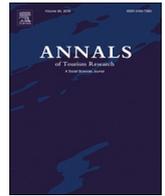


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Gazes and faces in tourist photography

Emily Höckert^{a,*}, Monika Lüthje^b, Heli Ilola^b, Erika Stewart^b^a Linnaeus University, Gröndalsvägen 19, 391 82 Kalmar, Sweden^b University of Lapland, MTI, Viirikankaantie 1, 96300 Rovaniemi, Finland

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ABSTRACT

The article illuminates one of the central ethical questions concerning tourist photography: the ways in which tourists photograph local people in tourist destinations. In line with the previous research on tourist photography, the study suggests that tourists' experiences of responsible behaviour become continuously re-defined and negotiated in relations with others. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of tourists' accounts, the study focusses on the role of the face in photography; that is, how encountering the face of the other interrupts the photographer and calls for heightened responsibility and reflection. Drawing on the Levinasian idea of ethics as being-for-the-other, the article visualizes relational ethics that do not originate from the tourist's gaze, but from the face of the other.

Introduction

I photographed groups of schoolchildren in uniform, and children playing in Lisbon, in a poor district. When a girl saw me doing this, she stuck out her tongue and posed with her hands on her hips, seemingly irritated. Yet, I got the picture. (25F¹)

This is an example of a story that we received after requesting Finnish tourists to share their thoughts and experiences of photographing and using a camera while travelling. Since its inception, our research has been fuelled by curiosity about the questions of ethics in tourist photography and, more specifically, how tourists photograph local people in tourist destinations. Throughout the analysis of our respondents' accounts, we drew attention to the situations where despite their strong desire to take pictures, the respondents had experienced photographing as inappropriate.

It is clear that tourism and photography are fundamentally integrated, and a great part of tourists' experiences and encounters become filtered through camera lenses (Bruner, 2005; Chalfen, 1979; Lo & McKercher, 2015; Picken, 2014; Scarles, 2009, 2012; Sontag, 1977; Urry, 1990, pp. 136–140). According to John Urry's (1990) influential conceptualization of the *Tourist Gaze*, the ways in which we look and use the camera are learned abilities. According to Urry, the tourist gaze is socially constructed and organised, which means that on holiday we tend to gaze and photograph differently than we do at home. Previous research on tourist photography has focussed on the nature of the tourist gaze and explored the different meanings of photographing. These studies have been driven by question like "What do we photograph?", "What do we find worth saving and remembering?", and "How does the tourists' gaze freeze its objects?" (see e.g., Belk & Yeh, 2011; Caton & Santos, 2008; Chaim, 2014; Garrod, 2008; Haller, 2014; Lanfant, 2009; Larsen, 2005, 2006; Snow, 2012; Stylianou-Lambert, 2012).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: emily.hockert@lnu.se (E. Höckert), monika.luthje@ulapland.fi (M. Lüthje), heli.ilola@ulapland.fi (H. Ilola), erika.stewart@pp.inet.fi (E. Stewart).¹ The code following the data quotes indicates the chronological order of arrival of the writings, the gender (F/M) and the age of the writer (if known).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.09.007>Received 16 April 2018; Received in revised form 5 September 2018; Accepted 11 September 2018
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The discussions in the previous studies support the idea that many of us travel with a desire to capture and recollect the extraordinary in ourselves and in others. First, starting from the extraordinary in ourselves, ‘the tourist self’ tends to play the role of the protagonist in a great part of holiday photos. We take pictures of our family members, friends, own toes and faces, as all of these seem to appear more interesting and beautiful in relaxing holiday settings. Jonas Larsen (2006, pp. 86–89) writes how the ‘family gaze’ revolves around the production of social relations, which means that people on holiday desire to take personal and private holiday photos of their ‘loved ones’. Anja Dinhopf’s and Ulrike Gretzel’s (2016; see also Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2018) recent, thought-provoking article launches selfie-taking as a new way of touristic looking. They argue that we have turned the tourist gaze towards ourselves, reaching perhaps a completely new level of self-centeredness.

Second, as tourism builds on providing and extending opportunities to experience things different from home, the ‘otherness’ of places and people often functions as a magnet for camera lenses. Tourists take pictures of people, landscapes, plants, and things that correspond to our ideas of otherness, of whatever ‘exotic’, ‘romantic’ or ‘picturesque’ might look like. In many cases, travellers are after similar images to those they have seen of the destination beforehand. Just like in tourism brochures, pictures are taken of landmarks, waterfalls, animals, and empty beaches (see Caton & Santos, 2008; Larsen, 2005; Urry, 1990). Therefore, tourist photography has also been approached from a perspective of post-colonial critique, pointing out the objectifying and ‘othering’ ways of using a camera (Caton & Santos, 2008; Cohen, Nir, & Almagor, 1992, p. 215; Scarles, 2013; Wijngaarden, 2016). These above-mentioned critical authors have all drawn attention to the ways in which tourists’ practices of photographing might reflect, replicate and reinforce stereotypical images of people, places and non-human nature (see also Bandyopadhyay, 2011; Bruner, 2005; Edensor, 1998; Pattison, 2013, p. 96; Whittaker, 2009).

In the research at hand, we align ourselves with scholars like Pinney (2003), Peterson (2003) and Pattison (2013, p. 96), who suggest that analysing the ways people use a camera can provide a path for understanding subjectivity and recognizing agency. While focusing on photographic encounters between hosts and guests, we wish to join the search for alternative, relational approaches to tourism ethics (see Grimwood, Yudina, Muldoon, & Qiu, 2014; Prince, 2017; Veijola, Germann Molz, Pyyhtinen, Höckert, & Grit, 2014) and political ontologies (van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2017) that challenge the prevailing solipsistic theorizations of ethics and responsibility (Smith, 2009a). It merits mentioning that our purpose is not to provide guidelines for tourist photography. Instead, we focus on exploring different meanings of ‘the face’ in tourist photography, asking what it might mean to be face-to-face with someone or something. What we suggest here is that while we might gaze at something or someone from a distance, the notion of face invites for a different kind of recognition, proximity and engagement. Hence, the theoretical ambition of this article is to envision and discuss the potentialities of ‘the face’ in tourism ethics.

Throughout the hermeneutic analysis, we focused on tourists’ written accounts of their own experiences from taking pictures. We did this by engaging in a close dialogue with seminal research by Caroline Scarles (2013), which underlines the situational and intersubjective nature of ethics within tourist photography. The analysis began with our general interest in how the camera mediates and shapes encounters between hosts and guests in tourism settings. Along the circles of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, we became surprised and interested about the role of the *reversed gazes* (Gillespie, 2006) and *faces* (Levinas, 1969) in tourists’ accounts. Before going on to describe our findings in detail, we present the previous academic discussions on tourist photography that our research builds on, and then continue unfolding our theoretical approach of *the face*. This approach draws on French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas’ (1969) discussions of ethics as the first philosophy and idea of *the face* that fulfils the purpose of his philosophy. In Levinasian writings, the face does not refer to one’s self-image, prestige or mask (see e.g. Goffman, 1955), but to the face of ‘the Other’ that fundamentally resists categorization and possession.

While Levinas wrote his *Totality and Infinity* (1969) in post-war-settings – long before selfie-sticks and Facebook – he described ‘the face of the other’ as something that invites and obliges us to take on responsibility (see also Hand, 2009, pp. 42–44; Wild, 1969, pp. 12–13). Following the Levinasian idea of the face, our ambition here is to visualize ethics in tourism settings that do not originate from the tourist’s gaze, but from the *face of the other*. We align ourselves with Hales’ and Caton’s (2017, p. 96) argument that despite the significance of the face and its role in mutual recognition of vulnerability, the face has largely been overlooked in tourism studies. Based on our analysis, we suggest that encountering the face of ‘the other’ interrupts the photographer in different ways and calls for heightened engagement, responsibility and reflection.

Gazes and faces in tourism encounters

One of the earliest articles that recognized and explored the ethical concerns of tourist photography was written by Richard M. Chalfen in 1979. While appropriate camera use varies from culture to culture, Chalfen (p. 440) pointed to the fact that most tourist photography occurred with little knowledge of local norms. Chalfen (pp. 439–445) argued that while complete restriction of tourist photography by the hosts was rare, it was also uncommon that host communities would allow complete camera freedom.

Larsen (2005, p. 417) has later described *the discussions* around tourist photography as “all eyes and no bodies and sometimes no brain”. This description, as Felicity Picken (2014) underlines, is a constructive critique directed most of all towards tourism research, not tourists per se (see also Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). It prompts caution about the ways in which we read and interpret tourism theories and attach ourselves to typologies and characteristics of ‘the tourist’. As a valid starting point, we wish to stick here with Haraway’s (2016) thought of ‘staying with the trouble’; that is, with encouragement to escape settings that would set ‘us’, researchers, on the ‘right’ side, observing, describing and criticizing the problematic behaviour of ‘them’, the tourists. All four of us authors of this article carry around our smart-phone cameras and, to different degrees, recognize the wish to capture and save both mundane and extraordinary moments in our digital memory. Saying this, we explore the world with a presumption that the majority of people travel and take photographs with good intentions and consider themselves as quite responsible human beings – with bodies, souls *and* brains.

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