Chapter 21

The Language(s) of the Tourist Experience: An Autoethnography of the Poetic Tourist

Chaim Noy

Introduction: The Tourist State of Mind

And she said why, why don’t we drive through the night
We’ll wake up down in Mexico? . . .
Tell me why, why won’t you love me for who I am where I am?
(Paul Simon, Hearts and Bones)

It has been ten years since I began researching tourists and their experiences, and yet, during this time what the “tourist experience” is has become increasingly less clear to me. During this time, rather than developing a more analytical and defined perception of the array of concepts, theorems and methods that comprise the (inter-/sub-)discipline of tourism research, I have found that defining or delineating what tourism means to people living in modern times has become an increasingly more evasive task.

In the beginning of the classes on tourism that I teach, I routinely suggest — in a somewhat provocative manner — that tourism “is a state of mind”. That is, that to partake in tourist activities means to partake in a symbolic dimension, wherein an altered state of mind is in fact witnessed. Quoting the philosopher-phenomenologist, Alfred Schutz (1945, 1970), who wrote that “the world is composed of multiple realities”, I tell my students that the culture(s) of tourism may be fruitfully approached from a symbolic perspective, i.e. from the unique experiences of tourists, or from the “the tourist state of mind”.

At a later point during the course, when the class discusses the semiotics of souvenirs, I tell the students a well-known and rather kitsch tale. The tale tells of a person who fell asleep, and dreamed of flowers or butterflies, only to wake up to find that there was a flower or a butterfly (respectively), on her/his chest. The tale, I suggest, relays what is so

---

1I am indebted to Nehama Uni for the many constructive suggestions made to earlier versions of this chapter, as well as to Paul Lynch for coining the term “poetic tourist”.

The Critical Turn in Tourism Studies: Innovative Research Methodologies
Copyright © 2007 by Elsevier Ltd.
All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.
ISBN: 0-08-045098-9
emotionally unique and powerful about souvenirs as metonyms of tourism: their ability to "travel back" from other "worlds", "realms", "spheres" or Schutzian "finite provinces of meaning". The point I would like to make, I continue, is that when people recall and recount their tourist-related experiences, they take on the expression of re-calling a dream, a daydream or a (religious) vision. They seem to be focusing on a point that lies elsewhere, beyond or past the here-and-now's of everyday spaces and routine practices. As Berger and Luckmann famously observed (in line with Schutz):

[as] I move from one reality to another, I experience the transition as a kind of shock. This shock is to be understood as caused by the shift in attentiveness that the transition entails. Waking up from a dream illustrates this shift most simply. (Berger & Luckmann cited in Young, 1987, p. 7)

What is true of retrospective recollections is, of course, true of prospective fantasies as well. When people expect and imagine a vacation they will take, the views they envision transcend those of the "everyday": different landscapes, different bodies, different movements and different selves. Persons fantasizing or reminiscing in these ways, bearing these experiential expressions, might be regarded as being in or under the "tourist state of mind". This "state of mind" is pervasive in affluent societies. In the current era, people in these societies enjoy almost constant access to various cultures of tourism, and are, in one way or another, "much of the time 'tourists'" (Urry, 1990, p. 82). "Tourists' dreams colonize all those other fifty weeks, when we are not on vacation", as Lofgren (1999, p. 7) so eloquently puts it. Indeed, this supports MacCannell's (1999) early claim, that the tourist is no less than the symbol of modernity, indeed "one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general" (p. 1).

But how do we go about researching this unique "state of mind"? How do we not lose, by excessively theorizing and through overly analytical categorization and reductionist conceptualization, the delicate language of tourists' experience? Lastly, what is the language — the syntax and the grammar — of the inquiry into tourists' experience, through which subtleties and ephemerality can be studied?

The contributions that this chapter offers address these questions. First and foremost, the chapter offers a methodological proposition in the form of an autoethnographic study of tourists' language of experience, as well as of the experience of tourists' language. The chapter also includes a discussion of theoretical concerns, and empirically illustrates the method of autoethnography and its consequences. It shows how autoethnography enables one to communicate experience and reconstruct it in vivid, lively and sometimes even painful ways, in ways that are not "purely" academic or that result in an over-intellectualization of the sense of having an experience. By pursuing the research of experience in an evocative fashion, the resulting presentation is often more insightful, and can evoke a deeper appreciation of the subject matter of the tourist experience. In this regard, the present research should be viewed as a branch of the more recent advancements in tourism research methodologies (Aitchison, 2000; Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins, 2005; Botterill, 2003).

Second, the chapter explores and sheds light on the relations and correspondence between tourism, on the one hand, and everyday life, on the other. Truly, tourism research
literature has yet to conceptualize the oxymoron of the “everydayness of tourism”. For the present exposition, tourism and everyday life are viewed as co-related and complementary symbolic orders or structures. Indeed, it is commonly argued that the possibility of mass-tourism, and its accelerated growth over the last half century, was both a prerequisite and an outcome of the inherently modern notion of “everyday life” (as identified and described by Foucault, 1979; Goffman, 1959, 1974).

In this capacity, this chapter joins and contributes to the established tradition within sociological research into tourism — that of the “tourist experience” (Cohen, 1973, 1979). The notion of the “tourist experience” entails a dazzling array of human experiences that emerge when people engage in the sphere of tourism, via its many institutional extensions, representations and guises. These emotions emerge as a result of the construction of tourist activities — whatever they come to include in different cultures — as transcending the order of the everyday.

Performing Travel Writing: A Tourist Autoethnography

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), whose views of autoethnography I find both provocative and productive, an autoethnography is “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739).

Autoethnography is a critical and reflexive method of inquiry that developed over the last decade or so within the North American Qualitative movement in the social sciences. Appreciating the strengths and weaknesses of this mode of inquiry, as well as of the implications it bears, and its impact on various fields of research, necessitates acknowledging its inherent relation to the diverse family of qualitative research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). While much can be said of the elements common to qualitative research methods and autoethnography, for the present exploration it suffices to note that the qualitative method involves:

an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them . . . to describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3)

This broad definition indicates that at the heart of qualitative research lies the desire to understand and make sense of “meanings in individuals’ lives”. Within the family of qualitative research methodologies, however, autoethnography represents an extreme form, a radically subversive and oftentimes provocative relative. Indeed, autoethnography is a mode of inquiry that is wholeheartedly — morally, emotionally and ideologically — committed to the subject of the research, namely to people and to their complex, intricate lives and experiences. In this respect, autoethnographical research can be compared with
performance studies, symbolic interaction, various feminist research and similar schools of thought, both recent and traditional, within the social sciences.²

The term autoethnography literally defines the inquiry procedure: The researcher addresses herself or himself ("auto"), as a subject of a larger social or cultural group ("ethno"), by ways of revealing research and writing ("graphy", Ellis, 1997, see also Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2003). The autoethnographic work aspires to describe those constitutive dimensions that in ordinary, conventional sociological research are erased, or play a backstage role. In addition to personal, lived experience, autoethnographic research explores voice, emotions, processes (rather than results or products) etc., as a part of "the guerilla warfare against the repressive structures of everyday lives" (Denzin, 1999, p. 572). Frequently, autoethnographic research is an investigation into the relationship between researchers, their fields of inquiry and their informants, thereby supplying innovative perspectives on the underlying assumptions of various academic disciplines, as well as on the process of disciplinary socialization in academia. As a method that is centered on the scholar herself or himself, autoethnography is inescapably an emotionally painstaking exercise, a type of ethnography that "breaks your heart" (Behar, 1996).

Exploring tourist-related experiences by means of autoethnography suggests an exciting, even volatile nexus. It forces the tourists — ourselves — to inquire into and to challenge our own experiences, which would otherwise be dismissed as "recreational", "superficial", "fun" etc., in a reflexive and informed manner. Autoethnographizing one's tourist experiences reveals a broader, more complex and challenging aspect to the sphere of tourist experience than the conception of tourist experience as, almost without exception, leisurely or positive. Rather, this type of critical and reflexive research forces us to admit the extent to which much of one's tourism-related experience resonates with feelings of alienation, sadness, aloneness and other bleak and disconcerting experiences.

Furthermore, tourists are performers; they are constantly under the gaze of other people — tourists, locals, tourist operators etc., and their behavior is constantly regulated and monitored so as to avoid "improper" expressions (Aitchison, 2000; Fullagar, 2002). This particularly occurs in enclavic tourist spaces (Edensor, 2000, p. 49), where the exhibition of only certain behaviors is acceptable and gratifying, while other behaviors are discouraged. Indeed, on the stage upon which international tourists find themselves, the show must go on, and "deviant" behaviors, emotions and experiences are effectively, albeit subtly, sanctioned.

Exploring tourists' experiences autoethnographically bears an additional merit. It illuminates the fuzzy and liminal space that lies between tourism experiences and everyday experiences. While tourism-related practices clearly generate unique experiences, these experiences interestingly interrelate with a sense of everyday life. This interrelation will be explored hereafter.

²It is relevant to point out here that various phenomenological and reflexive methods of inquiry are not recent developments, but have in fact been applied for over a century. Similar to the Qualitative paradigm in general, the recent emergence of autoethnographic inquiries can and should be seen as part of a "pendulum" movement in the history of research methods in the humanities and social sciences (for a review see Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In addition, it would not be inaccurate to suggest that autoethnography, like ethnography or interview studies, is not a single research method, but rather a cluster of methods that share an underlining approach.
Lastly, because autoethnographic research accesses a different type of lived experience
than do other qualitative methods, and because it is ideally suited to explore the relationship
between researchers and their fields of inquiry, it is potentially a (self-)empowering endeavor.
The autoethnographic method has the capacity of revealing and rearranging traditional aca-
demic institutional relationships by illuminating the normative, taken-for-granted axioms of
various fields. This form of auto-inquiry stimulates critical reflections about one’s scholarly
involvement, attitudes, constraints and ideological and epistemological commitments
(Jones, 1998; Noy, 2003).

Put differently, although the materials tourism scholars research often have a seemingly
trivial appearance, they are in fact ridden with ideologies (as grand as “capitalism”) and power
dynamics and relations. Within these tricky circumstances reflexive monitoring promotes the
understanding of the positions of the different actors within the field of tourism, and conse-
quently, the comprehension of the nature of the field as a whole as well. Reflexivity carries
the potential of shedding light on the ideologies tourist scholars themselves hold, partly in the
capacity they too are tourists “much of the time” (Urry, 1990, p. 82), and thus are as
susceptible as anyone else to commercial-ideological suggestion.

Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739) note that autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of
forms, including poetry, fiction, novels, personal essays, fragmented and layered writing
and more. These forms are tailored to the social and cultural reality that is being studied.
The present exploration includes the interpretation of a poem, “In-between sanctity and
profane”, as well as a discussion of some five additional poetic texts, all of which were

All the poems presented hereafter concern vacation trips to Sinai. Beside the last con-
tribution, they were all written by a naive author, as yet unfamiliar with research into
tourism. As I am not an accomplished poet, the pieces are best conceived as stylized jour-
nal entries, as part of a travelogue or a scripted souvenir densely depicting memories and
feelings I had whilst in (or on the way to or back from) Sinai. As poems, they can be
viewed, at least partly, as tourist performances of the type of “reminiscing” (Edensor,
1998, pp. 135–148), revealing the emotions and experiences — alienated, exhilarated and
reflexive — in tourism.

Sinaiscape: Topography of (Extra) National-collective Experience

The texts to be discussed were written by a single tourist — myself, about a single tourist
destination — the beaches of the Sinai Peninsula by the Red Sea. The advantages, and
shortcomings, of this particular combination of tourists and destination can be examined
against other possible combinations, such as an autoethnographic travel biography that
addresses different sites visited by a single person (or a single social unit, such as a
family); or research on a larger scale, that explores different people (or social groups) in
relation to a single destination or to a number of destinations. Since the present inquiry,
however, is concerned with a single destination, I will briefly introduce some background
information on Sinai, which will clarify the setting in which and in regard to which the
pieces have been composed.
The Sinai Peninsula is located between the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, and is a mountainous desert of the Saharan belt. During the twentieth century the Sinai Peninsula changed hands time and again (see review in Lavie, 1990, pp. 45-84). In the second half of that century it was conquered by Israel from Egypt in 1967 and later evacuated in 1982. In the late 1970s, when the area was still under Israeli occupation, it played a unique role as a truly liminal tourist space (Azaryahu, 2006; Cohen, 1987; Lavie, 1990). This was partly due to its spectacular beaches, which had been popular destinations, providing an ideal place of escape for many. In more ancient time and in mythical history, the Sinai Peninsula played an important role in the Exodus and emancipation of the Jewish People from Ancient, Pharaohnite Egypt. For this reason, too, the sharp peaks of the granite Sinai Mountains, and the dramatic contradictions that they evince with the deep-blue Red Sea, suggested — and still suggest — a mysteriously attractive scenery of mythical richness.

Indeed, throughout the centuries the pregnant scenery of the Granite Sinai desert and the gulf of the Red Sea, have attracted a wide and varied range of travelers and wanderers, poets and novelists, pilgrims, ascetics and hermits. “The equation”, Michael Tobias (1995) explains, “was obvious: one look at the Sinai, with its tortured colors and windless furnace, its incessant midges and stinging nights, suggested all the ingredients of penance” (p. 21).

In the function of a more mundane resort space intended for the consumption of modern mass tourism, Sinai can be viewed as the pleasure “periphery belt” of Israel. It is an interesting — liminal and peripheral — destination precisely because it is not located at a great geographical distance from the Israeli homeland. It is easily accessible via land transportation, and can be traversed in only a few hours of travel. The traveler to Sinai does not need to pass through airports or to check-in luggage. The geographical continuity of the land and the relatively easy accessibility of the destination offer a perplexing equation of differences and distances in the visiting tourist imagination; it is located away, but not far away. This condition has also fostered different types of spatial constructions and tourist performances in Sinai (Coleman & Crang, 2002), as well as longings to Sinai, which are referred to in the poem presented shortly, in the form of what Smadar Lavie has termed “colonialist nostalgia” (Lavie, 1990).

The poem below, “In-between sanctity and profane”, is dated March 31, 1996, and was penned during a vacation to Dahab, Sinai, that I took with my (future)-wife.

---

3The 1977 Peace Agreement with Egypt affords relatively easy entry into the Sinai Peninsula for Israeli citizens, who are not required to obtain visas in order to do so. This factor contributes to the popularity of Sinai among Israeli tourists, many of whom choose to spend their holidays and vacations on Sinai’s beaches. However, this state of affairs has dramatically changed as a result of the recurring terrorist bombing attacks, mostly aimed at tourists.

4The title of the poem is an Hebrew expression (which appears in the Old Testament and in the Jewish Prayer Book). The Hebrew word in the title that is translated to “profane” or “mundane” is haol (Bein kodesh uvein haol), which also means “sand”. The poem plays on this double meaning, contrasting sand as something earthly with spirituality or the divine. For the purpose of its inclusion in this chapter the poem has been translated from the original (Hebrew), and five verses have been omitted. Hebrew words are italicized and words originally in English are underlined.
In-Between Sanctity and Profane

Back at Sinai for
the third time, more or less
with a book in Hebrew and a book
in English (Inta Omri and LILA)\textsuperscript{5}
Passover, Hatashnav,\textsuperscript{6} is approaching.

The muse in me has been silenced.
The sand of gold has poured from the mountains
the reefs
the Red Sea breeze.

This entire peninsula —
one giant reef
fossilized corals
of stones of Tablets of the Covenant
between a starfish and a coral
between a sea-sponge and a sea-anemone.

The last time here
I was seven.
From inside a Renault 4
emerged a tent
and six people: uncles, parents, children,
cousins.
And one dawn
half-asleep I wondered to the
nearby palm trees and saw:
a man at rest reading a book,
his huge penis hanging-limply,
and two Scandinavian women as
bare and as tanned as the sand
quiet as the sand
warm and soft as is the sand —
perhaps.

Then too a Red Sea Front was approaching
and at night the wind struck the tent with fury.

And in the time before that
the desert was as arid as it is today

\textsuperscript{5}The Hebrew title Inta Omri is a transliteration from Arabic, meaning “you are my love”.
\textsuperscript{6}Hatashnav is the transliteration of the Jewish year count (5756), corresponding to the year 1996.
and some of us were passionate, and some compassionate
and some the earth had swallowed
and some just wanted to make it
through
and Jehovah supplied us with food and
seemed
annoyed,
and promised to watch over us.

But this of course is an impersonal
recolletion
another contemplation in the History of the
Jewish People
the fourth visit
the fifth visit, the
s-c-r-i-p-t-u-r-e
the revealed Torah
the Elders, Judges, Kings, Kingdoms, Prophets, Diasporas,
the Messianics, Healers, Ministers, Fascists
the sand
sand
sand.

Muzeina
An elderly Bedouin woman as
wrinkled as a desert shrub
black as the night
recounted how her uncle’s wife’s husband-in-law
pushed her wounded back
and cried,
and later laughed,
and told my lover she is
‘from the Bedouins’
because the shade of her skin is dark
and her hair so black.
And to me, with a colorful tourist hat on my head,
she said:
‘and you,
you are from the hat’.

This sand, blinding, purifying,
hot, boiling,

Sand
blinding purifying
The Language(s) of the Tourist Experience

... 

The Language of the Tourist Body

The language of the tourist experience as it is represented in “In-between” is essentially embodied. It is not only a set of lexical, grammatical and syntactical choices and correlations, but is, first and foremost, a language of embodied practices, or performances. Hence, before addressing the various bodies, and bodily postures, senses and transformations described in “In-between”, I first wish to suggest the notion that the poem itself conveys an embodied state. Written by an author at leisure on the pristine sands of Sinai, the poem’s length, the repetitions it evinces, and the narrative it unfolds in a gradual manner — all convey a notion

7*Hames* means leavened dough, the consumption of which is strictly prohibited during the Passover holiday according to the Jewish dietary rules (*kashrut*).
of extension or expansion. Very much like the relaxed tourist body vacationing on the Red Sea beach, the poem too has a “relaxed” quality, and evokes sense of contemplation that is typical of the type of reflexivity often indulged in by tourists on vacation. That is to say the frame of mind in which one feels one “gets away from it all”, and also have the time and opportunity to look back and take stock from a wider perspective. Hence, in this capacity, the poetic form amounts to a souvenir of sorts, one crafted by the tourist himself. The poem has the power to relay bodily sensation in that in reading the poem, it is possible to rekindle the type of bodily senses that were experienced by the tourist-author at the destination.

A good deal of “In-between”, however, is dedicated to the description of the different bodies that share the spaces of tourism. Bodies first emerge in the poem in an indirect manner, during a recollection that the trip to Sinai has triggered (verse #4). “The last time here” opens a tourist scene within a tourist scene, one that took place when I was seven (in 1975, twenty-one years before the poem was written). Literally, “last time here” juxtaposes spatial sameness (i.e. “here” or vacationscapes), and temporal or chronological difference (travel biography), having the effect of creating the “emotional phenomenology of return”, but not to the place that is perceived as “home”. It touches on one of the tourists’ mottos: “To be back again”, as Lofgren (1999, pp. 149–150) reminds us.

In the author’s recollection, different bodies are engaged in different practices. First, in a way that is almost transformatory, the six of us “emerged” from a tiny Renault 4, the group comprising, in fact, three different families and members of families: my aunt, uncle and their two children, another aunt (who is single), and myself. In that constellation I was the oldest of the children. No physical details are provided with regard to our bodies beside the fact that we all move from one enclosed space, that of the moving automobile, to another, that of the stationary tent.

There is another “emergence” which occurs at dawn. The second instance of recollected bodies portrays three Scandinavian nudists whom we happened to lodge in close proximity to (in hindsight, it begs the question as to whether the location of our tent in a nudist colony was in fact accidental?). As dawn approaches, probably still half asleep, what I witnessed when I left the safe and predictable familial confines (in the shape of the tent), was registered as nothing less than a vision. Down South, beyond and “under” the borders of national sovereignty, the “tourist body” was powerfully present (Crouch & Desforges, 2003). It primarily takes the form of a naked Scandinavian male body, with what then seemed to me to be a huge flaccid penis, next to two nude female companions (I realize in hindsight, that it was the first uncircumcised penis I ever saw, as well as the first vulva). The physical proximity to a foreign and adult male body left me shocked, and aroused pre-pubertal anxiety (I remember how concerted I was with the thoughts, “when will my aunts wake up? Something must be done about this”). Note the perspective (the “gaze”): a young male tourist looking at the body of a mature male tourist. The blurring of social borders in this heterogeneous space — between the normative and the transgressive, the clothed and the unclothed, and later in the poem, the blurring of social borders between the Bedouins (native), the Israelis (tourist), and the Europeans (tourist), was of a liminal quality, and left a powerful imprint in my memory.

The third instance of recollected bodies includes collective bodies inhabiting national-mythical space. These are largely anguished bodies, passionate and compassionate, passing through the Sinai desert on the way to the Promised Land. While some of the members
of the mythical Tribe of Israel met a horrible fate during their travels/travails (such as that of followers of Karachi whom God punished by having the ground swallow them whole, [see Numbers, Chaps 17–18]), others are described in more mundane language: they “just wanted to make it through”. In any case, the caterer of foods, beverages and accommodation during the period of forty years that the Tribe of Israel spent crossing the Sinai desert, as well as the implementer of discipline (punishments and rewards), is not the capitalist industries of tourism, but God himself.

Through the threading of ancient and contemporary visits to Sinai, the poem “In-between” indicates that the accumulative nature of these visits and re-visits transcends the notion of an individual travel biography on various levels. Akin to other symbolic sites (Edensor, 1998), whether natural or man-made, visiting Sinai ties the tourist individual or the tourist group to a larger historical (or mythical) chain of visitings. Interestingly, under these conditions, the distinction between individuals, groups and collectives is blurred.

I indicated earlier that Sinai is a liminal and somewhat paradoxical destination (at least this is so for Israelis), precisely because it is not located at a very great distance from “home”. For instance, among the many Israelis who backpack throughout Asia and South America, Sinai is referred to as “a stop on the way back home”. That is to say that Sinai is symbolically perceived as existing betwixt-and-between the homeland and more distant destinations and fantasies. For many Israelis Sinai is foreign, but at the same time not entirely foreign. This point is made in “In-between”, via the recapitulation of different “visits” to Sinai, both historical (real) and mythical (imaginative), occurring both in the past and in the future. Thus, the present trip can be seen as located in-between various dimensions or temporal and spatial spheres.

The next body presented in the poem is of a different nature altogether — Muzeina’s (verse #8). Muzeina’s body is the body of the native, and it suggests various contrasts to the bodies of the European tourists: it is vulnerable (old and wounded), but it also possesses a voice (Noy, 2006c). And unlike the nudists, it is completely veiled behind a black Higab (one of the verses I omitted from the present version includes the line, “Muzeina/clothed in the blackness of Bedouin wool/from head to toe”). Although she is veiled, the skin-color of the actors in this tourist scene is referred to, for the second time. The first reference describes the nudists’ practice of tanning, and the second reference is by Muzeina, who addressed my partner’s shade of skin, which is considerably darker than mine. Muzeina addresses not only genetic dimensions (concerning the colour of skin), but also acquired ones, i.e. practices: while my wife enjoys the sun and does not wear a hat, I favour wearing a (synthetic colourful) hat in order to protect my lighter skin. Through reporting the sad and then humorous “hat” exchange with Muzeina, we are positioned in the poem as particular types of tourists. Somewhere between Western nudists and local Islamic traditions, Israelis seek to locate themselves in the Levant, in this case through the practices of tourism. In this and other cases, heterogeneous and multinational tourist spaces supply pubic arenas wherein collective-national is negotiated (Edensor, 1998; Noy, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

\(^{8}\)In Arabic, Muzeina (or colloquially Mzeina) means pretty or decorated. It is also the name of a Bedouin tribe located near Dahab (see Lavie, 1990).
In the verse, Muzeina is captured through the poetic tourist’s pen, in a way that resembles to some degree the tourists’ cameras, which capture and portray the “native” (the image of which is indeed most commonly feminine). However, unlike the silent image of the “native”, Muzeina has a voice with which she speaks. Following Lavie’s (1990) ethnographic work with the Mzeina Bedouins, the actual woman we met, and the stories she shares with us, can be interpreted as more general allusions. Her vulnerable body, on the one hand, and her interaction with and perception of tourists on the Dahab beaches (which are Mzeina territory, or rather were Mzeina territory before the Bedouins were dispossessed), on the other, are also allegorical: Egyptian sovereignty, the Israeli occupation (in the years 1967–1982), and then, presently, the “tourist occupation”, engender a set of power relation and dynamics, where the Sinai Bedouins are repeatedly the oppressed (Lavie, 1990). Note that this notion supplies part of the local motivation for Bedouin collaboration with and participation in anti-tourist and anti-Egyptian terror attacks in the Peninsula.

The last two evocations of bodies refer to our bodies, the tourists’ bodies, from within the trip (verse #11, the second-to-last verse), and outside of the experience — after the trip has been concluded (the last verse). These are the only instances in which a process (a transformation) is described. While vacationing in Sinaiscapes, our bodies are soaked and immersed in sand. Shoes, tans, armpits, eyes, hair and the poem too, are bodily organs that are mentioned apropos the sea/sand bath we bath in. They are described, or better, prescribed as yet-to-be souvenirs (“I shall bring to the Jerusalem apartment/like bottled multicolored sand”). The tourist knows that the inevitable countdown to the end of the trip, and to the end of the poem, has begun. Preparations, in the form of the accumulation of souvenirs, have therefore commenced. The poem, and the organs, and the clothes that are mentioned, are indeed ideal souvenirs: ears, shoes, armpits and hair are places where sand can be kept and can be transferred from one location to another. Akin to bottled, multicolored sand, sold by Bedouins on occasion, the tourists’ bodies capture and retain sand — in its symbolic capacity — authentically indicating that they truly were at that desired liminal location, where the earth meets the water, i.e. “the beach” (Cohen, 1982, 2005).

However, having returned home, the tourists in “In-between” comply with the prescriptions of the approaching Jewish Holiday, known for its strict and detailed dietary prohibitions. They scrub and wash their bodies of the Sinai sand, viewing the sand — again, in symbolic and semi-religious terms, as unacceptable (or un-kosher) Hames. The cleansing of the body indeed recalls orthodox purification rights pursued at Passover, whereby the house is examined inch by inch, in search of impurities. Thus there is here a third “emergence”, the emergence out and away from tourist spaces and states of mind and body. The proximity to the Passover Holiday contextualizes the tourist actions in a ritual framework: in this case scrubbing the body extensively is part of the tourists’ ritualistic practices of returning to everyday life. In other words, the Passover Holiday only emphasizes the necessary and accepted condition whereby it is expected that no tourist would return to the workplace after a vacation with sand behind her or his ears or inside the armpits.

Lastly, while attending to the tourist’s “whole body”, now back under everyday hygienic discipline, scars are observed. Albeit temporal, bedbug bites cannot be scrubbed away like sand; they are not simply “dirt” but are inside the tourist body (“blood-red”). As Haldrup and Larsen (2003) observe of tourists, “[m]emory moves and lives in the body” (p. 40).
The Language of the Tourist Experience: Circumstances and Performances

An autoethnographic exploration of the “poetic tourist” suggests that at the focus of our attention is not the language of the tourist experience as much as the tourist experience itself as a language; as a polyphonic nexus of “languages”, and of modes of consuming and producing inscriptions.

Earlier, I mentioned that the poem “In-between” is an embodied discursive medium. It both embodies the tourist “body-on-the-beach” and describes various bodies, bodily postures and organs. I would like to return now to the former type of embodiment, that of tourist “body-on-the-beach”, which is the body of the author. In the capacity the poem serves as a souvenir, it is inscribed — produced — by the tourist while vacationing. After all, the core ideas, which later developed into the present form of the poem, had to have been written, or (more realistically) scribbled, down “In between” — that is, while on vacation. This operation is best conceptualized in performative terms: “In-between” is not only or simply a souvenir of a vacation in Sinai, with its experiences and stimulated fantasies, it is also a souvenir of an embodied tourist state, that of writing. Just like walking, photographing, gazing, remembering (Edensor, 1998) and storytelling (Noy, 2004), are embodied performances pursued by tourists, so is reading (to which I shall return shortly) and writing. This is why part of the domain considered under the title the language of tourists, must include the embodied circumstances and possibilities of inscriptions available to tourists, and these inscriptions’ performances.

The poem “In-between” stops short of reflecting on the very act of the poem’s inscription within a tourist setting. I can attest to my habit of taking a yellow office pad with me, and can recall scribbling an initial draft of the poem on the pad. While I generally like to write (with preference to poetry), taking a paper pad with me on trips offers me the opportunity to document travel events, experiences and reflections in particular, in a way similar to recording by camera and camcorder. It is a tourist tactic adopted to overcome and to compensate for distances and divides. Furthermore, “performing” writing while on a tour, positions me differently in relation to most other tourists (who are the tourist’s primary reference group). Why they, I tell myself, are “passive consumers”, because they read books and tourist brochures; I am active and agentic, because I read and write. I produce something.

I mentioned the performance of reading. This embodied performance is alluded to in “In-between” several times. The first occasion is in the first verse: (Inta Omri and LILA). At this strategic point, mentioning the books helps to mark the practices described later in the poem as “touristic”: they denote the duration of the tourist’s time spent on vacation as “free time”, and infuse it with different languages (English and Arabic), and additional narratives and imagined meanings relating to the books’ content. In other occasions, the nudist tourist is reading a book, as are the relaxed Israeli tourists, who are reading books under palm trees (a frequent sight, which is described in a verse I omitted).

Lastly, these occasions of reading allude indirectly to two further acts of reading: the reading of the tales of the Haggadah (which is the central part of the Passover night, see Zemel, 1998), and the reading of the poem “In-between” itself. While the former is alluded to by the references made to the scriptures and to the Torah, the latter allusion arises from the very function of the souvenir. “We need or desire souvenirs of events that are
reportable”, Susan Stewart (1993) writes, “events whose materiality has escaped us . . . events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative” (p. 135).

In discursive souvenirs the portable and the reportable are enmeshed: the very object that is portable is the report.

Other poems I wrote about excursions to Sinai also express a linguistic polyphony, and describe the spaces of tourism as discursive nexuses. For instance, a short piece dated March, 1999, concerns translation in a fairly literal manner. The main part of the poem (untitled) is simply a very short Hebrew-Arabic lexicon. The transliteration of eight Arabic words is supplied, followed by their translation into Hebrew. The outcome corresponds with a known genre of tourist publication, namely the “tourist phrase booklet”. However, while commercial (institutional) phrasebooks construct — enable and limit — the discursive possibilities of the host-guest interaction, this poem emerges *in and from* the interaction: it describes more than it prescribes. The short list reflects the very minimal contact between guests (Israeli tourists) and hosts (Bedouins) in the heterogeneous tourist spaces of the Sinai beaches (Edensor, 2000), and addresses the notion of translation — so inherent to the many divides (linguistic and other), that exist within tourism. Poetically, the list of eight word-pairs also amounts to a cursive “picture” of a Sinai beach, its sounds and meanings, at a given point in time. *N’balleh* ("let’s begin"), *havali" ("approximately"), *awal imbareh," ("the day before yesterday"), and other Arabic-cum-Hebrew words, portray the beach’s soundscape, and are, at the same time, also a souvenir.

Another short poem, titled "On the way to Sinai" (dated January, 2002), expresses the polyphonic discursive dimension of tourist endeavors in a different way. The poem refers to an earlier trip made around 1989—1990, together with three close friends.

### On the Way to Sinai

The four of us packed in a Fiat 127,
4 a.m. by the Dead Sea Scrolls, we roll around laughing as
the SW radio commands:

*ras dva tre chetiri!*
*ras dva tre chetiri!*

"On the way to Sinai" captures or "freezes" a moment in motion: the four of us in Guy’s mother’s old Fiat, leave Jerusalem before dawn, and hear, near the Dead Sea, a program broadcasted from one of the former Soviet Republics. The early morning program, which is the only transmission the car’s radio receives, is a morning exercise drill (of the type which the Israeli Broadcasting Authority used to broadcast in the 1970s). The radio program consisting of an authoritative and severe male voice, accompanied by a piano, counts loudly to the rhythm of stretching movements for the exercising listener: *ras dva tre chetiri!*

Hence, similar to the previous texts, "On the way to Sinai" evokes foreign words, sounds and rhythms that permeate our social space (this time through long-distance, short-wave transmission). The poem captures a unique moment because the Russian words

---

9I am thankful to my friend Dedi Laniado for clarifying these dates.
capture in a discursive form the “foreignness” of the experience of leaving familiar spheres. In addition, the moment depicted in the poem is also a moment of jubilation: the tourists in the Fiat take a particular pleasure at the contrast between the authoritative disciplining instructions, thundering in a bass voice, and the ludic and joyful tourist state. We are out of the reach of the symbolic Father, to employ an Oedipal-Freudian language.

However, unlike the two poems discussed earlier, “On the way to Sinai” captures a moment that occurs during the liminal phase of traveling. In other words, even before we actually arrive at Sinai, the polyphonic nature of tourism, and its discursive or linguistic manifestations, is manifest. The liminal dimension of traveling is interestingly alluded to through the descriptions of the proximity to the Dead Sea (“the lowest place on earth”, as the commercials describe it) — a place, that for me, always had a special aura, through the twilight quality of dawn, and through a sense of isolation (the Judean Desert and lack of radio reception). Similar to the notion conveyed in Paul Simon’s words in this chapter’s motto, after “we drive through the night”, or through other liminal zones, wake up elsewhere transformed — “wake up down in Mexico”. The Renault 4 and the Fiat 127 — akin to a Boeing 707-200, are modern vehicles not only of (material) transportation, but also of (symbolic) transformation.

The evocation of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls, described by some as the “most outstanding archeological findings found in Israel”, adds a mythical flavor to the spaces through which the old Fiat is traveling. The Dead Sea Scrolls also introduce into the poem yet another form of discursivity: while the rhythmic count in Russian arrives from a great geographical distance, the Scrolls represent texts that have transcended great chronological spans. (Indeed, the evocation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, albeit documented historical facts, in “On the way to Sinai”, corresponds with the mythical Exodus mentioned in “In-between”, in creating a “tourist prehistory”). The point is that the “tourist state of mind” embodies a unique composition — that of polyphonic discourses and multilayered meanings, regardless of whether it is at the destination, or while traveling there or back, or even before the trip has commenced or after it has concluded.

Note that there is one autoethnographic piece of information that is missing from the description above, which is the trigger that has led to the composition of the poem “On the way to Sinai”, some twelve years after the trip it describes has occurred. I regrettably did not record and cannot recall the “tourist moment of reminiscence”, which occurred sometime in January, 2002, and which re-evoked the earlier experience of elated laughing on the way to Sinai. It might well be that it was yet another excursion to Sinai that has brought the earlier one into remembrance.

Back into Everyday: Writing the Return(s) from Sinai

The poem “In-between” includes several indications concerning tourists’ more general travel biographies, in the form of evocations of earlier and future trips to Sinai (both real and fantasized). In this respect, the poem’s last verse, describing the trip’s aftermath, amounts to a short chapter in a history of homecomings. That is, within an accumulated documented history of reflections, recollections and reminiscences of returns from Sinai. Of shaking the golden Sinai sand off our sheets, towels and shoes, and packing our belongings
into the colourful wool packs that we brought back from Nepal; of driving along the scenic road leading to the Taba Border Checkpoint and crossing over from the Egyptian side to the Israeli side; of driving the hot, dry and mind-numbing road that leads from Eilat through the Arava Desert for over three hours; of unlocking the door of our cool Jerusalem apartment, of putting our daughters to bed, our clothes to the laundry, and ourselves back (in)to routine. As if it all didn't happen. Or that it happened, but in a dream — in a shared altered state of consciousness of the type that memories are made of.

Indeed, subtle tourist transformations occur before the trip commences, as well as after its conclusion. These transformations suggest that a more nuanced model should account for the overall tourist experience (if a model is to be suggested at all). The model should not be triadic: pre-trip, trip and post-trip, as is typically the case in tourism literature. This can be illustrated by my own recent experience. Two weeks prior to our family's most recent vacation in Sinai, when attempting to comfort my daughter Noa (who was seven years old at the time) during a moment of frustration, I found myself referring to the upcoming vacation:

Noa, think of Sinai and cheer up. We're gonna take your floating mattress for the sea and your buoys for the pool. Wow. Just think about it — it's going to be really great.

However, as can be expected, it wasn't long before I had to stop myself from referring to the very same (expected) vacation in a contrary, and threatening context; during a moment of anger, I just barely prevented myself from uttering something like: "Noa, if you keep up this nasty attitude of yours we're simply not going to go to Sinai!" These illustrations, which are likely familiar scenarios to most caregivers, capture a phenomenology of tourist preparations. The event of the trip, or the trip's eventfulness, permeates our daily lives, and adds layers of language and meaning to existing dialogues.

Toward the conclusion of this discussion, I wish to turn to the tourist's phenomenology of "the return", such as the one described in the last verse of "In-between". The issue I would like to address here, then, is not related to the experiences that occur during the journey to or back from the destination, or during the vacation itself (see "On the way to Sinai"). Instead, I inquire into reflections and hindsight, aftermaths and aftermaths; into a state that is the mirror image of the planning, expecting and preparing state that precedes the trip.

The last occasion of return from Sinai took place fairly recently, at the end of our last Passover vacation (April, 2006). We traveled to Sinai contra to the recommendations of worried relatives and friends, who insistently reminded us of the many pending and specific travel warnings against visiting Sinai (issued by the Israel Foreign Ministry), and that the place is prone to terror attacks (a position that was reinforced when a terror bomb attack in Dahab claimed the lives of twenty-three people a week after we had returned. However, while on vacation, another suicide bomb attack took the lives of nine people in a kiosk in Tel-Aviv).

Keeping in mind this chapter, I tried to observe, as closely as I could, the fluctuations in my experiences during the return. Diligently applying an (auto)ethnographical method, I made sure not to be caught without my pen and yellow writing pad upon which I recorded any experiential vicissitudes (see Figure 21.1). But nothing outstanding was revealed.
Instead, everything on our way back went quite smoothly: no particularly emotional moments, unique rituals of passage, homecoming or interactions. With the exception of a vivid daydream that I had during the trip back, about visiting a popular Jerusalem pub on the evening of our return (which, I realized I would probably be too exhausted to do), my mental sonar did not detect any unique emotional movement. Perhaps I had tried too hard, I thought. Perhaps I had looked too eagerly, or with an overly academic focus, and had missed something; or worse, I suspected that my self-conscious analysis had prevented an experiential association from occurring, thus preventing such an association from enriching the overall experience of the trip and its aftermath. In this regard, I admit to feeling a sense of some disappointment and of a triviality with regard to my return.

The last entry in my yellow notepad is dated April 22, 2006, 00:55 (the day after we returned):

In the morning I am walking Yael, my three year old, to her nursery school. It's located two blocks away from our apartment, and we usually walk
along this path together. Yael hasn’t been at the nursery, with her teachers and toddler friends, for over two weeks, because, prior to the holiday, and to our vacation, she had smallpox and missed the last few days. So we are really excited. As we leave home in the morning, I notice that at first, she wants to take a small seashell she brought from Sinai with her (she always likes to take small things with her). Then, right near the door, she changes her mind. She leaves the shell at home and instead takes a chocolate yogurt from the refrigerator, of the type she usually takes with her everyday to the nursery (“Milky”). I can’t tell what is going on inside her mind (is she worried that her friends will not appreciate the shell as much as she wants, etc.), but I make a mental note to myself that she is returning to her routine; that she is regaining her everyday practices, minute by minute: “Milky” > a shell from Sinai.

At the nursery it emotionally dawns on me.
We get there quite early, sit on tiny chairs near tiny tables, and peel the aluminum foil off the “Milky” yogurt. Yael is consuming it slowly. Tablespoon by tablespoon. Her tiny hand is shaking slightly, and I’m deeply moved. Now I’m suddenly teary, and I’m not sure why. I’m trying to hide my reddened eyes from her and from Na’ama, her nursery teacher. I’m supposed to be happy. Right at this moment I recall a moving dream that I dreamt the night before. I dreamt of my mother who died in 1997. I guess I had simply forgotten the dream. I didn’t dream of her in a long while, and I was now shocked to recall that I had dreamed of her office. It was empty, and yet there were other people there who I didn’t know: I think there a woman there who replaced her as the Curator of the Prehistory Department at the Israel Museum. I cannot recall exactly the emotions that I felt in the dream, but the feeling was clearly despairing. Her office was always full of Neolithic stone tools, flint arrowheads and even human bones, and was a great place to spend adventurous childhood mornings. In the dream there was only alienation and distance: the space of the office wasn’t mine any more in any way. It was her place but she wasn’t there. In this case sadness has triggered a dream, and not the other way around. I say good-bye to Yael and leave the nursery quickly, and now I can express my sadness openly and cry.

Yael is returning to her everyday routine, and so am I: walking her to the nursery, chatting with her, absorbing her childish blows (she practices hitting me with her small fists, with marked pleasure) and making her laugh. My return to our routine is reflexive because I observe myself observing Yael. When I do, I slip (back) into the role of the parent, her parent, observing her and Noa on a daily basis. In line with Haldrup and Larsen (2003), tourism might indeed be said to produce symbolic spaces of recreation, mainly re-creating social relations — familial relations in the present case (p. 24). Families are indeed affected by tourism, both during the trip, but also before and after it has actually occurred.

The return from Sinai has triggered dreaming, which partly serve to mediate and negotiate the transformations that occur between different states of mind and being, or between “everyday-life and tourism-life” (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 25). These transformations
are fairly common, and indeed various returns from Sinai, as well as from other destinations, were followed, in my experience, by particularly vivid, life-like dreams. These dreams, which are real, i.e. they actually occurred (unlike the excursions to Sinai, which are not “real” dreams), converse with altered states of consciousness. The evocation of the death of my mother in this context suggests additional terrains of reminiscences and nostalgia. While I wish to avoid simplistic symbolic interpretations of the dream, it is fairly clear to me that returning to “everyday life” means realizing — time and again — the enduring absence of my mother (illustrated in the dream through a similar language to that employed in tourism: spaces — inhabited and vacated). And death, too, is transformative, although under modern worldviews, death is not viewed as a state from which one returns or from which homecomings are possible. It remains, however, unclear to me why it is my mother’s workplace that I visit in the dream, rather than, say, my parents’ warm living room or the cozy kitchen that she had liked so much. My guess is that this recollection concerns my return to my (academic) workplace, and particularly to the act of writing — a sphere about which I feel very close to my mother’s experiences (see Noy, 2003). In any case, the fact is that it has been years since I last thought of, or imagined, that somewhat peculiar office, which embodies an interesting (and neglected or forgotten) aspect of my childhood spaces and experiences.

Conclusion of the Poetics of Sinai Journeys

By following the tourists, we may be able to arrive at a better understanding of ourselves. (MacCannell, 1999, p. 9)

At the onset of this chapter I proposed the notion that an autoethnographic inquiry can offer a singular contribution to the exploration of tourists’ “languages of experience”. The poetic texts described in the chapter suggest that tourism amounts to a nexus of both language and discourse — a nexus of different languages (such as Hebrew, Arabic and Russian), as well as the different syntaxes of various experiences. These (symbolic) languages are both the result and the means of translations of experiences across different Schutzian (1945, 1970) “provinces of meaning”, primarily between the spheres of tourism and of everyday life. In the chapter I endeavored to illustrate this idea through examining a heterogenous — as well as heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) — corpus of trips, experiences, recollections, languages and texts (written in the last decade, 1996–2006), of which there are only two homogeneous aspects: there is only one tourist — myself, and only one destination — the serene beaches of Sinai by the Red Sea.

As a methodology, autoethnography should be viewed in the present context as yet another “language”, which relates to the field of research. Indeed, the experience of writing autoethnographies embodies a strong sense of “language”: the author departs from traditional social science discourse in favor of attending to, and re-evoking specific discursive spheres. The autoethnographic exploration introduces additional languages into the already polyphonic semiotics of the tourists’ experience. It is, then, not a neutral and impartial “method”. Rather, by definition, it evokes the experiences of, and the prevailing ideologies in the field in which it is applied as a method of inquiry in an attempt to highlight them and discuss them critically.
Because the texts presented in this chapter were initially penned while the author was on vacation, they are viewed as souvenirs, those metonymically materialized products of the abstract notion of “tourist semiotics”. What Haldrup and Larsen (2003) write with regards to the social role photographing plays in tourism, can well be said about productions of tourists’ texts-as-souvenirs. In both cases, the tourist “is both the subject and the object of the photographic event – [she or he] is both in front of and behind the camera” (p. 42).

This leads to the observation that the poetic tourist’s texts have an embodied quality, which can be discerned at both ends — in the texts’ production and in its consumption. This embodied quality is related to the fact that the texts are created, or “entextualized” (to borrow from Silverstein & Urban, 1996) within a lively social setting, as a product of tourist performances. Much like the production of other tourists’ texts — from eighteenth century postcards to contemporary electronic blogs and mail — tourists’ poems require particular conditions for their production. Likewise, the reading of such texts in this chapter was also viewed as a tourist performance — akin to the consumption of a variety of discursive objects within sphere of tourism (commercials, guidebooks etc.).

At the outset I also proposed that, with time, the notion of tourists’ experiences is increasingly less clear and more elusive to me. The autoethnography presented above attempts to address this condition, but not in linear ways. It does not suggest, test and accept or reject further hypotheses or analyses. Rather, it conveys a “thick” (Geertzian) and emotionally loaded description, which touches upon and evokes the intricacies and subtleties of which the sphere of tourism is so rich with, and arrests or freezes fleeting moments, which, too, are so inherent to the same.

The nature of an autoethnographic inquiry is holistic or “Gestaltian”. It is therefore presently employed as an inquiry into the whole of the tourist experience. This is why the chapter organically “follows the tourists” (MacCannell, 1999, above) — from the journey to the destinations, through the sounds and rhythms of the vacationscapes of the beaches of Sinai, to the phenomenology of the return(s). Indeed, the chapter’s final section is devoted to experiential vicissitudes and transformations, which transpire in the course of negotiating “everyday-life and tourism-life” (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003, p. 25). The observation that people are tourists most of the time (Urry, 1990), does not lead, to my mind, to the view that everyday and the touristic spheres are homologous, but rather that transformations and translations are more frequent and are negotiated more subtly than before. They amount to moments of “awakenings” which the chapter tried to highlight.

References


Zemel, A. (1998). The Passover Haggadah as argument, or why is this text different from other texts? *Argumentation*, 12(1), 57–77.