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Portrayals of Voluntourism through a
Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

The popularity of voluntourism (volunteer tourism) over the last couple of decades has developed rapidly into a global phenomenon. The concept of voluntourism seeks to align tourism with development initiatives occurring often within the Global South with the assistance of volunteer sending organisations (VTSOs). At first glance, voluntourism is seen as distinctly noble in its intentions with altruism being one of the defining characteristic, but its rise in popularity has coincided with a rise in profit-oriented VTSOs. Thus, leading to several ignoble conclusions being made by the media and academics about voluntourism's relationship with profit, development and its intended beneficiaries. Therefore, this study examines how the for-profit VTSO Volunteering Journeys portrays voluntourism on its website through an analysis utilising a postcolonial theoretical framework. The results showed that from a postcolonial theoretical perspective, Volunteering Journeys' portrayal of voluntourism had neocolonial themes, which were Giving back/Compassion, Making a Difference, Personas, and Us versus Them. These themes were further divided up into two categories to better examine particular focus areas. The first two themes were put into the category Portrayal of Voluntourist. The second two themes were put into the category Portrayal of Host Country/Community. Furthermore, through a postcolonial perspective the analysis and results showed that Volunteering Journeys portrayal of voluntourism highlighted the voluntourist being portrayed as superior to host country/community.

Key words: Voluntourism, volunteer tourism, postcolonialism

Words: 8454

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1 Introduction

International volunteering began in the 1960s when programs such as the American Peace Corps and the British Volunteer Service Overseas would send qualified citizens to provide technical assistance to other countries in need (Vrasti, 2012, p.1). Placement periods for such programs were (and still are) two years and participants receive up to three months of training before departure. While the popularity of these programs has remained strong over the years since, they pale in comparison to a new breed of comparatively shorter programs of 1-12 weeks which allow anyone to combine the opportunity to help others with the practice of traveling for pleasure. This is the concept known as voluntourism (a neologism of volunteer tourism) and over the last couple of decades has become a global phenomenon, drawing in an estimated 1.6 million participants annually worldwide (Wearing & McGehee, 2013, p. 120; Wearing, Young, & Everingham, 2017, p. 513).

A voluntourist is thus defined as someone who is seeking a mutually beneficial tourist experience, one who wants to “contribute not only to their personal development but also positively and directly to the social, natural and/or economic environments in which they participate” (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Voluntourists participate in voluntourism through the use of voluntourism sending organisations (VTSOs). These are companies that act as the intermediary between the voluntourist and the host organisation/institution. They are often responsible for organising visas, voluntourist placement, accommodation, in-country orientation and support. It is because of these factors that VTSOs often bear the most responsibility throughout the voluntourism process.

Whilst many VTSOs operate as non-profit charitable organisations, evidence also points to the growth in those aligning themselves with commercial interests (Smith & Font, 2014, p.1) which has caused critique to be raised over the ethical considerations of a profit-driven development model (Tomazos & Cooper, 2012). Essentially, if a VTSO is for-profit there can be a disconnect between the promotion of its brand and the actual function it plays as a driver of development initiatives (Tomazos & Cooper, 2012). Calling into question the authenticity

and morality of the experience that is portrayed as beneficial to the destinations it works with (Smith & Font, 2014, p.1). Additionally, since many VTSOs view the Global South as their operational area, how they portray it is particularly important for their success in the market. However as the phenomenon of voluntourist travel has increased in popularity, so too has a particular portrayal of these destinations, one where countries within the Global South are seen as ‘needing’ the voluntourist to help them develop (Simpson, 2004, p.682).

Research that explores VTSO website portrayals of voluntourism is underrepresented in the literature. Although the topic has been researched somewhat (Buchmayer, 2017; Simpson, 2004), there is still a lot of room for further research. Seeing how important the internet is today for facilitating the formation of new opinions and beliefs, I found it relevant to study how voluntourism is portrayed by a VTSO website. Thus the aim of this study was to examine how the for-profit VTSO Volunteering Journeys portrays voluntourism on their website - www.volunteeringjourneys.com. I did this via conducting a qualitative content analysis. The data used was text from specific sections of the Volunteering Journeys website. The selected data was coded and analysed using the theoretical framework of postcolonialism. The results showed that from a postcolonial theoretical perspective, Volunteering Journeys’ portrayal of voluntourism had neocolonial themes, which were Giving back/Compassion, Making a Difference, Personas, and Us versus Them. These themes were further divided up into two categories to better examine particular focus areas. The first two themes were put into the category Portrayal of Voluntourist. The second two themes were put into the category Portrayal of Host Country/Community. Furthermore, through a postcolonial perspective the analysis and results showed that Volunteering Journeys’ portrayal of voluntourism highlighted the voluntourist being portrayed as superior to host country/community.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study was to examine how the for-profit voluntourism sending organisation (VTSO) Volunteering Journeys portrays voluntourism on their website (www.volunteeringjourneys.com).

The research takes the form of a case study with the following research question:

- How does Volunteering Journeys portray voluntourism?

1.2 Delimitations

This scope of this study was limited to exploring the portrayal of voluntourism through a postcolonial theoretical perspective. Naturally the result is limited to understanding the data through postcolonial themes. Therefore the results may have been different if another theoretical perspective had been chosen. Furthermore, during the coding of the data eight themes were found but only four of these were analysed further due to limitations on word count. The conclusions drawn from this study are therefore limited to only the themes used.

1.3 Disposition

This paper is divided up into six chapters: Introduction, Background, Method, Theoretical Framework, Results and Discussion, and Conclusion. Within this introduction I have addressed the research problem, the aims of this study, how this study was conducted, the findings from this study and the limitations encountered. In the next chapter, Background, I will address previous research and provide general background on the organisation at the centre of this research: Volunteering Journeys. The third chapter, Method, will introduce the methodology being used to conduct the study. Followed by the fourth chapter, Theoretical Framework, detailing the theories and debates within postcolonialism used. The penultimate chapter, Results and Discussion, provides the results and discussion which stemmed from the analysis. Finally, the last chapter, Conclusion, will discuss the conclusions drawn from the study and give suggestions for further research.

2 Background

2.1 Previous Research

As discussed in the introduction, the proportion of research that analyses portrayals of voluntourism through VTSO websites is underrepresented within the literature and therefore is relatively limited. However, while the insights that can be gained from them are by no means irrelevant and will be discussed, I felt that in order to provide sufficient knowledge of the previous literature recognising a wider corpus would be best. Therefore I have chosen to include research that looks at the general concept of voluntourism and what motivates the desire to do it both as a supplement and starting point to this chapter.

Research into voluntourism started in the early 2000s and focused largely on the supposed homogeneity of the concept and the positive effects it had on the voluntourists (Wearing et al., 2017, p.514). One example is the research from Broad (2003), who conducted an ethnographic study of the voluntourists who volunteered at the Gibbon Rehabilitation Project in Thailand, which found “intense rather than superficial social interactions” with the Thai culture were associated with a positive attitude change in the voluntourist (p. 70). Broad’s advocacy stance was accompanied by other researchers (see Broad et al., 2008; Brown & Morrison, 2003; Gard McGehee, 2002; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004) who, for the most part, saw voluntourism as one of the keys towards a cosmopolitan future. However as the popularity of voluntourism increased, commercialization within the market began highlighting its more negative impacts. For example, Smith & Font (2015) found the VTSOs who were the most expensive to purchase trips from were also the most irresponsible because they were more concerned with turning a profit than actually ‘doing good’ within the communities they operate in. Moreover as Guttentag (2011) points out in his review of the extant literature, while earlier studies repeatedly found that voluntourists are motivated “by personal reasons in addition to altruism” (p. 70) they neglected to explore the effects that

these motivations had on voluntourist preferences when choosing projects. The reason why this is important is because these preferences have a large influence on the types of projects VTSOs advertise. The VTSOs know, as Lorimer (2008) reminds us, “which projects work and sell well” (p. 9) and “continuously gauge and channel volunteer enthusiasm and then seek to establish or solicit similar ventures” (p. 9). It therefore stands to reason, as Guttentag (2011) suggests, that such marketing strategies can lead voluntourists to believe and partake in projects that benefit the VTSO but may in fact run counter to the needs and desires of the host communities (p. 70).

The idea that ‘the west knows best’ is something that has been critiqued at length within the voluntourism literature. One example is the critique by McGloin & Georgeou (2015) that voluntourism is a form of colonial paternalism. Borrowing from criticism by Giroux (2004) on neoliberalism, McGloin and Georgeou argue that voluntourism with its idea of ‘doing good’ is essentially contributing to a normalisation of unequal power structures between voluntourist and host community (p. 409). While many of voluntourism’s early proponents celebrated the fact that both parties gained something from the interaction (i.e. the voluntourist learns something and the host community benefits from free labour), McGloin and Georgeou contend that because voluntourists are framed as the “active agents of change” (Colleen McGloin & Nichole Georgeou, 2015, p.409) within the discourse, they therefore become influenced by the idea that they are there to provide ‘help’ to others in ‘need’ (p. 409). This ‘help’ comes in the form of knowledge, which is deemed as something the host community ‘lacks’ and implies that local knowledge and practices are seemingly inferior thereby creating a power differential (p. 409).

Similarly Buchmayer (2017), who conducted a qualitative content analysis of the website Canadian NGO ‘Me to We’ used to advertise its voluntourism trips, found that the organisation had an overwhelming tendency to focus on egotistical motives for volunteering, promoting a “consumer-first, consumption-based mentality” (p. 109). Buchmayer also found that while the language used on the website portrayed an organisation who was keen to promote sustainable development and capacity building, the underlying rhetoric reinforced “unequal power structures between the Global North and Global South and the status quo of global inequality” (p. 110) by utilising an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality and teaching voluntourists to accept development as a form of charity rather than development as a form of solidarity (p. 110). Likewise, Simpson (2004) found in her analysis of gap year marketing content that

development was seen “as something that can be ‘done’, and specifically, by non-skilled, but enthusiastic, volunteer-tourists” (p. 685). According to Simpson, the majority of gap year programmes prefer to focus on the idea that “doing something is better than doing nothing” (p. 685) and on creating end-products showing visible achievement (such as a school being built, a bridge being repaired, a child being taught English), calling into question something that is seldom mentioned within voluntourism marketing material: the long-term impact these programmes are having on development (p. 685). While building physical infrastructure is helpful, it is not much use if structural problems hinder its proper functionality. For example, a school will suffer from poor attendance if the cost of going to school cannot be afforded by the surrounding community or if the family requires their labour. In this regard, the ideology surrounding voluntourism is very similar to that of the burgeoning aid industry where a similar approach of favouring the short-term over the long-term is conducted.

2.2 Background information on Volunteering Journeys

Volunteering Journeys (www.volunteeringjourneys.com) is a UK-based VTSO which was established in 2014 and specialises in running voluntourist programmes in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal (Volunteering Journeys, 2018a). Other programmes are also run in Cambodia, Thailand, South Africa and Peru (ibid.). Programme lengths can run between 1 - 12 weeks with the voluntourist choosing how long to stay. Volunteering Journeys caters for many demographics including students, career breakers, retirees, families, friends or couples, corporations and gap year students (ibid.). Programme fees vary due to length and type but to give some idea, the average 4-week programme in India costs USD\$1220 with this fee providing pre-departure support and information, airport pickup and drop off, accommodation in a homestay, breakfast and dinner, an in-country orientation meeting and project transportation and training (Volunteering Journeys, 2018b). Participants must pay for flights, visas, insurances and vaccinations separately (ibid.). Programmes on offer from Volunteering Journeys are split by six categories:

- Teaching
- Social work
- Medical / Nursing / Dentistry

- Renovation / Construction
- Women's empowerment
- Sports coaching

Programmes within the medical/nursing/dentistry category require specialised knowledge and are designed as internships for students within these professions, while the other programmes are open to all who apply. Volunteer commitments during the programmes typically run on a 4 - 5 day cycle per week with weekends and also Fridays off depending on programme choice (Volunteering Journeys, 2018b). During their time off, voluntourists are encouraged to explore the local attractions (ibid.). Finally, the organisation has a set of values which influence the design and structure of its voluntourism trips (Volunteering Journeys, 2018a). These values are listed and described as:

1) Illuminating discoveries

“We believe that the more we learn, the more we grow. Our programs ensure that our volunteers acquire a newfound awareness of one’s own abilities as seen through the eyes of the local community whose lives they help improve. These personal interactions bring about a deeper understanding of others, the larger world around us, and provides a fresh perspective on life.” (ibid.)

2) Personal responsibility

“We hold ourselves responsible for the welfare of all those we help connect. Our programs are driven primarily by the needs of the local communities. We understand that change is not an event, it is a process. Therefore, every effort is made to ensure continuity and consistency in volunteer – community interactions, so that the positive short-term differences add up to significant long-term improvements.” (ibid.)

3) Real community living

“We encourage harmonious living within existing local settlements and sharing space with members of the local communities, other volunteers from around the world and with the natural environment around. This not only gives a real and immersive experience of life and local flavour, it helps form deeper lifelong bonds.” (ibid.)

4) Fun friends

“We are of the opinion that if what we do is not fun and joyous, it’s better not to do it at all. Soak in local art & heritage, explore sights & sounds, savour flavours, learn new skills like cooking & painting or simply, enjoy some ‘me-time’ in Yoga amidst serene surroundings after the gratifying volunteering hours. Make this a joyous experience.”

(ibid.)

3 Method

In this chapter I present the method that has been chosen to analyse the data from the VTSO Volunteering Journeys website. Here I also outline how I chose my data and the methodological standpoints grounding the study.

3.1 Research Strategy

I chose to do qualitative research after designing the research question and finding it to be the best approach to answer the question. Qualitative data typically consist of words which can take the form of a variety of materials, for my study this was textual data posted on Volunteering Journeys' website. Qualitative research strategies are typically less structured than quantitative studies, giving the researcher an opportunity to explore and let the data influence the structure of the analysis (Punch 2005, p.57). Therefore because my question dealt with how Volunteering Journeys portrayed the concept of volunteer tourism, the qualitative method was most appropriate as I was able to let the data determine the themes I would use as the basis for the analysis.

3.2 Research Design

A single case study design employing a qualitative content analysis was used in order to best examine how Volunteering Journeys portrays their volunteer tourism programmes. The goal of this research was to illuminate the underlying narrative within the data, to find what Krippendorff (2004) refers to as the "the phenomena not spoken of" (p. 346). A single case study was the most appropriate choice to carry out this research as it allowed me to develop deep understanding of the phenomenon within a bounded context while adhering to the word count (Punch 2005, p.144). Furthermore, as Yin (2003) points out, one of the main advantages in using a case study is that they allow researchers to look into specific details within the data while also keeping it contextualised. Context was something that I considered

important to keep due to the data being text-based and found it was often disregarded with other designs (p. 13). However case studies suffer from numerous disadvantages which are important to understand. It is often said that they lack rigour mainly due to sloppiness on behalf of the researcher (Yin 2003, p.10). For example this could be through failure to follow systematic procedures when conducting the analysis or by allowing partiality to influence the direction of the research (ibid.). Another liability with case studies are that they lack the ability to making statistical generalisations. Again, Yin (2003) concedes that this certainly is the case but that isn't the goal of case study research to begin with, rather case studies focus on making expansions and generalisations on theories (p. 10). Applying them to populations and universes has never been the objective of case study research. Concerns about rigour were handled through an adherence to a set of data selection and coding procedures described by Krippendorff (2004) and Punch (2005) respectively, thinking critically and not making statistical generalisations have also been thought about as I went through the research process.

3.3 Case Selection

The goal with selecting a case for case study research is to find a representative sample that provides a useful variation within the theoretical domain the research is focused on (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p.296). With this study, I chose to focus specifically on the Volunteering Journeys' website from a selection of nominations for a number of reasons. Firstly, of the research I could find surrounding the analysis of VTSO websites, none had been done on this organisation at the time of writing (July, 2018) and it therefore represented an untapped opportunity for case study research. Secondly, I believed this organisations website provided a representative sample of a typical case which would allow for greater understanding going forward with a larger class of similar cases (ibid.). I must note however that this finding was not achieved through the conduction of a multivariate analysis as is typical (see Seawright & Gerring, 2008), but rather through examining multiple VTSO websites to establish what a typical VTSO organisations website consisted of. For example, common features found among VTSO websites included the use of marketing information directed towards the voluntourist, programme descriptions, company information, testimonials from past voluntourists, and the ability to apply online for a programme. Lastly, the website provided a large amount of textual data which I believed was useful when looking for theoretical connections.

3.4 Coding

Coding is the process of assigning tags, names or labels to pieces of data so that they are given meaning (Punch 2005, p.199). But it also facilitates the data retrieval process by allowing the data to be indexed in a database (ibid.). Coding can be split into two stages, basic or first-order coding and advanced or second-order coding (ibid.). The first stage is often descriptive in nature and requires relatively low levels of reasoning to work out the connection between the code and the data, while coding done at the second stage is more abstract, often as the result of looking for patterns within the coded data (Punch 2005, p.200). In constructing the codes there are often two possibilities, using prespecified codes or finding them within the data (ibid.). Punch (2005) argues that this decision cannot be seen as independent but instead must align with the research question and conceptual framework the research is using (p. 200). Punch also notes that the two possibilities are not in any way siloed throughout the coding process, allowing the researcher to interchange between the two when warranted (p. 200). In relation to my research I have not used predetermined codes because my research question seeks to understand how Volunteering Journeys portrays voluntourism. Using predetermined codes here would just conflate their perspectives with others. Thus coding was done through systematically going through each website page within the data selection and looking for mentions to themes illustrative of voluntourism's portrayal. In total there were 107 mentions to eight themes found, which were then recoded to create two major categories. The number of themes found turned out to be too large for this study due to limitations with word count so only the themes shown in Table 1.1 with bold font were selected for the analysis stage.

Table 1.1 Themes with their respective categories and number of mentions in absolute values

Category	Themes	Number of Mentions
Portrayal of Voluntourist	Giving back/Compassion	17
	Making a difference	11
	Motivations	25
Portrayal of Host Country/Community	Being taught	7
	Exotic	6
	Personas	15
	Us versus Them	23
	Women as vulnerable	3

The decision to choose these sets of themes specifically will now be explained. Within all of these themes I was interested in looking at the portrayal of the interactions between the voluntourist and host country/community as portrayed by Volunteering Journeys. Therefore, Giving back/Compassion and Making a difference were chosen over Motivations which dealt only with the assumed benefits for the voluntourist. For Personas and Us versus Them this again was the case, except here because all themes covered interactions between voluntourist and host country/community I chose to use the most frequently occurring themes for the analysis.

3.5 Data Selection

For analytical purposes Krippendorff (2004) describes the importance of distinguishing between the three types of units when collecting data for the content analysis method, these are sampling units, recording/coding units and context units (p. 98). These will first be explained with general definitions and then specified in turn with reference to my study. For Krippendorff, sampling units are “units that are distinguished for selective inclusion in an analysis” (p. 98). In other words, they are the higher order units that determine the boundaries of the analysis and what sections within the data shall be deemed analysable. For my study, sampling units were viewed as the sections (which sometimes consisted of multiple pages)

within the Volunteering Journeys' website holding textual data useful for the analysis, these are listed in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Sampling units used from Volunteering Journeys website

Section	Page(s)	Number of Pages
Home	Home	1
Destinations	India Nepal Sri Lanka Multi-Country Deals	4
Projects	Teaching Social Work Medical / Nursing / Dentistry Renovations / Construction Women's Empowerment Sports Coaching	6
Categories	Career Break / Professionals Family Volunteers Over 50's / Grown Up Volunteers University Groups High School Volunteers / Groups Multi Country Volunteers	6

Recording/coding units are described as “units that are distinguished for separate description, transcription, recording, or coding” (p. 99). Essentially, what Krippendorff is saying is that these are the descriptive themes found within the sampling units which are informed by the theory or generated through the data itself. These units translate into the themes found during the first-order coding (see Coding) and are the basis for making the inferences which form the analysis (p. 100). Lastly, context units are “units of textual matter that set limits on the information to be considered in the description of recording units” (p. 101). Which essentially

means that context units are the units that delimit the scope of information used to classify recording/coding units. Context units “generally surround the recording units they help to identify” (p. 101) but they can also be located elsewhere such as in introductions and headlines. Krippendorff notes that the larger the context unit, the more adequate the account of the recording/coding unit will be (p. 101). With reference to my study, context units have been utilised when coding to ensure adequate representation of the themes generated. In general these have been the paragraphs that surround particular recording/coding units. Lastly the data was collected over a period of six days, between the period of 1st - 6th August, 2018.

3.6 Epistemological Position

Social science research deals with the social nature of our species and as such is commonly of the interpretivist epistemological position due the positivist position lacking the ability to observe the finer details of human social interaction (Bryman 2012, p.380). Additionally it is often said that interpretivists believe objectivism is not possible when conducting social science research as the subjectiveness of the researcher is inescapable (Bryman 2012, p.381). I agree with the interpretivist position and acknowledge that the claims made in the results section come with a very important asterisk, that being they suffer from subjectivity bias.

3.7 Ontological Position

Ontological positions are important to consider in research because together with the authors epistemological position they form the foundation of a researchers beliefs and thus subconsciously influence the research (Bryman 2012, p.34). My position as a researcher is that of constructivism, the belief that the social world is continuously being constructed and deconstructed into habitual structures by social actors (Bryman 2012, p.34). Our belief structures form the way we interpret the world and therefore act as a subjective lens for how we view reality. Therefore I recognise that my interpretation of the evidence gathered is in no way a complete representation of the case.

4 Theoretical Framework

A postcolonial theoretical framework was used to interpret the themes uncovered from coding and thus answer the research question. Postcolonialism in its original representation, conveyed the change of a country's political status (e.g. from colonial to post-colonial) however since the 1980s it has also been “identified with a way of reading and interpretation, a theory and a methodology, that examines the nature of Euro-American nations’ conquest, domination and exploitation of countries and cultures” (Nayar, 2015, p.122). At its core, postcolonialism is an academic discipline concerned with giving the “formerly colonized, the subaltern and the historically oppressed” (ibid.) a voice through studying the discourses and rhetoric used against it in Euro-American historic and contemporary texts (ibid.). Additionally and important to note, the domination and exploitation that occurs after a country has decolonised is referred to as Neocolonialism (Nayar, 2015, p.115). Neocolonialism is subtler in the way it functions, preferring coercion through economic policies and cultural hegemony over displays of military force (ibid.). In addition to postcolonial studies, the theory has also played an increasing influential role in the interdisciplinary domain of tourism studies since the 1990s, particularly when it comes to studies about developing countries where concerns over postcolonial identity and representation have been examined in light of the “cultural, political and economic encounters that are intrinsic to the tourist experience” (Hall & Tucker, 2004, p.1). Further examination of the theory shows that it indeed has a good deal of relevance to tourism, with many of its theoretical perspectives now being used to critique the phenomenon. Therefore I have used aspects of postcolonial theory to construct my theoretical framework. In addition to this I have complimented it with debates from within postcolonialism relating to cosmopolitanism to give the theoretical framework greater depth.

The theoretical framework will therefore introduce four theories that are related to or aspects of postcolonial theory: cosmopolitanism, cultural hegemony, essentialism and orientalism. These will later also be used within the Results and Discussion chapter.

4.1 Cosmopolitanism

Stemming from Immanuel Kant in the era of the Enlightenment, the term cosmopolitanism has been used to define a philosophical idea of a ‘universal humanity’ where “humans can be citizens of the world through the sharing of moral codes, intellectual ideas and compassion” (Nayar, 2015, p.37). The idea calls for a wider sense of responsibility toward others living outside of our national boundaries, essentially calling for the formation of a global set of ethics (Popke, 2007, p.509). However within the context of postcolonial studies this idea becomes more insidious as it is believed that the compassion aspect of cosmopolitanism has been used to justify the Global North as “benevolent protector of the distant Others, or colonial subjects, in the world” (Nayar, 2015, p.37). Cosmopolitans centrality to ethics is therefore problematic when dealing with the former colonial nations as its presumption that unconditional hospitality is warranted and even necessary by the West due to sympathy or pity for the Other “denies the Other her historical and geographical specificity, and thus potentially any subject position from which to speak or act” (Popke, 2007, p.514). This issue can be connected to the concept of ‘white man’s burden’, which had its foundations in the Eurocentric perspective of the Enlightenment where it was presumed that Europe with its advanced civilisation was responsible for the development of the rest of the world in its image (Nayar, 2015, p.73)

4.2 Cultural Hegemony

Cultural Hegemony occurs when a society is dominated culturally by another society (Nayar, 2015, p.87). One can use the English language as an example here. English is treated as “as the sign of social mobility, civilized behaviour and progress by the African or the Asian subject” (Nayar, 2015, p.88). Cultural hegemony is closely related to hegemony, with the key difference being that hegemony includes domination by “ethnic group, nation, class or race” (Nayar, 2015, p.87). In general, hegemony works through the construction of “myths, belief systems and practices through which the subject culture is presented as inferior and vulnerable” (Nayar, 2015, p.88) and it does this through consent rather than the coercion (Nayar, 2015, p.87). Hegemony was therefore crucial to colonialist discourse as it provided the influenced necessary for native populations to consent to Western colonisation (ibid).

4.3 Orientalism

Developed by Edward Said (1978) following the work of Antonio Gramsci, Orientalism is a “created body of theory and practice” (p. 6) that details the methods used by Europe in the eighteenth century and onwards to filter a distinctive conception of the Orient into the consciousness of the West (ibid.). Following massive European expansion between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Orient was used as a way to construct Europe’s identity (p. 3). By setting itself apart from the Orient in every conceivable way and portraying the Orient and its people as inferior, Europe successfully managed to establish an identity of superiority through the might of its cultural hegemony (p. 7). The idea of Europe was, as Denys Hay (as cited in Said, 1978) explains “a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans” (p. 7). Furthermore, Said reasons that “what gave the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West” (p. 40). Meaning that Orientalism, a production produced from outside the Orient itself, was effectively able to define, silence and marginalise the very same people who were considered its subjects (Gregory et al., 2009, p.513).

4.4 Essentialism

Essentialism acts as the “opposition to difference” (Fuss, 2013, p.xii), it reduces complex processes like that of human nature, individual identity or culture to a set of “invariable and fixed properties which define the “whatness” of a given entity” (ibid.). Essentialism is often expressed as a pejorative, acting as a way to diminish an individual, race or culture’s self-worth (Gregory et al., 2009, p.210; Nayar, 2015, p.67).

5 Results and Discussion

The following chapter presents an integrated results and discussion of the empirical data. A total of eight themes were found through coding pointing to how Volunteering Journeys portrays voluntourism. These were then split into two major categories, those with portrayals referencing the voluntourist and those with portrayals mentioning the host country or community. I decided to further analyse four of these themes, choosing two inside each of the two major categories found. The complete set of themes found are listed in the below table with the ones marked in bold being chosen for further analysis.

Table 2.1 Themes found during coding

Category	Themes
Portrayal of Voluntourist	Giving back/Compassion Making a difference Motivations
Portrayal of Host Country/Community	Being taught Exotic Personas Us versus Them Women as vulnerable

Categories have been used as the headers within this section to provide an adequate structure for answering the research question, which as a reminder was:

- How does Volunteering Journeys portray voluntourism?

Within these categories I will be explaining how Volunteering Journeys portrays each of the listed themes and then apply aspects of or discussions within postcolonial theory to answer the research question.

5.1 Portrayal of the Voluntourist

Within the category of Portrayal of the Voluntourist two themes emerged which were Giving back/Compassion and Making a Difference. Each of these will be discussed in light of how Volunteering Journeys has portrayed them and then examined through a postcolonial lens.

5.1.1 Giving Back/Compassion

Throughout the Volunteering Journeys website 17 mentions to the themes of Giving Back and Compassion were found. In all cases the references were directed toward the voluntourist. References to the moral argument of ‘giving back’ and compassion were used in a number of occasions like the following example:

“you’ll be able to truly give back and make a real difference to disadvantaged communities” (Volunteering Journeys, 2018c)

Other phrases included variations on the same themes:

“It’s never too late to give back and our over 50s programs allow you to do your bit helping others whilst travelling responsibly and ethically” (Volunteering Journeys, 2018d)

"This program is designed to help you contribute to sustainable development efforts across our various locations, and it’s an immersive travel experience that will give you a new found sense of compassion and understanding, as well as a stepping stone to advance your own career in social work." (Volunteering Journeys, 2018e)

Table 2.2 The Giving back/Compassion theme's total number of mentions along with its percentage from the total amount found.

Giving Back/Compassion	
<i>Number of Mentions</i>	<i>Percentage from total number of mentions found</i>
17	15.887%

Upon analysing the theme through a postcolonial lens these findings presented examples of cosmopolitan and Eurocentric thinking, where the suffering of the Other interfaces with the idea of a ‘universal humanity’ proposed by cosmopolitanism (Nayar, 2015, p.37). Expanding on this claim, it can be said that the ‘giving back’ rhetoric adopted by Volunteering Journeys can be seen as a response to the cosmopolitan logic that a “violation of right at any *one* place on the earth is felt in *all* places” (Kant, 2006, p.84) and thus precipitates feelings of compassion and action toward those suffering. However it must be noted that the idea of cosmopolitanism is distinctly Western in its conception, and therefore fails to take into account other moral or ethical ideas sitting outside that boundary (Popke, 2007, p.513). This, as argued by Grovogui (2005), can lead to the belief that:

“By imagining the world through mere generalizations of “Western” experiences, some cosmopolitans entertain the fantasy that universal norms and institutions arise solely from Western philosophical systems and ontological categories. They also harbor the illusion that others outside the West lack the political will, moral faculty and mental capacity to envisage political agency beyond the state or native communities” (p. 105)

Indeed the claim of being cosmopolitan has been leveled at voluntourism before by Vrasti (2012). However for Vrasti the problem isn’t cosmopolitanism itself but the effects neoliberalism has on it. She argues that while voluntourism does express a genuine desire for charity, community and compassion, these aspirations have been marred by the extensive effects of capitalist value production which seeks to turn everything into a commoditised experience (p. 119). So while the idea of ‘giving back’ has noble intentions it can also become

problematic when it comes to countries with a prior history of colonialism as the dual effects of globalisation and neoliberalism actively undermine the efforts made by decolonisation.

5.1.2 Making a Difference

The ability to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of the Other is a theme that has been drawn 11 times from the data. This theme speaks to the impact voluntourists can make on the lives of the host community. This is illustrated by quotes like the following describing Volunteering Journeys’ social work program:

“Kolkata is famous as the city where Mother Teresa spent a lifetime serving the poor. This is your chance to come and make a huge difference, enhance your CV and get vocational hands-on experience in social work with local grass root [sic] organisations.” (Volunteering Journeys, 2018e)

And another describing their construction program:

“The purpose of our construction programs is that it can really help to improve the quality of life for the community. From renovating a run down school or painting a classroom, to helping improve clean water access, the work of our teams and our partners really does make a difference to other people’s lives.”
(Volunteering Journeys, 2018f)

Furthermore there are multiple references to making an impact within a small timeframe, such as the following found within the “Renovations / Construction” program category:

"Volunteer with your school or with your family and make a huge impact in a short time. Volunteer in Nepal, India or Cambodia. This is a great group program with a minimum commitment of 1 week only!" (Volunteering Journeys, 2018f)

Lastly and situated within the ‘make a difference’ rhetoric is the assumption of voluntourist expertise as evinced by the following quotes:

"Volunteers for sports will be coaching, training and playing sports in local schools, orphanages and community centres" (Volunteering Journeys 2018h)

and

“But whether you’re joining with our expert English teaching volunteer team for vocational growth or personal growth, there’s one thing that every voluntary teacher will take from their experience; and that’s a new way of looking at the world.”

(Volunteering Journeys 2018g)

Table 2.3 Making a Difference theme’s total number of mentions along with its percentage from the total amount found.

Making a Difference	
<i>Number of Mentions</i>	<i>Percentage from total number of mentions found</i>
11	10.280%

The idea that the voluntourist can ‘make a difference’ in the lives of the Other will now be discussed through a postcolonial theoretical perspective connected with the idea of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony normalises the idea that the voluntourist can make an impact in the host country. As can be seen from the quotes above, the fact that Volunteering Journeys can market their voluntourist experiences with the assumption that the voluntourist will make a “huge impact in a short time” is testimony to the prestige and confidence of western culture. It is also a sign of what Simpson (2004) calls a “publicly accepted ‘mythology’ of development” (p. 682) where the very fact that so many of these voluntourist organisations root their companies legitimacy and their programmes in the concept of a ‘third world’ drives them to heavily articulate a perceived ‘need’ for its development (ibid.). One which can only be filled by the Western voluntourist who has “the ability, and right, to meet this need” (ibid.).

5.2 Portrayal of the Host Community / Country

The second major category relates to the portrayals of the host communities and countries that Volunteering Journeys operated in. The themes examined are Personas and Us versus Them. Each of these will be discussed in light of how Volunteering Journeys has portrayed them and then examined through a postcolonial theoretical framework.

5.2.1 Personas

The Volunteering Journeys website included 15 mentions to stereotypes relating to the personas of host country people. Mentions were predominantly regarding friendliness but other descriptors included humbleness, shyness, kindness, generousness, lovingness, warmness and happiness to describe the local people. A selection of the evidence found can be seen below:

Teaching English in Peru

Share your passion in teaching with the friendly, smiling children and help to impart an important skill to help communities thrive. You will be based in the gorgeous Cusco from where you can visit Machu Picchu on the weekend!”

(Volunteering Journeys 2018g)

Friendly People

Sri Lankans are a warm, friendly and humble people. They’re notoriously shy but they’re always kind and giving and you’ll meet some great people along the way. You will meet and work with many locals when you volunteer in Sri Lanka – its the best way to learn and immerse yourself!”

(Volunteering Journeys 2018h)

Teaching in Thailand and Nepal

Thailand and Nepal has the most friendly people you will ever meet! Explore the magnificent mountains surrounding Nepal and the gorgeous beaches of Thailand as you teach children in local schools in these two countries.”

(Volunteering Journeys 2018g)

Table 2.4 Personas theme’s total number of mentions along with its percentage from the total amount found.

Personas	
<i>Number of Mentions</i>	<i>Percentage from total number of mentions found</i>
15	14.018%

This will now be discussed from a theoretical perspective using the postcolonial theory of essentialism. Essentialism acts as the “opposition to difference” (Fuss, 2013, p.xii), it reduces complex processes like that of human nature, individual identity or culture to a set of “invariable and fixed properties which define the “whatness” of a given entity” (ibid.). Like an actor who continually gets type casted as the villain in movies, essentialism reinforces particular identities through its use. Thus, when Volunteering Journeys for example mentions Sri Lankans as “warm, friendly and humble” it ascribes a set of fixed characteristics to the country’s inhabitants. Furthermore, because Volunteering Journeys is positioning Sri Lankans as a people who embody these characteristics it can create a precedent in the mind of the voluntourist that this is what to expect from the locals while volunteering there. This, as Sin (2009) points out in his study on voluntourist motivations, can lead to the voluntourist confronting his “existing assumptions, stereotypes and privileges” (p. 495) and act as an impetus for changing said beliefs. However that is only if the voluntourist is open to doing so. Sin for example found evidence for the opposite and sees it as more than likely that the discomforting feeling one has after acquiring evidence counter to an existing belief or opinion is quickly rectified by rejecting said evidence (ibid.).

5.2.2 Us versus Them

References to a defining difference between the voluntourist and the host country community and country was evident by way of 23 mentions within the text. This mechanic was used the

following ways. The first was through defining the host community with descriptors referencing their poverty, disarray and lower living standards:

"Find a deeper meaning in life and do something altruistic for the poor, run down communities who really need us" (Volunteering Journeys, 2018f).

"Learn more about gender issues in the developing world and see the world from the eyes of disadvantaged communities"
(Volunteering Journeys, 2018i)

"Immersing yourself into a whole new culture and experiencing everyday life from the eyes of underprivileged communities allows us all to open up our minds and find compassion deep within ourselves."
(Volunteering Journeys, 2018g)

The second was through the references to host countries as mysterious and/or traditional. For example, Volunteering Journeys founder Ridhi Patel describes India on the "Destinations" section of the website in the following way:

"In India every sense is alive, the smells range from spices, marigolds, incense, to smells not so pleasant, the colours are vibrant and the sound is mostly of constant talking and car horns. You find mouth watering food that is sweet, salty and everything in between! People still wear traditional clothes like saris and lungis and over 10000 languages and millions of dialects are spoken. There is no country in the world as diverse and enigmatic as India. It will truly blow you away..."
(Volunteering Journeys, 2018j)

A third way Volunteering Journeys represented the Other was through reference to their host country as ancient or simplistic. As shown in the selection of quotes below:

"You will have evenings free for cultural activities such as visiting Temples in the area, local markets or to chill by the beach"
(Volunteering Journeys, 2018h)

“In this small central-Asian country, you will find ancient cities exploding with temples and pagodas, tiny villages with warm welcoming locals and sprawling rice terraces, and perhaps even the strength within yourself to embark on a challenging and inspiring Himalayan trek.”

(Volunteering Journeys, 2018k)

“This popular Everest trekking route will amaze and enchant you, as you immerse yourself in the rich culture of the Sherpas, and experience the tranquillity of the millennia-old Buddhist monasteries you can visit on the way.”

(ibid.)

Table 2.5 Us versus Them theme’s total number of mentions along with its percentage from the total amount found.

Us versus Them	
<i>Number of Mentions</i>	<i>Percentage from total number of mentions found</i>
23	21.495%

Within postcolonial theory, the dualistic theme of ‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’ first came to light with Edward Said (1978) and his theory on Orientalism. Through Orientalism, the Asiatic parts of the world (the Orient) came to be known as the West's inferior surrogate (p. 41). This title extended to the people as well, Said for example states that the Oriental was classified into a set of generalisations whereupon “it was in terms of such genetic universals as his "primitive" state, his primary characteristics, his particular spiritual background” (p. 120). Over time more differences in the form of binary pairs were used to further differentiate the West from the Other such as “civilized versus barbaric”, “modern versus primitive” and “free versus oppressed” (Nayar, 2015, p.119). All this is to say that language very often functions as a form of intellectual power, whereupon the dominant culture’s use of it creates “recurrent tropes that can be easily drawn on and, as a consequence, freely reproduced in popular culture” (Heron, 2007, p.3). We can see this with Patel’s quote above portraying a version of India as both diverse yet traditional. Where cars, or at least their horns, seem to exist but there

is little else that shows India as the modern nation state it has come to be. Patel's portrayal of India therefore seems fixed in time, one that still positions India as a country in its early stages of development.

Previous research from Simpson (2004) on gap year programmes explains that the use of simple descriptors to sum up entire nations of people is due to the need for them to "produce evocative and recognisable imagery" (p. 682) that can be easily digested by a Western audience (p. 682 - 683). Therefore when Volunteering Journeys uses language that references the Other in a way that is simplistic and homogeneous it is seeking to entice potential voluntourists into consuming the voluntourist experience but at the same time furthering the rift of difference between them and the Other by positioning them as inferior relative to the West.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how the voluntourism sending organisation (VTSO) Volunteering Journeys portrays voluntourism on their website (www.volunteeringjourneys.com). This study had one research question which was:

- How does Volunteering Journeys portray voluntourism?

This study identified four themes of Volunteering Journeys' portrayal of voluntourism which were further analysed using the theoretical framework of postcolonialism. The themes were Giving back/Compassion, Making a Difference, Personas, and Us versus Them. These themes were further divided up into two categories to better examine particular focus areas. The first two themes were put into the category Portrayal of Voluntourist. The second two themes were put into the category Portrayal of Host Country/Community.

Within the Portrayal of the Voluntourist category the two themes discussed were Giving Back/Compassion and Making a Difference. Giving Back/Compassion details how Volunteering Journeys promotes a language of compassion towards the Other which was explained through the cosmopolitan belief in a 'universal humanity', first proposed by Kant (2006) in the Enlightenment era of Western philosophy. Cosmopolitan ethics and moral standards were then explored deeper with the ideas of Grovogui (2005) who argued that some Western interpretations of cosmopolitanism are limited in their ability to perceive other beliefs, attitudes and values sitting outside the Western perspective. Finally, we return to the voluntourism literature to show that Vraști (2012) considers the 'giving back' rhetoric a bi-product of neoliberal discourse. Explaining that while voluntourism's intentions are meritable it has been defaced by the extensive effects of capitalist value production.

Inside the Making a Difference theme we saw how Volunteering Journeys mentions the impact its voluntourists will make on the lives of the Other. This was related to the idea of Western hegemony and the effect it has on normalising language which was then connected to

what Simpson (2004) termed a “publicly accepted ‘mythology’ of development” (p.682). This ‘mythology’ occurs when VTSOs base their legitimacy on a concept of the desperate ‘third world’, where development and rectification of the situation happens only through the help of paying voluntourists who are portrayed by VTSOs as having the ‘ability’ and ‘right’ to do so.

In the second category Portrayal of the Host Country/Community two themes were discussed. These were Personae and Us versus Them. Personae discusses how stereotypes relating to the host country or community’s character are understood through the postcolonial theory of Essentialism. It was found that when Volunteering Journeys made reference to the Other they would describe them homogeneously as a group with fixed properties defining their identity. This was understood as having implications for the way the Other is defined in the mind of the voluntourist. Sin (2009) pointed out that these preformed stereotypes of the Other can be hard to change, even after encounters with the Other produce evidence countering their existing beliefs.

The second theme within the Portrayal of the Host Country/Community category examined references to a defining difference between the voluntourist and the Other. This was understood through the postcolonial theory of Orientalism and found that the language used within the Volunteering Journeys website repeatedly portrayed the host community or country as either poor, simplistic, mysterious, ancient or traditional. It was then suggested that language functions as a form of intellectual power, where the dominant culture’s tropes are frequently used and reinforced by popular culture. This was then discussed with an example of how Volunteering Journeys founder portrayed India. Simpson (2004) was used to explain how within voluntourism the phenomenon of using simple descriptors to define entire nations of people happens because of the need for the VTSO to produce imagery that resonates with a western audience, with simple and evocative language being preferred. Finally this was concluded by tying the discussion back to the theme of Us versus Them.

In conclusion, the results found that from a postcolonial perspective, Volunteering Journeys’ portrayal of voluntourism had neocolonial themes. From such a theoretical perspective both the portrayal of the voluntourist and the host countries and communities involved were affected by an underlying rhetoric of difference, causing the voluntourist to be portrayed as superior to the host country/community. I found the results interesting as the portrayal of voluntourism from Volunteering Journeys perspective is explained as something positive for

both the voluntourist and the host country/community yet when applying a postcolonial perspective, it can be understood as something that has the potential to do more harm than good.

This study was limited to exploring the portrayal of voluntourism within two categories with a limited set of their underlying themes. Therefore I would suggest future research of the categories and themes that were not analysed in depth with this study in order to give more comprehensive knowledge of Volunteering Journeys portrayal of voluntourism. Additionally I would suggest studying other voluntourist organisations for future research as well as applying a different theoretical perspective in order to understand the phenomenon of voluntourism in a different light.

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