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## **Abstract**

### **Ethical tourism and development: the personal and the political**

Over the last twenty five years ethical tourism has become an important point of reference for social scientists, business specialists, campaigns and significant numbers of ordinary people. Yet just a generation ago, prior to the pervasive influence of consumer politics, the consumption of holidays seemed problem free – you really could “leave your cares behind”. Political and moral interventions in society were posed in a different way and within a different context prior to the growth of consumer politics in the 1980s.

The rise of and dilemmas associated with ethical tourism tell us more about wider social and political consciousness – simply how people make sense of their place and their possibilities in the world – than it does about a surfeit of lack of ethical behavior. This paper focuses on the growth of a discourse of qualities such as ‘care’, ‘awareness’ and ‘responsibility’. It draws on the idea of the private and public sphere to argue that a language of private virtue is substituted for political analysis in the advocacy of ethical tourism. Given ethical tourism’s association with development and wellbeing, this in turn reinforces assumptions that are damaging from the perspective of reinvigorating political possibilities and debate on development.

## **Ethical tourism and development: the personal and the political**

### **Introduction**

Over the last twenty five years ethical tourism has become an important point of reference for social scientists, business specialists, campaigns and significant numbers of ordinary people (Fennell 2006; Lovelock and Lovelock 2013). It is a part of the wider advocacy of ethical consumption, a trend that emerged in the 1980s, and has become a focal point for people's attempts to act on development and conservation (Nichols and Opal 2005; Barnett et al 2011). As such it is a significant example of the 'public face of development' (Smith and Yanacopulos 2004)

Yet just a generation ago, prior to the pervasive influence of consumer politics, the consumption of holidays seemed problem free – you really could “leave your cares behind”. It is doubtful anyone seriously considered their holidays a moral intervention into the world's problems until the 1990s (Butcher 2003). That did not mean (as is implicit in a lot of advocacy of ethical consumption) that people were less caring or moral. It simply meant that consumption was not regarded as key in the construction of moral personhood. Political and moral interventions in society were posed in a different way and within a different context prior to the growth of consumer politics in the 1980s.

The rise of and dilemmas associated with ethical tourism tell us more about wider social and political consciousness – simply how people make sense of their place and their possibilities in the world – than it does about a surfeit of lack of ethical behavior. This paper focuses on the language through which ethical tourism is advocated, and considers the latter as a social construct, as a product of the times we live in. It notes the growth of a discourse of personal qualities such as 'care', 'awareness' and 'responsibility'. These narratives of personal virtue occupy the terrain once held by a distinctly political debate on what people can do about a lack of development in the developing world. Further, the paper will begin to consider some of the consequences for development of the growth in attempts to make a difference to the world through the pursuit of ethical holidays. Specifically, it is argued that personal qualities such as care and responsibility are substituted for political analysis in the advocacy of ethical tourism. This expresses and reinforces a post and anti-political public debate on development.

### **a pervasive agenda**

Calls for ethical tourism, whilst relatively recent in origin, have become pervasive, and this is reflected in academic literature, industry marketing, media accounts and NGO campaigns.

In 1987 Krippendorf's *The Holiday Makers* painted a grim picture of modern tourism, and reads as a manifesto for a new, 'ethical' tourist. More recent titles such as *Preserve or Destroy: Tourism and the Environment* (Croall 1995), *The Paving of Paradise and What you Can Do To Stop It* (MacLaren 1998) and *The Final Call* (Hickman 2007) are characteristic of a negative view of the development of mass leisure travel shared across much advocacy of ethical tourism. More recently, authors such as Fennell (2006) and Smith and Duffy (2003) have sought to develop a more substantial understanding of ethical tourism, the former elaborating an impressive survey of philosophical thought on ethics to provide ways in to looking at contemporary ethical dilemmas, the latter's focus being tourism development. MacCannell's *Ethics of Sight-seeing* (2011) is a notable addition to the ethical tourism

literature, as he focuses on the construction of tourism as a moral field rather than taking that as a given. Lovelock and Lovelock (2013) provide a recent account of the influence of growing ethical concerns in relation to a range of social and political issues.

Advocacy of ethical tourism is evident in the commercial sector. Numerous companies and web sites offer 'ethical' holidays to their customers, whilst newspapers and magazines frequently feature ethical travel. Advocacy of ethical tourism is often met with scepticism by the NGOs and campaigns, who question whether the concern to be ethical is genuine or merely 'greenwashing' or a marketing ploy (Lovelock and Lovelock 2013). Nonetheless, many such companies echo the criticisms of package tourism made by the NGOs and express a similar rhetorical commitment to the environment and the host's culture. They also display a similar disdain for package tourists. The general sentiment is well expressed by Explore, a trekking holiday company, who advertised their holidays as being for 'people who want more out of their holiday than buckets of cheap wine and a suntan' (cited in Butcher 2003: 14).

Gap years are no longer associated with counter cultural experimentation, but instead involve signing up to global citizenship (Palacios 2010), CV building (Heath 2007) and caring for children or assisting community development projects as a volunteer tourist (Lyons et al 2012). Niches such as ecotourism have morphed into markers of moral intent (Butcher 2003; 2005). A range of tourisms - responsible, green, ethical, community etc - proclaim their moral stance in relation to the environment and also development issues (ibid.). Volunteer Tourism – the latest focus for the search for an ethical tourism – brings together leisure travel with people's social and political aspirations to make a difference. Here tourists are also seen as social activists – their holidays are designed not just to be benign, but are focused on erstwhile political goals of development and social justice (Butcher and Smith 2014).

Industry groups such as The International Ecotourism Society are influential in marketing and promoting the ethical credentials of green holidays. Their role is not only commercial, but to advocate the superiority of eco holidays for both tourists and hosts. The society claim that: 'Ecotravel offers an alternative to many of the negative effects of mass tourism by helping conserve fragile ecosystems, support endangered species and habitats, preserve indigenous cultures and develop sustainable local economies' (TIES, undated). They encourage prospective tourists to, 'travel with a purpose - a personal purpose and a global one' (ibid.). This is the tenor of other industry groups and also campaigning NGOs such as Tourism Concern in the UK and the German Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung (students for tourism and responsibility).

Calls for ethical tourism feature prominently in the media, too. British social commentator Libby Purves sets the tone, arguing that: 'Tourists should not travel light on morals', and paints a bleak picture of the effects of the industry (Purves 2001). The UK Guardian newspaper environment editor, in an article entitled 'Tourism is bad for our health', asserts that mass tourism, 'wreak(s) havoc on the environment' and that despite attempts to clean up the industry, 'tourism is essentially and inescapably, environmentally destructive' (Griffiths 2001).

### **Ethical behavior and the ethical climate**

There are plenty of advocates and critics of different variations on the theme of ethical tourism. Some look at material outcomes from specific attempts at being ethical. Some attempt to formally

apply ethical theory to how people behave on holiday (Fennell 2006). There has also been a growth in debate on ethical kitemarking and on codes of conduct for tourists (Fennell and Malloy 2007). The former is often viewed as important, but with the potential to constitute tokenism or 'greenwashing'. The latter reflects an impulse to regulate 'unethical' behaviour (Butcher 2003).

Yet whilst contesting ethical tourism in these ways may be important, more important, and lacking in the debates, is a critical analysis of the ethical climate (Blackburn 2001). Put simply, this refers to the way right and wrong are posed in a society at a particular time: the assumptions of the time, the political standpoints debated, the way people relate to social and political issues.

Today's ethical climate is characterized by a dearth of political debate. Political issues tend to be interpreted through the prism of personal ethical behaviour, divorced from contested views of development and opposing philosophical perspectives. This situation has been described by some thinkers as 'post-political', or even 'anti-political'. One of the characteristics of a post political world is the substitution of ethics for politics (Zizek 1999; Swyngedouw 2009). It is worth considering this briefly.

The dual crisis of both capitalism and any alternative to it has emptied politics of competing visions of social change – the very stuff of politics. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Eastern European communism exposed the exhaustion of Left alternatives to capitalism and also, ironically, of capitalism itself (Jacoby 1999). The latter had justified itself in relation to its communist opponent throughout the period of the Cold War, and hence the victory of the market in the Cold War was pyrrhic. For Jacoby, the search for better forms of society, 'utopias', had been linked to the political projects of Right and Left (ibid.). In the absence of these projects a dull managerialism generally pervades all manner of public institutions, from parliaments to Universities. The saying associated with British Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, 'There Is No Alternative', accompanied by the failure of the market (the thing that it was claimed there is no alternative to), left a vacuum which has been filled by trends such as the politics of behaviour (e.g. Thaler and Sunstein's Nudge (2009)), lifestyle politics (e.g. Giddens (1991) concept of 'Life Politics') and, most importantly here, the politics of ethical consumption (Barnett et al 2011). These are associated with hitherto private aspects of life (shopping, personal behaviour, everyday life), now thrust into the public sphere, to the political scene. The rise of ethical holidays, and their association with development - really a sort of lifestyle politics (with the emphasis firmly on lifestyle) - is indicative of these trends.

Characteristic of this climate, then, is the growing propensity to problematize leisure travel and consumption in ethical and behavioural terms, linked tenuously to erstwhile political narratives of development and solidarity. Central to that is the rise of 'care' and 'responsibility' in the discussion – most often constituting a critical advocacy – of ethical tourism.

### **Care, responsibility and politics**

With the rise of ethical lifestyle strategies such as Fair Trade, ethical tourism, advocacy of organic food and localism, personal attributes have become the stuff of politics and are directly linked to desirable development outcomes. Questions such as are you 'responsible'? do you 'care'? or maybe you lack 'awareness'? are implicit in much of this. Such questions are also evident, and often explicit, in much of the advocacy of a self consciously moral approach to tourism consumption. The

way development is presented to the public through the media and in everyday life, a process sometimes referred to as the 'public face of development' (Smith and Yanacopoulos 2004), emphasises these personal traits. High profile telethons, charity challenges, Fair Trade and ethical consumption generally are examples of this trend. The personalised approach to development was first brought to the fore through Bob Geldof's 1984 Live Aid concerts. Since then, as Chouliaraki shows, the humanitarian impulse has increasingly come to be shaped by personal morality as opposed to finding expression in politics (Chouliaraki 2013).

However, up until fairly recently narratives of care and responsibility did not feature prominently in development or politics at all. Instead, development politics was informed by competing visions of social transformation through growth backed up by macro-economic theories and critiques (Chang, 2010). The politics of Left and Right, albeit encompassing a diverse set of positions, framed development politics and animated distinctly social movements and beliefs (Chouliaraki 2013).

An early and notable example of the focus on ethical lifestyle in leisure travel is Krippendorf's oft quoted 1987 book *The Holiday Makers: Understanding the Impact of Leisure and Travel* (1987). Krippendorf focuses on personal behaviour, awareness and attitudes as key to the role of tourism in development. For Krippendorf our personal freedoms 'threaten to engulf us' (1987: xiv) unless we engage in a pre-travel education to 'learn how to travel' (ibid.). He writes that tourism is a 'new and devious form of colonialism' (1987: 56) and a 'kind of friendly conquest' (1987: 55) – personal freedom has profound negative consequences in this view. Since Krippendorf placed personal ethics at the heart of tourism's development impact, 'care', 'awareness' and 'responsibility' have loomed ever larger. Charities such as Tourism Concern in the UK see their role as raising awareness of injustices (see [www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)). The assumption here is that if people are 'aware', then they might consider moral questions relating to their impact on other cultures and the natural environment, leading to more 'responsible' and 'caring' social outcomes. Laudable goals, such as the livelihoods of Nepalese porters, and more debatable ones, such as codes of conduct for travellers, are frequently discussed in terms of care, awareness and responsibility on the part of private consumers.

'Responsible Tourism' has become a well known brand courtesy of academic and ecotourism promoter Harold Goodwin and former Body Shop marketing executive Justin Francis, through their ResponsibleTravel.com web site ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)) (the late Anita Roddick, formerly prime mover in ethical consumption with her Body Shop stores, was part of originating the brand). For these advocates of ethical holidays, responsible tourism 'simply means holidays that care about local communities and culture as well as wildlife conservation and the environment.' (italics added) (ibid).

The laudable personal qualities of care and responsibility are explicitly linked to the social project of development in the campaigning and academic literature. Responsibletravel.com and Tourism Concern are examples of the former, and the academic volume *Responsible Travel* edited by rural development expert Anna Spenceley (2012) is indicative of the latter. Indeed, the adjective 'responsible' has been widely adopted, including from the mid 1990s by the world's biggest conservation body the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), as a label for their attempts at utilising tourism to link conservation and development in economically poor, biodiversity rich destinations (Woolford 2002).

The link between personal qualities and social outcomes is clearest with volunteer tourism, a recent addition to the lengthy list of 'new moral tourism' (Butcher 2003) labels. Here the impulse to act upon the world privileges personal experience and reflection over any political framing of the issues being addressed (Butcher and Smith 2014). Attempts to assist others are mediated through a self-conscious process of identity formation, a process focused on personal rather than political identities and morality (Chouliraki 2013; *ibid*). The very term 'volunteer tourism' would have seemed odd a generation ago precisely because of its conflation of private behaviour and political agency.

It is worth noting that what is taken to be 'responsible' in tourism consumption and development is generally discussed and decided amongst a milieu of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and campaigners and codified in statements ranging from the United Nations' Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism (UN/WTO 2002) through to numerous codes of conduct and declarations such as ResponsibleTravel.com's 2002 'Cape Town Declaration' ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)). What does and does not qualify as responsible or ethical tourism is hotly debated. For example, the accusation of 'greenwashing' is commonly made against corporate attempts to develop ethical tourism (Robbins 2008). Voluntourism in particular attracts praise for its development potential and enlightening role (Wearing 2001) alongside criticism that it is a conduit for neoliberalism and neo-colonial attitudes (Vrasti 2013). Nonetheless, the tenor of all these discussions is very much how we can make our holidays truly moral pursuits, rather than a questioning of the efficacy of the lifestyle politics central to ethical travel.

The ethical sounding adjectives (responsible, caring, green, aware ...) that are commonplace in the above examples suggest personal qualities, not political categories. To describe oneself as 'caring' or 'ethical' gives nothing away as to your politics and beliefs about society and the people in it. Likewise, to say your policy is 'responsible' gives no indication of its position on any wider political spectrum. Neither does it even place it on a moral spectrum beyond what Chouliraki refers to as a 'self-oriented morality' (Chouliraki 2013), one that is only capable of framing the attendant issues in terms of the identity and feelings of, in this case, the tourist. It does, however, serve to place the view on the moral high ground. This is especially case vis a vis mass package tourism, the consumers of which are implicitly less moral, less responsible (Butcher 2003). Responsible tourism is a rhetorical orthodoxy amongst campaigners, lecturers and many commentators. The ethical lobby now colonise the moral high ground, which can on occasion have the effect of closing down political debate on contrasting development choices and visions. After all, who could be against care and responsibility?

### **The public and private spheres**

The issue is not at all whether people should care or act responsibly. Rather, it is the prominence of these code words for goodness in the public realm of political debate on development that is significant. The elevation of a discourse of 'responsibility' and 'care' into the realm of the politics of development is indicative of an important trend in politics: that of the diminution of public life and the consequent extension of private concerns and personal qualities into the centre of hitherto political debate. Therefore in order to situate the 'new moral tourism' (Butcher 2003) it is worth considering the relationship between personal qualities and private reflection on the one hand, and debate in the public sphere as an expression of politics on the other.



Historically, the establishment of a public life outside of the private realm of home marked the rise of a sense of society, of a social order constructed out of and subject to the wishes of the people. Aristotle was probably the first to consider a distinctive public sphere beyond the individual citizen: the polis or political community. The Roman forum as an arena for trade and the discussion of public affairs is a further example of the public sphere. The Italian city states in the Renaissance, the development of parliamentary authority and political parties and subsequent demands for democracy, and the ideas of the Enlightenment that placed human beings at the heart of the social, are all indicative of the rise of an active public sphere and also of the widening and deepening of human agency beyond private feelings and interests.

Richard Sennett in his ground breaking book *The Fall of Public Man* (2003) provided an analysis of the changing character of the private and public spheres in modern times. The coffee houses of eighteenth century Britain are discussed by Sennett as indicative of the rise of the modern public sphere. The patrons drank coffee and talked about the public affairs of business and politics. France's salons served a similar purpose. The codes and institutions of public life, in the salons, the societies and in political institutions, separated it off from private, intimate life to the benefit of each - public involvement is dependent upon, but at the same time removed and different from, private life and reflection (see Sennett (2003) and Arendt (1958) on the private and public sphere).

Sennett argued that the blurring of boundaries between the two marked a diminution of public life, and of politics. The extension of personal qualities (awareness, care, responsibility), associated with private actions (individual purchases, lifestyle, behaviour) directly into the realm of politics, as is the case with the claims made for ethical tourism, is surely a case in point. That is not to suggest that these qualities are corrosive in any way, but that a healthy public, political scene involves both a recognition of a world beyond the individual and the capacity of the individual to involve themselves in understanding, commenting upon and negotiating issues that cannot be explained or understood through a discourse focused on personal qualities and private interventions.

The process Sennett noted in the 1970s is accentuated in these post-political times. However, some view the developments Sennett describes in a positive light. For example, feminists have politicised the private sphere as a site of the oppression of women, and the slogan 'the personal is political', originating from feminist Carole Hanisch's oft quoted 1970 essay, neatly sums up the desire to view the intimate and private world of relationships as a directly political issue for discussion in the public sphere. Similarly one could argue that the politicisation of lifestyle opens up new avenues for a politics more relevant to everyday experience (Barnett et al 2011). That just about everything is political has become a hallmark of post-structuralist political thought, drawing upon Foucauldian ideas of dispersed power.

But the argument that 'the personal is political' presupposes a clear recognition of the social roots of personal struggles. The defining difference today is a lack of social critiques – the public sphere has been emptied out by the apparent exhaustion of both mainstream and alternative political philosophies (Leys 1996; Laidi 1998; Furedi 2005; Chouliaraki 2013). Laidi argues that the end of the Cold War destroyed the principal framework through which politics of the Left and Right were defined (1998). Chouliaraki concurs – the grand narratives of Left and Right, flawed as they were, mediated between private experiences, emotions and reflections on the one hand, and a public realm of political contestation on the other (2013). Their decline has not been paralleled by new

ideas that facilitate political reflection and judgement. Rather than 'the personal is political' it is more apt to say that the personal occupies the space once inhabited by politics.

### **Care, responsibility and anti-politics**

The trend towards a politics that revolves around responsibility, awareness and care – indicative of a blurring of the private and the public as discussed by Sennett – is clearly reflected in human geography's 'moral turn'. 'Geographies of care' (Silk 1998) and 'responsibility' (Popke 2006; Massey 2004) hold that through an awareness of our place in global trade, which can be developed through a focus on the commodity chains that link consumer and distant producer, we may be able to extend a 'care' normally associated with those close to us (by family ties, geography or nationality) to distant others. We can buy ethically here to extend care globally. Giddens, for example, comments:

'Our day to day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the world. Conversely, local lifestyle habits have become globally consequential. Thus my decision to buy a certain item of clothing has implications not only for the international division of labour, but for the Earth's ecosystem.'

(1994: 5)

This argument has been developed quite extensively in relation to Fair Trade (e.g. Lyon 2010; Nichols and Opal 2010). One recent intervention, *Globalising Responsibility: the Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption*, sees a recognition of these links between everyday consumption and global, often distant, impacts as part of the developing of a new progressive politics (Barnett et al 2011). However, aware of the charge that this is a 'consumer politics' with limited horizons, they further argue that such an approach can lead to wider 'political' recognition of how to change society (ibid). In other words, they understand some of the limitations of ethical trade but consider it as more pre-political than post-political, looking forwards towards new forms of social and political agency.

What is most notable about this view, though, is the way that politics is written out of the analysis precisely in the name of 'responsibility'. What is considered responsible (in this case organic agriculture, Fair Trade and green tourism) is a given in *Globalising Responsibility*. Political contestation of ideologies of development (the stuff of politics) is completely absent from the analysis. Those who do not act in the prescribed ethical manner are deemed to lack awareness and the opportunity to act responsibly (ibid.). This is anti-political and also patronising.

An example of this trend from the advocacy of ethical tourism is responsible tourism guru Harold Goodwin's casual equating of being responsible with the promotion of organic agriculture and localism: 'You just have to look at the growth in ethical consumption,' says Goodwin. 'People buy into Fair Trade, organics and local produce, so why would you not take that mindset with you when you go on holiday?' (cited in Rowe undated). The political, contested question of agricultural production can be ignored as the 'responsible' side of the argument is simply assumed as for organic agriculture and localism. Politics is circumvented by a prescriptive discourse of responsibility.

For Lovelock and Lovelock, ethical tourism is 'tourism in which all stakeholders involved apply principles of good behaviour (justice, fairness and equality), to their interactions with one another, with society, with the environment and other life forms' (2013: 8). These 'principles of good behaviour' err towards small scale development and the politics of ethical consumerism. Yet views

on animal rights, the plight of poor workers and favoured forms of development are not best understood as subject to 'principles of good behaviour' – they are political issues. Arendt's agonistic public sphere of substantial political debate and choices (relating to society, economy and environment) is circumvented by normative assertions of ethical conduct and particular ideological positions being presented as universal ethical 'principles'.

There is hence an implicit assumption in the politics and geographies of care that buying non Fair Trade food – for example factory farmed, genetically modified (GM) food – means you don't care (or lack 'awareness', a slightly less pejorative characterisation). That you may believe farming utilising GM to be a better option for the future of the developing countries, or that you may not believe consumption can really address political issues of development, is outside of the framing of this debate. Similarly, buying a cheap package holiday is not failing to care. It could reflect the view that holidays are a poor vehicle for advancing social and political aspirations. It could legitimately reflect the opinion that the eco-options that go under the heading 'responsible' more often than not have nothing much to offer by way of development (Butcher 2003 & 2007).

In this way the 'moralisation of tourism' (Butcher 2003) leads away from a political framing of the issue of development. 'Caring and uncaring', 'responsible and irresponsible', 'awareness and lacking awareness' not only reproduce a discourse of personal qualities as the key to acting on the world, but they close down debate on other development perspectives that don't conform to the characteristics favoured by the ethical lobby. In this sense the rise of personal ethics mirrors the decline of both politics and an attendant public discussion of political morality.

### **is closer better?**

Ethical consumption has been viewed as a progressive humanising of politics (see Shah et al (eds.) 2012), although it could more accurately be characterised as a personalising of politics. In contrast to abstract theories and grand narratives, it appears to bring political issues down to everyday human relationships. This is attractive in post-political times. Take Fair Trade for example, which is assumed absolutely central to ethical consumption (Barnett et al 2011). Consumers are encouraged to consider the impact of their consumption upon the producer, and to pay more to support them, very often on the basis that they are small scale and organic producers. Fair Trade favours small scale production over large, and organic over modern methods such as the use of genetically modified organisms. The latter is barred from being certified as Fair Trade. Cafés and Fair Trade packaging and publicity carry pictures of the farmers, and their names – the connection is personal.

In similar vein, the clientele of 'ethical' holiday companies are also encouraged to make a difference to the individuals they meet. Through tourism, the care associated with ethical consumption is experienced personally (Meletis and Campbell 2007). If care is seen as bonds associated with those close to us (family, friends, neighbours) then tourism is an exemplary case as tourists are both literally and metaphorically developing a closeness to the objects of their care.

The clearest example of this is the new 'voluntourism', which links holidays directly to the active promotion of wellbeing of the people personally encountered. The personal element – names, acquaintances, friendships – is key, unsurprising given that the aim is to care. Consumers not only see and learn a little of the workers producing their product – their village, their names, their farms etc. – but visit them and work with them on projects to assist their livelihoods.

This personalised aspect of ethical tourism plays well at a time when government and business are often prefixed by 'big', 'distant' or even 'dirty', and in the social sciences 'grand narratives' are not only not in evidence, but are regarded as untenable by many (see Minca and Oakes (eds.) 2012, with regard to tourism). Ethical tourism fits well with contemporary anti-politics and often adopts a populist rhetoric – 'the local community' are often contrasted favourably to the perceived impersonality of governments and global trade (Butcher 2007; 2013).

But the closeness to the object of our care, in itself, provides no moral guidance. If we encounter a poor trader selling coral necklaces whilst on holiday, should we buy it to help the man and his family (but contribute to the destruction of the coral) or refuse to buy to discourage damage to the reef (but leave the man and his family poorer)? Holiday encounters, like all consumption based ethical strategies, seem to expand the possibilities for moral action, but in doing so narrow the scope for moral agency.

A similar argument is made by Giles Mohan with regard to development volunteers. He points out that being over reliant upon personal contact for one's view of development tends to encourage a conception of development and inequalities based upon a fetishised view of culture, rather than through an emphasis on fundamental historical and material inequalities (Mohan 2001). The personal touch – "being there" - is no substitute for politics. The intimate and "can do" approach of ethical tourism seems to encourage this fetishised view of culture as personally experienced, cut adrift from a wider political framing.

Whilst reducing literal distance between the subject and object of care does not lead to enlightenment, the same can be argued with regard to metaphorical distance. Chouliaraki argues that the immediacy of emotional and personal responses to humanitarian issues – for example a response to a poster of a poor orphan, a half built village school or a film showing starving children - without the mediating influence of a healthy 'agonistic' public sphere, leave us with a 'post humanitarianism': an inability to think and act beyond a 'self oriented' moral framework in relation to the suffering of others. She argues, in effect, to re-establish some metaphorical distance between the humanitarian individual and the object of their humanitarian impulse. That distance makes possible a framing of the issues in social and political terms, and a contestation of the roots of the humanitarian matter at hand. It enables us to see other people as having agency within the context of their lives and society, rather than collapsing this into our own search for a moral lifestyle. Without this distance, Chouliaraki argues that solidarity will be fleeting, fitting around the lifestyle of the humanitarian, reacting to the surface rather than the substance of the issue. This is the limit of lifestyle, personalised politics informed by the language of responsibility, awareness and care. Ultimately, as Chouliaraki shows, the best intentions can feed in to a narcissism, where the issues we wish to act upon are a backdrop for a western search for selfhood and purpose - a self oriented moral project rather than an other oriented one (Chouliaraki 2013).

This argument is illustrated, albeit in an extreme way, by the controversies over volunteer tourism to orphanages in poor countries such as Cambodia (Pitrelli 2012; Al Jazeera 2008). The impulse to help a poor child motivates volunteer tourism, and this, alongside the personal benefit the tourist will get through the experience, is what is promised by volunteer tourism operators. Yet the political and economic roots of poverty, the social struggles of families to get by, the construction of childhood in

different circumstances – issues in many ways for the public sphere and for Chouliaraki's (2013) metaphorical distance from the object of concern – appear beyond the individual. The social agents are the tourists alone, and the children, their families and societies are presented as victims and bystanders. Most children in the orphanages are reported as having at least one surviving parent, but in Cambodia tourist dollars and the emotions of well meaning volunteers can push desperate families apart (Pitrelli 2012). Effectively, albeit unwittingly, help is available if you give up your child, but unavailable if you do not. Care from a western volunteer attracts money, care for your own children does not. Outcomes for the children in some orphanages are reported to be poor to the extent that some volunteer tourism companies have recently withdrawn from this area of work (Francis 2013). Beyond the material outcomes, orphanage volunteer tourism reinforces damaging political assumptions of a dependent, vulnerable Third World in need of the benevolent, caring westerner (Guiney 2013).

That is neither to condemn nor praise volunteering in foreign orphanages, but to point out the poverty of such actions as social or political interventions in development. Charity is always an admirable impulse. However, the good Samaritan who crosses the road to help someone in need is in a sense the opposite to the new moral tourist. One claims to be a player in development gathering valuable life experience, the other simply acts in a charitable manner. Private charity as conspicuous lifestyle politics diminishes politics. It may also diminish charity as a selfless act for others.

### **reflections on the private sphere**

Not only does ethical tourism and the claims made for it mark a diminished politics and public sphere, it also does not benefit our capacity to reflect and act in our private lives. Here we are constantly confronted with moral dilemmas – do we castigate the naughty child, do we give the beggar some money, do we tell our friend that they are in a bad relationship? Do we volunteer at the Cambodian orphanage, send a donation or redouble our attempt to understand and challenge the reasons why Cambodia is a poor country. We develop and exercise our own moral autonomy in these everyday encounters. There is no benefit in prescribing or proscribing private, lawful individual behaviour in the name of ethical conduct.

The thrill of travel is to negotiate new people, new places, cultures and relationships. Travel may well provide opportunity for critical reflection on one's life and society. However, making the exciting private journey of the tourist subject to a set of ethical imperatives linked to a particular political outlook cuts down the potential for personal development – or in Sennett's terms, the development of moral autonomy through reflection in the private sphere (2003).

### **Conclusion**

Contrary to the claims that ethical tourism is or points towards progressive politics, it diminishes politics in two senses. First, politics is diminished as personal qualities replace political categories in public development discourse. This reflects and reinforces the emptying of the public sphere in post-political times. Second, ethical tourism is a particular outlook masquerading, via terms such as care and responsibility, as a universal ethics for all. It narrows discussion of different development options by, a priori, placing some on a moral pedestal and consigning others to the ethical wilderness.

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