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#NoFilter: Identities, Tourist Narratives, and the Millennial White Savior

Alicia Graziano
Skidmore College

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Alicia Graziano
International Affairs Senior Capstone Project
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Professor Pushkala Prasad

Abstract: Throughout time, human beings have used various means of expression to create identity and fashion a brand for themselves that exhibits favorable characteristics. The age of globalization has facilitated the ease with which people travel and experience new parts of the world, but has also made it easier to share one's experience through social media, thus allowing for wider recognition of one's identity as a citizen of the world. Modern tourists prefer the word "traveler," due to widespread concerns about the negative impacts on the tourism industry on certain global locations and populations. In this paper, I will explore the rise of poverty and volunteer tourism which attract tourists who seek a more authentic and ethical experience, but in reality these niche forms of tourism simply perpetuate the one-sided, neocolonialist narrative created by a ideological oversimplification of a much more complicated history between Africa and the West.

"One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things."
– Henry Miller

"The use of traveling is to regulate imagination with reality, and instead of thinking of how things may be, see them as they are."
– Samuel Johnson

"The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see."
–Gilbert K. Chesterton

"Traveling – it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller."
– Ibn Battuta

Introduction

"Are you a Traveler or a Tourist? Take the Quiz to Find Out!" boasts the headline of a 2013 Huffington Post article. Merriam Webster defines a tourist as "a person who travels to a place for pleasure," or oddly enough, "a member of a sports team that is playing a series of official games in a foreign country." As opposed to the traveler defined as "someone who is traveling or travels often," or "a person who moves around from place to place instead of living in one place for a long time." Aside from the seemingly unrelated statement about professional athletes, according to these definitions the only difference between a tourist and a traveler is that tourists travel for pleasure, whereas travelers are consistently on the move. Yet, it would seem that one who constantly travels would acquire a certain amount of pleasure from the experience, otherwise what would be the point? Though the dictionary has proved to be rather useless in differentiating, popular rhetoric puts a lot of weight on the answer to this question. The dichotomy between travelers and tourists was immortalized in Daniel Boorstin's essay, "From Traveler to Tourist: The Lost Art of Travel," where he hypothesized that it was the rise of the railroad and travel agents promoting package tours that marked the death of the trope of the adventurous traveler by making leisure travel accessible and affordable to middle and working

classes. However, this seems quite harsh. Could it really be true that it was the increased facility in movement that brought about the downfall of the traveler? This logic seems counterintuitive. The age of globalization has facilitated with ease with which people travel and experience new parts of the world, so one should logically be able to assume that we should be in a period of rebirth in travel rather than demise.

Yet, it just seems to prove the popular belief that in the post-colonial era, tourism as a word and as a practice has oftentimes been negatively perceived as superficial and morally questionable. To combat this negative perception of tourism, new kinds of niche tourism have risen in popularity which cater to the "traveler" who seeks to truly understand and become immersed in new cultures, rather than the "tourist" who comes in and looks at the sights and people of a different culture, but simply imposes voyeuristic expectations and Western tradition. Poverty tourism, oftentimes marketed as "reality tours," is the industry of guided tours through poorer neighborhoods and slums of major cities (Meschkank, 2010). After seeing what real life in the global south looks like, tourists can be motivated to help which leads to another example of niche tourism: volunteer tourism.

For tourists who seek out opportunities such as poverty tourism and volunteer tourism, their experiences can be eye opening and sometimes the revelations made on these journeys can be very profound and personal, but it is also an opportunity to construct one's identity. Social media, a product of the modern age of technology, has become a powerful tool which people use to construct identities. Tourism narratives and photographs, by participants in both poverty and volunteer tourism, shared on social media have the ability to construct identities for both the tourists and the subjects, but these identities often serve to create a one-sided narrative, therefore reinforcing existing stereotypes and divides between the developing and developed world.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have long debated the nature of "otherness" which has long permeated every aspect of human history. Edward Said's *Orientalism* describes the creation of the idea of the Orient as irrational, weak, and feminine, in contrast to the rational, strong, masculine West which was used to justify Western cultural and political hegemony in the East (Said, 1978). Said connotes the difference between American perceptions of the Orient, mainly China and Japan, versus European perceptions which due to their close proximity with the Orient have used and perpetuated orientalist stereotypes as a means of coming to terms with the role of the Orient in European history. While the ideas of the Orient are based in the imaginative, over time orientalism has manifested itself in physical European material culture, institutions, practices, and ideologies. The divide between the Orient and the Occident is not inherent in nature; it is a man-made concept that has been given life by systems of power and a tradition of European hegemony that allowed the idea to flourish. Though Said focuses very specifically on the creation of the Orient, primarily societies in Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East, his thesis can be applied to reflect certain overall consequences of Western hegemonic practice, namely the fabrication of imaginative identities of the "other" which allow for the West to remain morally, culturally, and ideologically superior.

While I would argue that Said's thesis is relevant in a discussion about Western inventions of African stereotypes, the concept of *primitivism* is more directly correlated. The word *primitive* first appeared in English during the fifteenth century and signified the "original or ancestor" of animals, and by extension of men (Torgovnick, 1990). The primitive constitutes both the familiar and the exotic, referencing the earlier, simpler times of human existence,

oftentimes with a rather nostalgic tone that can be highly pejorative and naïve. Primitive peoples and societies, who are oftentimes portrayed as hyper-sexualized, vulgar, and uncouth, are popularly regarded as incomplete in themselves, but rather as progressing towards Western standards of development without much hope for success (Torgovnick, 1990). There is a simultaneous nostalgia for a simplified past, along with a rhetoric of control and superiority which is similar to Said's findings on orientalism. Though the primitive aesthetic oftentimes refers to literary or artistic movements, namely Paul Gaugin's voyage to Tahiti or Pablo Picasso's fascination with African masks, the rhetoric surrounding the idea of the primitive has become highly problematic in a historical and political context due to the continuation of Western hegemony. Primitivism highlights the starting point of modern civilization—from which the West evolved and developed, and the rest struggled to keep up. This line of thinking became the basis for colonialism, imperialism, neo-liberalism, and every other method in which the West used their elevated status to pillage, plunder, and decimate the "other."

These concepts lay the foundation for the idea of the *gaze*. In *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry uses the gaze as a means of describing power structures present in touristic encounters. Urry bases his idea of the tourist gaze on Foucault's notion of the medical gaze, arguing that the tourist gaze is specific method of examining and understanding one's tourist experience, but above all that these understandings are relational and socially constructed. Tourists use the gaze to employ 'aesthetic reflexivity' to make sense of the visual, putting the tourists in the position of power as they are the ones who gaze as opposed to those who are being gazed upon. There is no single tourist gaze; it varies by society, social group, and historical period since the gaze is constructed by difference. In this way, tourists can view any site, product, or experience as an object to derive pleasure, awe, or titillation. The idea of the gaze takes on an entirely new

meaning in the cases of poverty and volunteer tourism, as it is people rather than places that are being gazed upon. The humanitarian gaze builds upon this idea by creating a binary hierarchy between the givers and receivers of aid (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Urry's ideas are directly related to the idea of the spectacle and authenticity.

Boorstin's characterization of modern tourism as superficial is reconstructed by Dean MacCannell as 'quest for authenticity' and by Nelson Graburn as a 'sacred journey' (Svenson and Ruf, 2011). Thus, the tourist is reborn to symbolize a 'modern pilgrim' who seeks out the new and unknown, rather than an outdated reminder of a complicated hegemonic history. MacCannell explores how tourism is often motivated by a desire for authentic experiences, and while tourists may believe that what they are seeing is authentic, it is oftentimes difficult if not impossible to know for sure. This desire for authenticity pushes tourists toward offers which promise an 'off the beaten path' or 'in with the natives' experience, leading tourists to believe that they are getting a backstage look into the reality of a place, but as Goffman describes, in actuality, they are simply seeing a staged back region rather than the institutional backstage (MacCannell, 2013). Eric Cohen examines the role of the 'tourist imaginary' which "spans the spectrum between the experience of the traveler in pursuit of 'mere' pleasure in the strange and the novel, to that of the modern pilgrim in quest for meaning at somebody else's centre" (Cohen, 1979: 180; Svenson and Ruf, 2011). Ideas of authenticity and staged reality relates directly to ideas discussed in the literature surrounding both poverty and volunteer tourism.

Poverty Tourism

To reiterate, poverty tourism is broadly defined as guided tours of poverty-stricken areas, slums, in major metropolitan cities in developing countries for the purpose of seeing poverty firsthand (Outterson, Selinger, and Whyte, 2011-12; Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). This

industry is usually associated with the Global South with favela tours in Rio de Janeiro, township tours in South Africa, and slum tours in Mumbai, but have also been found in Western world, most notably in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. These tours often cater to upper-class tourists from the West who expect that the tour will be an educational experience and will help alleviate poverty (Outterson, Selinger, and Whyte, 2011-12). Slum tourism seems to contradict common notion that while traveling tourists wish to distance themselves from everyday life, relax, and see beautiful things (Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). However, this could be explained by the idea discussed earlier that tourists want to have authentic rather than staged experiences (Dürr and Jaffe, 2012). Poverty and urban deprivation are perceived as real and authentic, so these tourist experiences are seen as real and authentic by extension.

The term "slumming" became popular historically in the 1840s, when London's upper class would travel to London's East End to see poverty first hand, oftentimes under the guise of charitable concern (Koven, 2004). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the goals of slumming shifted from being a desire to understand and help slum conditioners to becoming more popular as a more purpose-free, leisure activity comparable to reading a book or having tea with friends. At around the same time, the practice of slumming was popular in Paris as well, due to geographic and socio-cultural changes as a result of industrialization which were also found in London (Steinbrink, 2012). In the 1880s, slumming arrived in the United States with the first commercial tour companies specializing in slum visits founded in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco (Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). By the early twentieth century, slum tourism became an integral part of urban tourism for travelers within their own cities, leading to more modern marketing tactics of slum tourism for international tourists in global cities.

Simultaneously voyeuristic and altruistic, poverty tourism transforms poverty and impoverished communities and people into tourist products which can be gazed at and consumed (Dürr and Jaffe, 2012). Poverty tourists use photos, films, and reports to proliferate the idea of the slum as an attraction (Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). The use of photography in the slums can also be historically contextualized. Dr. Thomas Barnardo used images of 'ragged children' to exhibit how love and good care in his orphan homes in London's East End were transforming at risk children into model citizens (Koven, 2004). Interestingly enough, Barnardo was brought to court on charges that his photographs were staged and unauthentic which he freely admitted, but saw no wrong in his so called "artistic fictions," making Dr. Barnardo a kind of unofficial father of the trope of the ragged child which continues to be present in modern marketing campaigns for aid organizations as well as volunteer and poverty tours. In the United States, Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* brought to light to squalid conditions of poor immigrants in tenements of the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

It is the combination of "aestheticized deprivation" and "clichéd images of urban poor" which draws tourists to pursue slum tourism. Though tourists have expressed doubts and a sense of guilt for their participation in these tours, their desire to experience the "real life" of these cities outweighs their trepidations (Rolfes, 2010). Poverty tourism markets slums as being places of authenticity which makes guided tours of slums attractive to travelers (Meschkank, 2011).

Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism, which I will be calling voluntourism from now on, is broadly defined as travel combined with volunteer work which attracts individuals who are seeking a mutually beneficial tourist experience that will benefit not only their own personal growth, but positively impact social, natural, or economic environments of the communities (Wearing, 2001). It is

important to note that though the word volunteer usually designates a free exchange of labor, voluntourism is an activity in which people pay to volunteer in development or conservation projects (Wearing, 2001). Mary Mostafanezhad described voluntourism as a type of 'fair trade tourism,' for its commoditization of pro-poor and poverty reduction sentiments. Voluntourist programs are run by a variety of organizations, such as private companies, non-governmental organizations, conservation, and educational organizations. A 2008 study of over 300 providers found that voluntourism accommodates nearly 1.6 million tourists each year, worth between as estimate of $1.7 and $2.6 billion (Butcher and Smith, 2015). The rise in the popularity of gap years has made this a popular market, especially for the 18-25 year age bracket; furthermore, nearly eighty percent of all voluntourists are female (Butcher and Smith, 2015; Mostafanezhad, 2013). A diverse range of projects is available ranging from community work such as building or painting schools or hospitals, care work such as teaching English, child care, or skill building, or conservation projects such as reforestation and habitat building (Butcher and Smith, 2015).

Though voluntourism is a fairly recent trend, scholars and popular journalists alike have attempted to quantify exactly how effective or ineffective these projects are and what the larger implications might be in terms of both development and in terms of perceptions of the developing world by Westerners. Much of the literature focuses on the important ethical considerations of voluntourism, consequently oftentimes splitting up into two groups: those who realize its potential as an innovative form of small-scale, community-oriented aid work, and those who view the practice as the ultimate perpetuation of neo-colonial legacy and the volunteers themselves as being either wittingly or unwittingly swept up into a market-oriented, neoliberal reality (Butcher and Smith, 2015). Proponents argue that voluntourism fosters a sophisticated understanding of local culture which leads to improved cross-cultural

understanding between volunteers and host communities, and that friendships formed during these exchanges can reduce racial, cultural, and social boundaries globally (Raymond and Hall, 2008). However, with the growth in availability of more short-term options, scholars have begun to question whether these initial prescriptions would stay true, finding that voluntourism may simply reinforce existing stereotypes, strengthen the 'them vs. us' divide, and reinforce neo-colonialist power inequalities within communities (Raymond and Hall, 2008). Furthermore, in many of these programs volunteers take on the role of 'expert,' regardless of their qualifications which further promotes the idea that Westerners are inherently superior.

Many scholars hypothesized about volunteer motivations for choosing this type of tourism over more traditional option. Travel generally is promoted as the best method to foster cultural understanding, awareness, and tolerance (Raymond and Hall, 2008). In a 1998 study of voluntourists on a service-learning program in El Salvador and Nicaragua found, Robbin D. Crabtree discovered that voluntourism was seen as a type of 'reconciliation tourism' by the volunteers who were using this experience as a means of "cleaning up your own mess" (Crabtree, 1998: 195). In this example, the volunteers were aware and cognizant of the role of the West in the social problems that existed in the area and believed that their work was "the right thing to do" (Crabtree, 1998: 195). Other scholars have found that volunteers use the experience as a means of contextualizing their own privilege, to gain a more complete understanding of the world or to simply see a new part of the world, to contribute or to help in some way, to see if they could overcome the challenges associated with living and working on less than ideal conditions, and to find purpose (Sin, 2009; Raymond and Hall, 2008; Otoo and Amuquandoh, 2014). Whatever the motivation, the concept of voluntourism as a viable means of

helping or providing aid to the developing world is distinctly tied to a larger debate about the effectiveness of aid generally in the Global South.

Development and Aid

In *Encountering Development,* Arturo Escobar discusses how in the early post-World War II period, the rhetoric of the war against fascism was replaced by a more social struggle, the war against poverty. This led to the creation of the Third World as a new area of geographical domain where poverty and hunger were widespread which demanded immediate action, prompting the beginnings of development. Development has evolved exclusively in a modern Western system of knowledge and has become a mechanism of control similar to colonialism and imperialism (Escobar, 1995). Peter Bauer argued that aid subsidies rarely reach those who need it most in recipient countries, instead falling into the hands of a small few and that aid-based policies are inconsistent with economic realities. Zambian economist, Dambisa Moyo discusses how the failure of post-war development policy created the culture of aid that pervades our modern society (Moyo, 2009). In her book *Dead Aid,* Moyo argues that aid is the root of Africa's problems rather than the solution and offers an aid-free solution to the issue of development. Just as the West is addicted to giving aid, Africa is addicted to receiving aid. Moyo calls for gradual reduction of aid over a five to ten year period which would leave room for local economies to grow with the goal of building an Africa that is able to sustain itself without being reliant on Western aid.

Problem Formulation

The literature for both poverty and volunteer tourism provides a decidedly one-sided narrative. Scholarship on voluntourism analyzes the expectations and experiences of the tourists, but provides little to no information about reactions and feelings from the host communities and

the subjects of these development projects. There is a fair amount written about the connection between photography, specifically social media imagery, and voluntourism, as it seems the documentation of the experience is integral for many voluntourists which relates to other discourses about the role of mass media and celebrity humanitarians as well as the idea of the tourist and the humanitarian gaze. Research on poverty tourism often discusses the motivations of tourists in seeking out a more realistic tourist experience. Both volunteer and poverty tourism cater to a market of tourists who seek a better understanding on the real life of a country's people and how oftentimes poverty is seen as more authentic than other more staged types of tourism. Research on both fields is often conducted in a case study format of specific countries or specific tours. While some scholars have made links between poverty and volunteer tourism, the two types of tourism are often discussed separately despite the fact that the motivations for choosing these two types of niche tourism are often very similar.

The lack of scholarship from the standpoint of the subjects of these types of tourism highlights a gap in the literature that is integral for a more complete understanding of these two trends. The one-sided perspective discussed simply allows for Westerners to see an incomplete picture of the reality of life in the developing world which rather than educating tourists simply perpetuates colonialist narratives. This incomplete narrative oftentimes created through mass media and social media photography allows tourists to construct identities as being culturally aware citizens who help the less fortunate, while deconstructing the identities of the subjects of tourism by limiting the discourse to simply recreate past stereotypes about the divide between the First and Third World.

I identified what I saw as a chain reaction which has led to the rise of these two types of niche tourism which links to the importance of discussing the rise of the perpetuation of these

tourist narratives and photographs. A structural and ideological history of Western hegemony, plus globalization which has facilitated the ease in which people travel has led to a popular debate about what it means to be a traveler versus a tourist. As I discussed in my introduction, the definitions of the words are not actually that different, the connotations associated with the words have become important in both scholarly and popular discourse. This debate has led to a rise in popularity for two niche genres of tourism: poverty and volunteer tourism. The rise of social media, another direct impact of globalization and the rise of technology, has created a simple method by which these tourists can share their stories and photographs which leads to continued proliferation of the one-sided narrative that is found in scholarship, mass media, and now social media. After identifying the combination of factors that led to these two specific genres of tourism, I hypothesized that poverty and volunteer tourism which attracts tourists who seek a more authentic and ethical experience, but in reality these niche forms of tourism simply perpetuate the one-sided, neo-colonialist narrative created by a history of Western hegemony and an ideological oversimplification of a much more complicated history between Africa and the West. While the inherent ethical concerns in both poverty and volunteer tourism must be addressed, I believe that it is the fast and widespread sharing of these tourist narratives and images on social media that are the true cause for concern, as a majority of consumers in the modern era receive their information through mass and social media. Especially when taking into consideration the rise of emerging nations such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), the continuation of this one-sided narrative could have disastrous effects on the future of international affairs.

Methodologies

The basis of my argument was based on secondary research of relevant theories, historical context, in addition to past research and case studies of both poverty and volunteer tourism. I originally intended on focusing on voluntourism specifically and looking at it from a perspective of the problematic nature of aid and humanitarian work by the West. However, upon conducting further research and discovering the poverty tourism, I decided to conduct further research on tourism with a particular interest in these new, special interest genres of tourism. This led me to the work of John Urry and the tourist gaze, culminating to my decision to focus on tourist photography and social media, and use primary source images that I had seen in my own social media practices to explain and justify these trends in tourism and the one-sided narrative that I was finding in my secondary research. Due to my background in art history, I am comfortable using images and visual evidence as a means of constructing an argument and was familiar with Said's work on orientalism, as well as the ideas and arguments surrounding primitivism.

I decided to focus regionally on Sub-Saharan Africa due to my own personal academic interest in the continent. Both before and after departing for a semester abroad in Dakar, Senegal, I found that there were widespread misconceptions about Africa even by people who I consider to be highly informed and educated. While I believed that mass and social media played a critical role in the perpetuation of these stereotypes, but as a lifelong believer in tourism, I wanted to investigate the role of emerging tourist genres as well. Though my cases were more broadly poverty and volunteer tourism, for my discussion of poverty tourism, I focused specifically on township tourism in South Africa. I chose this case because I wanted an example of poverty tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa and township tourism was the most widely researched, and I thought because of South Africa's role in the rising BRICS economies, it would provide an

interesting case study. For my discussion of voluntourism, I chose not to pick a specific country case study and take a more holistic approach to the practice regionally. I made this decision because I did not feel I could adequately address a single country case study without actually being in the country and conducting a wide range of personal interviews. While there are many case studies about voluntourism in specific countries, such as Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania, they were done by researchers in the field. By not choosing a specific country, I was able to consult case studies from countries throughout the region without having to limit myself. Furthermore, I felt that since I would be acquiring most of my data for this section through first hand analysis of social media images and well as interviews with voluntourists that I would be able to prove my points without needing to pick a single country case study.

I conducted 2 in person interviews with international students at Skidmore. My first interview was with Stella, a senior from Kenya, who had after attending high school in Kenya, went to school in Italy before attending Skidmore and majoring in economics. The second interview was with Langa, a sophomore originally from Zimbabwe, but had actually lived in four different African countries, all of which happened to be former British colonies. She had moved to Kenya and South Africa because of her parents' jobs before going to Swaziland to attend high school. Both students had attended a United World College. I chose to conduct these interviews as a way of trying to implement the African narrative that I felt had been ignored in previous studies. While both students are from upper-middle class families in their home countries which has afforded them opportunities which are not available to Africans more closely impacted by the rise in poverty and volunteer tourism, due to geographic and time constraints, they were my best available option.

Additionally, I conducted 6 interviews with young people who had participated in voluntourist experiences abroad. These interviews were conducted over email, by sending a short list of questions out to a targeted list of people who I knew, through personal connections or through friends, had participated in these types of programs. Interestingly enough, all the responders were female which from my findings seems to correspond with general demographics for voluntourism. A limitation I faced was that only 2 responders had volunteered in Africa, both in Senegal. Due to time constraints and difficulties in finding students to interview, I decided to open my survey to a wider pool of participants who had volunteered anywhere globally, not just in Africa, but made my questions more generally about the voluntourism experience and were therefore easily applied to fit my purposes. I was told by many of the participants I sent it to that the questionnaire was longer than expected, and since many of these people were college students with busy schedules, it became difficult to obtain as many responses as I had initially hoped for. While I would have loved to have more responses, the responses I received were helpful. Another limitation I faced was that while my section on voluntourism was crafted through the use of primary source images and data, my section on township tourism was based solely upon secondary source research because I did not personally know anyone who had participated in a township tour. That being said, between my secondary source data, my interviews, and the images I found on social media, I felt I was able to successfully craft my argument. Finally, due to personal experience with poverty tourism in Rio de Janeiro, and a brief exposure to volunteering abroad, I was able to implement my own unique, personal narrative in my paper.

Cabinets of Curiosities

Throughout the Renaissance and during the height of the colonial era, European aristocrats would accumulate objects from their travels and then organize these objects into personal collections known as cabinets of curiosities. The cabinets often contained very eclectic assortment of objects and artifacts and are now considered the precursor to modern museums. Cabinets of curiosities became a source of tremendous pride as the variety of objects and artifacts and the various places those objects represented showed how well-traveled and cultured one was and was therefore an important factor in fashioning an aristocrat's image and identity. Being cultured and showing knowledge and understanding of the world indicated a level of intelligence and sophistication that the European aristocrats aspired to attain.

In the modern era of globalization, cultural understanding and global awareness are more important than ever. Modern technology has made it easier than ever to learn, to communicate, to travel, and most importantly to share—items, ideas, photos, opinions, stories—with people all around the world. I would argue that similar to the way that European aristocrats used cabinets of curiosities to construct self-identity, the modern tourist uses social media profiles and travel photography in a similar manner, but with a modern twist. However, while the European aristocrats were only able to share their brands with friends and acquaintances who visited their cabinets in person, the modern traveler is able to quickly and easily share their brands with fellow social media users globally. Therefore, the modern travelers are at a distinct advantage as their self-brand can have a more widespread impact that the European aristocrats could have only dreamed possible.

Mass Media, Africanisms, and Celebrity Humanitarians

In September 2015, Taylor Swift released the music video for her latest single "Wildest Dreams." In the video, Swift, depicted as a 1950s Hollywood heroine, falls in love with her co-

star while filming in an unknown, exotic, and obviously outside of the Western Hemisphere. When the heroine and her lover return to the real world, Swift runs off in tears as she realizes that her relationship, just like the exotic locale, were nothing but a dream. Swift employs popular symbolic tropes such as wide-open desert terrain, waterfalls, herds of frolicking zebras, and safari vehicles to contextualize the setting as Africa. Swift's Africa, in comparison to the real Africa, is a monolith space full of picturesque landscapes, wild animals, and devoid of any actual African people. Her choice of "Africa" as a setting is interchangeable and could be replaced with any other non-Western location due to its nondescript and visibly colonial representation. The video uses nostalgia to recall colonialist history and dreamlike, exotic imagery in an attempt to showcase Swift as a musician who is capable of using diverse locations in a manner that is both aesthetically pleasing and artistically innovative. However, Swift's efforts fall short.

The video received widespread backlash from critics who found Swift's use of outdated visual tropes of the African continent, which are deeply embedded in the notion of colonial fantasies, uneducated and offensive. In response to the video, James Kassaga Arinaitwe and Viviane Rutabingwa of NPR wrote:

> To those of us from the continent who had parents or grandparents who lived through colonialism (and it can be argued in some cases are still living through it), this nostalgia that privileged white people have for colonial Africa is awkwardly confusing to say the least and offensive to say the most…She should absolutely be able to use any location as a backdrop. But she packages our continent as the backdrop for her romantic songs devoid of any African person or storyline, and she sets the video in a time when the people depicted by Swift and her co-stars killed, dehumanized, and traumatized millions of Africans.

For Arinaitwe and Rutabingwa and others who have close personal or familial ties to Africa, the video brought back painful associations. However, it is highly likely that many viewers watched the video without recognizing the problematic implications of media stereotypes about Africa which perpetuate Western hegemony culturally. A recent article in

Vogue titled, "How to Vacation Like Taylor Swift in Her VMA Debut Music Video, "Wildest Dreams" reveals that for some audiences the video was even inspirational—providing incentive for her viewers to travel to similar exotic locales—in style—to take similar artistic photographs to then share on social media. *Vogue* provides an interesting point of analysis through its use of African landscapes oftentimes in conjunction with the widespread use of Africanisms in the world of high fashion and haute couture, most notably in the collections of most top designers in the Spring 2009 collections.
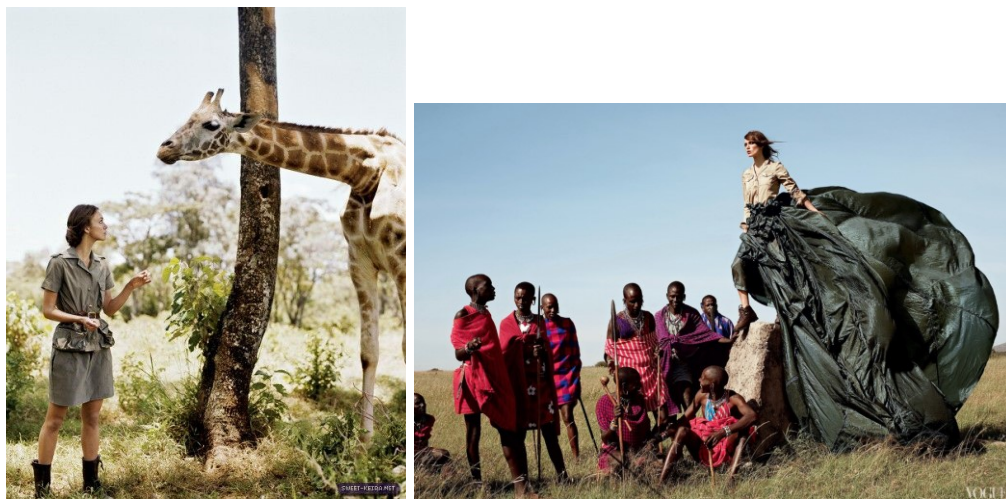
In the images shown above come from a 2007 *Vogue* centerfold piece about Keira Knightley, the magazine uses clothing, landscape, and two very potent symbols of Africa: wild animals and 'tribesman' to construct a global image for the magazine and high fashion that once again puts forward power dynamics about the inherent superiority of the West. In the image on the left, Knightley is having a close interaction with a giraffe. There appears to be no one else nearby, giving off the impression that Africa is a land full of wide-open spaces with giraffes and elephants roaming about as they please. Her safari gear gives off the impression that Africa is a place rife with opportunities for Western exploration just waiting to be discovered, but that Africa's true potential can only be uncovered by Westerners in a Western context otherwise the

secret of Africa will remain hidden. The image on the right pairs Keira with a group of Masai men and uses a variety of photographic techniques to relay ideas about power and agency. To start, Keira is physically in a position of power over the men. Her dark, billowing, imposing dress as well as her placement above a rock makes her both wider and taller than the group of Masai warriors. Though in the Masai culture, these warriors would be the ultimate sign of masculinity, here they are portrayed as inferior by this lanky, white woman in expensive clothing. The decision to use images of the Masai for the magazine allows *Vogue* to build an identity as being a global magazine aware of geography and ideas about diversity, but it simultaneously undermines the power of the Masai to construct this identity for *Vogue*.

Celebrity humanitarians such as Angelina Jolie and Bono use their status as celebrities to bring attention to important global issues such as the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the Darfur Genocide (Mostafanezhad, 2013). As celebrities act as spokespeople for these issues, their role as a celebrity humanitarian is being constructed by their apparent dedication and desire to use their fame for good (de Waal, 2008). The influence of celebrity humanitarians cannot be undermined, as celebrity discussion of important global issues is sometimes the way young people become exposed to certain global problems. Additionally, these celebrity humanitarians serve as role models for young tourists who are seeking to become more aware and engaged with social issues through poverty and volunteer tourism.

Reality Bites: The Case of Township Tourism in South Africa

Township tourism is widely accepted as the start of the most recent trends in poverty tourism, as its origins lie in the time of apartheid (Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). Since the 1970s, tours of 'non-white group areas' were organized by government officials, faith-based groups, and anti-apartheid activists, and were often highly political in nature (Frenzel, 2014).

Post-apartheid, township tourism expanded to all major cities in the country, especially in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban, the three main tourist destination cities in the country (Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). Township tours have become an integral part of tourism in South Africa, serving around 800,000 tourists annually nationwide with tours being offered by roughly forty to fifty operators in Cape Town alone (Steinbrink, Frenzel, and Koens, 2012). A highly professionalized business, township tours offer focuses on music, food, and ecology with adventure aspects such as bicycle, motorbike, and bungee jumping tours as well. South Africa has long hoped that township tourism could be a possible tool for economic development and to transform the mostly white owned tourism industry in South Africa into one that is more representative of the true demographics of the country (Frenzel, 2014).

Studies have attempted to quantify the role of township tourism in poverty alleviation and business opportunity, but instead scholars found that despite initial attempts to involve township residents into the organization of these tours, it has primarily been mainstream tour operators from outside of the townships who control the flow of tourists, and therefore retain most of the revenue (Rogerson, 2004). While there are examples of local tourist companies from inside the townships, especially in the Cape Town area, there is a widespread lack of cooperation and collaboration which hinders the ability of these businesses to successfully thrive (Koens, 2012). The rise in locally owned bed and breakfast businesses has risen, particularly in Soweto, which has brought in new sources of revenue for local, small business owners (Frenzel, 2014). The widespread availability and profits associated with township tourism has led to a rise of slum tours in more rural areas in South Africa, most notably in the Bantustans regions (Rogerson, 2014).

Early on in my interview with Langa, she mentioned how in Johannesburg, the Alexandria slum, which I found in my research is one of the more popular locations for township tours, is right next to one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in South Africa. Langa described, "Opulence like you've never seen, you might even forget what part of the world you're in, right next to the matchbox houses of Alexandria." This quote struck me because it shows how such distinct, differing urban identities have been formed in such close proximity to one another. Later on in the interview, I asked Langa more specifically about the township tours. Though she had initially never heard of them, she was appalled to hear that tourists opportunities were afforded opportunities to visit poor neighborhoods to see poverty because "the poor people who live in the townships did not choose that life." This brings about another ethical consideration about the power structures that exist which allow certain people the chance for upward mobility, but not others. Furthermore, why would people travel all the way to Africa just to look at poverty when poverty exists throughout the US and Europe? It would be a lot cheaper to look at poverty closer to one's hometown, but the exotic constructions of Africa make tourists look more globally aware when recounting tales of their experiences to friends back home. When I asked if she thought these tours would be acceptable if they were organized by local community members as a means of making a living, Langa remained unconvinced as she saw this as neighbors taking advantage of the misfortune of their fellow neighbors to make money. She argued that unless the money was being split amongst all affected community members, there would always be ethical considerations. I agree with Langa's sentiments.

Unfortunately, it seems to me that township tourism is not going to disappear, but there are ways to mitigate the harmful effects of the practice perhaps by implementing an approach that includes township inhabitants in the conversation to foster a more inclusive and

collaborative approach. I would advocate for township tours that are organized by local community boards with itineraries and tour routes being formed through community wide discussion amongst those who live in the township. All revenue generated from the community sanctioned tours would be poured back into projects that would benefit the entire community, such as after-school recreational activities for youth. Not only does this solution add a new stream of revenue into the community, it allows locals to write the narrative being told which flips some of the power dynamics found in township tours and poverty tours in general.

Township tours reflect the complicated history of South Africa. The use of township tours as a political tool highlights ideas about agency and power dynamics which force us to question who is reaping the benefits from the township tours. I argue that inhabitants of the townships must be included in the all aspects of the conversation surrounding the tours, as well as see some of, if not all of the revenue that is earned. Inherent in all of this is the idea that "seeing" becomes "knowing," whereby a tourist's prior perceptions and stereotypes could either become strengthened or challenged depending on the person and the situation (Griffin, 2004). This leads me to my discussion about the role of images and social media, specifically in relation to voluntourism.

Opening the Fanny Pack: Volunteer Tourists and the Crusade to 'Save Africa'

All individuals, but especially young individuals are in constant pursuit of self-performance. The invention of the internet in 1991 and the subsequent rise of various social media outlets from Myspace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, and Twitter in 2006 has made building a brand as simple as pressing a button (Van Dijck, 2013). Young people, who are just starting out their lives, easily attached to the new forms of media which allowed them to easily narrate and curate their life stories for the world to see. Elsrud argues that voluntourists are essentially

"expressing a story about who he or she is or wants to be" (Elsrud, 2001: 599). As discussed previously, globalization has facilitated the ease with which people travel, but also the ease with which they can share their travel experiences. This has tremendously impacted the tourism industry. The rise of travel review websites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor, travel companies themselves have also been forced to use self-branding practices simply as good business practice. However, for my purposes, I will be discussing the idea of self-performance in photographs taken by travelers which are used for personal purposes.

John Urry discusses how tourists use images to collect and consume places, giving them a certain amount of power over the place because the image of a place is framed and weaved into a personal narrative by the tourist. In this regard, a place loses its agency through its role in a narrative that is dictated by the tourists who uses it for their own purposes. Images of white, usually female volunteers surrounding by darker skinned children in ragged clothing, oftentimes with snot dripping from their noses have become synonymous with voluntourism in a social media context. Nancy McGehee notes that these pictures often show volunteers in protective poses with children either hugging or giving out gifts with the children who become 'objects of care' smiling appreciatively. The images often bring into question gender roles as they visibly display iconographic similarities to images of the Madonna and Child and are reminiscent of the concept of motherhood and domesticity where women are associated with childcare and unpaid volunteer care work, while men continue to be associated with real, income generating labor (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Furthermore, these images aestheticize the poverty of the host communities. The poverty of the children in these images is seen as real and authentic, and the volunteers are seen as saviors for having witnessed, helped, and above all, survived the

experience. The pictures shown below were taken by one of my interviewees during a five-week

summer trip for high school students in a small village in Senegal.

I grouped these two photographs together because they show the two volunteers in the

aforementioned role of caregiver, but in these images volunteers not only give care, but they also

give joy. In the picture on the left, the volunteer gives the child a piggyback ride and on the right,

the volunteer pushes a little boy around in a tire swing. This puts smiles on the faces of both of

the volunteers and both of the children. In my interview with Langa, she said:

> The Europeans would come and want to take pictures with the kids…and say things like I
> can't believe they still smile at the end of the day. Why wouldn't they smile? Just
> because they don't live the life you live doesn't mean they aren't happy, obviously it is a
> desolate situation and he could be better off, but…He's playing soccer with his friend. Do
> you expect him to be sulking everyday of his life?

The idea of smiling at the end of the day despite impoverished conditions is prevalent in

the discourse surrounding volunteer tourism, and in these pictures the volunteers directly use this

stereotype of the sad, poor African child, by showing their ability through volunteering to bring

cheer to the lives of these children. Additionally, both of these images reflect stereotypes about

who is traditionally the giver and who is the receiver of aid. These volunteers use these images to

construct their identity as self-sacrificing girls who are changing the lives of these children who

are the next generation of Africa, and become the living embodiment of the millennial white savior.

My next image shows a volunteer interacting with a group of young girls who are sitting together looking at a Western fashion magazine. Regardless of whether or not this specific magazine features some of the degrading mass media representations of Africa discussed earlier, Western fashion magazines use impossible stereotypes that are impossible for most Western female audiences to achieve let alone these young African children. Langa noted that Africans feel this constant desire to show that "they've made it," she explains that is the reason why Africans are always the best dressed, whereas white people never have to prove their worth because they have been historically placed in a position of superiority. In my interview with Stella, she described how whenever a white person would enter a village, the children would gather around to touch them because they are intrigued. She also spoke about the idea that white people are always assumed to be successful and that when she goes back home, the people in her village do not believe that poverty exists in the United States. These views reveal African perceptions of occidental idealism, the ultimate symbol of which I would argue are images and media ideals shown in American fashion magazines. So, by showing this magazine, the volunteer is simply perpetuating superior idealizations of the West onto children who have likely already been exposed to the damaging stereotype that they are lesser than the West.

My final images reflects the way that voluntourism turns any volunteer, no matter their age or their prior expertise into an expert. I chose this image because the volunteer is not only teaching to a group of children, but she is teaching to an older African woman and man. Despite the fact that this volunteer may have no prior knowledge of the skill she is trying to teach, she is still seen as superior and more qualified than older Africans with more life experience, simply because she is from the West. This relates to the idea of opportunity which came up in both of my interviews with Stella and Langa. Langa noted that Africa has become so used to being pitied that they have learned to pity themselves. She stressed the importance of young Africans getting out of that victim mentality because while Africa has historically received the lesser end of the bargain, young Africans are just as if not more capable than young Westerners, especially when it comes to development issues in their home countries. Stella discussed how volunteering can create unemployment in host communities because even though there are locals who have the education and expertise to complete the same tasks, it is cheaper to have volunteers to do the work for free rather than having to pay locals. This creates an unsustainable model of development because once the volunteers leave, they are the only ones who have had the additional training necessary to perform those specific tasks which undoes all possibility for positive impacts of volunteering.

While none of the students whom I interviewed that had participated in voluntourism abroad had malicious intent, it is clear that the practice of voluntourism can be harmful for host communities and that the people who truly benefit from this genre of tourism are the tourists. That being said, I think the true issues lie in the narratives that voluntourist images convey and perpetuate. While the volunteers themselves may not have been ill-intentioned, the images do reflect a one-sided neo-colonialist narrative which often reaches a wider audience than the tourists themselves could ever try to individually remedy.

Humor to Subvert the Gaze: Barbie Savior

The widespread proliferation of these voluntourist images is evident in several ways. First, by the existence of a growing body of popular and scholarly discourse about the topic from a wide variety of disciplines which integrate these problematic images into their arguments. Additionally, whenever I discussed my research project with any of my peers, students were instantly able to recall the images of white girls with African orphans as these types of images have been appearing on the newsfeeds of my entire generation for years. In fact, right before I left for a semester abroad in Senegal, one of my friends jokingly remarked, "Don't be one of those girls with a profile picture of you hugging an African child. Find a zebra or elephant instead." Finally, the rise of internet parodies of voluntourist images highlight not only the importance of these images in modern social media practices, but these parodies use humor to bring to light the power dynamics and ethical concerns that I highlighted in my earlier analysis in a more lighthearted manner. In traditional voluntourism images, the volunteer is in the position of power over the children. The volunteer is the expert and the savior, no matter their age or lack of experience. I would argue that in this case, humor is a powerful tool which places the

voluntourist in a subversive role of the one who is being gazed upon rather than the one who is doing the gazing.

Barbie Savior is the Instagram account that is putting Barbie on the front lines. The account parodies the social media photographs of both volunteer and poverty tourists in the developing world using clever captions and hash tags to bring attention to this problematic story that these types of tourism are telling through the widespread proliferation of tourist photography. In the image on the left, Barbie Savior cuddles a little African orphan Kelly doll with the caption, "Orphans take the BEST pictures! " followed by various hash tags such as #whatsyournameagain and #strangers2secondsago. These captions and hash tags highlight the bizarre way in which volunteers use these images of nameless orphans, who likely have no idea that they are being featured so prominently on a stranger's Facebook profile. The second image is a parody of poverty tourism photography with the caption "Just taking a #slumfie amidst this dire poverty and need. Feeling so #blessed and #thankful that I have so much more than this and don't have to live this way!" accompanied by #slumbarbiemillionaire, #ghettofabulous, and #mygoodlife. This image highlights the idea that seeing poverty is an ineffective way of tourism if it is simply used to remind tourists of their own privilege. Additionally, it showcases the idea of the slum as a tourist object which can be seen and commoditized. By using Barbies, the

creators of this page were able to discuss a wide variety of problematic systems of power in a comical way. This page has received extensive media coverage and could potentially be used as a tool that will educate past, present, and future tourists about the important narratives one might be unintentionally, or intentionally creating when posting certain tourist images on social media.

Conclusion

I became familiar with voluntourism during my sophomore year in high school. At my elite, private, all girls school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, some of the girls used their summers to accumulate service experiences and earn material for college essays about their life changing week in Costa Rica, painting brightly colored murals on the walls of orphanages and playing soccer with the children. I would see their pictures on Facebook and I would be jealous of how worldly and cultured they seemed. I had traveled outside of the Western world, had profile pictures of myself riding an elephant and getting henna in a market in Jaipur, but it was not the same. I needed my token photograph with an African child, and I got it.

My final images feature myself in the controversial role of 'Millennial White Savior'. They were taken during a family safari trip to Kenya and Tanzania the summer before I started my freshman year at Skidmore. Before leaving the US, our travel company had notified us about the opportunity to visit an orphanage as part of our safari package, and encouraged us to bring schools supplies as gifts for the children if we were interested in participating. My mother took it upon herself to find and organize all of the school supplies that I had accumulated over the years into little packages for us to give. When we arrived at the orphanage, the children greeted us and performed a little song and dance before going out into the group grabbing each of us by the hand and walking us through their home. I came into this experience with the intention of getting a photograph of myself holding an African child. This was not necessarily a malicious intent, but it was definitely dubious. Four years later, I am thoroughly ashamed and embarrassed about the existence of these images, but knew they would be important to include in my discussion. I am proud to say that these photos never actually made it to Facebook and have stayed hidden in my online media libraries.

Last year, *The New York Times*, titled "Voluntourists Needed: Apply Within," by Leila de Bruyne, founder and executive director of Flying Kites, a non-profit school and community project in Njabini, Kenya. Three years prior, de Bruyne had written a scathing critique of voluntourism and the doe-eyed teenagers who participate in these programs for the *Huffington Post* called "Voluntourism: We Have to Stop Making This About Your Niece." After receiving phone calls from other publications who hoped to write similarly negative reviews of the practice, de Bruyne began to feel that she had perhaps been too quick to judge, especially considering that she herself had begun her work in Kenya after a summer teaching children in the slums of Nairobi. In her second article, de Bruyne admits that while girls who "Help Africa" is a

thoroughly uncomfortable trend, she does, in fact, believe in voluntourism. She ends by saying, "there is only one thing that is worse than girls who "help Africa": girls who don't," and her words have stuck with me throughout the entirety of my research. I want to conclude with a quote that I, very fittingly, stumbled upon on my Facebook newsfeed. In a recent article for *Conde Nast Traveler* on the continued importance of travel and exploration, Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love* said:

> I am not afraid of the world, but I am afraid of people who are afraid of the world…I want to live in a world full of explorers and generous souls rather than people who have voluntarily become prisoners of their own fortresses. I want to live in a world full of people who look into each other's faces along the path of life and ask, Who are you, my friend, and how can we serve each other?

The purpose of this project was never to vilify the tourism, or even to vilify the tourists who pursue these two controversial genres of tourism—most of the time anyway. At the end of the day, we are all tourists. Sometimes, it is not even necessary to get on a plane to be a tourist. One can be a tourist even in their own hometown or current place of residence. Furthermore, I believe in tourism. It is important to step out of one's comfort zone and experience a new part of the world, and in my own practice I have found that tourism and immersion is the best way to learn. Additionally, tourism is an important part of GDP for many African nations. In a world which grows ever more fearful and distrustful of each other by the minute, tourism can be a solution, but only if done right. I am advocating for travel as a means of cultural exchange and cross cultural learning rather than Western audiences using Africa as a means of creating a self-serving identity. I am advocating for travelers who understand the systems and stereotypes that exist before sharing their story and their images for hundreds of Facebook followers to see. Because even if the tourist who posts these images is aware of the underlying systems of power and ethical concerns of the images, the same guarantee cannot be made about the hundreds or

sometimes even thousands of people who might see the posts and make their own assumptions, some of which will perpetuate the problematic one-sided narrative that I identified in my study. A picture is truly worth a thousand words and in our globalized, ever changing world, we must always be conscience and aware of what those words are.

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