

## SHIFTED IDENTITIES IN TOURISM: WHEN MYKONOS 'TRAVELS' TO THAILAND FOR HOLIDAYS

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*The purpose of this paper is to present the family tourist trips and holidays as a complex process, defined by a series of socio-cultural factors such as the sense of locality, the family ties, the professional status. There will be the attempt to show the tourist perceptions and practices of a group of entrepreneurs from Mykonos (place of origin), an overly-developed Greek tourist island. While they themselves are producers of tourism services, by going on pleasure trips to Thailand they become tourists, even forming a tourist identity related to perceptions about the sense of belonging and the family.*

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**Keywords:** *family, tourism, entrepreneurs, Mykonos, identities.*

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper, there will be the attempt to show the tourist perceptions and practices of a group of entrepreneurs from Mykonos (place of origin), a Greek tourist island. The main purpose of this essay is to highlight the family tourist trips and holidays as a complex process, defined by a series of socio-cultural factors such as the sense of locality, the family ties, the professional status.

The anthropology of tourism boasts a rich bibliography of research on social change and the process of economic restructuring in areas that have been developed for tourism. Moreover, a rich theoretical discourse has evolved out of the interpretation of tourism experiences and the ways in which tourist identities of people and places are shaped. More specifically, it has been concerned with the ideologies that influence the subjects' motives for travelling, as well as with the (re)production of images of the 'other' in the course of the encounter between tourists (guests) and their hosts (Smith, 1989; Swain, 1995; Selwyn, 1996; Abram



et. all, 1997; Waldren, 1997; Smith, 2001; Tucker, 2002; Rojek and Urry, 2004).

In an attempt to explain the reasons why people travel in the modern era, researchers such as Cohen argued that “tourism is essentially a temporary reversal of everyday activities – it is a no-work, no-care, no-thrift situation” (i.e., Cohen, 1972:181). Also MacCannel (1976), emphasizing the search for authenticity, considered tourists try to escape from their alienating living conditions in the capitals of the Western world by travelling to far-off places in search of real and authentic life experiences. The tourism escape takes place in contained places designed more or less specifically for tourism, such as resorts, hotels, attractions, beaches. It is an escape from the ordinariness, which has a quest for more desirable ‘consumable’ places (Urry, 1995).

On a similar tangent, Graburn (2001) considers that tourism constitutes first and foremost a ‘social ritual’ in which the tourist trip resembles a pilgrimage in the Christian world as has been analysed by Turner. Tourism, therefore, constitutes an anti-structure from the moment that the tourist is out of his everyday time and space, experiencing a state of liminality. In this state, the conditions are created for a deep interaction/communitas between tourists, but also between tourists and the host society. In this sense, tourism offers an opportunity for renewal and relaxation.

From another theoretical perspective, analysts such as Kohn (1997) have demonstrated that the structural categorisation and contradiction of the model ‘tourist’-‘host’ that was used in studies such as Smith’s (1989) to analyse the phenomenon of tourism, is ultimately problematic. Usually, oppositional categories such as ‘tourist’ and ‘local’, ‘guests’ and ‘hosts’ are used to conceptualize largely neocolonial/assymetrical -in terms of power -relations, constitutive of international tourism -as “‘guest have the upper hand in determining how any given encounter will unfold” (i.e., Stronza, 2001: 12). Nevertheless, such a classification tends to simplify a complex and ever-changing social reality because very often someone who is a tourist may, at another time and place, become himself a host and vice versa. According to the above claim, for So-Min and Miller power relations in tourism systems are dynamic and subject to constant change. Tourists may become middlemen/intermediaries by setting up enterprises or holding governmental positions. They may also become ‘locals’ by residing permanently in the tourist destinations. Similarly, the locals may become intermediaries through tourism management and planning enterprises. They may also become tourists. The changing identities of the above depend on different possibilities, time and place

(So-Min and Miller, 2000: 377). In this sense, the subjects' identities are subject to a continuous negotiation, as people's mobility in today's globalised world constitutes a normal state. In particular, as Miller quote, "contemporary identities can be theorised as a reflexive project, shaped by the institutions of late modernity and sustained through narratives of self-identity that are continually monitored and constantly revised" (i.e., Miller et. all, 1998: 20).

## **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW ON PROXIMITY AND FAMILY LEISURE**

The bibliography of the anthropology and sociology of tourism has generally demonstrated that trips undertaken by people who may, in another social framework, be producers of tourism services themselves, have been analysed as trips of mainly young people and are perceived as products of change because of the distribution of wealth which contributed in the opening up of horizons (i.e., Pi-Sunyer, 1989: 198). They have been examined to a limited extent as spheres for the exploration of identities in flux, in other words as spheres for 'role-reversal' practices by those who participate in the tourism industry, either from the point of view of the producers of tourism services or of the consumers of those services. Moreover, these trips have not been regarded as spheres of negotiation and reconstruction of familial or indigenous identities by the visitors. Nevertheless, Urry's considerations on mobility, networks and proximity (2007) can be a very useful framework of interpretation to this perspective.

According to his point of view, tourist studies have neglected issues of sociality and bodily co-presence and thereby ignored how much tourist travel is concerned with (re)producing social networks and social togetherness. Tourist travel is non related more to exotic places or exotic experiences but to a set of social and material relations (re)connecting 'disconnected' people in face-to-face proximities.

For Urry the corporeal travel and co-present meetings are of increasing importance. They create thick socialities of bodily closeness where people are available, and subject to one another (Urry, 2003). The 'co-present interaction' is the corner-stone of the social interaction for a range of institutions, particularly for families and also for friendships. The co-present interactions build up trust and sustain intimacy. In particular, togetherness is connected with visibility, the eye and the gaze. Looking at one another is what effects the connections and the 'purest' interactions of individuals (Urry, 2002).

In the collective study of Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, and Urry (2004) is argued that most tourists also travel with significant others to places which are valued for their ability to afford intimate proximities. In that places the tourists are searching not as much for the authentic 'Other' as for 'existential authenticity' - between themselves (Wang, 1999).

As far as is concerned the bibliography on the topic of the family travel, the anthropological and sociological literature is poor in researches and is lacking in a conceptual framework of 'family holidays'. Disciplines like social psychology, marketing, leisure studies offer the most significant theoretical knowledge on such issues.

According to the above, it is argued that family holidays, as a kind of family 'togetherness' offer time and space for interpersonal relationships and social connections within multiple generations mainly with adults and children. In the every day life, the overbusy families spend much time engaging in separate activities such as work, after-school activities, leaving less time for families to spend together (Epp, 2008). As Larsen (2005) has showed, Tourists consume places and perform togetherness. Families on holiday invest much work in staging and enacting happy social life especially for the camera (Larsen, 2005; Haldrup and Larsen, 2003).

From another point of view, Daly has pointed out that "family vacations are culturally viewed as a temporal oasis away from rigid demands and schedules" (i.e., Daly, 1996: 74), they are breaks away from busy ordinary lives and they are supposed to be a healing from the stress and the strain of modern family urban life.

In general the dominant theoretical point is that collective experiences, particularly family leisure activities, helps families develop a sense of family identity (DeVault, 2000; Shaw and Dawson, 2001). This identity is "the family's subjective sense of its own continuity over time, its present situation, and its character" (i.e., Epp and Price, 2008: 52). Family identity is more a co-constructed concept through action and less a construct that resides in the minds of individuals.

Families pay special attention on holidays and the reason is that vacation as a bounded time-space context is a distinguished base to construct and manage multiple identities. For Shaw and Dawson family leisure has special purposes and it is organised by parents in order to achieve particular short- and long-term goals (Shaw and Dawson, 2001). One set of goals related to family functioning, family communication and cohesion, and a strong sense of family. In many cases, the family

cohesion over the years supported by concrete vacation traditions (such as visiting the same special place year after year).

The above theoretical positions will be the theoretical axis for the analysis of the ethnographical data on Mykoniot entrepreneurs' holiday travels to Thailand.

The research information is based on 25 in-depth interviews with male and female Mykonian entrepreneurs, aged between 35 and 50, conducted in the late 1990s in the context of a Ph.D anthropological fieldwork on entrepreneurial identity, as well as on additional interviews conducted in 2006-2007 in order to obtain a more complete picture of the subject across the years.

## **MYKONOS/GREECE AND THAILAND: INTERCONNECTED TOURIST WORLDS**

According to Massey places should be understood as a distinctive articulation of social relations from the global to the local. Places are not bounded areas but porous networks of social relations, constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places (Massey, 1994). From this perspective Mykonos island and Thailand have formed special tourist identities as places- 'scapes' of global flows that are constitutive of imagined worlds. As Appadurai uses this term, the 'scapes' are what make collective meanings possible in conditions of fleeting and transformative globalization. Generally the concept of 'scape' means openness and accessibility (Appadurai, 1996).

In tourist-related literature dealing with Thailand, Johnson has focused on two specific instances of tourism: a) the ethnic tourism, where the tourist adventure is an unironic search for the 'unspoilt' tribal areas of Thailand; and b) sex tourism connected with a rediscovery of masculinity that is echoed both in tourist's diaries and in fiction written by and for expatriates living in Bangkok (Johnson, 2007).

At the other hand Mykonos is a small island of Greece (about 9,300 inhabitants) that has been a popular tourist destination for the Western world for over 60 years (Stott, 1982). Over the years, Mykonos has become the leading ground for modern trend-setting in Greece as well as the rest of Europe, and has been on the receiving end of various experimentations, particularly in lifestyle (Nazou, 2003). As a tourist island is also connected with 'gay' tourism (Nazou, 2006a). In the late 1990s, the prevailing perception of Mykonos was that of an open and extensive market of tourist services. Mykonos is also a place of residence for many and various inhabitants. It is inhabited by 'locals', a category

into which one may incorporate those who share knowledge, a cultural code of values and an insight of the local community as a durable communal space, made up of relatives of Mykonian descent, familiar stories about people, marks left in particular places and on the ground, a communal memory (Nazou, 2006b). Together with the locals, economic migrants from Asia, Eastern Europe and Albania are also sharing Mykonos' space. Other groups of residents include the 'Mykoniot by choice' (Boussiou, 2008), namely Greek civil servants and also various foreigners and Greeks who have set up businesses, bought houses and reside on the island all year round.

## **THE MYKONIOT ENTREPRENEURS AND THE PLEASURE TRIPS TO THAILAND**

The Mykoniot entrepreneurs and their families who are the main focus of this study have been directly involved in the tourism industry and own enterprises which they operate at least six months of the year (hotels but also restaurants and general trade in basic goods). Through their business activities they hold a leading position in the production of tourism services and have a very high income. Most of them, both male and female, are between 40 and 50 years old. The socio-cultural group of entrepreneurs operates as "a conveyor of social change in the local community, which promotes the process of tourism development, viewing it as a carrier of modernisation on a social, financial and cultural level" (i.e., Tsartas, 1996:103) and which, despite its internal differentiations, appears to own and manage significant material assets.

Mykoniot entrepreneurs work intensively in their businesses during the tourist period from the beginning of April to the end of October. Their work reaches peak levels in July and August as great reserves of human energy are required to serve the large number of tourists flocking to the island. Those involved need to channel all their mental, emotional and physical powers in this direction. It requires 12 to 15 hours' work a day if the "*summer is not to be lost*", and any money with it: there is therefore little time for socialising with people beyond one's immediate family, while socialising and mixing with the throngs of tourists is an absolute priority.

The entrepreneurs' socio-cultural group appears to be highly acquisitive (in material 'goods', such as new plots of land for building and extending their hotel activities) but at the same time it is also very consumerist. Its consumerist practices have to do, for example, with the purchase of large (and often luxurious) houses, small private yachts, the

purchase of designer clothes, as well as travelling to Asia, Brazil or Dubai. This group also enjoys symbolic goods, such as a high social standing in relation to other professional groups among the local population.

The Mykoniot entrepreneurs' socio-cultural group exhibits particularly interesting consumerist practices during the period when it is not involved in intensive entrepreneurial activities, in other words from the end of October until the end of March. One of the favourite practices of many entrepreneurs and their families is taking pleasure trips to safe destinations in warm climates such as Thailand, and specifically to areas there which have been developed for tourism, such as the island of Phuket. These are places of rest and relaxation for the whole family after an exhausting summer in Mykonos. Many young Mykoniot (between 25 and 35 years of age) also travel to Thailand, independently from their families. Many of them, though, end up spending their holidays as part of a large group of compatriot families, with which they may well have been acquainted back in Mykonos, but which do not form part of their immediate social circle.

I have become acquainted with the travelling experiences of the entrepreneurs and their families through their own personal narratives, based on interviews of people of different ages. Moreover, my understanding of these experiences has been based on my own travelling – tourist – experience and my participation in my own family's enterprise and work cycle, as well as on my close relationship with many entrepreneurial families in Mykonos which developed during the anthropological research for my doctoral thesis. In this sense, my perception of the entrepreneurs' tourism experience in Thailand has a personal dimension. Evidently, it is not possible to ignore the fact that such accounts are, in effect, interpretations in which "the symbolic world of the narrator is interwoven" (i.e., Ambatzopoulou, 1994: 40). However, this does not impede on seeing the holidays in Thailand as pleasure trips but also as consumer practices through which the 'familial' identity of the entrepreneurs and the sense of participating in the local cultural code outside the geographical boundaries of Mykonos are reconstructed. For what emerged out of these trips was not the contact between the entrepreneurs and 'others' (Thais or other tourists), thus lending the trip a dimension of encountering otherness. Moreover, none of the entrepreneurs perceived this trip as a process where the 'self' lost its fixed boundaries (Minh-ha, 1994; Galani-Moutafi, 2001). On the contrary, these trips were the framework for reconstructing and revitalising the family and indigenous relationships in a different cultural context dictated

by the entrepreneurs' tourism practices during their leisure period or "*their holidays*".

## **THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE TRIPS TO THAILAND**

As already mentioned, 'labour' as "*hard work*" appears to be for the subjects and their families the set context of reference of their entrepreneurial reality and constitutes (in direct relation to the concept of 'family') the basic channel through which experience is filtered and judgments, evaluations, and a whole world of meanings concerning both the individual and social dimension of the subjects as 'entrepreneurs' are produced. As the interviewees often reminded:

*"...All the things we have achieved in our lives are the result of hard work. How could we have a beautiful house, go on excursions, have everything we want for ourselves and the children? ...Should we be putting our hand in our pocket without really caring?"*

The intensive working practices, perceive as "*hard work*", may be viewed as a process of using up the individuals' mental and biological reserves over the summer months, like a drainage works of the brain's juices, or of the imagination which, as it appears, may be offset only if one thinks of their conversion into consumption of various pleasures, a large part of which has to do with the realisation of a long trip. It is important to emphasise that the most consumerist period is considered to be the four- to five-month-long winter. However, even this period, when pressure and stress for accumulating wealth is not so apparent, cannot be perceived as wholly detached from any activity related to raising financial/entrepreneurial funds. This appears to be the best time for investment considerations and for organising the financial tactics and moves for the next tourist period. Generally, however, this period feels like a 'return' home for the entrepreneurs and their families; a return to themselves as well as to an 'introverted' socialisation that is realised through get-togethers with friends and family. This sort of socialisation often has the character of a ritual performance as in, for example, the slaughtering of the pigs, and the fairs which act as mechanisms for strengthening local ties (Stott, 1982). The winter period is also rendered meaningful through wasteful practices and the consumption of wealth (which naturally also occur in the summer months, only not so regularly). Purchases of consumer products (cars, boats) are mainly made in winter when there is time to consider them "*without pressure*".

Trips to destinations such as Thailand take place – in a sense – in a 'dead' period, a 'free time' period, because "*they [the entrepreneurs] also need to feel what it means to have a holiday*". Already from the end of

October most of them plan the dates for their trips. The most desirable period for travelling is around Christmas (15-20 days). They can then move around as a family more easily than at any other time of the year. On the whole, however, from November up until February, those who are able to travel abroad and spend a long time away from Mykonos.

The idea of the 'upcoming' trip constitutes for the entrepreneurs one of the most pleasant thoughts in the middle of their exhausting summer. It takes on the guise of the most hopeful deferment of life to a time when they themselves will be able to enjoy everything that their "hard work" deprives them of when everyone else is on holiday. A very energetic woman with her own hotel business mentioned:

*"I try to go to warm places because I miss the summer. Well, you know all about that...We Mykonians have no time off in the summer because of the pressure, and so we try to find it elsewhere and enjoy it like the people we serve here. I think about my trip throughout the whole year...Whenever things get difficult, I tell myself to be patient, that my turn will come too...My trip gives me strength to get through the summer, I don't dare think how things would be without this pleasant interlude".*

According to the above comment, the trip appears to restore any social 'asymmetries' between tourists and those serving them (Galani-Moutafi, 1995), which manifest themselves wherever tourism exists. It would seem, however, that it is also a mental trick to transcend any negative thoughts and possible existential dead-ends, if one considers the loss of experiences because of intensive work. Work is presented as the driving force behind the mechanism for deferring experiences to a future time while at the same time, through the trip, the same mechanism bestows the desire to work with new significance. (Urry, 1990) Another of the debaters, commenting on the pressures from her daughters for free time in the summer, explained what she told them:

*"They mustn't press me about going swimming because then who will mind the shop? Let them be patient, winter is not far away...they will go swimming there [in Phuket], they can't have it all their own way all the time...I can't wait either. Once I get out of Mykonos nobody can bother me...It's not just the swimming, it's that I don't need to think about anything while I'm there. I can detoxify from work a little...Do you know what it's like to coordinate two businesses? There is a lot of worry and mental fatigue...that's why every year I end up there with Mimis [for three years now] where everything is at my feet, I don't need to think about food or about what to wear...I'm carefree".*

The trips to Thailand as tourism-consumer practices lend a bourgeois dimension to the entrepreneurs' identity, as they constitute a consumer

model of an urban way of life, where life experience, according to international bibliography is mainly negotiated through work in Western capitals. The adoption of urban ways of life by the Mykoniot entrepreneurs was traced by Stott, a social anthropologist, when she wrote that the Mykoniots are beginning to act like townspeople (1996: 301).

## **THE ENTREPRENEURS AS 'TOURISTS'**

The Mykoniot entrepreneurs who travel appear, like all modern-day tourists, to engage in practices rendered significant by the imaginary search for pleasure. Like most tourists, they also act on the basis of a sum of preferred social activities, structured according to their taste. They set off on their first trip having first contacted their information network, based on tourism experiences of fellow islanders or travel brochures. It is a multi-collective stage which reinforces the imagination, while also providing the security of pre-knowledge through reliable information. The validity of the latter is practically assured from the moment that the people who play the role of tour operator already trade in tourist services in Mykonos and are in a position to judge because they have a deeper 'knowledge' of the subject.

The entrepreneurs and their families go to Thailand not so much to learn about the 'other' or 'different' world, but to restore good relations with themselves. The first time Maria went to Thailand she went sightseeing and strolled around the markets. These things no longer interested her because she preferred to swim "*...and when you go to the sights you lose out on swimming and you don't rest*".

The Mykoniot entrepreneurs choose to take their holidays in Thailand in highly 'touristic' areas, with hotel facilities that provide luxurious services for tourists. They choose – in a sense – what is already familiar to them from Mykonos, namely the artificial tourism environment, reproducing "a small monotonous world which reflects our image wherever we are" (i.e., Turner and Ash, 1975: 292). Their daily timetable includes breakfast, where they gather in groups, describe how they spent the previous day, joke with each other, talk about news from Mykonos and draw up plans for the day: a swim at the beach, excursions to nearby areas, planning the midday or afternoon meal in which a large number of Mykoniots participate, making up a large group.

The trip to Thailand constitutes the means through which the entrepreneurs' identity changes and is reversed, in other words from producers of tourism into consumers/tourists. Miller's view sheds light on this reversal from an interesting interpretative perspective. He argues that

the same circumstance that constructs 'production' as a moment of self-alienation could also provide the conditions through which 'consumption' (in the form of the trip in this particular case) may possibly appear as a 're-appropriation' of the self (Miller, 1987). Moreover – in an interpretative perspective that originates from Baudrillard's view – what the Mykoniot entrepreneurs finally consume in Thailand is a world of mimicry and 'copies', since they consume nothing but 'elements' or re-enactments of their own reality in Mykonos, when they act as entrepreneurs and sellers of tourism services.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that the trip, whether as 'self-consumption' or as 're-appropriation', leaves much room for comparisons of the 'slight' differences (from the Mykoniot's point of view, naturally): a) between the Mykoniot version of identity with reference to the working sector of providing services (if they are, for example, good hoteliers) and that of the Thais' (if they are better, more polite with the tourists, what the reasons for this are, etc), and b) between the Mykoniot and the Thai with reference to their ways of life and the social reality in which each cultural group lives. With regard to the comparisons in the first part, the trip takes on the form of a rethinking of an aspect of the entrepreneurial identity that is linked with work and which results in widening the cognitive consciousness on this subject. The desire to re-examine the labour identity of the entrepreneurs constitutes a very serious reason for combining a holiday with obtaining information. For, despite talk of 'relaxation', concern about work and business is never too far off the entrepreneurs' minds. Vlassis, who also visited Phuket in Thailand, made the following comment:

*"I can't tell you how efficiently the Thais work...And everybody is so polite in the hotels...[They give you] the moon and the stars...To the point that I'm ashamed now! I can't do all that for the tourists...That's why they say that tourism is on the decline in Greece..."*

As most entrepreneurs therefore know first hand the quality of another country's tourism industry, they become a little 'wiser' concerning their own labour identity. From this point of view, the trips to Thailand involve a cognitive dimension beyond being essentially pleasure trips.

With relation to the comparisons between Mykoniot and Thai in the wide intercultural context of their encounter, the former identify in the latter both positive and negative attributes such as "*poverty*", "*stench*", but also "*inexpensiveness*". As far as the provision of tourism services is concerned, they recognise their "*politeness*" and "*attentiveness*". On the whole, the Mykoniot entrepreneurs place themselves higher up in the socio-cultural hierarchy dictated by the Western perception of 'other'

cultural realities. More specifically, they perceive ‘others’ through mental categories that reflect the Mykoniot/Western hierarchical value system. These intercultural encounters give rise to various value judgements like:

*“It’s nice there too but there’s nowhere like Mykonos...They showed us Buddhas and more Buddhas...but our ancient monuments in Dilos [ an island with ancient monuments, closed to Mykonos], it’s as if God himself had created them...And the whole of Greece has so much to show...But we don’t know how to promote or advertise!”*

However, intercultural encounters are not the purpose of these trips. More than anything else, what is sought and what in fact takes place on these trips is an encounter with the ‘same’, in other words with other Mykoniot entrepreneurs, as well as the restoration of family ties somewhere ‘else’ as opposed to ‘here’ in Mykonos.

## **RECOMPOSING THE ‘FAMILY’ AND ‘INDIGENOUS IDENTITY’**

The trips to Thailand are characterised by the encounters between Mykoniot entrepreneurs away from Mykonos. With their families, they set off from Mykonos together as ‘groups of friends’ and, when they reach Thailand, they meet yet more compatriots to the point of joking among themselves that *“half of Mykonos moves to Thailand in the winter”*. This type of collective encounter in foreign places constitutes an opportunity for displaying aspects of the indigenous identity, and through this display to re-establish a ‘sense of belonging’ and ‘family’ and to re-confirm social ties.

The family that travels to Thailand appears to recover everything it had been deprived of by the stress and exhaustion of the summer and at the same time everything it could not get by self-withdrawing ‘within’ local boundaries during the winter: to see itself within a ‘rejuvenating’ reality, to make up for all the deficiencies, to determine its emotional fissures and heal the various traumas through the ‘lost’ but potentially ‘regained’ summer in Thailand. The trip appears to be a need to regain personal balances through the small or extended yet fixed family group. It also seems to be an admission that the family is a stable framework through which the active subjects can draw strength, security and satisfaction.

A trip to Thailand has the nature of a ‘gift’ and, in one sense, establishes relations of symmetry, reciprocity and interdependence between the people who exchange goods and services (Mauss, 1990). This ‘gift’ is usually offered by the parents to the younger members of the family who work intensively in the summer at the family enterprise. It is a

gift that signifies the feelings of love they have for one another, while it also appears to be a moral reward for the provision of emotional, financial and practical support by the younger family members towards their entrepreneur parents or support or recognition between spouses. The Mykoniot groups of friends that are formed during the holidays in Thailand give the trip a socially 'unifying' character. Vivi told that:

*"Us Mykoniot may not even say 'good morning' to each other [in Mykonos] because we're busy and in a hurry...there, when we meet each other, it's as if we're covered in honey, we don't want to leave each other's side ...We get on really well together. We're a large group of friends, a large family. We're always kissing, hugging, making jokes and laughing...It's because away from Mykonos we feel 'united' and there are no misunderstandings, nor do we quarrel easily".*

The trip, therefore, does not only amount to movement in space but also to the movement of 'boundaries' in general. In Mykonos, the entrepreneurs are often competitive with each other and they try to defend their entrepreneurial interests in ways that bring them into conflict with one another for financial reasons as well as for reasons of social pride. However, from the moment they go away on holiday they surpass their competitive self, making Thailand a 'neutral' ground where the recovery of the collective indigenous identity is a priority among the various requirements that need to be satisfied during the holidays.

The emphasis given – within the context of these trips – to the feelings of "love" and "camaraderie", and the use of the "family" metaphor by the same entrepreneurs to better convey their experience, could define these trips as the cultural framework within which the symbolic content of the identity of the entrepreneur/tourist intersects with that of the pilgrim. The movement from one stage to the next (in other words from the departure from and return to the familiar geographical space of Mykonos) encompasses a state of 'liminality', where the 'self' through 'communitas' (communion/experience of collectivity) loses its fixed boundaries and participates in what is 'holy' and 'transcendent' (in this case of the holidays) (Turner and Turner, 1978).

## **THE 'PIG SLAUGHTER' IN THAILAND**

If the trip of the entrepreneurs and their families could be viewed as a fissure in the structure of work that encompasses the experience of an indigenous sociability, then the significance of the game, "laughter" and "joking around" (as they themselves point out) acts as a catalyst in this singular experience. On these trips the Mykoniot point out (together with

'how much they rest') how much "they laugh and joke with each other". They invent various kinds of games to the point of subverting the order of things, using symbols and meanings and reassigning them to the holiday context, changing their sense, as for example, in the case of the 'pig slaughter' in Thailand, which was like a show and a re-enactment of a 'native' custom through a game-parody.

The slaughtering of the pigs constitutes a customary domestic ritual practice for Mykoniot society from the end of October to the beginning of Lent. In the course of this family celebration, a pig is slaughtered and friends and acquaintances of each family are invited to eat and drink together. The symbolic force of this gathering is great, as it signifies the withdrawal of the local society unto itself after an 'open' tourist summer when cultural boundaries are fluid. The slaughtering of the pigs in which the Mykoniot indulge in Thailand is an ironic reminder of the above and is presented as an opportunity for 'jest'. One of the interviewees humorously described the following mykoniot pig slaughter in Phuket:

*"What should we do, what should we do... (we wanted something from back home) ...slaughter a pig, that's what we should do! We told the Thais about this...and the next day they turned up with two piglets in bags! But now we somehow had to slaughter them...Once the men had slaughtered one of the pigs, and they had boiled and shaved him and were in the process of skinning it, the other pig escaped from the pen and ran and hid in a swamp! (The Thais were watching us as if they were seeing the strangest thing in the world!) Mimis ran after it to save it and stop it from going under, but the mosquitoes woke up and turned on the good Christian ...Mimis swelled up like a balloon from the bites. But the more lively pig turned out to be the tastiest!...Well, we couldn't do everything that we normally do when we slaughter a pig...Even if it was like the restaurant belonged to us - they brought us everything we asked for. We only ate the pigs baked...but I will remember the fun and laughs we had for a long time".*

The liberating force of 'laughter' through this game of sociability and parody lends the trip to Thailand another dimension: that of revisiting childhood and of play: The trip is an opportunity of being informal, of do not follow established rules. "Playing in its purest sense lacks a pre-defined structure and is an open-ended activity of people making immediate improvised responses to the stimuli of environments and of others" (i.e., Junemo, 2004: 186). Also The Mykoniot's laughs and jokes constitute powerful mechanisms for defusing accumulated tensions which would be enough either to destroy a person mentally or to destroy the cohesion of a group or society.

From the moment that such trips are made in a collective way (in keeping with local travelling fashions), the importance of being with others like 'them' in a similar but at the same time different environment is emphasised, as it reveals that the entrepreneurs feel safe within this 'collective' environment from the various cultural challenges. At the same time, as they share a common set of references they constantly confirm their social position and their prestige among people who share the same code of values. From this point of view, a trip to Thailand, which is dictated by curiosity, competition and even more by mimicry of the same 'taste', may be perceived in terms of an indigenous social 'equalisation' between subjects that belong to the socio-cultural category of entrepreneurs.

It is of particular interest that the experience of the trip as a memory is retained both within the family as well as by the wider local social context, to the point that this common travel 'memory' feeds into narratives, as well as being fed by them, even when a long period of time has elapsed since the trip itself. These narratives, which are presented as family holiday chronicles, are needed in order to 'tame' the image of the world of 'labour' and the family 'enterprise', to tone down its 'wildness'.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Finally, the trips the entrepreneurs take to Thailand highlight once more the fluid meanings encompassed in the conceptualization of 'place' and its definition by perceptions about entrepreneurial (individual and familial) identity of the subjects: the place of work and the family enterprise, of the home and domesticity may be perceived as a 'familiar' and everyday place, but the same place may not also be perceived as a space that fulfils vital desires and pleasures. It is perceived more as a place from which sociability and a sense of belonging are 'absent', as well as a place which is limiting as far as pleasure and the subjects' ability for self-knowledge are concerned, especially during the tourist period.

One of the aims of this paper was to demonstrate that Thailand and Mykonos constitute a bipolarity through which one may observe the way in which the subjects shape their entrepreneurial or tourist identities by participating in social worlds as globalised as they are intensely local. Nevertheless there is still a set of issues such as family travels as a form of consumption or the concept of 'family vacation' which could be the analytical focus of a future study from an interdisciplinary point of view.

Also a systematic fieldwork with participant observation of entrepreneurs' actions in Thailand, combined with quantitative data of

tourism in Asia could provide a broader picture of this special category of mobile subjects.

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