Ateljevic et al., 2007; Tribe, 1997), a rather positivist and business-oriented approach to tourism inquiry is still dominant in most of the work published in Asia by Asian tourism scholars (Mura & Pahlevan-Sharif, 2015).

**Theme 2**

**Issues of authorship**

As the ethnodrama unfolds, issues concerning attribution of authorship in research emerge in different scenes:

PROF. KUMAR
...and then of course we’ll have to write papers and publish them. For the project, we promised 10 papers but don’t worry, I have other PhD students in the team helping. (Scene 1)

PRAKASH
Professor Kumar said we will publish papers together. That’s scary as I have never done it but he said he will help me. Will we write together?

DISHA
Erm... together? Actually we PhD students write the papers and then our supervisors help us. (Scene 2)

As the excerpt from Scenes 1 shows, Prof. Kumar employs the pronoun ‘we’ to indicate teamwork and shared responsibilities in the production and publication of papers for the project. Yet, Disha’s explanation to Prakash in Scene 2 clarifies that writing papers is a task to be accomplished by PhD students. Importantly, as the conversation is entirely related to the number of papers to be published, there is no discussion of authorship’s allocation or authors’ roles and contribution in the research process.

While issues concerning the complexity of authorship credit, guest authorship and ghost authorship in large research projects have been debated in science and social science (see Erlen et al., 1997; King, 2000; House & Seeman, 2010), less attention has been paid to PhD authorship allocation by tourism scholars. This is a particularly sensitive topic due to the nature of supervisor-PhD student relationships (mostly characterised by unbalanced power structures not favouring doctoral students). The ethnodrama presented in this paper attempts to raise awareness of this issue, especially for tourism PhD scholars based in Asian institutions. Although specific studies on this issue do not appear in the tourism literature, authors in health research, such as Misra et al. (2018), Rohwer et al. (2017) and Salita (2010), have reported several cases of misconduct concerning authorship allocation and ghost/guest authorship in Asian institutions. Indeed, Rohwer et al. (2017) found that in East Asian institutions adding non-contributing scholars to a paper is a normal practice, which is largely accepted. Salita (2010) refers to scholar’s seniority, hierarchical level, academic title, courtesy, gratitude, respect for authority, social pressure and the need to
harmonious social relationships (rather than the actual intellectual contribution to the paper) as indicators to attribute authorship in Asian academia. By referring to a specific institute in the Philippines, she also points out that ‘when graduate and post-graduate students have their theses published, they also co-author their papers with their advisors even if the advisor’s contribution is mainly editing the draft’ (Salita, 2010; p. 37).

This *modus operandi*, as portrayed in our ethnodramatic script, has become a common practice also among tourism scholars based in Asian institutions. Socio-cultural aspects, such as the collectivist nature of most Asian societies and a general refusal of challenging authority, are components contributing to crystallise authorship’s malpractice among tourism PhD students and scholars in Asia. Salita (2010; p. 38) states that ‘authorship malpractices can be a vicious cycle. Younger scientists may, in turn, practise authorship abuse when their time comes; the abused becoming abusers’. In this respect, our ethnodrama also attempts to break this vicious cycle. More specifically, in Scene 8, Prakash’s decision not to act as his former supervisor should be interpreted as a hopeful sign of change in tourism academia.

*Theme 3*

*Gendered dynamics*

Another important aspect that is highlighted in the script is the gendered nature and dynamics of academia. In scene 6, the proposal defence of Disha provides an example of gendered relations:

**JUROR1**

Firstly, you need to write your report more objectively. There is too much of your opinion on the report. You have to avoid bias, so you have to change the writing style to make it objective like research and not a novel. You have to make it more systematic and structured.

**DISHA**

Actually, my aim from this study is not to draw generalisations but to understand the traditional and
contemporary societal constructs that are shaping the reality of the people I am studying and the implications as such on tourism.

DR. AZITA
Thank you very much for your presentation. I truly enjoyed it. I would like to share my views if possible.

JUROR1
Of course you can (as if he was the person in charge of moderating the defense)

With his demeanour and language, the male juror personifies an assumed superiority, especially as he feels comfortable to take control of the flow of criticism towards the female student, and further create a situation where the second juror, a female scholar, has to take permission from him to speak and share her feedback. He further comments on the lack of value in Disha’s work on the premise of it being ‘subjective’ and ‘novel-like’ (read emotional), as opposed to ‘objective’, ‘systematic’ and ‘structured’ (presumed to be masculine characteristics- see Figure 1). Such assumptions – dominated by patriarchal values where men assumed an ‘all-knowing’ position – have been historically situated in positivist science and post-Enlightenment academia since its early years. Traditionally, higher education institutions have been hierarchical in nature, with a cluster of highly paid men whose careers have entailed the services of a very large base of ill-paid or unpaid persons, mainly women (Rich, 1980).

Furthermore, gender is a socially constructed phenomenon and thus is fluid and subjected to cultural contexts (Ong & Peletz, 1995). In this scenario, on top of the general institutional hierarchy where men still largely dominate high ranking positions in academia (Leathwood & Read, 2008), there is also the cultural discourse of gender and social hierarchies where systematic gender discrimination and marginalisation remain present in postcolonial Asia. For instance, in his study of women in higher education management in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, Luke (2002) presents the dynamics of Asian value politics and religious-cultural ideologies that demand specific constructs of Asian femininity. Often these discourses are
embedded within stereotypical binaries, such as rational/emotional, public/private, dominant/submissive, or independent/dependent (Li & Beckett, 2006). Such notions do not necessarily exist within male/female instances, but also in the processes of self-gendering as seen in scene 5, where Amelia refers to Disha’s fear and panic for the event (proposal defence) as ‘acting like such a drama queen’ or in scene 6 where Disha naturally selects make-up and high heels to seem presentable (see Scene 6 video, 0:45-1:10).

However, instead of simply focusing on the predominant male/female dichotomy present within gender critique, the ethnodrama also attempts to show the entanglements of gender with other power structures, such as age and institutional hierarchies, and its changing nature as per the environment. For instance, while Disha critically addresses juror one’s notions of subjectivity and bias in qualitative research over quantity-based objectivity, she later resorts to accepting her predicament at the time. This is mainly due to the power structures between her as a student and the juror as a higher academic member, and the ‘respect’ that is due as per Asian values. In other instances, both Disha and However, Dr. Azita moves beyond the traditionally assumed ‘nonconfrontational and submissive’ gender image of the Asian woman (Li & Beckett, 2006; Mohanty, 1988). Indeed, during the proposal defence, she clearly encourages the audience (politely yet firmly) to move beyond ‘a narrow approach to research’ and ‘encourage postgraduate students to consider non positivist ways of knowing’ (see Fig. 3 & Scene 6 video, i.e. 5:50 & 6:35). Her comment is followed by an awkward moment of silence that indicates a non-expected/non-conformed way of being.
In some instances, gender dynamics are transcended by the shared nature of experiences (the students being PhD students), which highlights the multiple nature of identity itself, which is never singular but continuously constructed, reconstructed and in a state of positional shift (Hall, 1996). As Leathwood and Read (2008, p.4) note, “gender identities and constructions of femininity and masculinity change over time and in different social contexts, and reflect the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation”. Hence, it can be noted that gender dynamics are also induced by other environmental dynamics at play. For instance, while in scene 6, the dynamics between the male juror, the female juror, and the female student are rather hostile, in other scenes (i.e. scene 2, 3, 4, 7), doctoral students, both female and male, are seen conversing and debating openly. Indeed, Prakash, although intimidated by Disha, takes her perspectives to be valuable (as seen in scene 8). In essence, the ethnodrama presents the static (material structures of inequality, privilege and segregation) and dynamic gender relationships that exist in Asian academic culture and how they are indeed intermeshed with other social identities.
and contexts that play a specific part in how gender comes into and out of play. As Ong and Peletz (1995, p. 5) explain, “gender relations in southeast Asia and elsewhere cannot be considered fixed systems, because they are typically comprised of contradictory ideologies which are constantly undergoing change, and which equally constantly creating new possibilities of subversion and resistance”.

Theme 4
Postcolonial legacies
In several parts of the ethnodrama, we have attempted to highlight the colonial/Eurocentric ideologies that persist within the intellectual thought of postcolonial societies. These include the psychological structuring of modern Asian identities, which remain predominantly embedded within a Eurocentric reality (see Alatas, 1972; Bhabha, 1994; Memmi, 1965), epistemic beliefs within scientific endeavours, academic training leading to Western ideologies crystallising over time, and finally, hope in the cycle of colonial ideologies being broken.

PROF. KUMAR
How nice! Suresh is a very good friend of mine. We were friends during our doctoral studies in England. You know?
I did my PhD in England. Best experience ever!

DISHA
Ah Professor Kumar, nice. He is a nice professor. My supervisor is Dr Stuart from the UK.

PRAKASH
Yeah right (mumbles to himself). Prof.
Kumar studied in the UK too.
DISHA
Really? Nice to meet you. Wow! first
time we have a PhD student from
America here. What brings you here
to Asia? (Response to Ronnie from USA studying in Asia)

The above excerpts portray some of the ideological leftovers in the social consciousness of former colonial societies (see Nandy, 1983), as raised by several authors, such as Frantz Fanon (1952), in his ‘black skin, white mask’. Within Eurocentric thought, Europe (or rather the West) remains the epicentre of development paradigms and hence a reference point for modernity itself at macro and micro (individual) levels (Chakrabarty, 2009). As such, having graduated from the United Kingdom (as Prof. Kumar claims in Scene 1) is a matter of pride and adds credibility to one’s intellectual identity, and subsequently, a student from the United States (Ronnie in Scene 7) being in Asia (a region labelled as ‘developing’) for higher education pursuits is a matter of surprise. Disha’s surprise on Ronnie’s decision is also a form of ‘self-orientalising’, a process of self-identity formation shaped by both hegemonic former colonial binary constructs and contemporary neo-colonial discourses (Wijesinghe, Mura, & Culala, 2019). The reoccurring narratives amongst the doctoral students regarding positivist and interpretivist traditions alongside their norms of statistical generalisations, detached science, objectivity/subjectivity, bias, first-person writing and reflexivity and its supposed divide between Asian and Western intellectual pursuit represent multiple examples that attempt to highlight the predominant epistemic beliefs that exist amongst Asian scholarly communities.

PRAKASH
Well, then I believe I am a
positivist. I like numbers and
statistics. That’s how they taught me
research in my undergraduate and
master’s courses. You learn
quantitative research first and then I
remember the last two classes on
qualitative….interesting but it’s too subjective.

DISHA
And what’s the problem with being subjective? I am an interpretivist and in interpretivist research we acknowledge and value subjectivity… and also reflexivity… I have read articles written in first person, from the perspective of the author.

AMELIA
But are we allowed to do it here? I mean writing in first person? Maybe they can do it in Western countries but here I am not sure...

PRAKASH
Exactly. These are things for Westerners, not for us Asians.

As Alatas (1972) notes, intellectuals in Southeast Asian social science communities remain in a state of a ‘captive mind’, structuring their knowledge around the tenets of scientism and valuing objectivity, free ethics, and universalism, all of which lay at the heart of Eurocentric ideology and were propelled during the colonial era. Furthermore, particularly in tourism, recent debates have brought to the fore the colonial nature of its epistemological and methodological foundations, where ‘positivist’, ‘universalistic’ and ‘commercialised’ forms of research enjoy a supreme position due to generations of tourism scholars who played (and continue to play) an active role in ‘tourism myth-making’ (McKercher & Prideaux, 2014). Hence, uncritical imitations of ‘western’ and ‘masculine’ ideals are a continuous reality in tourism academic circles of the ‘non-west’ (see
Increasingly, young scholars continue to be trained within the same intellectual traditions, with little autonomy to challenge this *status quo* (unless in rare occasions where institutional structures ‘allow’ doctoral candidates to break from these schemes and venture on creatively). These dynamics are further portrayed in Disha’s proposal defence (Scene 6) where juror 1 suggests a mixed-method research approach to ‘solidify’ the study and mocks her attempt to pursue a topic not aligned to the predominant economic research lines in tourism (see Figure 2). Disha’s resisting character, as well as Prakash’s changing attitude at the end of the script, reiterate the hope envisaged for academic change and decolonisation of the academia, mind, and intellectual endeavours by scholars since the 1960s in the wider social science arena and in tourism circles (i.e. Bhambra, Gebrial, & Nişancıoğlu, 2018; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Chen, 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles & Whyte, 2013; Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011; Spivak, 1988; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Wa Thiong’o, 1986).

**Conclusion**

By combining three different genres – academic writing, theatrical playwriting and performing – this article presents different ways of knowing and representing realities for tourism scholars. More specifically, drawing upon social scientists’ influential work on performance texts (e.g., Barone & Eisner, 2012; Conquergood, 1998; Denzin, 2003; Mienczakowski, 2001; Saldaña, 2008) and on an ethnodramatic script written by the authors based on dramatized ethnographic and autoethnographic work, it portrays a tourism PhD journey in an Asian institution. As an attempt of representing the power structures underpinning academia (and tourism academia), namely postcolonial, gendered, global, regional, institutional, and socio-cultural forces, among others, the 8 scenes constituting the script discuss how Asian PhD journeys are shaped by specific approaches to supervision, issues of authorship, gendered dynamics and postcolonial legacies. The main rationale behind this work lies in the recognition of the powerful/performative role of embodied texts and performances in producing, shaping and re-presenting realities. More specifically, the ethnodrama presented in this paper acts as a vehicle that is both political and entertaining in producing meanings.

Overall, we believe that this work has important theoretical and practical implications for the tourism academy and the industry. From an academic/conceptual perspective, this work bridges
different fields of inquiry – tourism, performance studies, theatre studies and other social sciences drawing on forms of arts-based research – to provide alternative epistemologies and ways of representing ‘worlds’ to tourism scholars. By doing so, not only does it constitute a practical example that adds to and partially addresses recent multiple calls for epistemological diversity and more disruptive methodologies in tourism qualitative research (Canosa et al., 2017; Ivanova et al., 2020; Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015; Wilson et al., 2020); but it also encourages forms of interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary inquiry in tourism, as discussed by Coles et al. (2006). Embodied texts also allow us to unveil unknown realities or explore existing known realities from different perspectives as the methodological approaches employed to frame social phenomena contribute to produce aspects of those social phenomena. Furthermore, one of the conceptual implications of this works lies in its propensity to question the hegemonic role of written texts as main forms of representation of empirical research in academia. In this regard, while this paper does not intend to devalue or replace the act of writing in inquiry, it proposes forms of embodied knowledge (theatrical scripts and their enactments) that complement the ‘written world’. This is important to have a better grasp of the complex and multisensorial nature of tourism experiences and tourism scholars’ realities, which cannot always be fully represented by written texts.

From a practical perspective, we believe that presenting academic research in non-traditional and more entertaining forms could help to strengthen the dialogue between academia and the tourism industry. As ways of conducting research in the academic world are propelled and shaped by values, ideologies and approaches different from those characterising the industry, theatrical representations of research outputs produced within tourism academic circle could be more accessible to the tourism industry. As such, tourism managers and marketers could have a better understanding of the topics debated in the tourism academic literature and align their strategies and promotional material (which often tend to essentialise and objectify peoples and cultures) to the critical empirical material produced and circulated within universities. Also, an important practical contribution of this work concerns the role of performances and non-traditional/non-academic texts in connecting researchers and participants academia and communities. While critical scholarship in tourism has often reiterated tourism scholars’ need to involve communities affected by tourism in forms of inquiry that are more participatory and emancipatory, we believe that academic texts do not facilitate a dialogue between researchers and research participants.
Conversely, theatrical translations of academic empirical material could pave the way for more inclusive ways of knowing with local communities.

**References**


