Hell is other people? An existential-phenomenological analysis of the local gaze in tourism

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ABSTRACT

The "Gaze" is a complex and overarching phenomenon comprised of diverse "Gazers" and "Gazees". This paper adopts an existential-phenomenological perspective to understand tourists' lived experiences of being gazed upon by local people. Based on thirty experiences collected from interviews with ten participants, we show that experiencing the "Local Gaze" exposes the tourist as Sartrean "Tourist-esque": an inauthentic experiencer of positivity, discrimination, alienation and self-consciousness. Moments of true human connections are at best ephemeral. Through an existentialist lens, the study questions the possibility of authentic host-guest relationship in tourism and argues that to maintain hopes for an authentic relationship, the concepts of "Gaze" and – perhaps even of "Tourism" – need to be transcended.

1. Introduction

Tourism has been defined as a "way of seeing", where experience is staged by businesses and subsequently consumed by tourists (Larsen, 2014). Inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1963/ 1973) concept of medical gaze, Urry (1990) conceptualized this visual practice as the *Tourist Gaze*, a socially and technologically patterned and learned way of visual consumption.

The predominance of the visual sense for touristic consumption has been contextualized to an ever-increasingly globalizing society in Urry's second version of the book (2002) in which he argued that, through the advancement of technology, the "gaze" has become more complex and overarching. While originally proposing that the world is merely gazed upon by the tourist, the *Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Urry & Larsen, 2011) discusses the power of the objectifying gaze of the Gazees. Maoz (2006) had suggested earlier that, rather than a linear gaze, there is an intricate *Mutual Gaze* between tourists and local people; a more complex reality where different gazes affect and feed each other.

As a result, follow-up studies on the gaze made advances in high-lighting some of its complexities. Drawing upon Pernecky (2012) and Urry (1990), Huang, King, and Suntikul (2017) highlight that the gaze can be conceptualized as a personal construction (constructivist and romantic), but also as embedded in social interactions (constructionist and collective). This mirrors a further distinction between the "exotic other" which is being gazed upon in a Foucauldian display of power

(e.g. Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; McGregor, 2000) and a gaze which is more complex, intertwined, negotiating and reciprocal (e.g. Maoz, 2006; Zara, 2015). Additionally, following wider sociological trends in the tourism field, as highlighted by Cohen and Cohen (2017), there are calls to acknowledge further realities which are likely to play into the formation of the gaze. Scholars have called for more awareness re-garding embodied experiences with a particular focus on emotions, such as empathy, engagement, shame and discomfort (Frazer & Waitt, 2016; Gillespie, 2006; Tucker, 2016). Others have drawn attention to different types of emic experiences such as non-visual sense percep-tions, ranging anywhere from smells to visceral senses (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013; Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2014; Jacobsen, 2014; Rakić & Chambers, 2012).

The embodiment of the "gazer" also presupposes that the tourist does not merely gaze upon the other as a Foucauldian spectacle behind bars (Urry, 1990), but also carries personal baggage which is open to be observed, judged and also "gazed upon". This is evident in recent stu-dies where race, class and gender have been shown as important in forming tourist experiences (e.g. Brown & Osman, 2017; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Spracklen, Laurencic, & Kenyon, 2013); partly through being exposed to the objectifying gaze of local onlookers. In particular, this *Local Gaze,* has been shown to be perceived as "harsher" than the guests' gaze upon the hosts (Tasci & Severt, 2016). Accordingly, it can be assumed that, even if considered from an emic stance, the gaze embodies a power dynamic between the self and the other (Urry &

Larsen, 2011) and may be reflective in nature, enabling the tourist to gain a clearer sense of the self (Huang et al., 2017), or to reinforce pre-existing stereotypes (Bruner, 1991).

While existing research on the gaze in tourism allows theorizing the gaze as complex, embodied and experiential, the above review highlights over-reliance on the power relations in the gaze. Other hardly considered issues, such as meaning (lessness), existential alienation, freedom, impeding death and dangers are also essential aspects of how tourists experience destinations (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017a, b; Vidon & Rickly. 2018; Xue, Manuel-Navarrete, & Buzinde, 2014) and tourism actors (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015; Gössling, Cohen, & Hibbert, 2018). We thus argue that the existing conceptualizations alone cannot help understanding how the experience of the gaze unfolds and what it means for tourists. Subsequently, this study seeks to extend existing literature by understanding how the *Local Gaze* is emically lived by the tourist through building on theorizations of human sociality introduced by the 20th century existentialist philosophers Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Buber, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Existentialists have long highlighted the importance of human sociality (Zahavi, 2012), theorized the extent to which interpersonal encounters can and should define the human existence (Buber, 1923; Sartre, 1943, 1989), and speculated about how human sociality functions in a shared lifeworld, particularly through embodiment (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Heidegger, for example, argued that humans are intrinsically bound through *being-with-the-other* in a shared world (*being-in-the-world)*, in which total self-ownership is impossible. Here, the tourist finds him/herself bound in a human body which is simultaneously interpreting and is interpreted, acting as the subject and object of perception (Koo, 2015; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Sartre (1943) adds the potential hazard of reducing an individual completely to a *being-for-others* through the gaze, as expressed in his famous quote "Hell is other people" from the 1944/1989 play "No Exit". In Sartrean terms, ontological existence of "things" (e.g. tables, chairs) is termed a *being-in-itself*. Human consciousness, however, is seen as destined to be reduced to a *being-for-others* because it cannot simply "exist" in the same sense as "things" of the physical world and has the capacity to reflect and distance itself from onlookers. The concept of *being-for-other*s suggests that *being-in-the-world* with other human beings and being exposed to their perception can reduce a being into an object; which is gazed upon and judged by others (*being-in-itself*). As the pinnacle of existing knowledge concerning human sociality, interpersonal relationships and encounters, these and other existential notions such as Merleau-Ponty's *intersubjectivity* and *embodied experience*, Buber's *I-Thou* relationship and Heidegger's *lifeworld* well lend themselves to the investigation of the *Local Gaze*.

Motivated by the need for a complementary perspective on the gaze and emic understanding of how the gaze is experienced, this research aims at examining human sociality embedded in the *Local Gaze* through the lens of existential philosophy. As a consequence, this study adopts an emic perspective to phenomenologically understand a tourist's lived experience of the *Local Gaze*. The research questions thus concern the phenomenon of the *Local Gaze* as experienced by tourists and ask (1) How does the experience of the *Local Gaze* unfold for tourists? and (2) What does the lived experience of the *Local Gaze* mean to tourists? Adopting an existentialist lens, this study hopes to enrich the theoretical understanding of the *Local Gaze*, host-guest relationships, and the tourist experience as a whole.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Gaze in tourism

Building off Foucault's idea of medical gaze, Urry (1990) proposed the concept of tourist gaze to understand "socially and technologically patterned and learned "ways of seeing" in tourism, which provide a reaffirmation of how a destination differs from home" (Larsen, 2014, p. 305). Urry argues that gazing upon seemingly ordinary elements of a destination frees tourists from routine, and allows experiencing a sense of the extraordinary; in which the gaze is typically seen as a form of visual consumption (Urry, 1990). The gaze can also be understood as a construction on the part of a tourist, which is mediated by specific representations, such as guidebooks, films, promotional materials, co-constructing and reinforcing the gaze (Huang et al., 2017; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Similar to the dominating power of Foucault's medical gaze - when a doctor evaluates a patient, tourists are believed to exercise power and judgment when gazing at locals. Reflecting the power dynamics in a typical tourism scenario, the tourist gaze orders and regulates the relationship between gazers (tourists) and gazees (locals), as a relationship between "self" and the exotic "other" (Huang et al., 2017).

According to the above conceptualization, the tourist gaze has provided theoretical grounds for empirical research, interrogating the guest-host dynamics in tourism (e.g. Huang et al., 2017; McGregor, 2000; Robinson, 2014; Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Although it is generally shown that guidebooks and other media selectively draw tourists' attention to those destination features that more effectively realize the "authentic exotic" other (McGregor, 2000), in the analysis of second-generation Chinese migrants traveling in China, Huang et al. (2017) found that tourists were rather looking for similarities, in order to establish a greater connectedness with the ancestral homeland.

Urry (2002) re-considered the role of the visual gaze in tourism consumption, among other aspects, and argued that the gaze is in fact more complex and overarching than just being a linear relationship. The gaze has become an embodied, all-encompassing, experience that is no longer exclusively Western or belonging to tourists. For example, Everett (2008) looks at food tourism as a non-visual tourist gaze. Zara (2015), who initially focused on gazes of Hindu travellers in tourist sites of Varanasi, India, concludes that "there are often sites of multiple and multifarious gazes, where different visual legacies interact and merge, making a real distinction between "tourist" and "host" difficult to define" (p. 41). This echoes Maoz's (2006) earlier proposition that the tourist gaze inescapably influences and is influenced by the *Local Gaze*. The locals' own construction of tourists as the exotic "other," and the term "mutual gaze" was coined to symbolize the interrelationship between the two gazes (Maoz, 2006). The above inspired Urry and Larsen (2011) to develop a relational take on the gaze, termed as gaze 3.0, as "[t]he eyes of Gazers and Gazees are likely to meet, however, briefly, each time the tourist gaze is performed" (Larsen, 2014, p. 308). The gaze 3.0 also discusses how neither gazers nor gazees are passive and can exercise power over each other through the gaze. Jordan and Aitchison (2008), as well as Brown and Osman (2017), for example, show that female tourists, especially solo travellers, are acutely aware of the objectifying sexualized and controlling gaze of local men. The objectifying power of the gaze can be also self-directed as in the case of selfie-taking (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Chhabra (2010) demonstrates that locals (the Amish) internalize the tourist gaze with mixed reactions, which could be characterized as "negotiated reciprocity."

In summary, the existing research has progressed from understanding the gaze as one-directional (tourist to local) to its conceptualization as multi-directional and encompassing various modalities. Despite the recent recognition of the gaze as also constructivist (Huang et al., 2017), the overwhelming number of studies investigate the gazer-gazee social relationship in terms of power dynamics, particularly when it comes to the categories of gender and social class. Although valuable, we argue that a supplementary perspective that recognizes the very humanness of actors in tourism and, by extension, their sociality is necessary to understand additional realities contextualizing the gaze, such as emotions, empathy, embodiment, as well a uniquely human concern for meaning. An existential-phenomenological lens, to which we turn next, provides not only the appropriate ontological and epistemological apparatus, but also valuable

conceptual foundation to explore these issues.

2.2. An existential perspective

Sociality and intersubjectivity have a longstanding history in phenomenology and existentialism (Zahavi, 2012), and thus some interpretations of key ideas may vary and be subject to controversy. To give a fair overview, the below discussion is based not only on the original key texts but also on interpretations given by pertinent experts.

As the concept of tourist gaze was primarily derived from Foucault's medical gaze, it is important to highlight the relationship between Foucault's thought and the phenomenological-existential paradigm of this study. According to Iftode (2013), Foucault's "notion of the self" shares several key points with phenomenologist thought. On the one hand, Foucault is concerned with "breaking away from the self" by acknowledging the arbitrariness of daily existence. On the other hand, he refers to a type of individual empowerment, taking the case of the Greek-Roman philosophical tradition of "care of the self"; a regulated form of human existence and harmony between words and deeds which is expressed through social practices and discourses. On a similar line, Wehrle (2016) argues that Foucault's thought has transitioned from recognizing the subject as being passive and subjugated to recognizing an active subject; which is not only able to reflect, but also to exercise power on his/herself. Taking the case of phenomenologist Edmund Husserl's example of double sensation (touching a touched hand while feeling the touch and being touched at the same time), she states that the "care of the self" could be interpreted as a type of phenomenological awareness of one's movements and thus a base for self-reflection and critical thought.

Given the relationship between the gaze in tourism and Foucault's thought, phenomenology and existentialism are also conceptually tied to the gaze. Koo (2015) sums up existentialist views on sociality with two principles: 1) interpersonal encounters determine the basic character of human existence (as can be found the early Sartre (1943) and Martin Buber (1923) and 2) an adequate account of human sociality must begin with how we always already exist in a shared world (as represented by Heidegger (1927/1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1964). As this study aims at investigating the *Local Gaze* through an existential and phenomenological lens, it is necessary to review existential viewpoints on "the other" of the above thinkers.

Heidegger. Heidegger (1927/1962) claims that *being-with-others* (*Miteinandersein*) is a necessary condition for the experience of being a human. The *being-in-the-world* is primarily conditioned by coexistence with other human beings, where we live as engaged agents rather than as disconnected spectators. Even when no other human beings are present in the immediate surroundings, humans are always bound to a being-with the other in the lifeworld. Yet, it is possible to feel alone among others, through encounters of indifference and alienation from those with whom the lifeworld is shared (Theunissen, 1984). This also means that the world cannot exist as detached and independent from humans' interpretations, as it is based on socially shared beliefs, practices and norms (Koo, 2015); and there is a pre-existing background understanding which underlies human life experience. This interpretation does not only involve the other, as it also presupposes that the world is not "present-at-hand"; but rather presents itself as a practically significant environment, in which the human being interprets itself based on an interrelated, pre-understood complex of beliefs (Koo, 2015). In other words, the daily world makes sense *to* and *of* us, the human beings who inhabit it.

Heidegger argues that self-interpretation resides on socio-cultural heritage, which normalizes human behaviour and enables the human condition (*conditio humana*) in a shared world; this can be general or specific to a certain context, e.g. being a tourist. Self-ownership can never be a total and complete detachment from the assumptions through which humans make sense of themselves or others, and this is a natural (rather than negative) aspect of human experience. In tourism,

this aspect is typically interpreted as a Heideggerian quest for authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017a), although Sheperd argues that for Heidegger the fact of a tourist being detached from "soil and roots" would inherently be inauthentic – thus tourism and authenticity should be mutually exclusive. In how far a tourists' experience the *Local Gaze* as rooted in the lifeworld, or as "pure", decontextualized intersubjectivity, remains in question.

Merleau-Ponty. While largely following Heidegger's notion of *being-in-the-world*, Merleau-Ponty places more importance on the role of the human body in constituting lived experiences (Low, 2009). In his "Phenomenology of Perception" (1945), he discusses the apparent contrast of being "open to the world" yet "bodily embedded in it", questioning Cartesian dualism and separation between the subject and object of perception. His notion of "embodiment" is also related to how humans interrelate with each other. First, other human beings are experienced as embodied beings with their own perspectives on the world, expressed through their bodily and linguistic activities. Second, interrelationship with others is reciprocal, in a sense that others are aware of the perceiver as much as he/she is of them. Accordingly, sense is made largely through perceptions and communication about how bodily activities express subjectivity; as such communication takes a central stage in forming thoughts and emotions. Other people's bodies are not experienced like material objects, but are embedded with subjectivity, powers and capabilities to respond to their distinctive environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Merleau-Ponty further argues (1945, p. 168) that "another consciousness can only be deduced if the other person's emotional expressions and my own are compared and identified, and only if precise correlations are recognized between my gesticulation and my "psychic facts." Then, an individual is incapable to fully live the experience of the other" (Koo, 2015).

Sartre. For Sartre (1943,1989), human relationships present an inherent conflict but are based in encounters, rather than in the existence of a shared world. He sees the most authentic way of relating to other people in solicitude, or genuine (non-dominating or possessive) relations to other human beings; which "must consist in openness and willingness to listen and receive as well as to speak and to give" (MacQuarrie, 1972, p. 109). Such connections are possible only when individuals become autonomously authentic beings, who are capable of relating to others in a non-objectifiable manner. Sartre, particularly in his early works, does not believe that such relationships are realistically achievable, because any social encounter necessarily implies alienation of "self" through its objectification, when an individual becomes an object of perception of the other; a notion that he calls *being-for-others* (Sartre, 1943). Sartre's (1943) *being-for-others* relies on the fact that, as human beings we are continuously confronted with the physical and mental presence of others; and this can lead to diverse effects on the relationship with our own being. On the one hand, we can get to know who we are through being gazed at by other people; on the other hand, being looked at and judged by the other can reduce us to an observed and judged object – a *being-for-others* (Daigle, 2010). For Sartre, this onlooker does not have to be physically present, as the mere thought of being objectified by another might cause feelings of pride and shame. Cox (2009) highlights that this experience can be a traumatizing, as it compromises meaning-making abilities and undermines a sense of freedom and self-ownership.

In Sartrean terms, the existence of the self is meaningless until the self can be perceived through being aware of the other– "a seeing-myself because somebody sees me" (Lavine, 1984). In return, the self may choose to re-objectify the onlooker in order to regain control of interpretation (*sadism*), or to reduce itself to an object to be interpreted by the other (*masochism*) (Sartre, 1943). A third attitude is given as "indifference", where one rejects objectification by viewing others merely as obstacles and functional objects, resulting in isolation and a sense of alienation (Detmer, 2009). Sartre concludes that relating to other beings in an objectifying way is unavoidable and thus, relational authenticity is unattainable.

Buber. While Buber reaffirms Sartre's relationships transcending situatedness, he entertains the possibility of positive, unalienated encounters with others, termed as the "*I-Thou*" relationship. This encounter is open, unmediated, mutual and responsible (Buber, 1923). Buber makes a sharp distinction between the *I-It*, in which the other is "experienced", "gazed upon" and "objectified", and the *I-Thou* relationship, in which interlocutors listen, speak to (and not about) each other, and respond to the distinctiveness of the other (Koo, 2015). Buber assigns a negative, objectifying quality to interactions, when the other is not wholly present but rather experienced in terms of his/her objectifying features (*I-It* relationship). Thus, according to Buber, authentic and rewarding relationships are only possible if an individual can transcend the gaze by giving all of him/herself to a mutual encounter. This is only achievable when the other is not experienced through sensations, but rather merges into a relationship not separated by bounds (Buber, 1923). He also states that this relationship can anyhow not be engineered, but happens by grace of "the word", which is commonly interpreted through religious connotation (Koo, 2015).

The *I-Thou* relationship takes into account the very humanness of another individual, a necessary condition of authenticity. In other words, without the Thou, one can never be fully human (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Addressing an existential concern of alienation is then to be resolved in favour of forming authentic connections to other human beings. Unlike Sartre, Buber does not see a contradiction between one's authentic "self" and the need to relate. For him, the essence of a human being is not to be alienated from - but rather to be connected with other humans.

Although these four key thinkers can all be referred to as existentialists, there are some key points where they diverge from each other, offering fundamental concepts to inform this study. The early Sartre and Buber place heightened emphasis on the importance of the interpersonal encounter in establishing human relationships. While this invites researchers to heighten the focus on immediacy and mutuality, *being-for-others* and the *I-Thou* relationship are not particularly concerned with the contextual features of the encounter; such as gender, race, nationality and socio-cultural heritage among others. In a tourism context, this would mean to presuppose the gaze as being "*worldless*" (Buber, 1923), whether or not an authentic encounter is possible (Buber) or ephemeral (Sartre).

On the other hand, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty highlight the contextual importance in which the gaze is embedded; be it socio-cultural background, nationality, physical features, linguistic features and the Foucauldian power-relations which might come with it. Gender in particular, has been a topic of increasing interest in investigating and "embodied" gaze; among which gender equality (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2015), and female travellers from non-western backgrounds (e.g. Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). While an embedded and embodied gaze could be seen a problematic, especially in terms of power of interpretation, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty offer the possibility of a "generic" understanding based on mutual interpretation of each other's; worldly situatedness (Koo, 2015).

Tourism research has taken up a dialogue with existential thinkers on multiple occasions to frame tourist experiences in relation to the human condition (Brown, 2013; Kirillova & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., b, 2017a; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Shepherd, 2015; Wang, 1999). The concept of authenticity, typically in its Heidegerrian and Sartrean conceptualization, was borrowed to understand tourists' quest for genuine relationships with self and others, which can become a travel motivator (Vidon & Rickly, 2018; Wang, 1999), an unexpected outcome (Brown, 2013; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017b), or an illusion altogether (Knudsen, Rickly, & Vidon, 2016). Yet, despite the acknowledgement of existential alienation (e.g. Xue et al., 2014), there has been no focused inquiry into human sociality and particularly the phenomenon of the gaze as built on a more comprehensive existential-phenomenological approach which incorporates ideas of Buber and Merleau-Ponty.

3. Methodology

An existential-phenomenological lens, which blends the philosophy of existentialism with the phenomenological paradigm, is utilized in this study as a theoretical backdrop. With attention to and appreciation of the human condition, an existential-phenomenological analysis seeks to understand humans not in behavioural terms or through cognitive structures but through contextually based and holistic examinations of lived experiences via non-dualistic ontology and first-hand accounts (Belk, 2017; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Methodologically, this study is underpinned by phenomenology. Phenomenology is often contrasted with natural sciences, as it neither aims at controlling the world, nor at causally explaining phenomena of an objective and independent reality (van Manen, 2014). Taken as a type of human research, phenomenology offers the opportunity to gain credible insights into the world as experienced by humans, in order to understand one's "lived experience" (Husserl, 1975).

Among various interpretations of phenomenology, the two most prominent orientations are Husserl's descriptive and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. Husserl, claimed to be the founder of phenomenology, conceived a phenomenological project as a "reduction", which allows researchers to arrive at "essences," or "a structure of essential meanings, which explicate a phenomenon of interest" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11). Adopting the "epoché," or bracketing a researcher's biases and pre-conceived ideas, is thought as necessary to "see" a phenomenon in its pure form, free from routine or previously learned assumptions. In this way, the essences of phenomena are not meant to be interpreted, as they already belong to the "lived" experience of an individual. Husserl's phenomenology relies on a realist ontology (world and nature can be assessed through *being-in the world*) and objectivist epistemology (researchers as distant investigators) (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Heidegger, however, proposed that a phenomenon becomes observable only when it emerges from a stream of consciousness and thus phenomenology is possible only when one acknowledges and explores the meaning of a phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology is thus interested in how lived experiences are interpreted and understood. Heidegger (1927/1962) maintains that both parties - a research participant and a researcher - are already involved in the "environing" world, inasmuch as their life background, cultural surroundings, and traditions inevitably contextualize interpretations of an experience. He denies the possibility of phenomenological bracketing as context and language become the means of interpretation and co-construction. Heidegger's phenomenology is thus based on a relativist ontology (reality exists in the form of mental constructions) and hermeneutic epistemology (understanding is reached through dialogue between researcher and participant) (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

This particular study embraces ontological, epistemological and methodological stances of both orientations. While the first research question is addressed on the basis of Husserl's phenomenology (Wassler & Schuckert, 2017), the second question, which centers on meaning, is best answered through hermeneutic phenomenology. Simultaneously employing two contrasting phenomenological orientations in one study presents challenges. On one hand, it is necessary to distinguish between two separate methods in terms of approaches to participant interviews and data analysis. For example, the practice of bracketing is relevant in descriptive phenomenology but cannot be employed under the hermeneutic principles. On the other hand, the final phenomenological account, presented as research findings, should read as a coherent analysis and reconcile results from both approaches. The next section outlines the specific steps taken to facilitate simultaneous separation and integration of two phenomenologies in this study.

4. Method

Consistent with the above stances, the study adopted a qualitative approach based on individual interviews. Data collection was

Table 1
Participant information.

Participant pseudonym	Nationality	Residence	Gender	Age	Educational background	Experiences shared
1. Wei	China	China	female	23	B.S.	1 Independent travel to USA 2 Independent travel to Singapore
2. Irene	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	female	31	M.S.	3 Travel to USA with friends 4 Tour group travel to Egypt 5 Travel with parents to Kyoto 6 Independent travel to South Korea
3. Marina	Russia	USA	female	36	Ph.D.	7 Seaside vacation in Southern Russia 8 Independent travel to USA 9 Conference travel to Thailand
4. Jessica	USA	USA	female	63	Associate degree	10 Tour group travel to India 11 Independent travel to Lisbon, Portugal 12 Independent travel to Hong Kong
5. Laura	China	Hong Kong	female	39	Ph.D.	13 Family vacation in London (with 2 children) 14 Independent travel to Australia
6. Ana	Mexico	England	female	39	Ph.D.	15 Travel with mother to Southern Mexico 16 Independent travel to Lille, France
7. Marco	Italy	Italy	male	34	High school	17 Travel to Barcelona with colleagues 18 Business trip in Chile 19 Independent travel to Vietnam 20 Independent trip to Hong Kong and Macau
8. John	England, UK	England, UK	male	48	Ph.D.	21 Family trip to China and Hong Kong 22 Independent travel to Jamaica with wife
9. David	Northern Ireland, UK	England, UK	male	54	M.S.	23 Independent travel to Malaysia 24 Independent travel to Italy 25 Independent trip to Germany 26 Independent travel to Turkey
10. Jorge	Brazil	The Netherlands	male	36	M.S.	27 Backpacking in India 28 Backpacking in Laos 29 Backpacking in Vietnam 30 Independent travel to Iceland

performed throughout November 2016–December 2017, and participants were recruited following experience-based purposive sampling. Although almost any tourism occasion is a context for the *Local Gaze*, a phenomenological analysis necessitates tourists' awareness of the gaze to become accessible for investigation. Therefore, the criterion for inclusion was having an experience and awareness of being gazed upon by others during travel. Given that instructional and relevant out-of-class experiences were found to make significant contributions to gains in critical thinking and awareness (Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995), expectedly, the ten study participants tended to have above average education and to be well-travelled. Participants, who were recruited through researchers' personal network and snowballing technique, originated from nine different countries, representing North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. Since the sampling unit and the unit of analysis in phenomenology is an experience rather than a participant (Englander, 2012; Kirillova, 2018) and the participants had reflected on more than one instance of the experience in question, the final sample size consisted of 30 relevant experiences that occurred in both domestic (in relation to participants' country of residence) and international destinations throughout the world (see Table 1). Data collection efforts were based on the principle of generality (Giorgi, 2009), which means that the collected data must be phenomenologically saturated, or, in other words, producing the structure of a phenomenon that is invariant across all collected experiences. The data were deemed as saturated and the results as generalizable at a sample size below 30 experiences; however, several other experiences were collected to further verify generality.

Data were collected by means of in-depth interviews in person (four interviews) and via Skype (six interviews), in the language most comfortable to participants (English, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, or German). At the descriptive stage, participants were first asked to recall an experience of being gazed upon by locals during travel, as lived through. They were asked to describe the context (where, who, when) and their reactions (thoughts, feelings, sensations) to each of the recalled experiences. Then at the hermeneutic stage of interviews, an

interviewer and a participant jointly explored what such an experience meant to the participant, how and why it was interpreted at the time of its occurrence and made sense of later. Similarly, two layers of analysis (descriptive and hermeneutic) were applied to each narrative, which was transcribed verbatim and translated into English (when necessary) for analysis. The final data set consisted of 75 single spaced pages of transcribed text in English.

First, four steps of Giorgi's (2009) analytical method were followed (see Table 2). During this (descriptive) stage of data analysis, it was important to adhere to the principle of phenomenological bracketing, which was ensured in two ways: 1) the literature review was not consulted until the write-up stage of the study and 2) a research assistant, who had no knowledge of the study's objectives, was not an expert on the subject-matter and did not read the literature review, was hired as an additional and independent analyst. Second, the data regarding the meaning of an experience were analysed by van Manen's (1990) iterative (whole-part-whole) method which included re-reading each transcript for the sense of the whole, concentrating on the parts pertaining to the research question, and returning to the evaluation of the whole as informed by its parts. The data were analysed independently by two authors and a research assistant; the final results are the product of continuous comparison and discussion among the three analysts.

Table 2
Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology. Steps of data analysis (Giorgi, 2009).

| Step	Description
1	Reading each transcript for the sense of the whole
2	Determining meaning units contained within each phenomenological description by going back to each transcript and marking a place in which a significant shift in meaning is identified
3	Transforming each meaning unit into a psychologically meaningful statement to express the essential meaning of the data portion
4	Writing out/graphing a general structure of an experience, based on essential transformed meaning units that are common across all transcripts
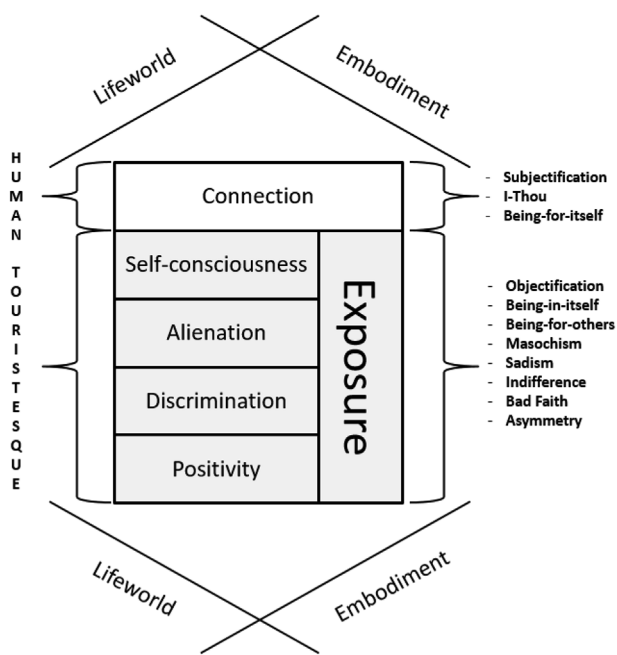
Fig. 1. Tourists' experience of the Local Gaze.

5. Findings and discussion

The findings show that the *Local Gaze* is lived through primarily as an objectifying exposure by local people and experienced in four forms, namely 1) gaze as a positive exposure, 2) gaze as alienating exposure, 3) gaze as discriminating exposure, and 4) gaze as self-consciousness. Despite the dominance of the objectifying aspects, longing for subjectified human relations was, too, a necessary feature of the *Local Gaze* experience (see Fig. 1). In the first pages of this section, we discuss various shades that the four aspects of the exposing *Local Gaze* can exhibit. We then follow with the analysis of the *Local Gaze* as connection, highlighting the contradictory dynamics between objectifying and subjectifying aspects of the same phenomenon.

The *Local Gaze* as an exposure tended to hinge on indicators that tag tourists as outsiders (e.g. carrying a photo camera, asking for directions). Typically understood as "normal," this exposure to the *Local Gaze* was seen as engineered, scripted and therefore made sense of as a comfortable and expected encounter. Such a role assignment (tourist vs. local) is expected when tourism spaces are thought of as a special type of Heidegger's *being-in-the-world*, conditioned by the shared experiences of *being-with-others* - spaces in which one's identity can never be fully comprehended as detached from assumptions held by other interpretable beings. The *Local Gaze* is thus given a necessary meaning through assigning respected typical roles tourists and locals are supposed to play in the contextualized setting of tourism.

5.1. Gaze as positive exposure

Several experiences of exposure were lived through as positive by the respondents. Tourists felt gazed upon their physical features when being notably taller than most locals when traveling to China, as in the case with the Englishman John; or of a different race in Egypt as in the case with the Hong Kong-native Irene. As such, the gaze is commonly interpreted as an act of genuine curiosity about a tourist. The US tourist Jessica who, on her visit to rural India, was asked to pose for photos with local teenagers, states: "They had an interest in me. They wanted to know about my life, where I was from." Likewise, the Chinese participant Laura recalls her experience in Melbourne, Australia, near Christmas time:

[A]fter I did the shopping, I saw the Santa with his helper. (…) And then I go to the Santa and asked him if I can take a photo with him. [Laughs] And I was very excited, yeah. I think that time people may know that I'm not local, not even from Australia. They looked at me; they smiled. I think because for Western people, Asian women always look younger. So when you are in the Western countries, you are considered as a little, tiny and cute girl. And I like that feeling.

This gaze, which is typically contingent on visual dissimilarity (in terms of race, ethnicity, and clothing) between a tourist and destination residents, opens up a social space of interpretation, in which embodied markers of difference serve as the basis for mutual perceptions and negotiations of assigned roles (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Although commonly lived as pleasurable, the above instances of the *Local Gaze* can be seen as examples of Sartrean "being-for-others" with masochistic tendencies, when tourists accept the objectifying Gaze; exchanging their *being-for-others* for "being-in-itself". This corresponds to Sartre's (1943, 1989) notion of giving away control over one's authentic identity and falling into "bad faith" ("interesting", "tiny and cute" tourists vs. curious locals) (Sartre, 1943). We therefore argued that even a positive "look" has yet to reach the genuineness and responsibility associated with Buber's *I-Thou* relationships or Sartre's *solicitude*; a relationship in which tourists and locals would dialogically respond to the distinctiveness of the other.

It is thus necessary to investigate this gaze further through a lens of Sartre's concept of "*bad faith*" (*mauvaise foi*), or inauthenticity. Giving the example of a waiter in a coffee shop, Sartre explains how the waiter becomes increasingly "*waiter-esque*" in his movements and mannerisms, conforming to the expectations of his onlookers, thereby giving up his freedom as an authentic human being. This also coincides with the Sartrean notion of "masochism", when the Gazed-upon do not "fight back" and voluntarily conform to the interpretation of the onlookers. Tourists with indifferent or "masochistic" tendencies were found not only to conform to the *Local Gaze*, which is often interpreted as "being part of the script," "inevitable," or "expected", but occasionally to find enjoyment and pride in interpretations of the other. This is, for example, evident from Laura enjoying the "cute" stereotype that comes with being an Asian woman in Western countries. Thus, the gaze naturally poses an inauthentic *I-It* relationship between the tourist and locals; yet the tourists' "*bad faith*" leads them to pose as a "*tourist-esque*" object; which, as shown, can be a pleasant experience.

5.2. Gaze as alienating exposure

The demarcation between tourists and locals based on bodily characteristics and physical objectification is also experienced as "othering" and alienating; such as being looked at as a "Westerner" in Vietnam (Jorge) "if they see me, for example, a westerner in Asia, the default treatment is that I am a mass tourist that is just there to buy", a vulnerable Asian woman in non-Asian destinations for Wei, "It affected me psychologically … I was affected. I was in a foreign place and just wanted to eat but I was treated unfairly" or an "older single lady," or an easy scam target, for Jessica "always somebody trying to sell you something or they think you want to shop, or they think you're naïve or easy because oh, there's an old grandma". In response, Merleau-Ponty highlights that the body is simultaneously an object and a subject of perception, yet the way we express ourselves through our bodies and linguistic abilities cannot be completely experienced by others; in a sense that it cannot be experienced in the same way as we experience it by ourselves. This implies a dual asymmetry of the mutual gaze. In this context, a reduction of the individuality of a tourist to his/her embodied expression of otherness through the *Local Gaze* is lived as a distancing experience. Below is how Ana, a Mexico-native who travelled with her mother to Southern Mexico for a cultural festival, recounted the experience of becoming aware of the alienating gaze:

We are not from Oaxaca, we are not from that southern region. But I

wanted to show that I was appreciative of their culture and so that kind of brings a distance if they call you güera, which literally means blonde. (…) We're not blonde, we have dark hair but we are white so people in Mexico call you güera. That always kind of shocks me because I know I'm Mexican, but some people in Mexico perceive me as a tourist. You know and it's a distinction that they make you feel different even though you're from the same country.

The above shows that a sudden awareness of being looked at as an object (a being-for-others), which is based on objectification of the tangible and embodied elements of otherness, can lead to an experience of outward ostracism, hurt, and the perception of an irreconcilable barrier between tourists and locals. Despite tourists' longing to belong to a destination, their unique identities are often reduced to the demarcated roles of a non-local through the gaze; and a distinctive labelling as an outsider results; e.g. "the Asian," or "the white guy."

The alienating gaze is experienced as a shameful encounter, when objectification occurs on the basis of less obvious, yet still embodied socio-cultural markers; such as language, cultural background, or ethnical belongingness. Limitations in linguistic abilities, such as speaking with an accent or speaking the language of a destination poorly, tended to amplify the asymmetry in the objectifying experience and to increase the harshness of the *Local Gaze*. On his business trip to Chile, the Italian Macro was forced into the stage in a restaurant to become as a source of entertainment. Not being able to understand or speak much Spanish, "so at once I was on the stage, and you have to dance and whatever. And in addition, you don't understand what people tell you, it's terrible." In the case of Marina, the participant attempted to communicate in English when she approached a New York policeman to ask for directions: "I came up to him, and I said, 'would you mind telling me how to get to whatever subway station?' (…) He looked at me and said sarcastically "yeah, I will tell you if you tell me how to get to Europe." Embarrassed, Marina made sense of the incident as "he, the policeman who was supposed to help, was just making fun of me, me not knowing things and me having a Russian accent." The sense of being judged and shamed for not fitting in, especially when reinforced through confrontation, becomes an essential element of the alienating and asymmetric power of the *Local Gaze*.

Being objectified as the "other" tended to trigger feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness, and loss of control; especially in situations with locals which go "off script," thereby exposing tourists' lack of awareness of the cultural context and accepted codes of behaviour. To some extent, off-script encounters also imply non-conformance to the "tourist-local" role assignment. Although in their co-existence with the other at a destination, tourists may be expected to be "forgiven" for being culturally unaware, the range of situational possibilities for such unawareness seem delimited to staged and engineered encounters (Heidegger, 1927/1962). John, for instance, found himself misusing local slang in Jamaica "if you talk to locals, the thing to say of course was "Irie", so we overused this expression and I can remember very heated, borderline aggressive encounters with the locals, trying to sell stuff, as they do. I have heard this from everyone else that day (laughs)". Experiencing the gaze involves awkwardness, embarrassment, and frustration when, for example, tourists' reactions and emotional responses do not fit within a local context. Jessica recalled an episode in Lisbon, Portugal, when she witnessed a violent fight between two local men:

I was like "Oh my god, somebody needs to help" and so I'm yelling for help and nobody would come and help. Everybody there was like "I'm not going near this, this is none of my business", and then a bunch of Japanese tourists were getting off a bus and they were taking pictures but nobody would help, and I felt like I was on another planet. I felt like I was a total outsider. I didn't look Portuguese, and I obviously wasn't with the Japanese tour bus, and the people that were beating each other up were Portuguese and then … maybe culturally I should have kept my mouth shut and just kept moving. People were looking at me, looking away, and

running off. I felt like a pariah.

She further reflected on her attitude towards dealing with violence as grounded in *Local Gaze*. The incident also reminded her of being a temporary outsider in the visited community, where her unawareness is permitted only in a conventional tourist-local encounter.

In many cases, the alienating gaze is experienced as impeding danger and hostility. Marco recalled his trip to Chile: "I left and went through a dark street, there were some groups of locals sitting drunk and shouted at me that they would kill me and so on … that was really, you stand out, you are being looked at as a tourist, the area is not safe." On her trip to Lille, France, Ana was hesitant about leaving a hostel "on my own, as a woman, late at night. Just a feeling of being harassed by a group of men who were just looking at me constantly, and I had to go back to the hostel. I didn't go any further." Perceived objectification and these negative experiences, trigger a visceral reaction in tourists. To minimize the harshness (and at times danger) of the objectifying *Local Gaze*, tourists often reflected on the need to blend in the surroundings, such as staying in tourist zones and hiding tourist markers, e.g. not carrying a guide book, to avoid the look and to regain control over one's identity.

5.3. Gaze as discriminating exposure

A related aspect of living through the *Local Gaze* is through the experience of discrimination; when tourists are cognizant about receiving subpar treatment compared to local residents. All participants recalled experiences of being overcharged for goods and services, hustled, or being sold subpar products. For example, even as a Hindi speaker, the Brazilian tourist Jorge witnessed a local shop assistant asking his boss how much he should charge "the white guy," whereas a Hong Kong-native Irene was overcharged at a local market in South Korea, despite her proficiency in Korean. These experiences were interpreted by participants as unjust, yet ingrained in the very discourse of tourism as a means for economic development - a situation in which tourists are naturally gazed upon first and foremost as revenue-generating objects. Tourists are objectified not on the basis on their being *touristesque*, but their economic potential, corresponding to Sartre's idea of oppression and masochism when sociality of an individual agent is reduced to his/her ability to satisfy the other's (in this case economic) needs.

Similar tendencies can be observed in experiences when discrimination borders outright hostility, as in the context of market vendor harassment in Jamaica for John or Wei's experience of dining in a restaurant in the USA:

The waiter started to explain [the menu] patiently at first, but then maybe because we have different accent from the locals (…) he asked us whether we came here for travelling and I answered yes. After that he changed his attitude. He treated us badly. At the end, when we asked for the bill and we knew that we were supposed to tip in the foreign country, he just like threw the bill to us. And then he told us that we had to pay a certain percent of tips; otherwise, it would be not ok and he was very specific about the amount of tips.

Because the tourists in this study mostly resisted to be objectified as revenue generating mass tourists, the discriminating aspect of the *Local Gaze* was experienced as unfair and disturbing. This covert resistance, however, implied either demonstrative indifference or complete resignation, rather than an open confrontation. Wei explained: "English is not our first language, and also I would need to spend a lot of time explaining … We would waste the time when we were supposed to continue our journey." Yet, in Sartrean terms, resignation or indifferent attitude does not allow tourists "to ground their being in relation to the other" and thus dismisses the very possibility of relating to the other with solicitude.

5.4. Gaze as self-consciousness

In existentialist standings, intersubjectivity which underlies the phenomenon of sociality necessarily implies the experience of self-consciousness. In other words, physical and, more importantly, mental presence of others inextricably changes the relationship a tourist has with his/her being. For Ana, the experience of being objectified through ethnic differences via a label of "güera" by her compatriots in Mexico led to the questioning of her own privileged social standing in the hierarchical society of Mexico. She notes: "the way you look [appear to others] (…) gives the clues about where you are from … in a certain way it gives away the kind of privilege I have." She further highlights that, although a similar gaze can be encountered even in her own city, "for some reason it bothers me more when I travel." From a Sartrean viewpoint, this objectifying exposure transforms the tourist from an independent, meaning-making being-for-others into an object of perception, the so-called *being-for-others*; for the tourist, this offers the possibility for enhanced self-awareness through experiencing the *Local Gaze*, but also poses the danger to be reduced to a *being-for-others* – a powerless object of perception (Daigle, 2010). Cheong and Miller (2000) cite Foucault (1977) in that social "agents construct the gaze as they observe the target. In this process, the target ends up internalizing the Gaze to the point that he is his own overseer." Tourists thus become self-controlled and self-governed agents whose judgements about right and wrong hinge on the messages embedded in the *Local Gaze* rather than their own value systems.

Another aspect of the self-exposing gaze is its objectifying power of generalizing and stereotyping tourists, as well as an associated experience of resistance to this process; which causes tourists to reflect on their status in a destination. Respondents described the experience of being looked at as "ignorant mass tourists" in terms of guilt, as well as acceptance. For example, John recalled feeling guilty that he was gazed upon as a mass tourist responsible for negative impacts on the local community, and he had to "carry other tourists' weight on his shoulders." His additional reflection on the incidents of aggressive harassment by vendors at local markets in Jamaica included:

> I am relatively lucky, middle class, white western male, you know, and you sort of associate the stigma with other types of tourist that somehow aren't you (laughs). (…) then you start to question, why do people feel like that about me? And once you got over the idea that it's about you and they are angry at you. I get over that very quickly I think, but I think because of the nature of what I do I could in a moment of reflection after that understand why they were fed up with people just telling them to go away in a nice British way by telling them everything is fine, everything is cool.

Other tourists, such as David, reflected on the stereotype of his fellow British travellers, which resulted in a need to improve the perceived image of his compatriots among the local people.

Resisting the gaze, this implied a strategy of regaining control over the tourist identity through attempts to connect on a more personal level, as well as through intentional and unintentional self-distancing from (mass) tourists. In terms of the former, being exposed as "the other" caused a deep longing to be immersed in the local culture and to become, inasmuch as possible, a part rather than an onlooker. Jorge, for example, felt the need to demonstrate his abilities to speak Hindi to the locals in India in order to show that he could be a part of the local community. When gazed upon as a conventional tourist in Vietnam, he sought out deeper, meaningful conversations with the locals; aiming to demonstrate a genuine interest in the local culture and distinguish himself from other tourists: "How do I feel? I feel an immediate urge to change their mind to show that maybe I am from another segment of tourists." Conversation with locals was a frequent means to "subjectify" the *Local Gaze* through human connectedness. In Mexico, Ana felt that she could get accepted by the local community if they "would get to know me a little better" or engage in a conversation explaining "her

motivations and purpose of travel."

Sartre's *tourist-esque* objectification tended to be lived through as negative experiences of alienation and discrimination, when vulnerability, loss of power and self-control brought about by the gaze inspired tourists to "fight-back" and take control of their self-image, resulting in Sartre "*sadistic*" mode of being. Resorting to hiding tourist markers, attempts to blend in, and portraying themselves as "different from usual tourists," tourists fight the gaze to aspire to a more symmetric *I-Thou* relationship of care, in which the notions "tourist" and "local" disappear completely.

5.5. Gaze as connecting exposure

Living through the *Local Gaze* was also marked by a transcending sense of connectedness to the other, an unmediated relationship in which tourists felt embraced in their humanness rather than objectified or separated by bounds. Buber (1923) maintained that such encounters cannot be scripted, engineered, or staged. David, for instance, mentioned "instead of going to the main restaurants and bars, I go into the villages and the smaller non-commercialized, non-touristy areas." On a trip to China, John was approached by local children and invited to play football, which was experienced as a genuine connection, transcending cultural and language barriers:

> I felt connected, you know, I didn't feel like a local clearly, because of the cultural differences, but I certainly didn't feel like an aloof tourist, I felt a little more engaged, immersed, as you can tell from talking about now, it's one of those stickable peak experiences, but it's certainly a take-home thing from my trip. I have a few memories of being there; that would be one more.

While dining in a restaurant in Singapore, Wei asked a waitress for directions. This local person not only explained the best route, but also recommended other sites to enjoy. Wei recalls: "so I felt very warm and happy from my heart. I felt like I was being taken care of by those local people. They were so nice, and I felt like the whole country would have this kindness." Contrary to a significant part of literature which typically emphasizes the importance of the *exotic other* in a tourism encounter, these findings side with Huang et al. (2017), in that tourists actually seek out a *Local Gaze* which transcends this exoticness based on universal values, e.g. kindness, empathy; or better, they seek to transcend the gaze altogether into a more authentic relationship.

To experience a true, genuine Buberian *I-Thou* relationship, the tourist transcends "gazing" and "being gazed upon" through moving towards genuine, personal mutuality; therefore, connecting to the other first and foremost as a human being, a subject (*being-for-itself*) rather than object (*being-in-itself*). This mirrors the concept of short-lived "communitesque" moments in consumer encounters introduced by Lugosi (2008, p. 143), which are "liminoid experiences in which the rationality of relationships is abandoned in favour of a playful, emotional openness towards one another". Much like these, connecting sentiments were limited and ephemeral among respondents' experiences. In particular, they should not be mistaken for affection. For example, Laura shared about her trip to Cambodia: "I feel very sorry for the local people, yes, because they just look at you, not stare but they look at you for quite a long time because like the way we dress and it's very different. They don't even have shoes." Although this demonstrates a sentiment of care and concern, there is little acknowledgement of the locals as human subjects to connect *with,* rather than as objects to gaze and be gazed *upon*. Laura's quote offers a subtle distinction between *empathy* and *sympathy* contained in the gaze. Although both concepts are widely contested throughout philosophical lines of thought, Tucker (2016, p. 32) has defined empathy in a tourism context as an emotional capacity to "put oneself in the shoes of another" in order to understand their experiences. Sympathy, on the other hand, is commonly used to as an individual's response to a person's misfortune, which often leads to pro-social helping behaviour. Although in the field of tourism these

concepts lack of a deeper understanding (Cohen & Cohen, 2017), it can be argued that there is a type of sympathetic connection which the *Local Gaze* enables; while a true empathic connection may be sought for, but is not found.

6. Conclusion

This study adopted an emic perspective to phenomenologically understand a tourist's lived experience of the *Local Gaze* through an existentialist lens, based on theorizations of human sociality introduced by the philosophers Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Buber and Sartre. Involvement and the presence of the other are typically seen as a desirable component of a quality tourist experience. Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen (2007) even proposed that modern tourism is no longer an escape from the ordinary, inasmuch as a quest for possible social connections. Meaningful interactions with local residents are believed to help achieve cross-cultural understanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008), intercultural sensitivity (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2015), and even peace (Durko & Petrick, 2016). Tourists consume destinations, including their residents, not only visually but also corporeally, they travel to unfamiliar places "to be there" to touch, to smell, and to hear the destination" (Urry, 2002, p. 154). This largely positive outlook on the presence of the other is anyhow questioned by the findings of this study, while it offers empirical support to the theorization of the Gaze 3.0 as being relational and controversial.

Through an existential-phenomenological lens, we show that the hopes for truly meaningful and authentic relationships between tourists and the toured are at best ephemeral - and at worst utopian. A Sartrean *tourist-esque* objectification is lived through and interpreted in many ways, ranging from tourists' positively embracing the gaze through conforming to the imposed image with indifferent or masochistic "*bad faith*" to outward feelings of alienation and discrimination. The asymmetric gaze also triggers *tourist-esque* self-awareness which conforms or resists to the lived objectification. With their bodily and behavioural "out-of-placeness" tourists find themselves "consumed" as "the Westerner", the "Asian woman", or "the Blonde". Hampered by tourists' accents, misuse of cultural references, and other socio-linguistic faults, authentic communication is rarely possible in cross-cultural travel. Finding themselves in a Heideggerian *being-in-the-world* with locals yet unable to foster authentic connections, tourists are locked in the quasi-linear relationship of being gazed-upon and thus trapped in the Buberian *I-It* encounter: being experienced and not encountered, spoken about and not spoken to, gazed upon and not truly met.

6.1. Theoretical contribution

The findings of this study lead thus to a range of contributions to existent literature. First, it adds to the understanding of tourism as connectedness. Gössling et al. (2018) propose that, in our continuously individualizing societies, tourism functions as a means to achieve social connectedness and (corporeal and physical) proximity to others. Tourism as a possibility to create a community has long been highlighted in literature (e.g. Brint, 2001; Germann Molz, 2007); be it *in loco* (e.g. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Cohen, 2010), in transit (e.g. Dickinson, Lumsden, & Robbins, 2011; Hibbert, Dickinson, Gössling, & Curtin, 2013) or in a virtual space (e.g. Gössling & Stavrinidi, 2015). This study is the first attempt to problematize the relational aspect of tourism from an existential perspective, which should expand the bourgeoning, yet still under-represented, tourism literature on existential themes (e.g. existential authenticity, anxiety, alienation). Human (dis)connections are a source of existential (in)authenticity and thus their understanding should clarify the workings of tourism as an (in)authenticity catalyst. In other words, findings of this study suggest that tourism, through the objectifying power of the gaze, is inherently disconnecting. From an existential perspective, this study argues subsequently that the gaze, as experienced by the tourist, is detrimental to

an authentic human relationship between a host and a guest and, ultimately, to the understanding of their respective societies. Rather than offering factual insights, the gaze alienates, stereotypes, objectifies, and ultimately, de-humanizes the gazer and the gazee in a power-struggle of interpretation. Thus, any tourist experience that involves the presence of a gaze is paradoxical, inherently inauthentic and disconnecting. As a result, further research is needed to investigate tourism, not just the gaze, as a catalyst for human disconnectedness.

Second, findings showing this precarious relationship should be contextualized in the wider area of host-guest relationships. Host and guest relations have been a key facet of tourism studies for decades (e.g. Smith, 1977; Smith & Brent, 2001) but have long been looked at from a management or development perspective (Sharpley, 2014). In other words, these studies are typically concerned with how residents perceive tourism policies or development, while more fundamental human relationships have often been overlooked (Woosnam, 2012; Zhang & Kwong, 2017). Offering an existential critique of sociality, the study questions the very possibility of balanced and authentic host-guest relations in a tourism context, as long as there is a gaze among the human actors involved. Although this study shows that tourists long for transcendence of the gaze in hopes to overcome a barrier between hosts and guests, this effort was found to be largely futile. Further insight is needed on the question if tourism without the gaze is possible, as findings suggest that the gaze and genuinely authentic human relationships are mutually exclusive. In other words, as tourism is intrinsically connected to the activity of gazing (Urry & Larsen, 2011), the question might arise if tourism as a human activity and a Buberian *I-Thou* relationship can co-exist. The feeble moments of connection which our respondents have experienced, could as well be interpreted as moments where they transcended being a "tourist" - or a "guest" - altogether.

Third, this research introduces the notion of the *tourist-esque*, a concept through which the tourist conforms to the expectations of his/her onlookers. While not necessarily unpleasant, this forces the tourist to fall into a Sartrean "*bad faith*", giving up the freedom of an authentic human being and becoming an object that is gazed-upon. While previous studies have found the *Local Gaze* to be unpleasant for the tourist (Gillespie, 2006; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Tasci & Severt, 2016), our findings show that the gazed-upon might in some cases find pleasure in his/her objectification. Being noticed, looked at, or "consumed" as an object is found to be an essential and inevitable part of the tourist experience, while not necessarily an unpleasant one; inasmuch as the widely acknowledged gazing-upon a destination. Phenomenological insights derived from this study thus contribute to the understanding of what being "consumed" means and feels like for the tourist. Findings suggest that "other people" being a Sartrean "hell" does not imply the presence of an unpleasant or shaming Gaze, but rather an inauthentic objectification into the *tourist-esque*, which results in a loss of freedom and - to some extent - humanity.

Finally, this research adds to the overall conceptualization of the gaze in tourism. The study offers empirical support to previous theorization of the Gaze 3.0 as being relational and complex (Maoz, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011) but also shows further facets of its complex nature. Focusing on the *Local Gaze* primarily from an emic experience we show that, although multifaceted, this experience is always one of exposure. We argue thus that the Gaze is not merely a Foucauldian power-play among gazer and gazee, but an inherent carrier of inauthenticity and disconnectedness between, among others, objectified "tourists" and "locals." This raises issues such as the possibility of "tourism" without "the gaze" and questions further implications of being gazed-upon, particularly in terms of the *conditio humana* and existential fears of losing one's humanity.

6.2. Practical implications

Our findings imply that marketing and staging what are hoped to be

authentic tourist experiences is ultimately illusive for the tourist as a customer, especially if the destination is conceptualized as a product for consumption. Although marketing tourism products (e.g. tours) using the promise of authentic and subjectifying connection with locals could be effective to attract tourists, the mostly objectifying nature of the gaze may become a point for disappointment and internal contestation. Rather than leaving it up to tourists to internalize the gaze as a pretext for controversy, practitioners are advised to transform the gaze into the subject for negotiation through assisted discussions and making sense of encountered gazes. For example, after a tour to a traditional village, a local tour guide can gather tourists' perspectives on how they felt and sensed being the center of villagers' attention and can provide the local perspective on how villages may see tourists. This is critical in the contexts of cultural and ethnic tourism, in which encounters with local gazers tend to be specifically sought out.

Yet, with the rise of the so-called "backstage tourism," where tourists prefer to venture outside tourism precincts, get off the beaten track to discover the "real" destination, and stay in non-hotel accommodations (e.g. AirBnB, couchsurfing), many tourism activities now occur outside the immediate destination management scope. In a way, by using this travel mode, tourists attempt to transcend their status as visitors and the tourism phenomenon altogether. Our participants admitted their attempts to blend in the local social landscape and to conceal their identity as outsides with a hope for more genuine experiences and encounters. In this context, marketing realistic experiences and managing the local perspective on strangers (or tourists) might ultimately be a key feature of successful in-destination management of human sociality.

6.3. Limitations and future research

Finally, this study has several limitations. In primis, the relatively small number of respondents did not allow for deeper insights into different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, tourist types, genders, etc., although socio-cultural features emerged as important for the gaze. Rather, the study has made an assumption of "homogeneity" among the participants' socio-cultural and demographic backgrounds. Future studies could adopt representational methodologies with sampling based on the statistical theory to zoom into how it might have influenced their experiences and interpretations. The purposive sample (searching for an experience rather than an individual) skewed the respondents towards higher-educated and well-travelled people. It might be assumed that these have a higher awareness of the gaze itself and issues surrounding this experience. Interviews with less experienced travellers and/or mass tourists could give a slightly different perspective on how the gaze is lived.

Next, although we followed clear guidelines of how (descriptive) phenomenologists should bracket themselves out not to bias data analysis (e.g. Giorgi, 2009), bracketing has been criticized in terms of reliability (Vagle, 2014). In this study in particular, existentialist writers were taken as a philosophical guideline for results presentation and interpretation. Furthermore, existential phenomenological analysis, combined with hermeneutic phenomenology in this study, embraces co-construction between researcher and respondent in interpreting the lived experience. Thus, we acknowledge that alternative interpretations, e.g. based on non-existentialist ideas, are equally possible and encourage other scholars to re-examine our findings using alternative theoretical lens. At last, the existentialist lens relies heavily on the notion of personal freedom, experiences and perceptions; constraints to individual choice, if any, are approached from a socio-cultural viewpoint. Future studies could adopt other philosophical thoughts, for example critical realism, in order to identify natural and social mechanisms which condition the individual experience of the gaze, offering a perspective on the natural and social world in which this phenomenon takes place.

In the end, we must admit that despite its contributions, this

research opens up more questions than it actually answers. Future research is needed not only to gain a wider understanding of the gaze(s) in tourism, but also of the lived experiences of the various gazers and gazees. On a more holistic level, studies should look phenomenologically at what it means to be a tourist; especially how it relates to the human condition, existential fear and (dis)connectedness. In extremis, future research needs to understand if concepts such as "gaze", "tourism" and "tourist" need to be transcended to allow for authentic human relationships.

Declarations of interest

None.

Authors' contribution

Philipp Wassler: initial idea, conceptualization, 50% data collection, 50% manuscript writing and editing, 50% manuscript revising.

Ksenia Kirillova: conceptualization, 50% data collection, research assistant training and supervision, 50% manuscript writing and editing, 50% manuscript revising.

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