GAZES AND FACES IN TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY

Emily Höckert, Monika Lüthje, Heli Ilola & Erika Stewart

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.

Keywords: tourist photography, ethics, gaze, face, Levinas, relationality

1. 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

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).
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).

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 unusual 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 Dinho’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 abovementioned 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 Christopher Pinney (2003), Nicolas Peterson (2003) and Helen 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 from 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 describing 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, p. 305; Hand, 2009, pp. 42–44; Wild, 1969, pp. 12–13) 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. 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 Rob Hales’ and Kellee 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.
2. 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.

Jonas 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 Donna 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.

As tourism researchers, we have learned to gaze at tourism worlds with help from Urry’s writings of the gaze and others’ re-use of Urry’s thought. In the first edition of his predominant book, Urry (1990) trained the attention to the ways in which photography is used to visually objectify and capture the tourist gaze. In his view, the tourist practices that involve the observation of physical objects are normally perceived as less intrusive than those that involve observing people. Further, this approach brought to the table the dubiousness of observing the private lives of the hosts, as a factor that would most likely produce social conflicts (Urry, 1990, p. 57; see also Urry & Larsen, 2011, pp. 60–63). In a similar vein, Necdet Teymur (1993, p. 6; see also Haller, 2014) argued that tourists look at everything behind a transparent barrier that makes all visible to them without getting them too involved, and “the most tangible transparent barrier … which demarcates the tourist from the ‘Other’ is the lens”.

Following Urry’s thought, Cohen et al. (1992) moved the focus from the tourist’s objectifying gaze towards the interactions between photographers and locals. Their research approached residents partly as objects that tourists may photograph, but also as active subjects interacting with the tourists. Cohen et al. (1992, pp. 214–217) suggested that the most central characteristic of photographer-photographee interaction is ambiguity. The ambiguity is most pronounced when the photographer defines the relationship as unilateral but the photographee as mutual. For instance, when a tourist engages in taking a ‘candid’ picture of a person who appears to be unaware of the photographer’s endeavour; the subject,
however, reacts with fear, anger, a smile, or a pose. Alex Gillespie’s (2006) research in Ladakh, India introduced the notion of ‘the reverse gaze’ to describe the aforementioned situations where the photographer becomes surprised by the photographees’ gaze. He argued that the reverse gaze makes the tourist feel positioned in the same negative way as she or he perceives other tourists taking photographs.

The phenomenon of reverse gaze is also approached in Maoz’s (2006) exploration of ‘the mutual gaze’ and in Pattison’s (2013) research on ‘the host’s gaze’. These streams of research have complicated and enriched the discussions on responsibility and ethics in tourist photography. On the one hand, their studies have questioned the meaningfulness of treating the photographees as passive objects (see also Bruner, 2005; Lanfant, 2009; Wijngaarden, 2016), and on the other hand, they have challenged the perception of the ‘brainless tourist’ on autopilot.

While the general attention given to ethical and responsible tourism has been growing in recent years (e.g., Caton, 2012; Fennell, 2018; Grimwood & Caton, 2017; Mostafanezhad & Hannam, 2014), the ethics of tourist photography has stayed in the margins of these debates. This even though technological development has been rapidly increasing the volume and possibilities of photography. In her research on ethical considerations and effects of tourist photography, Scarles (2009, pp. 475–476) refers to a ‘profound confusion of ethics’ in tourist photography, noting that both tourists and locals may engage in awkward performance in photographic encounters. In her prominent research on tourists’ experiences of photographing locals in Peru, Scarles (2013) engages in unpacking the ethical complexities of the seemingly fleeting relationships between tourists and hosts that emerge during photographic encounters. By drawing especially on Spinoza’s and Deleuze’s thoughts of unpredictability of the ethical response, Scarles (2013) underlines the reactionary character of tourist photography. She uses the term ‘ethical maze of tourist photography’ (Scarles, 2013, pp. 899–900), referring to Prosser’s (2000) concept of ‘moral maze’, which illustrates the ethical negotiations tourists enact with themselves, one another, and the local subjects in the moment of photographing. Scarles (2013, p. 913) concludes that the continued confusion and uncertainty that pervaded her respondents’ reflections on their photographic behaviour confirm the importance of researching the ethics of tourist photography.

The discussions about ethics in tourism have for long time been dedicated to creating codes of conduct to make the tourism business more ethical (see Fennell & Malloy, 2007; Smith, 2009a). According to this approach, even ethical relations between people are manageable with guidelines and rules. Mick Smith (2009a, p. 264) argues that the prevailing understanding of ethics in tourism research has been standing, unfortunately, on the idea that respect and responsibility towards the other are something unnatural – something imposed on us from outside. While acknowledging the importance of codes of conduct in raising awareness of ethical issues in tourism, we, equally to Scarles (2013), question the possibility of understanding or promoting ethical encounters between photographer and photographee mainly through explicit guidelines. Hence, instead of defining ethics as external rules of doing good, we consider ethics as the core of social relations.
Our approach is inspired by Levinas’ phenomenological work where ethics is defined as being-for-the-other. In his thought, the relation and responsibility for the other is unavoidably in us from the very beginning – as something that transcend knowledge and form a fundamental part of our subjectivity (Levinas, 1969; see also Fennell, 2008; Grimwood & Doubleday, 2013; Hand, 2009, pp. 36–37; Smith, 2009b). Levinas’ approach to ethics is embodied in his presentation of ‘the face of the other’ that demands justice and calls for responsibility (Levinas, 1969, p. 294). In Totality and Infinity, Levinas (1969, p. 198) describes that “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation...”. For him, the face is not a biological, physical or aesthetic detail that can be reduced to an obstacle. Instead, the face manifests the other’s inviolability and holiness: it issues us with an absolute ethical challenge (Hand, 2009, pp. 36–37; Levinas, 1969, pp. 151, 194–201).

While Levinasian ethical philosophy is seemingly built upon the Aristotelian paradigm of the good life and Kierkegaard’s interpretation of selfless love (Fennell, 2008), the novelty and originality of Levinas lay in his way of always beginning from the other. Levinas’ redefinition of ethics and responsibility in a thoroughly intersubjective way is very different from the modern idea of a free, spontaneous individuals. Throughout his work, Levinas encourages us to confront the ways in which we understand and experience the ‘nature’ of social life itself (see also Crossley, 1996, p. 174) and to question the meaningfulness of treating ethical or responsible action as a mere choice of an individual subject (Höckert, 2018). Most of all, Levinasian philosophy challenges us to disrupt the idea of ethical relations that are based on totalizing obligations or conditions and it invites us to imagine infinite openness, infinite relations, between the self and the other (Derrida, 1999; Levinas, 1969).

The Levinasian idea of ethical intersubjectivity is an example of social imagination – of a utopic idea of what ethical relations between the self and the other could be like. Instead of providing hands-on solutions, Levinas offers insights into the very nature of ethics (Derrida, 1999; Smith, 2009b, p. 625). His approach is also pertinent to postcolonial philosophy as it is based on the critique of the oppressive character of dichotomies between the self and the other, subject and object, which tends to prioritize the freedom of being over the relation with the other. For him, any assumption of the self’s power, the subject’s ability to pursue one’s own chosen ends, is undermined by the requirement that attention and responsibility to the other come first (Derrida, 1999; Hiddleston, 2009, p. 20; Raffoul, 1998, p. 214). Hence, in Levinas’ work, ethical subjectivity is always intersubjective and relational, as the moral sensibility of the subject becomes awakened by the other and, more specifically, by the face of the other.

3. METHODOLOGY

We have followed with great interest the previous research in which photography has been used as a methodological approach and travel photos as research material. In their seminal work on visual methods in tourism, Tijana Rakić and Donna Chambers (2012; see also Burns, Lester & Bibbings, 2010) introduce and discuss a wide range of possibilities of collecting and analysing photographs and photographing. We could have chosen, for instance, to gather images from secondary sources (e.g. Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013),
to engage ourselves and our research participants in taking photographs (e.g. Bandyopadhyay, 2011; Garrod, 2008; Grimwood & Doubleday, 2013; Pattison, 2013; Scarles, 2013), or to test the use of photo-elicitation techniques (e.g. Khoo-Lattimore & Prideaux, 2013; Pattison, 2013). However, in this research, we decided not to focus on analysing or discussing about images as such, but laid our attention on tourists’ written accounts of incidents and occurrences during their trips, as well as descriptions of their photographing habits.

The empirical data for analysis was collected through a writing request that was published in four Finnish regional newspapers (Lapin Kansa, Kaleva, Pohjalainen, and Ilkka) and on three national online travel forums (Matkalaukku, Paikka Auringossa and Suomi24.fi) in 2010. The aim was to obtain data in free form from the tourists’ own point of view, but a few guiding questions were given: Why do you take photos when travelling? What – and how much – do you photograph? Why do you photograph certain objects? If you travel in a group, who takes photos? In what kinds of situations do you take photos and what kinds of pictures do you take? How often do you carry a camera with you? What happens to the pictures after the trips? The request did not include questions regarding the type of holidays or destinations, as we were keen to gain a more general understanding how people use cameras while visiting others. Yet, descriptions of unforgettable situations, along with more general perceptions and ideas regarding tourist photography were welcomed.

We received altogether 25 written accounts (38 text pages). Most of them came from the readers of the newspapers. Nineteen of the writers were women and six were men, and the average age of the respondents was 50 years. The youngest of them was 25 years and the oldest 81 years old. The respondents had written rich descriptions of their experiences of photographing people, places and non-human nature all over of the world. Based on the accounts, all respondents were keen photographers: for some, taking photos was a hobby, while others also used their travel photographs in their work. The accounts defined photographing important as it made it possible to remember details from one’s trip and to share one’s experiences with friends and relatives. The practical use of images seemed to vary greatly. Some of the photographs are deleted already the same day they are taken, some of them are shared online (see Lo & McKercher, 2015), many are forgotten in cameras and computers, some are printed in albums or even as large prints that are used as interior design at home.

The analysis of the data was inspired by a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which encourages focusing on experiences of different kinds of relations (Gadamer, 2004; van Manen, 1990; see also Edelheim, 2015; cf. Lanfant, 2009). Along with Thomas Pernecky’s and Tazim Jamal’s (2010, p. 1058) writings, we addressed the intersubjective character of an experience by training attention on language, given meanings and understandings. Inspired by these scholars’ work, we understand hermeneutic phenomenology as an orientation that acknowledges that there are always pre-understandings and assumptions about the phenomenon under scrutiny and endorses self-reflectivity about them. While moving from Levinasian reflections towards methodological discussions means exceeding the scope of
Levinas’ own texts, we suggest that the phenomenological method is pivotal for visualizing what Levinas’ thinking of face-to-face encounters could look and feel like in practice.

Georg Gadamer (2004) and Max van Manen (1990) underline that hermeneutic phenomenological methodology – which builds on Heideggerian thought – should not be seen as a simple model of exercise but as a heuristic guide of practice (see also Edelheim, 2015). In essence, this approach encourages being open and surprised by different meanings that people give to the phenomenon being scrutinized. Following van Manen’s (1990, pp. 64–65) proposal, we began the analysis by searching for expressions of experiences through the methods of holistic reading and selective reading. Holistic reading meant reading and searching for the main significance of the text as a whole. Selective reading included locating expressions that appeared as essential or revealing, such as “not noticing”, “admitting”, “photographing intentionally”, “deciding not to photograph”, “feeling embarrassed”, and “feeling irritated”. The main questions we sought throughout the analysis were: How do tourists experience photographing situations? What kinds of meanings do they give to their encounters with local hosts?

Throughout our analysis, we looked for expressions that described feelings, values and experiences related to photographing. We also followed van Manen’s (1990, pp. 65, 85) recommendation to focus on particular incidents and examples of the experience that stand out for their vividness. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the analysis process is guided by the relationship and encounters between the researcher and the data; that is, the researcher engages in a dialogue with the text and co-constructs the meanings together with the data. We moved on with the analysis in a hermeneutic circular fashion and understood phenomenology most of all as a way to offer new viewpoints to the issue of investigation (see Caton & Santos, 2008; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

In the following, we present the results of our three rounds of analysis in a way that makes it visible how our understanding and thinking proceeded along each circle of analysis. By doing this, we wish to stay loyal to the hermeneutic way of approaching the data and devotion to our ‘aha’ experiences (van Manen 1990, 26; Edelheim 2015). The next section describes the first round of analysis, where we acknowledged the moral maze as a fundamental character of tourist photography. Along the second round, our attention was drawn to different strategies the respondents used to solve the ethical dubiousness. The third and last circle brought us an epiphany about the absence and presence of the faces in the photographers’ accounts.

4. MORAL MAZE IN TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY

In the beginning of our analysis, we were mesmerized by our respondents’ strong desire to capture images. Several brought up their interest in taking pictures of local people who, in their varied activities, embodied the destination’s culture. There were also accounts that indicated when lots of pictures are taken, the locals risk becoming objects among other photographed objects (see also Scarles, 2013, pp. 898–899):
I might take more detailed photos than I usually do, for example, flowers, dishes we eat, goods offered on shopping streets, individual houses, street signs, decorated house doors, elderly people, etc. (11F50)

Simultaneously, the data included descriptions of how difficult it might be to exclude unknown people from the pictures that are taken on crowded places (cf. Scarles 2013, pp. 902–903). Some of our informants explicitly acknowledged that there were always people who did not like to be photographed. For instance, one of the respondents described her experiences as follows:

Photographing people is especially interesting because it tells a lot about the country, both daily life and festivities. When I photograph locals, drawing a line between appropriateness and inappropriate photographing is sometimes difficult. I want to respect the photographing practices of other religions. I find out in advance if, for example, religious ceremonies can be photographed. Even if I have received permission to take pictures, I am cautious about photographing because, somehow, I feel uneasy and intrusive. (8F38)

Accounts about cultural contexts and local norms drew our attention to the ways in which stereotypical images of people living in tourist destinations seem to shape decisions about photography (Caton & Santos, 2008; see also Chalfen, 1979, p. 445; Gillespie, 2006; Scarles, 2013, p. 911; Wijngaarden, 2016). For instance, while people in China were described as having a more welcoming approach towards photography, some nationalities were perceived as having a more restrained approach to tourists with cameras. This writer acknowledged that her camera can raise negative reactions in some contexts:

For example, in Arab countries, the free photographing of people is not that easy because of religion. However, in those countries I admit taking some secret pictures of people in various situations. (19F34)

The same kind of logic is evident in several accounts: taking pictures secretly implicates a bad conscious of taking pictures in secret but also how important it is to catch photos despite the restrictions (see also Scarles, 2013, pp. 904–905).

Our data shows how the decisions are often made on the basis of limited and conflicting knowledge about the appropriateness of taking pictures. In brief, the very first round of our analysis resulted in seeing travel photography as a moral maze (see Prosser, 2000; Scarles, 2013) where ambiguity and complexity prevails, and the tourists move around without a clear direction. The moral maze of travel photography contains a juxtaposition between the tourists’ will to take photographs and the local photographees’ potentially negative feelings towards being photographed. This finding – that the tourists are often confused and uncertain in their reflections of their photographic behaviour – was very similar to what Scarles (2009, 2013) describes in her research on tourist photography in the Peruvian context.
Scarles uses Prosser’s (2000) concept of the moral maze as a framework that allows asking and exploring how tourists negotiate their desire to reinforce their imagination of destinations by photographing and “simultaneously strive to minimise intrusion and maximise respect to the locals they choose to photograph” (Scarles, 2013, p. 913). In line with Scarles’ (2013) findings, in our data the moral maze of tourists taking photographs results from negotiations between the tourists’ own desires, stereotypes and the photographees’ perceived feelings. However, it merits mention that unlike in Scarles’ (2013) research, payment was not an issue in our data. In the stories that we received, the tourists seemed to be negotiating between their wish to capture ‘the essence of the destinations’ and their concerns of respecting the locals’ right to privacy. Therefore, we decided to continue our analysis by drawing attention to ways in which these negotiations take place between the photographers and locals.

5. THREE STRATEGIES OF PHOTOGRAPHING

Our second round of analysis resulted in three categories representing different ways of negotiating one’s ‘moral maze’. More specifically, throughout our analysis, we focused on the ways in which the tourists described their experiences of encountering others through a camera lens. These different experiences were categorized under headlines freedom to shoot, the option of shooting from a distance, and asking for permission.

5.1 Freedom to shoot

Some of the respondents described how traveling gave them the opportunity to become anonymous photographers who can photograph whatever they want (see also Chalfen, 1979, p. 441; Cohen et al., 1992, pp. 216, 226; Haller, 2014; Jokinen & Veijola, 1997, pp. 35, 46–47). In these writings, the tourists seemed to pay only little attention to possible codes of conduct regulating photographing, or to whether their ‘targets’ agreed to be photographed or not. The accounts revealed ways used by the respondents to secure their freedom to shoot other people, who are thus objectified like landscapes or monuments (see also Cohen et al., 1992, p. 215). One woman described her photographing habits as follows:

I feel somehow freer to photograph when I am on a holiday trip. Nobody knows you, and you know nobody. […] I have the camera in my hand and I take pictures as I move around. When we stop, I take pictures here and there. The pictures are taken in public places and the people in the pictures are strangers. […] I don’t leave anything unphotographed consciously. (14F55)

The writer underlined her interest in photographing everything: including local people and other tourists whom she does not know. Hence, at first glance, she appears as a spontaneous photographer with no thought about the feelings of the photographed. Nevertheless, during our analysis we realised how her considerations about the appropriateness of free shooting – about feeling ‘somehow freer to photograph’ – is also based on her relationship with the photographees. Unlike relationships at home, her interaction with locals in tourist destinations is momentary and non-repetitive. This raises the question of whether possible feelings of uneasiness catalysed by tourism photography might be easier to ignore or deal
with while we are travelling. That is, whether being a visitor offers the photographers an opportunity to feel less entangled in social situations (see Chalfen, 1979, p. 441; Cohen et al., 1992, pp. 216, 222; Jokinen & Veijola, 1997, pp. 25, 46–49; Lozanski 2013)?

5.2 The option of zooming in from a distance

The experiences that we placed into this category were from those respondents who considered it appropriate to ask for approval to shoot, but wished to avoid engagement with the photographees. This paradox had led them to take photographs secretly, from a distance:

Later on, I bought a new wide-angle zoom, 18–270 mm, which enables close-ups without a need to go in front of anybody’s nose! (10M62)

While the previous studies bring up the tourists’ wish to avoid intrusion (Chalfen, 1979; Cohen et al., 1992; Gillespie, 2006; Scarles, 2013), secret photographing can also be seen as a spontaneous strategy that allows tourists to catch fascinating photos:

I was in Sicily with my mother and we visited a small village. We were on a lovely square when my mother noticed that in front of a nearby restaurant there was a man who seemed to be its owner, but he also looked exactly like Santa Claus. He had a little bit of a stomach and an entirely white, long beard. We were at a distance of about 50 meters from the man. I quickly took a picture of him; it turned out very well because I had a good zoom on my camera. The man did not notice my photographing. (4N32)

Whereas several writers seemed to dislike the idea of secret photography, their interest in taking photos of fascinating situations was overriding (see also Scarles, 2013, p. 904). Interestingly, these accounts indicate how many photographers make the decision about the appropriateness of taking photos just before the ‘click’.

5.3 Asking for permission

The third and last category – before presenting our explicit analysis of the face – consists of examples where the tourists experience photographing as ethical only when the other agrees to being photographed (see also Cohen et al., 1992, p. 222; Bruner, 2005, pp. 117–118; Gillespie, 2006, p. 345; Scarles, 2013, pp. 903–904). Unlike in the previous categories, we filled this category with answers from respondents who seek face-to-face contacts with the locals and shoot only after receiving permission to do so. The consideration of the others’ experiences comes first, meaning that the writers do not take for granted their possibility to photograph. For instance, one of our writers summarizes the principle by stating, “(I) don’t photograph individual people without asking for permission” (13M61). Another one writes about a memorable occurrence of photographing in India:

I was trundling along in a rickshaw and admiring the colourful dresses of the women in front of me. Two of them were sitting with their backs to the direction of travel. We smiled at each other and I pointed to my camera and
then to them, with an enquiring gesture. I received permission to photograph and one of the women lifted a child of less than one year old in her arms.

(8F38)

Some of the experiences described by our respondents come close to those of Scarles’s (2013) interviewees who ask permission to shoot. In these kinds of encounters, the photographers are usually prepared to refrain from taking pictures in case the locals express their resistance (Scarles, 2013, pp. 903–904). As in Scarles’ analysis, it seems that photographing can enhance feelings of togetherness, trust and respect – despite language problems and the fleeting nature of the encounters (see Scarles, 2012, pp. 941–943, 946–947; Scarles, 2013, pp. 908–909). Most of all, asking permission conveys an intention to engage in a respectful face-to-face relation with the other and to resist one’s desire to take photos.

6. THE POWER OF THE FACE IN TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY

As our analysis proceeded, we noticed that many of the informants shared experiences of situations in which a photographee had caught them taking a picture. Furthermore, we realised how the respondents described the others’ faces as something powerful, private, and unforgettable. It seemed like quite many would have agreed with this photographer:

I do not take close shots of the local people. That is, I do not go and take a picture even though the person would look interesting. (22F65)

Realising the presence of the face in the data was a ‘eureka’ experience in our hermeneutic analysis (see Edelheim, 2015; van Manen, 1990, p. 26) that opened new doors for us to think about the questions of ethics in tourist photography. For example, in the opening story of this article, a young girl’s facial expression communicated her disapproval of photography in her schoolyard: ”she stuck out her tongue and posed with her hands on her hips…” (25F). The locals do not just gaze (Gillespie, 2006; Maoz, 2006; Pattison, 2013) at the photo-taking tourists, but they speak and engage in the situations with their faces. Although the photographer had taken the photo of the schoolgirl, it would be misleading to claim that she would have completely ignored the girl’s reaction. Instead, our respondent’s decision to share this story indicates that encountering the girl’s face through the camera lens had been a disruptive, memorable experience. Inspired by Levinas’ discussions of the face, we became keen to explore why the experience of encountering the face of another person might even haunt the photographing tourists.

One of the writers described a situation that had taken place when she visited and photographed the Berlin Wall:

On the other side of the Wall there was chaos that looked like a graveyard of building waste, pieces of the wall and old cars. In the middle of all that chaos, there were young men who seemed to be outcasts. I wanted to capture the view of the Wall, the symbol of the ending of one of the most important periods in the contemporary history of Europe, and the seamy side of
everyday living at the root of it. Photographing such a situation made me feel uneasy. I did not dare go closer, and I tried to take a picture secretly, but when I was setting up the camera, I got such a glare from one of the young men that I refrained from my intention. As selfish as it sounds, it still annoys me a bit that the picture was left untaken. (8F38)

In this case, the respondent’s desire to photograph freely becomes interrupted and forbidden by the photographee’s face. While the photographer expresses disappointment at not taking the picture, she had respected the other person’s wordless wish not to be photographed. This example can be explained with Levinas’ (1969) idea of face of the other that puts one’s right to take pictures in question (cf. Gillespie, 2006, pp. 347–348). In Derrida’s (1999, p. 52) words, following Levinasian thinking, the other interrupts the self. By interruption we do not refer (only) to interrupting the act of taking photos, but also to the way in which the face-to-face engagement disorients the tourists (Lozanski, 2013) and disrupts the clear-cut categories between self and the other, appropriate and inappropriate. Levinas (1969, p. 207) himself suggests that “The other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me”, meaning that encountering the face of the other catalyses our feelings and functions as a call for responsibility (see also Downes & Trigg, 2017).

While several accounts included the aforementioned situations where the photographee had suddenly noticed the photographer, there were also accounts that described the photographers’ discomfort in encountering faces of the less well-off. Some respondents made it clear that they choose to avoid taking photos of people who are, for instance, sitting on the street, begging for help. One man explained his unwillingness to take photos of “beggars or others like that who I don’t like to remember or look at” (13M61). Another respondent clarified that she remembered children begging on the streets even without taking pictures of them. While some of the accounts focus mainly on the intentions of remaining dissociated from the local social situations (Lozanski 2013) and on protecting oneself from unpleasant memories of one’s travel (see also Lo & McKercher, 2015, p. 105; Scarles, 2009, pp. 470–471, 481), the following respondent brings up the presumed feelings and expectations that the other might have:

Sometimes I have seen a beggar with no leg, or other cripples on the street, and I don’t photograph them either. Although beggars and cripples make me feel pity, they probably expect something else than being photographed.

(22F65)

In our view, this account implicitly includes two ideas; first, avoiding the risk of a disorienting face-to-face encounter that obliges recognition and reflection (Lozanski, 2013), and second, how taking pictures does not feel appropriate when the other might reject it. Kristin Lozanski’s (2013) inspiring research on Encountering Beggars: Disorienting Tourists? discusses how these kinds of situations include a potentially anti-colonial moment that can shift the ways in which we recognise both the self and another human as vulnerable and complex social agents. Levinas (1996, p. 167; 1998, p. 294) draws attention to the vulnerability and nudity of the face of the other that call for peace and make us demand more
from ourselves. The other whose face has been encountered can be seen, in Levinas’ words, as the neighbour. Hence, encountering the face of the stranger turns her or him into a neighbour with whom we want to live in peace. And just like at home, taking photos of our neighbours – without their permission – does not feel quite right (see section 5.1).

7. CONCLUSION

Throughout the analysis of our respondents’ accounts, we became fascinated by travellers’ strong desire to take pictures and by the ways in which their photographing behaviour seemed to change when they – and just as rightly, we – leave home. It is clear that the behaviour described by many of our respondents would most likely not take place in one’s home area.

In the beginning of this research process we aligned ourselves with the thought by Cohen et al. (1992, p. 230) that, “When people are the subject of photography, this context involves at least a minimal photographer-photographee interaction, except for photos taken from a distance.” However, at the end of our three rounds of analysis we are left wondering whether the possibility of encountering the reversed gaze (Gillespie 2006) – the chances and consequences of ending up in face-to-face situation with someone – might shape almost all kinds of tourism photography. Drawing on Levinas’ writings of ethics and responsibility, we suggest that even in situations where the photographer seemingly ignores the other’s resistance, or avoids engaging with the other, there is always already a relation between the self and the other (see also Grimwood & Doubleday, 2013; Pattison, 2013; Scarles, 2013). This, although our data included examples of supposedly free shooting, we align ourselves with Chalfen’s (1979, p. 443) argument on how experiences of complete camera freedom are actually very rare (see also Scarles, 2013, p. 906).

We have agreed here with tourism scholars who have pointed out the insufficiency of analysing and explaining responsibility in tourism encounters merely as choices of an individual, self-oriented subject (see Grimwood, 2015; Grimwood & Doubleday, 2013; Grimwood et al., 2014, p. 36; Smith, 2009a; Veijola et al., 2014). By focusing on tourists’ perceptions and experiences of responsible camera use in tourism destinations, we have drawn attention to relational and situational aspects of being responsible. In line with previous studies (Chalfen, 1979; Cohen et al., 1992; Gillespie, 2006; Scarles, 2009, 2012, 2013), the analysis of our research data indicates that the photographing strategies and the decisions on appropriate camera use are not based on explicit, pre-defined codes of conduct, but on the social situations, relations and face-to-face engagements between hosts and guests.

The article has opened discussion about the role of the ‘face’ in tourism ethics (see also Hales & Caton, 2017). We have suggested that encountering ‘the face of the other’ is a disruptive experience that demand moral sensibility and calls for heightened respect and care towards the other. In other words, through recognizing the other’s face, I become interrupted and challenged to reflect upon my responsibility (Levinas, 1969; Downes & Trigg, 2017). On this basis, we have wished to join the ever-growing discussions in tourism that call for a heightened orientation towards the other and multiple others. (Caton, 2012; Höckert, 2018; van der Duim et al., 2017; Veijola et al., 2014).
Considering possible directions in future discussions, we can ask what it means to face someone or something in general in tourism settings. What does it mean, for instance, to encounter the face of an animal or other non-human earthling (see Zylinska, 2014, pp. 73, 94), or one’s own face (see Dinhopf & Gretzel, 2016)? What are those questions that we are scared to face as tourism researchers? In addition to Levinas’ writings, how could Lin Yutang’s (1935) idea of ‘the Chinese psychological face’, Erving Goffman’s (1955) discussions of ‘face-work’ and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) meditations on ‘faciality’, among others, help us to explore the multiple meanings of the face? As Stephanie Downes and Stephanie Trigg (2017, p. 3) put it, "Whether the face is taken as textual or visual, literal or conceptual, represented or embodied, it is, like the emotions, critical in (Western) understandings of humanity itself” (parenthesis added). Aside from academic research, we could all slow down to experience the ungraspable beauty of human faces.

By introducing the idea of the face, this study challenges the idea of ethic-free zones of self-centred-tourist-flaneurs who wish to gaze and photograph the surroundings as mere objects (see also Smith, 2009a). When people describe their experiences of appropriateness or responsibility in relation with the others, it denies the possibility of treating morals merely as a series of individual and hedonistic choices (see Malone, McCabe, & Smith, 2013). In other words, the majority of our respondents’ accounts are contradictory to the idea that people think only about themselves, dwelling in their solipsistic tourist bubbles. In short, we could expect more from people – even from tourists.

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