OLONIALISM UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME: VOLUNTEER TOURISM

An industry born out of tourists desire for cheap travel in exchange for activism, volunteer travel programs advertise their companies under euphemisms like "change the world, change yourself" (http://www.goabroad.com/volunteer-abroad). For extremely low prices, tourists can travel and "make things better" for communities in need.

However, reports have shown that many of these programs "might not be doing any good." (http://www.utne.com/politics/the-dark-side-of-volunteer-tourism-voluntourism.aspx?PageId=3#axzz38PFnd00%20%20) In fact, volunteer abroad programs can be extremely harmful to local communities, as they produce conditions in which injustice becomes industrialized and profitable. Specifically, in regards to programs which involve orphans and building projects, ethical concerns have prompted activists to urge tourists against participating (http://matadornetwork.com/change/why-you-shouldnt-participate-in-voluntourism/20) in volunteer abroad programs.

Orphanages

Programs which hire volunteers to spend short periods of time in foreign Orphanages are endangering the lives of the kids there. With a constant circulation of unknown adults, these programs which capitalize on young children's suffering are not only making money off of pain, they are also exposing the kids to predators. For instance, Telegraph UK (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatlife/9055213/Orphanage-tourism-help-or-hindrance.html) reported: "Orphanages with open door volunteer policies may unwittingly expose children to predators." Unless the organization does background checks on its volunteers, volunteer programs expose children to hundreds of complete strangers every year. Recent news reports also suggest that predators seek out these types of programs. On July 21st, a teenage missionary was accused of raping children (http://ktla.com/2014/07/21/teenage-missionary-accused-of-rape-young-children-at-african-orphanage/) at a Kenyan orphanage. Participating in such a program only advocates for the continuance of it.

Even if the program does background checks, they still inflict emotional harm on the children due to a constant change in volunteer forces.

Matador Network (http://matadornetwork.com/change/why-you-shouldnt-participate-in-voluntourism/) has stated:

"For children growing up in an institutionalized, orphanage-type setting, it is of the utmost importance that children be able to develop a stable, long term attachment to their caregivers. Allowing troops of travelers to come in and hug, play and laugh with the kids every few weeks has precisely the opposite effect. Just as it was useful for you as a child to develop long term, stable bonds with the people who cared for you, so it is important for those children. To take part in orphanage volunteering is to take part in a cycle of creating and abandoning relationships that helps nobody emotionally except you."
In addition, recent reports document that some of the orphans in these programs are not actually orphans. Because, as Telegraph UK (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatlife/9055213/Orphanage-tourism-help-or-hindrance.html) reported, “Volunteering can be a lucrative, income-generating activity for orphans;” they have fiscal incentive to keep orphans occupied. Similarly, CNN (http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/life/richard-stupart-voluntourism-does-more-harm-good-260269) has reported that “Volunteers are fueling the demand for orphans,” and that parents in local towns have actually been renting their kids out to orphanages to satisfy the wealthy foreigners demands.

Ecotourism and Ineffective Volunteer Work

Similar programs also advertise their eco tourist trips which are designed to give cheap travel to those who work to save the environment.

However, according to Pacific Standard: The Science of Society,

"ATLAS reports that the value of the volunteer tourism market is around $2 billion (http://www.atlas-webshop.org/Volunteer-tourism-A-global-analysis) and the average cost for volunteers, in 2007, was $3,000 per trip (http://research.smuc.ac.uk/280/1/04-Butcher%20and%20Smith.pdf). That money, the thought is, would be better used if just donated directly. In his paper "Making a Difference': Volunteer Tourism and Development,' Jim Butcher (http://research.smuc.ac.uk/280/1/04-Butcher%20and%20Smith.pdf), who is a proponent of volunteer tourism, admits that fees paid to participate in volunteer projects could be more beneficial as wages to locals, who could contribute 'a greater amount of labor than the individual volunteer could ever hope to provide.' The other issue is that so many of these volunteers don't really know what they're doing (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016073831100079X)."

Even CNN (http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/life/richard-stupart-voluntourism-does-more-harm-good-260269) has reported that:

"Activities as banal as painting walls or building houses are fraught with ethical concerns. [For instance] Does the presence of volunteers really contribute to a community's well being, or are outsiders simply doing work that could have helped local bread winners earn a living?"

Peace Corps

According to the Peace Corps website (http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/):

"As the preeminent international service organization of the United States, the Peace Corps sends Americans abroad to tackle the most pressing needs of people around the world."

However, the Nation (http://www.npr.org/2011/03/02/134194082/the-nation-a-radical-alternative-to-peace-corps) recently reported that Kenya, which has a heavy Peace Corps volunteer outpost,

"is full of university graduates with significant skills — I know because I have taught some of them at the University of Nairobi — who can’t get jobs. This pool of wasted talent not only means slower development; it also represents a potential threat to stability. How does that square with the originally stated Peace Corps goal of promoting 'world peace and friendship?"

What immediately appears to be a program that promotes social justice, has been criticized (http://www.npr.org/2011/03/02/134194082/the-nation-a-radical-alternative-to-peace-corps) for being "more about U.S. superpower goals than about world peace."

Dr. Mary Mostafanezhad (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160738313000686%20) stated that volunteer tourism (specifically governmental programs like the Peace Corps) "systematically depoliticizes the global economic inequality on which the experience is based."

Namely, US contribution to global poverty and violence (http://femmagazine.com/?p=7116) is hidden by its "attempt" to "tackle the most pressing needs of people around the world."

More specifically, the money the government spends to send often unskilled US volunteers abroad would be much better spent in training locals to do the same work.

Though tourists may embark on these trips with the best intentions, the consequences of volunteering in this industry is accurately summed up by a local woman in Malawi’s despair over voluntourist organizations, which "sell our people to the foreigners." (http://www.utne.com/politics/the-dark-side-of-volunteer-tourism-voluntourism.aspx#ixzz3PHFwBN) It is evident that volunteer tourism has not only morphed human suffering into tourist attractions, it has also substantially contributed to injustice in each region.
Even conservation tourism might actually contribute to global warming and environmental harm as the resources it takes to fly, drive, house, and feed volunteers could easily overshadow the work done in each region. There are many conservation efforts that volunteers can participate in at home without contributing to extensive use of travel resources.

Teaching English Abroad

Similar to advertisements for volunteer abroad programs, Teaching Abroad Programs like InterExchange (http://www.interexchange.org/working-abroad) state that their “programs […] build work experience [for volunteers] and [allow them to] give back abroad.”

However, recent analyses of such programs question the legitimacy of claims that volunteers benefit local communities.

Specifically, social justice advocates suggest that these programs only strengthen, legitimate, and prioritize an unnecessary global reliance on the English language. This concept, known as linguistic imperialism (http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/mar/13/linguistic-imperialism-english-language-teaching), refers to the domination or prioritizing of one language over other equally valid and also culturally significant languages. Critiques of teach English abroad programs do not reject multilingualism, rather the preference of one language over another.

Specifically, TEA programs prioritize English so much so that native speakers have the ability to get a job abroad regardless of teaching credentials (only requires TEFL certificate). Even the InterExchange website, which advertises teaching abroad programs, states: “You don’t have to be a teacher to enjoy the experience of teaching English in another country.”

A Guardian article (http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/mar/13/linguistic-imperialism-english-language-teaching) on the same topic questioned the need for Anglo sponsored English programs by asking, “Is Anglo-American expertise really relevant in all contexts?”

In other words, if multilingualism is really the goal of these programs, why are Anglo-English speakers without credentials taking jobs that otherwise qualified local teachers could perform?

The current spike in global demand for English, which in part created teach abroad programs, is a product of the myth that English is a tool which leads to monetary success. While multilingualism may very well be an admirable resume booster, the fact of the matter is that many of the people who learn English will not have substantial financial gains. English and success are not synonymous (http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/jan/10/pakistan-language-crisis). In fact, according to the Guardian (http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/mar/13/linguistic-imperialism-english-language-teaching), the preference for English in non-English speaking countries can actually “prevent most children from accessing relevant education.”

Because language (http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-language-shape-what/) is a central component for thought and behavior (http://blog.ted.com/2013/02/19/5-examples-of-how-the-languages-we-speak-can-affect-the-way-we-think/comment-page-2/), changing linguistic patterns in a community can in effect change the community itself. Thus, by enforcing and contributing to a false global standard for English, teach abroad programs have been identified as a form of neocolonialism (http://teachingabroad.weebly.com/neocolonialism.html), or “The use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures to control or influence other countries” (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/neocolonialism): namely by decreasing the importance for languages other than English. Specifically, in regards to the US State Department launching a global push (http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/jan/10/us-elt-expertise) for English Language Teaching, activists may want to be wary of their contribution to a system which glorifies the loss of equally valid languages.

Why are we doing this?

Before embarking on one of these trips, it is essential to ask the question: why am I doing this?

- If it’s for activism, there are so many ways to change the world that do not contribute to the above injustices. Get involved in your own local community. Join an organization. Vote. Donate. And most importantly, research what you are supporting before you make a commitment to “fight injustice.”
- If it’s for cheap travel, I have added a list of resources which can drastically reduce the costs and, hopefully, the impact of tourism.

Feminist Guide to Cheap Travel

My first question is, is it even possible to travel without contributing to colonialism, violence, and environmental harm? The answer is most likely no. But for those who are going to travel anyway, here are some ways to reduce negative impact.

Carefully research the destination before traveling there. Trips to specific locations alone can contribute to violence in the region (see Birthright Trips (http://electronicintifada.net/content/jews-we-say-birthright-trips-must-end/12413) and Trips to Hawaii (http://www.worldcat.org/title/from-an-native-daughter-colonialism-and-sovereignty-in-hawaii/oclc/40076703)).

Knowledge of the local language will also reduce the English language work reliance.

http://femmagazine.com/2015/01/27/colonialism-under-a-different-name-volunteer-tourism/
Here’s a list of cheap and free ways to travel, most of which do not contribute to capitalism:

**Housing**

- Couchsurfing (https://www.couchsurfing.org/)
- WWOOF (http://www.wwoof.net):
- GlobalFreeloaders (http://www.globalfreeloaders.com):
- Housesitting (http://www.housecarers.com):
- CrewSeekers (http://www.crewseekers.net):
- HelpX (http://www.helpx.net)
- Camp in My Garden (http://campinmygarden.com)
- Servas (http://www.servas.org)
- Hospitality Club (http://www.hospitalityclub.org)

**Meal Sharing**

- Eat With Locals (http://eatwithlocal.socialgo.com)
- Meal Sharing (https://www.mealsharing.com)
- Co Lunching (http://www.colunching.com/en/login)
- The Ghetto Gourmet (http://www.theghet.com)
- EatWith (http://www.eatwith.com)

**Transportation**

- RyanAir (http://www.ryanair.com) – Cheap flights in Europe
- BlaBlaCar (http://www.blablacar.com) – Ride Sharing in Europe
- LiftShare (https://liftshare.com/uk/) – Ride Sharing in UK
- Mitfahrgelegenheit (http://www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de) – Germany
- GumTree (http://www.gumtree.com) – UK, Australia, NZ
- Kangaride (http://www.kangaride.com) – Canada
- Lyft (http://www.lyft.com) – Peer ride sharing US
- ThePointsGuy (http://thepointsguy.com) – Tips for Earning Rewards Points
- Sidecar (https://www.side.cr)
- Uber (https://www.uber.com) – Many worldwide locations
- GetAround (http://www.getaround.com) – Rent other peoples’ cars by the hour
- FlightCar (https://flightcar.com) – lets owners rents their cars from airport parking lots while on vacation

**Renting Items**

- Zilok (http://us.zilok.com) – Rent Anything
- Rentoid (http://www.rentoid.com) – Australia
- SnapGoods (http://www.snapgoods.com)

**Tours**

- Vayable (https://www.vayable.com)
- Local Guiding (http://www.rent-a-guide.com/?ref=lg)
- NewEuropetours (http://www.neweuropetours.eu) – Free tours in Europe. Many tour companies other than this one also offer free tours and only run off of tips.

Now go somewhere, and do no harm.
CORI BRATBY-RUDD

Cori is a second year Gender Studies major who is obsessed with the bizarre. In her spare time she enjoys reading Edgar Allan Poe, listening to obscure music, and watching horror movies.

HOW TO BE A BETTER FEMINIST ALLY

Randy James

FEATURED UCLA FEMINIST: DEVIN NICOLE
Colonialism Under a Different Name: Volunteer Tourism


Philip Kaishin Kawada on "YOU SEE ME": CHILDISH GAMBINO’S RACIALLY FETISHIZING LYRICS AT UCLA (http://femmagazine.com/2014/02/10/you-see-me-childish-gambinos-racially-fetishizing-lyrics-at-ucla/#comment-2265)

Darth Jader on REVERSE RACISM AND REVERSE SEXISM DON’T EXIST (http://femmagazine.com/2014/10/19/reverse-racism-and-reverse-sexism-don’t-exist/#comment-2259)

Mr. John Doe Esquire on "YOU SEE ME": CHILDISH GAMBINO’S RACIALLY FETISHIZING LYRICS AT UCLA (http://femmagazine.com/2015/02/10/you-see-me-childish-gambinos-racially-fetishizing-lyrics-at-ucla/#comment-2258)

A Guy from the Club Fair on HOW THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY IS RIDDEN WITH SEXISM (http://femmagazine.com/2016/03/11/how-the-healthcare-industry-is-ridden-with-sexism/#comment-2256)

Archives

Followers

(http://www.instagram.com/femnewsmag)