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ETHICAL TRAVEL DECISIONS
Travel Agents and Human Rights

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Abstract: This paper explores the ethics of selling tourism products for destinations that have known major human rights issues. The study uses the moral intensity framework to analyze the ethical decisionmaking of New Zealand travel agents. Qualitative interviews reveal support for all aspects of the framework. In particular, agents' judgements are strongly influenced by their perceptions of how their decisions impact upon their clients. In contrast, uncertainty surrounds the probability and magnitude of consequences of their decisions for destination communities. Strong social, cultural, legal, and economic links between the agent and the more proximate stakeholders mean that ethical decisions commonly favor these stakeholders. **Keywords:** ethics, travel agent, moral intensity, human rights.

Résumé: Décisions de voyage éthiques: agents de voyage et droits humains. Cet article examine l'éthique de vendre des produits de tourisme pour des destinations ayant des problèmes majeurs connus au sujet des droits humains. L'étude utilise le cadre de l'intensité morale pour analyser la prise de décisions éthiques des agents de voyage néo-zélandais. Des entretiens qualitatifs révèlent l'importance de tous les aspects du cadre. En particulier, les décisions sont fortement influencées par la perception des impacts des décisions sur les clients. En revanche, la probabilité et l'ampleur des conséquences des décisions pour les communautés de destination sont entourées d'incertitude. De forts liens sociaux, culturels, légaux et économiques entre l'agent et les principales parties prenantes font que les décisions éthiques avantagent généralement ces parties prenantes. **Mots-clés:** éthique, agent de voyage, intensité morale, droits humains.

INTRODUCTION

There is growing debate over the ethics of travel to destinations with a poor record of human rights. Myanmar, just one such country, dubbed ''the land of fear'' (Pilger and Munro 1996:np), has raised concerns at the United Nations, member countries expressing unease about the high level of human rights violations there (Amnesty International 2002, in Henderson 2003:101). Others on a short list of violators may include Algeria, North Korea, Indonesia, Libya, Colombia, Syria, Yugoslavia, China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe (Amnesty International 2005). Political leaders and nongovernmental organizations have called for consideration to be given to tourism

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boycotts of such destinations. With regard to Myanmar, imprisoned democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi has suggested that ''...travel [to Myanmar] be curbed in the interest of justice and humanity'' and that ''Visiting now is tantamount to condoning the regime'' (Burma Campaign UK 2003:1). Notably, travel guide publishers, Lonely Planet, have prefaced their controversial Myanmar guide with the section ''Should you go?'' discussing the pros and cons of visiting this country—but have drawn criticism from the nongovernment organization Tourism Concern for even publishing the guide.

The politics of whether or not to travel to such destinations has been addressed by a number of commentators. Henderson, who discusses boycotts of Myanmar, points out the ''fundamentally political nature of tourism, which acts as an expression of political philosophy and instrument of policy'', noting that tourism is perceived to ''have some potency as a force for change by protagonists in political disputes'' (2003:114).

Tourism as a moral and political practice is well recognized by nongovernment organizations such as Tourism Concern, The Burma Campaign, and Amnesty International, as well as a number of tourism researchers (Hall 1994; Richter 1989; Smith and Duffy 2003). Moreover, the moral and political nature of tourism has been identified by a number of governments, some of which have acted to remove choice on the part of the citizens and businesses over whether they engage with destinations that are human rights abusers. Thus, while for many tourists and tourism industry members the question of whether to travel to places with major human rights issues may be a moral question, for some parties and for some destinations, it becomes a legal and political issue too. For example, US trade embargoes impact on aspects of travel to the Balkans, Cuba, Myanmar, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, and Zimbabwe. Similarly, the United Kingdom has called on the industry there to cease business with Myanmar. Admittedly while some of the above embargoes are arguably for other political reasons rather than specifically addressing human rights abuses, the distinction is not always clear.

However, while ethical travel is beginning to appear in the tourism lexicon, it has still to be defined clearly. The fact that recent writers such as Fennell (2006), Smith and Duffy (2003) and Butcher (2003) have not clarified what is meant by ethical travel, demonstrates the complexity of this issue. Some have drawn links between ethical issues and ecotourism, and others with such types of tourism as sustainable, responsible, just, or pro-poor (Holden 2003; Hultsman 1995). However while environmental impacts are addressed in terms of ethical tourism, there is relatively little acknowledgement of the political and human-rights consequences for all communities.

An Ethical Issue

The decision whether or not to travel to repressed destinations is clouded by ambiguity and uncertainty, and the ethics of the situation

are invariably unclear (Henderson 2003). Typically, arguments against tourism hinge upon the idea that it lines the pockets of corrupt regimes and effectively condones non-democratic governments. It is argued that travel bans will draw international attention and pressure on the countries concerned and serve as a catalyst for change from within. However, the case *for* continued trips to these destinations can appear valid. Henderson notes the arguments of industry stakeholders for continued visits to Myanmar—where tourists become better informed about the human rights issues in that country, and their dollars contribute to incremental positive change in that destination. Others argue freedom of travel for the tourist-generating-region population should be paramount, as there may be questionable benefits accruing to a distant people and land from a travel boycott. Thus distance and/or proximity of stakeholders becomes central to such arguments. Jones (1991) asserts that, intuitively, people tend to be more concerned about moral issues that affect those close to them, rather than those with whom they have little contact, as in a distant country. Illustrating this, Kaplan, writing of the Afghanistan war, believes that it registered ''only at the fringes of our consciousness'' as it ''happened too far away, to an alien people'' (1989, in Jones 1991:372).

Despite the uncertainty over whether to travel to such destinations, what *is* certain, is that the various stakeholders involved will either benefit or be harmed by the decision, thus defining this as an ethical issue. Such an issue is said to be present ''when a person's actions when freely performed, may harm or benefit others'' (Velasquz and Rostanskowski 1985, in Jones 1991:376). Likewise, ethical decisionmaking is that for which one or more alternative choices may result in harm to one or more groups of individuals (stakeholders) affected by the decision outcome (Ross and Robertson 2003). For this particular issue, or ethical question, there are alternative choices facing individuals that will result in harm (or benefit) to certain stakeholders. The principal stakeholders under consideration in this case are the tourists, the tourism service providers, and residents of the destination who are (potential) sufferers of human rights abuses. Although it is acknowledged that tourism businesses operating from the generating region *or* from the destination itself are important stakeholders (Miller and Auyong 1991), this study only considers the former. This is partly pragmatic for the research, but primarily because the provider located in the generating region generally enjoys a much higher level of interpersonal contact with the tourist at the time of destination choice, than does their counterpart located in the destination itself.

Role of Travel Agents

One stakeholder vocal in their opposition to boycotts is the travel agent sector. Those in the United Kingdom, for example, have voiced concerns over the government's call there to stop selling tourism to Myanmar. More than any other stakeholder, agents are in a critical

position to influence the tourist's destination choice (Mitchie and Sullivan 1990; Snaepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worral 1990). They are opinion formers, and ''their opinions and the level of information they impart should not be underestimated in terms of their impact on an intending traveler's holiday decisionmaking process'' (Lawton and Page 1997:100). Agents provide expert advice on topics as diverse as politics and weather, and consequently have the power to both create and limit opportunities for tourists (Cheong and Miller 2000). As a consequence, destinations depend on their positive support, to the extent that ''a destination probably needs the support of the agent community to be successful'' (Roehl 1990:16).

Not only are agents important in destination choice, they also act as moral mediators when faced with a number of alternative choices that benefit or harm various stakeholders. They may make the booking (as to Myanmar), refuse the booking, or pass on information that will make the client choose an alternative destination—each with different consequences for tourists, host communities, agencies, and agents themselves. Even if unaware that moral issues are at stake, they remain moral mediators (Jones 1991). Even if the individual has ultimate responsibility of deciding where to visit, the agent has what is termed ''associational responsibility'' (Heider 1958 in Jones 1991:382) for the outcome of that decision.

Therefore, considering the critical role of agents in destination choice, this paper focuses on ethical decisionmaking by these professionals concerning travel to human-rights-challenged destinations. The paper utilizes the framework of ''moral intensity'' (Jones 1991:366) drawn from the field of applied ethics, to discuss their ethical decisionmaking in the scenario outlined above. The moral intensity framework used in this study, along with other related approaches from the field of applied ethics, may be of value to tourism studies, yet this field is largely absent in the literature. This paper responds to calls (Fennell 2006; Hultsman 1995; Lea, 1993) for tourism scholars to enhance their analyses of tourism-related ethical issues through embracing a more diverse literature drawn from the fields of moral philosophy and applied ethics. The moral intensity framework is widely utilized to examine ethical issues within other sectors. This paper draws on a study of travel agents in New Zealand and discusses how moral intensity influences their operations.

Ethical Decisionmaking

There are a number of different models of the ethical decisionmaking (EDM) process, most progressively synthesizing earlier work. Collectively, workers in this field have done much to isolate key environmental factors (personal, organizational, industrial, and cultural) that influence EDM and also to identify the processes by which such decisions are made (Brommer, Gratto, Gravender andTuttle1987; Ferrell and Grisham 1985; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Trevino 1986). However, Rest (1986) was the first to highlight EDM as a four-staged

process: recognizing an issue as moral; the moral judgement is made; establishment of moral intent; and engaging in moral behavior.

But it is Jones who has arguably made the most recent substantial advancement into the study of EDM with his introduction of the concept of moral intensity. While previous work has done much to identify environmental factors that influence the process, and to identify critical stages in it, Jones is the first to highlight the significance of the actual characteristics of the moral issue. In reference to existing models of EDM, Jones notes that none ''does more than hint that characteristics of the moral issue itself will affect the moral decisionmaking process'' (1991:369). Using Rest's (1986) model, Jones illustrates how the characteristics of the moral issue may impact on all EDM stages.

Jones' model rests on moral agents making decisions based upon six dimensions of the moral issue: the magnitude of consequences (the sum of the harms (or benefits) to victims—or beneficiaries—of the moral act in question); social consensus (the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil or good); probability of effect (a joint function of the probability that the act in question will actually take place and this will actually cause the harm or benefit predicted); temporal immediacy (the length of time between the present and the onset of consequences of the moral act in question; shorter length of time implies greater immediacy); proximity (the feeling of nearness—social, cultural, psychological, physical—that the moral agent has for victims or beneficiaries of the evil or beneficial act in question; and concentration of effect (an inverse function of the number of people affected by an act of given magnitude). Jones argues for the inclusion of these components in the moral intensity construct based on a combination of a common-sense understanding and observation of human behavior and empirically derived evidence (1991: 374-377).

The moral intensity model has been employed in numerous studies (Chia and Mee 2000; Dukerich, Walker, George and Huber 2000; Frey 2000; Jaffe and Pastemak 2006; May and Pauli 2002; Paollilo and Vitell 2002; Singer, Mitchell and Turner 1998; Singhapakdi, Vitell, and Franke 2006; Watley and May 2004; Weber 1996). However, the model has limitations, with some components appearing more important than others. Miner and Petocz (2003), for example, acknowledge that recent studies continue to find support for aspects of the model, such as social consensus, but believe that there is a lack of consistent support for the components based on consequentialism or care. In contrast, a study by Morris and McDonald (1995) found that social consensus and perceived magnitude of consequences mattered more than other dimensions. Further, Marshall and Dewe's (1997) study revealed only limited evidence of the importance of the six components, while Carlson, Kacmar and Wadsworth's (2002) study found strong support only for the component of proximity (of the three dimensions tested). Clearly, the importance of the components is relative and context dependent. As already outlined, in the travel agent situation there is often spatial, cultural, and ''racial'' separation between the moral mediator (the agent) and some of the stakeholders affected by the decision outcome, notably the destination community. Thus, of Jones'

(1991) components, one may expect proximity to be related to the mediator's perceptions of moral intensity, and thus be a more persuasive component in their ethical decisionmaking.

ETHICAL DECISIONMAKING

To date, the moral intensity model, although used within a retail context, has not been applied within the tourism industry, nor specifically for the retailing of its products. This paper reports on a study that examines the EDM behavior of retail staff within a tourism context, namely travel agents. The moral intensity framework is applied to their selling behavior with respect to the products for destinations with known human rights abuses and/or political suppression issues.

In general, business ethics may be viewed from three different perspectives: normative, analytical, and descriptive (Goodpaster 1983). This work takes the latter approach, the objective of the study not being to prescribe a certain ethical orientation, but to present an evaluation of the EDM of agents, and to utilize the moral intensity framework to help elucidate their behavior. Therefore, the study is interpretive in its attempt to understand the role of ethics in this tourism sector from the perspective of those employed by it. Indepth face-to-face interviews were chosen as the method for data gathering. This approach contrasts with most studies that have applied Jones' framework of moral intensity, which are quantitative in nature, primarily utilizing survey questionnaires. However, qualitative interviews have been used successfully in similar studies of ethical orientations and behaviors within workplaces (Lahdesmaki 2005; Lamsa and Takala 2000; Scott 2003) and their advantages have been noted (Kelley and Elm 2003; Robertson 1993).

Study Methods

This study utilizes data from a nationwide survey of travel agents in New Zealand, undertaken by postal survey conducted in 2003. The resulting data raised some important issues with regard to ethical travel advice (Lovelock 2003). Those findings were used to inform this qualitative study, comprising a sample of 15 agents. The interviewees were self-selected participants from the survey who identified themselves as willing to be involved in further research on the topic. A subsample was chosen and included frontline staff from small owner-operated niche tourism agencies as well as business travel wholesalers and large franchise holders within one or more of the country's national or international chains. All interviews were taped and transcribed, with transcripts analyzed for content, and broad subjects identified (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). These themes were then explored using the components represented in Jones' (1991) moral intensity framework: magnitude of consequences; social consensus; probability of effect; temporal immediacy; proximity; and concentration of effect.

As noted by other researchers (Lahdesmaki 2005; Spence and Lozano 2000), the language of ethics is not often a part of the discourse of small business operators; and there is no reason to suspect why agents (who although employed by a multinational company still generally operate within a small-business environment) may be different. Thus, the interviews in this study did not explicitly focus on ethics (were not asked overtly about their ethical orientations) but were asked to discuss behaviors and feelings surrounding certain issues, often presented as scenarios or vignettes. This approach is accepted as being particularly appropriate to study judgement formation on sensitive topics (Robertson 1993). In this way, the participants often introduced the topic of ethics into the discussion themselves. The scenarios discussed with participants were reflective of contemporary political, human rights, and safety issues commonly seen in both the tourism-specific and wider media. They included, for example, travel to post-coup undemocratic Fiji, to Zimbabwe during the Land Reform programme, and to an Asian child-sex destination. For clarification, in discussions, the term ''boycott'' was employed in its common usage, that is, an organized refusal to have commercial dealings with a destination in protest against its policies. Myanmar was the only scenario used for which a boycott had been widely promulgated.

Study Findings

A number of themes were revealed through an analysis of the interview transcripts. Major ones are those that were expressed in all or nearly all of the interviews, while minor ones were only evident in a small number of replies. Major themes included the paramount importance of clients' choice; the distinction of ethical from non-ethical destinations; freedom of travel for everyone; safety as a catalyst for considering ethical issues; and the benefits of tourism for all destinations. This analysis addresses the major themes, and touches upon some minor ones, while noting how they relate to components of the moral intensity framework. For the purposes of reporting the interview material, the participants have been assigned fictitious (but gender-correct) names.

The Paramount Importance of Client's Choice

There was a strong consensus surrounding the issue of freedom of choice for the client: ''the client is always right'' response of service industry workers. It became evident that agents felt that the customer's choice of destination is paramount over all other issues, including the potential impact upon host communities. Agents were reluctant to foist their personal political/moral/social views upon their clients through limiting destination and product choice for their clients:

> . . .if they make the decision to go somewhere it's up to me to provide the product and service that they require. Not for me to morally judge them (Dave).

There are also signs that the degree of consensus on this issue has been reinforced by the training that personnel undertake at the outset and throughout their career, as part of their ''creed'':

> It's the clients who decide. . . .it's not my call. It's their call. So I think agents on the whole have been brought up to believe that the customer, it's his right to go to wherever (Wendy).

Furthermore, agents strongly empathize with the aspirations of their clients: some agents describe themselves as being in the ''dream industry'' in the sense that to be able to indulge in an overseas trip is, for many New Zealanders, the realization of a lifelong dream. Many agents did not feel that they had the right to interfere with their clients' dreams:

> . . .what one must consider is that we only have one life to live. And if a client says I would really like to travel to a particular country then it is not my place to look at the political reasons for them doing that (Steve).
> I'm not going to say what the hell do you want to go there for? I don't want to ruin their dream (Dave).

Referring to the moral intensity framework, there are a number of contextual components that are evident in the presentation of this theme. Paramount is the issue of proximity. Jones states that, intuitively, people care more about those who are close to them socially, culturally, psychologically, or physically, than those who are distant. In this scenario, the client is closer to the moral (travel) agent under all of these categories than they are to potential victims (or beneficiaries) in a faraway culture and society. This nearness or distance factor was not explicitly stated by participants in the study, although the proximity to clients is revealed through agents' comments (above) about interfering with their clients' dreams. Typically one could only identify with the dreams/hopes/ambitions of individuals if this person had some commonality, or felt close to them in some way.

This proximity to the client is reinforced through workplace and legal factors. A number of researchers (Ferrell Fraedrich and Ferrell 2005) have noted the importance of the workplace and organizational environment upon ethical decisionmaking, including internal rules and codes of practice as well as legal obligations. For example, one participant noted the effect that a legally imposed boycott on selling products to certain destinations would have on her behavior, indicating that legal enforcement would prompt ethical behavior from her:

> Yeah, politics and ethics I think will always probably stay out, unless the law got changed and suddenly they wouldn't let you do all these things (Suzie).

Another participant referred to the need to abide by their industry association code of ethics. That code, however, refers to an obligation to service the needs of clients, and does not refer to a wider responsibility to other stakeholders such as the host society. There are also organizational ethics that are felt to take precedence over personal ones, and these usually favor the proximate party (client) over the

distant party (host community). One such ethic is imposing a duty upon agents (usually employees) to maximize the financial returns from their actions for the owner/manager of the business. One participant referred to putting aside some of their personal opinions and using their ''business head''. This is captured nicely in Dave's sentiment: ''If I don't sell them the fare, they can go to any of the other 20 agencies within five minutes walk of here''. Thus, there is a strong economic imperative supporting an ethical decision (continue to sell products) in favor of the proximate parties, the agency, and the client.

However, with regard to the proximity/distance between agents and the host community, paradoxically, participants in this study sometimes felt quite attached (some psychological proximity) to destination societies. This was particularly evident in those places to which the participants had visited frequently, or in which they may have resided for a period:

> . . .I love Thai people, I think they're the most amazing people, I spent two years in a monastery in Thailand, and I have great respect for their culture. And great respect for them as people. . . and their children are just beautiful. . . apart from saying I'm not going to sell you a ticket, what else can you do (Dave)?
> . . .I know what's going on in Zimbabwe and I know people who live there and been repressed, and I'm very reluctant to put people through to Zimbabwe at the moment (Giles).
> I used to love Nepal. If it all turned to custard in Nepal I'd personally point it out to the client, that I didn't like what was going on there (Christopher).

However, this closeness to host communities that some of the agents felt, as in the three cases above, seldom becomes such an important factor in the moral issue as to prevent travel to the destination. Thus, the interests of the proximate party—the client—remain upheld. In such cases, despite reluctance, the agents would continue to sell products for the destinations concerned. One participant, frequently visiting Thailand, has observed Western tourists engaging young Thai girls for paid sex. She feels an empathy to those girls, partly perhaps because she is a single mother with a young daughter herself:

> I've stood in Puket and watched these young Western guys come up on their motorcycles and take these tiny girls off, and you know why they're going, and you rage inside (Rita).

However, this agent also continues to sell products for Thailand, because she feels that there are positive benefits in doing so. Again, in this case, a felt psychological proximity to the host community has not prevented sales.

The Benefits of Tourism for all Destinations

The above case highlights a second major theme revealed in the study: that travel directly benefits destinations and host communities—so

why limit travel? While a minority of agents were concerned about the consequences for the host population (such as young girls, sex workers), this was not a widespread concern. In fact many agents questioned the potential negative implications and chose to focus instead on the positive economic, political, and sociocultural benefits of continuing to sell products for the destinations concerned. Some pointed out the potentially disastrous negative economic costs of imposing a blanket boycott of products relating to those destinations. Rita, for example, could not understand Aung San Suu Kyi's calls for a travel boycott of Myanmar:

> Yeah but you have to look the other side of the coin and that is that it's the people of those countries that are the beneficiaries of the tourist dollar... you're offering some vestige of hope. You're also offering some much-needed dollars into that society (Rita).
> Fiji... if you take tourism out of Fiji there isn't much left. If you've been there, the farms have had it. No matter what you say, it's the [tourism] money that keeps that country ticking over (Harry).

Similarly, Harry prioritizes the economic benefits of tourism in the case of Fiji. In general, most agents were aware of the serious human rights issues in destinations, and were in some cases disgusted with the regimes in these countries. However, this did not translate into a concern about the moral consequences of fostering travel to politically repressed destinations. Another group of participants indicated that the human rights issues within destinations may be overstated, and that one shouldn't be too concerned about conditions there:

> ... you can travel through countries and not be in any way aware of the political situation. It doesn't stop people ploughing the fields or picking the fruit or whatever, they still get on with their life. It's still the same, you've still got the same scenery, it's not going to change at all (Dave).
> When you go to China and you go to some of the countries, you actually see the country it actually gives in an insight into perhaps why they are authoritarian. Maybe it's not as bad as you think, or you've been led to believe. Certainly China, I don't know how democracy would ever survive in China... Yeah and so maybe an authoritarian type regime is probably a better thing (Mike).

This denial (that there are human rights issues in some destinations and that the people differ from ''us'' in some way because they need an authoritarian rule, or because they just keep on suffering and surviving such conditions) seems to be a search for markers of social differentiation, branding host communities as the ''other'' and in doing so facilitating a sense of greater social distance. Conversely, social distancing on the part of the agents, emphasizing that the destination community are the other, in effect increases the relative proximity of the client to the agent. Thus, moral decisions in favor of the client become easier to make.

This theme reflects three more components of the moral intensity model: probability of effect, magnitude of consequences, and social consensus. Discussion with participants revealed that there is serious

doubt over what (if any) the actual consequences are for the communities in human-rights-challenged destinations for which they sell products. Will these destinations benefit from tourism, or be harmed? If they are harmed, will this be substantial harm or insignificant? It appeared that most agents did not, as Jones puts it, appear to be constantly agitated over this moral issue. Most of them really failed to recognize any serious moral consequences of their actions, at least in regard to the potential impact upon host communities. Thus, it appears that this particular moral issue may have failed to reach what Jones refers to as a ''magnitude of consequences threshold''. This failure means that ethical behavior, in terms of not selling products for the destinations concerned, is not initiated.

There was certainly a high level of debate over whether taking the moral action of boycotting sales to destinations would in fact lead to benefits for the host community—as predicted by proponents of ethical tourism. But there was unanimous agreement that such action had a very high probability of harming their clients, and indeed, harming their business or employer. Furthermore, the level of awareness of this issue was generally low among agents (it was not something that they had thought about, and they did not appear to be guided by any general debate about the issue). Social consensus on the issue was lacking—there is no social agreement—not in the workplace, nor in the travel-services sector, nor in the wider community, over whether boycotting sales of tourism products to human rights challenged destinations is a good or a bad thing.

The Distinction of Ethical from Non-ethical Destinations

There was much debate over what constituted a destination with human rights issues, with many participants claiming that for many Western countries to make such judgements was hypocritical. Participants pointed out that there are ''lots of undemocratic governments in the world'', and some believed that the nongovernment organizations were targeting the wrong countries. For example, it was noted that Saudi Arabia, in terms of human rights, may be worse than many countries, but receives little attention from campaigners. More than one participant suggested that travel to America should be boycotted in view of political and military developments there. The complexity over what constitutes an acceptable or unacceptable destination was illustrated by one participant using the example of Australia, the most common destination for New Zealanders:

> Where do you draw the line?... you could argue that Australia... I mean how do they feel about the Australian government's decision to exclude refugees? ... or what do they think of the Australian government's treatment of Aborigines of the past couple of hundred years? So where do you draw the line? I don't think you can (Leonard).

Participants noted that there are positive aspects to all destinations, despite their political and human-rights situations, and that often the

politics of such places are ambiguous and misinterpreted in the West. Participants were asked about their actions with regard to selling tourism products for Fiji after the 2002 coup, hostage-taking, and during the period with no democratic government. Nearly all agents continued to sell products, one agent commenting that ''. . .even the Indians [in Fiji] hate Chaudhary [former Prime Minister and rebel hostage]''—thus it was acceptable to continue to sell Fiji products. In relation to this destination, another participant stated:

> And it's true it was an undemocratic parliament, but then you would hear so many different stories about, even though it was a democratic parliament, whether it was actually. . . doing any good and what the people of Fiji really want. I don't think you can know (Suzie).

This absence of reliable information upon which to make judgements on destinations' human-rights situations was a commonly identified issue. Interestingly, one participant pointed out that the authoritarian or totalitarian regimes in some countries are part of the reason that clients wish to visit there. With countries like Myanmar and Cuba, people go there to experience the political contrast with the democratic state in which they reside. Thus, the regimes are effectively an integral part of destination attractiveness.

This theme again relates strongly to the components of moral intensity as previously discussed. First, the magnitude of consequences (for the host community) is unclear and probability of effect uncertain. Second, there is no social consensus over what is a ''good'' or ''bad'' destination, nor over whether any ethical action on the part of the agent would lead to political gains for the host community relevant to their existing situation.

Freedom of Travel for Everyone

That all citizens should have the right to travel unhindered was a pervading ethical stance on the part of the agents interviewed. When asked if they would support a ban on travel to destinations with human rights abuses, the response was overwhelmingly negative, with one participant likening such an approach to being a ''bit communist'' and another to Nazism. One agent compared freedom of travel to freedom of speech, and another cited freedom of travel as a basic democratic right. One agent noted that imposing such a travel ban would then make the boycotting country become like the boycotted one:

> . . . we all deplore it when countries like China or Russia won't let people out of their borders. And for the same reason I think we have to be very careful (Vince). Yeah, sorry, I don't like the idea . . . as soon as they start telling you not to go and what not to do then you've had it. Its like. . . in Europe, they made it illegal to deny the holocaust, but to make it illegal to actually say something, its like. . .its just what the Nazis would've done. . . I would have a problem just because it is people's choice (Silvio).

Almost all participants, while arguing for the rights of their clients to freedom of travel, failed to make any connection between the

freedoms of their clients relative to the freedoms (or lack thereof) of citizens of the host destination. Only one agent believed that freedom of choice did not necessarily override other ethical concerns.

One participant described a situation experienced where she felt that her client was traveling to Thailand for the purposes of illegal sex tourism (with minors). Despite her reservations about his motivations, she continued to sell him a ticket on the grounds that ''I guess it is their right to be able to go in and purchase an air ticket'' (Deirdre). Another agent, suspicious but unsure about the intentions of a client—''I mean, he looked like a paedophile, you know, he had all the, well he had all the sleazy hallmarks''(Rita)—continued to sell the air travel, but then reported the client to ECPAT (a global network of organizations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography, and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes). Her involvement of this network is a rare example of ethical action taken. The more oft-repeated scenario—where an agent has a client whose motivation is suspicious, but they continue to sell the product—illustrates the power of the ideal of freedom of travel.

With regard to the difficulty of ascertaining a client's motivations, from the agent's position of relative ignorance, a client could just as easily be a child-abuser as an aid-worker, or someone traveling to bring comfort to desperate relatives. Some participants felt that as long as there was always a legitimate reason to visit an oppressed destination, attempts to divert travel away from destinations would be morally questionable. A part of ethically stopping a sale is uncertainty about intended actions of the client and consequences for members of the host community–will harm actually occur? Most agents were unwilling to make a judgement because of the uncertainty over their client's intentions. Thus, the moral intensity component ''probability of effect'' becomes an important aspect of ethical decisionmaking. Another aspect of this theme is ''concentration of effect''. Restricting or removing freedom of travel for one client has a more concentrated effect than the arguably little change that the moral action would bring to the relative personal freedoms of the millions of citizens within the politically repressed destination.

Safety as a Catalyst for Considering Ethical Issues

Many agents indicated that they would only consider making a moral choice to protect the client if safety became a concern. In this way there appeared to be a need to connect human rights issues with safety in order to reach a magnitude of consequences threshold. The implication of this is that the sociopolitical impacts of travel upon the host population are less important than the personal-safety-related impact upon their client. For example, Steve, when asked if political factors in destinations influence his selling behavior replied:

> No, no. Purely safety. Nothing to do with beliefs. I don't mix that with travel. If people want to travel to a country my first consideration is, is

> it safe? That's all. I don't really care too much about the politics because that's not why people are wanting to travel. People want to travel to do things and see things. Politics is a secondary consideration (Steve).

Similarly, one participant was uncomfortable with selling travel to Myanmar, not because of moral concerns but because of safety issues. Another participant was concerned about Zimbabwe:

> I would try and avoid selling it, just because of the political unrest. And the safety, yeah, but not because Mugabe is a tyrant who's destroying his people, just because he wants to stay in power a bit longer (Silvio).

That safety of their clients is a concern, is reinforced through some awareness that agents have some legal and/or ethical responsibility to inform their clients about health and safety issues (Lovelock 2003). But the irony is that nearly all while concerned about safety do not recognize these issues as often being symptoms of deeper ones rooted in sociopolitical inequalities within destinations. One more politically aware participant, Silvio, in describing how safety becomes the overriding concern uses Tibet as a destination to illustrate:

> ...its nearly all safety... I don't think I've ever heard anything that people said [about] the way the Chinese are deliberately out-breeding the Tibetans is a moral outrage and we shouldn't be going there. It's like... "Watch out for Tibetans they might be angry and bomb people you know"... Its never... never the other way (Silvio).

In this case safety is of greater concern than the underlying human rights issues (cultural destruction, economic exploitation, ethnic discrimination, and political suppression) that may have created a dangerous situation for tourists.

Again, if applying the moral intensity framework, when agents make an ethical decision based upon the personal safety needs of their client rather than the wider humanitarian needs of the destination community, a number of components are highlighted. Magnitude of consequences is evident in that injury or death of one client is of greater importance than the uncertain (probability of effect) sociopolitical benefits to the host community. There is also social consensus that personal injury or harm to clients is bad, such consensus having been strongly reinforced to agents and the wider community through occupational safety and health legislation and media-profiled litigation concerning safety issues (in other sectors). Proximity is also a concern, since most clients come from the agent's own community or culture, and are from the same legal system, with ready rights of redress if harmed or injured as a result of inadequate safety advice.

Other Themes

A number of minor themes also emerged from the interviews. Notable among these is the sentiment that "ethics are too radical": they are something only to be brought out and used on special occasions and by

special people. In general, participants in the study fitted the standard profile for agency employees, in particular having low levels of formal education. Previous studies (Lovelock in press; Malloy and Fennell 1998) have found links between levels of education of tourism industry members and their ethical attitudes and behaviors. A sentiment was evident where ethics are considered something exclusive or beyond the realm of ''ordinary'' workers. Related to this, a number of participants felt that they were not in a position to make informed ethical decisions. Rather, this decisionmaking should be guided by a higher set of ethics—for example, company ethical policy, industry association ethics, or legislation.

A further theme expounded by participants related to the ethics of expecting low-paid agency employees to make ethical decisions that may negatively impact their own remuneration:

> I don't know if you've done any research into working conditions for people in this industry? It's interesting... like these girls out here work on commission. On a ticket to Australia they might make $15. A trip to Burma which might cost someone two grand, they'd be lucky to make a hundred bucks. So it's a low paying industry with high stress. I really don't see [how] people who are lucky if they make thirty grand a year should be in a position where they have to turn business away as a decision they are making on behalf of someone else. The retail thing is so cut-throat...And an industry that is predominantly female and low wages (Harry).

Thus many participants felt there is no place for personal ethics in the workplace–because ethical tourism is seen to be in conflict not only with the business goals, but also with the agent simply making a living as an employee.

CONCLUSION

This paper has utilized an applied ethics approach to examine how agents perceive moral issues of boycotting tourism products associated with human-rights-challenged destinations. When they were faced with the ethical question of sending tourists to such location, all supported continued sales. The moral intensity framework (Jones 1991) was useful in explaining this behavior. In terms of the ethical decisionmaking (EDM) process (Rest 1986), it appears that their perception of the issue as a *moral issue* is critical to their ultimate retail behavior. The first stage of the EDM process involves recognizing a situation as a moral concern, but as Jones notes, ''the characteristics of the moral issue itself will affect the moral decisionmaking process'' (1991:369).

The study demonstrates that all of the components of the moral intensity framework are evident. For example, an agent may not refuse to sell an airfare to a client who wishes to travel to Zimbabwe because they know that this action will upset their client immediately (temporal immediacy), that it infringes upon their client's rights as a customer to freedom of travel (proximity), they are unsure of whether not selling the airfare will lead to any positive changes in the destination

(probability of effect), what those changes will be (magnitude of consequences), or when this will happen (temporal immediacy). They do know, however, that most of their colleagues and indeed the industry do not support ethical tourism and will not agree with them if they stop the sale (social consensus). They also know that preventing their client from going to Zimbabwe is going to have a profound effect upon this person, but that it will probably have minimal effect upon the thousands or millions of people in the destination (concentration of effect). Thus, when analyzing any particular ethical orientation of a participant, any or all of the components of moral intensity may come into play.

Some have argued that the relative importance of the individual components of moral intensity are difficult to ascertain because they are strongly interrelated (Kelley and Elm 2003). However, the data in this study suggest that while they are certainly interrelated, proximity is the dominant component and arguably to a large extent determines how the other five components are evaluated. The notion of proximity is dominant, shaping agents' evaluations of the issue and ultimately their ethical retail behavior. Importantly, on no occasion was the destination community seen to be the proximate stakeholder, that is, prioritized and a primary beneficiary of EDM. Thus, potential harm is assumed and allowed to remain a constant outcome. It is possible that this is a culturally specific result as an understanding of the magnitude of consequences, temporal immediacy, social consensus, and concentration of effect are culturally variable. Some of the significant cultural factors in this study would arguably include New Zealand's geographic isolation, the temporal realities connected with that isolation, and the colonial settler history that has shaped notions of social consensus.

In regard to proximity, Jones argues that moral intensity is related to the social, cultural, physical, and psychological distance from the moral agent to the affected stakeholders. It is argued that of the stakeholders for *this* ethical issue, the client and the agency, assume the proximate position and the host community remains distant. The majority of clients are drawn from the local community and share the same culture and understandings. In contrast, the social distance from the destination is demonstrated in this study by the agents' lack of knowledge of host communities, the manner in which some agents downplay the potential benefits of ethical tourism, and the manner in which they seem to condone or rationalize the poor social, political, and economic conditions in which the people of repressed destinations live.

This proximity (or lack thereof) aspect is exacerbated by a tourism industry and a wider society that support the view that the harm done by denying a client visiting a repressed destination (or any location) is far greater than the potential benefits to the larger, but distant host community. Tourism, through its training programs, organizational cultures, and code of ethics strongly supports the rights of the client. The industry has been active in recent times in the production of codes of behavior and practice. However, these tend to focus on the client, the tourist, and upon the immediate service economic transaction—

for example, the Travel Agents Association of New Zealand Code of Ethics and Practice (TAANZ 2002). At the organization level, very few agencies in the study had their own codes of practice, and if they did, they focused again on the contractual rights of clients. Generally the destination community is ignored in these industry-organization codes. As Payne and Dimanche note, ''society at large is often not recognized as being impacted by tourism, therefore forgotten in codes of ethics'' (1996:1003). An exception is the World Tourism Organization's ''Global Code of Ethics for Tourism'', Article 2 states that tourism activities ''should promote human rights and more particularly, the individual rights of the most vulnerable groups'' (WTO 1999: 2). However, it is arguable that few tourism practitioners, especially in such a sector as travel agencies, would have even heard of the WTO, let alone have knowledge of, or feel any obeisance to its global code. Furthermore, Article 2 could be seen to be in conflict with Article 7 of that code, which stresses the individuals' rights to freedom of travel. This Article would thus appear to preclude any option of a travel boycott for destinations suffering human rights abuses (at least in the mass or organized sense of the term boycott). Article 7 is reflective of, and offers further support to, the common ethic held in New Zealand (and presumably in other Western democracies) of freedom of choice and tourism. This study showed just how ingrained in society the ethic is. Accordingly, from the travel agent's perspective, the magnitude of consequences (harm) of ethical selling behavior on their part are far greater for the individual tourist than they are (benefits) for the host community.

Associated with the proximity-distance factor to the destination community is a lack of knowledge or certainty about what the potential harm or benefits of the moral act of selling the tourism product will be. Thus, probability of effect is another essential aspect of moral intensity. This uncertainty is not aided by a general lack of information to agents about sociopolitical, economic, and human rights issues in destinations. Other researchers have demonstrated that the provision of personal and consequential information enhances perceptions of moral intensity (Watley and May 2004). In this study, several agents called for more indepth ''beyond the glossies'' information on destinations. At the moment, most of their information is based upon generic destination promotional material, plus the limited international news coverage that agents gain from the popular media (Lovelock in press).

A strong influence upon how agencies view ethical tourism is the competitive business environment in which they act. If, on ethical grounds, they deny a client a product for a certain destination, they believe the customer would ''just go around the corner'' to another agency and do business with them. Thus, their work environment (and possibly legal environment too) appears to strongly influence their behavior in this respect. Individuals use lower levels of moral reasoning when in business situations (Weber 1990); in this vein, agents, despite some personal misgivings, continue to focus on the more immediate and pecuniary issues in contrast to global or societal issues.

They feel a strong responsibility to their client and their employer, and less of a connexion with the host community. Ultimately, agents felt that by continuing with sales to repressed destinations, they were acting ethically: because they had responded to the needs of their client, their workplace, and to a broader social ethic that would see a citizen travel where they like, when they like—hence conforming to culturally relative notions of freedom. Therefore, the relative benefits of their EDM are generally assigned to one or more of the proximate stakeholders rather than those in a far-flung destination.

Recent writings in the area of ethical tourism more frequently refer to the growth of the consumer movement and the development of a conscious tourism segment. But, as opposed to environmentally responsible travel, or ecotourism, for which there exists a strong social consensus (and a strong market), there does not appear yet to be such a demand for ethical tourism—especially where this may be juxtaposed with restrictions on the freedom of choice of destination and freedom of travel. Certainly this study showed that as yet there is little understanding and support for ethical matters in this tourism sector. This is important considering the strong influence that it has upon destination choice and thus destination development. Indeed, the results of this investigation suggest that for ethical tourism (at least of the type envisaged by nongovernment organizations) to be effective would require broad adoption and enforcement, possibly enshrined through legislation, although this study revealed little support for such a move. To ethically regulate tourism in this way would be challenging because it would involve regulating face-to-face interactions as well as virtual transactions. Online bookings (comprising US$60.9 billion in 2005 (Burns 2006)) are a significant portion of total tourism sales, and through this channel potential tourists bypass any ethical mediating influence of agents. How are ethical messages passed to e-consumers, and their ethical choices controlled?

Future research might examine the positions of tourism stakeholders on the issue of ethical dilemmas, and also, from the demand side, the extent and characteristics of any fledgling ethical tourism market. Greater use of applied ethics frameworks such as moral intensity is recommended as a means of gaining a better understanding of the ethical nature of tourism interactions—in the interests of social justice and also with regard to the broader environmental arena. A

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