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VOLUNTEER TOURISM IN CAMBODIA: PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES OF
RECRUITMENT AND POSTCOLONIAL IMPACTS

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ABSTRACT

An emergent area within tourism is volunteer tourism, in which people journey to developing countries and perform service as part of their trip. These volunteers are typically young, well-educated Westerners. International volunteering is an increasingly popular option for tourists traveling abroad, and it is one of the fastest-growing markets for people interested in alternative tourism experiences. Volunteers genuinely want to do good by participating in service work, and many feel pressure as privileged global citizens to “help” or “save” the less fortunate. However, these sentiments become part of a problematic “white savior” complex. This thesis focuses on Cambodia to illustrate some of the problems that volunteer tourism brings, and it discusses the contribution of volunteer tourism to Western supremacy and the white savior complex.

INTRODUCTION

When Sady, a 12-year old Cambodian girl, found herself at an orphanage in the region of Battambang, it wasn't because she was an orphan. It was because her parents didn't see another way to free her from the extreme poverty she faced at home. But, Sady's situation was only worsened by her parents' good intentions. Like many Cambodian children, she was used by private orphanage operators as a way to solicit gifts and cash from visiting volunteer tourists (Carmichael). Many orphanages in Cambodia are run as for-profit organizations, using disadvantaged children to bring in money for personal benefit. Children are often kept in deliberate poverty and treated poorly in order to maximize monetary donations from outsiders. Some orphanages even allow volunteers and donors to take children out on special day trips, allowing sex offenders and other criminals to take advantage of them (Ruhfus). However, most volunteer tourists do not know about these corruptions and often end up inadvertently contributing to a system that supports and allows the mistreatment of children like Sady.

Tourism is defined as the act of people traveling to and staying in places outside of their usual place of residence for a period shorter than a year. It is typically categorized into two sectors: domestic and international. Domestic tourism is when a person travels within their country of residence, while international tourism is when a person travels outside their country of residence (Ralston). Tourism itself has undergone substantial changes in the last 25 years. Widespread developments in the global economy, technology, and social and cultural societies have globalized the phenomenon of tourism (Cohen and Cohen, 2177-2178). For centuries, tourism and travel have been associated with a person's social status and money (Fordham, 9). But as rapid global changes occur,

tourism has expanded into middle-class groups. These changes have also opened up a new type of tourism: social tourism. Social tourism focuses on economically weak groups both globally and within developed countries, and pays attention to the sustainability of tourism practices both culturally and environmentally (Cohen and Cohen, 2187-2188). One emergent area is the practice of volunteer tourism, where foreigners journey to a developing country and perform service work as part of their trip. Volunteer travel overseas began in the early 20th century, and it has continued to gain popularity since (Hernandez-Maskivker et al.). Volunteer tourism has become an increasingly popular option for tourists traveling abroad, and it is one of the fastest-growing markets for people interested in alternative tourism experiences (Conran, 1454).

The typical volunteer tourist is well-educated, from the middle or upper classes, and is sensitive to global inequalities (Conran, 1456). They are often young, white, and liberal-minded (Henry, 9). Most volunteers come from developed countries and travel to areas considered less developed, such as the Global South or East (Hanchey). Volunteers genuinely want to do good by participating in service work, and many feel the pressure as privileged global citizens to “help” or “save” the less fortunate. However, these sentiments frequently become part of a problematic “white savior” complex. As will be examined further in this thesis, a “white savior” is a white person who feels as though it is their responsibility to save less fortunate people from their poverty. By bringing Western ideas and aid, the white savior hopes to be the hero by bringing their “superior” ideas of development and aid to developing countries. Jenna N. Hanchey describes the fantasy of the white savior: “The US American volunteer can ‘find herself’—that is, find

wholeness, be complete—in other countries, by saving other people. By making a difference, a volunteer can be the Self she wants to be” (4).

This idea of the white savior plays into American exceptionalism, the belief that the United States is one-of-a-kind in its superiority and ignores the possibility that the US could do any harm. In this way, volunteer tourism is hailed as ethically valorous and an undeniably positive act through which poor and impoverished nations can be saved (Hanchey, 4). However, as much as the volunteer desires and views their acts to be “doing good” in the world, this is often a false reality in which the volunteer unwittingly brings harm to the communities they believe they are helping (Guiney, 412). The fantasy of the white savior overshadows the actual needs and desires of the community in favor of Western ideals. In some cases, the involvement of volunteers actually contributes to host country corruption and dependence.

This thesis focuses on Cambodia as an example of some of the problems generated by volunteer tourism. Tourism plays an important economic role in Cambodia: It is the second-largest GDP contributor in Cambodia, and volunteer tourism is the fastest-growing niche tourism market in many developing countries, including Cambodia (Guiney, 410). Because of the large economic contributions of tourism and the growing importance of volunteer tourism, it deserves investigation.

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in Asia, and because of this it is viewed as an area where people have a unique ability to change the country for the better (Guiney, 411). Cambodia’s poverty stems from its recent and violent history of war and genocide, which destroyed the nation’s economy, education and schooling, political system, and rich cultural background (Chandler). Many volunteers are ignorant about

Cambodia's recent history prior to their visit to the country, but they do often cite the Khmer Rouge's genocidal regime as a reason behind their choice of volunteer destinations (Guiney, 412). There is a wide variety of areas in which volunteers participate in international service projects, including medical work, manual labor, building schools or houses, teaching in schools, working in orphanages, planting trees, helping with scientific studies, and more. In Cambodia, the three most popular forms of volunteer tourism are medical-related projects, teaching English, and working within orphanages.

Volunteering in a medical area is a popular option for medical students, in part because they want to "do good" and in part because this volunteer experience is a great resume-builder. While such opportunities do require a more specialized volunteer with some sort of medical background, these student volunteers are not yet licensed medical practitioners and would not be allowed to practice any sort of medicine within the United States. Thus, they choose to volunteer abroad in a setting where they can participate in these activities before they are licensed (Bruce, 7).

Learning English is often viewed as a necessity for children in developing countries. English is a globally dominant language, due to Britain's wide colonial reach and the proliferation of US trade and culture. Volunteers often choose to work in schools or with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) giving English lessons (Guiney, 410). However, volunteer-run English programs are often ineffective. Volunteers usually have little to no experience teaching, and they often are given beginner-level lessons to teach, which the children have already been through (Henry, 15). As students experience the same lesson over and over again, they do not gain any new information and usually know

the material very well (Guiney, 414). Because of this, the children are trapped in classrooms and given lessons they already know, all for the satisfaction of the volunteer. This is time that these students could be using to learn new information from their teachers, instead of participating in an ineffective volunteer program that does not benefit them. In a similar vein, language and literacy scholar Cori Jakubiak has observed that “Promotional literature is rife with suggestions that English alone promotes international understanding, global connection, and cross-cultural exchange” (252). Jakubiak’s research points out that many volunteers consider English language learning the tool that will help developing countries enter into the larger global network. However, this is often a large misconception, especially considering the ineffective ways that volunteers attempt to teach.

Orphanage tourism in Cambodia is arguably one of the most damaging areas that volunteers participate in. The commodification of orphanage volunteering causes a large number of problems, permanently harming and damaging the children within these orphanages. For-profit orphanages in Cambodia use children for monetary gain, instead of actually helping them. These orphanages have increased their numbers dramatically, jumping two-thirds between 2005 and 2011 (Carmichael). The increase in number corresponds to supply and demand. As more volunteers pour in, more orphanages are needed to satisfy their desires. In fact, many of the children in orphanages are not actually orphans and still have at least one living parent. But, families are induced by orphanages with the idea of a better life for their children (Guiney, 414).

Once the children arrive at the orphanage, these promises of a better life are broken. Instead, the children are kept in deliberate poverty for the purpose of soliciting

gifts and money from volunteers (Carmichael). When volunteers see appalling conditions within orphanages, they believe that their money can help. Little do they know that the owners of these orphanages pocket the cash, and very little of it makes its way to the children themselves (Child Protection: UNICEF Country Programme 2016-2018, 2). Beyond the volunteers' misused funds, orphanages themselves pose developmental risks for children. Children who live in the orphanage system are often damaged physically, socially, and emotionally (Child Protection: UNICEF Country Programme 2016-2018, 2). Such damage is caused by a large number of risk factors, including malnutrition and social deprivation (Johnson and Gunnar). Moreover, there is the potential for emotional harm. Tourists often look for an intimate experience, bonding with local community members (Conran, 1459). In the case of orphanages, tourists bond with young and vulnerable children, and many of these relationships are genuine. However, when children experience repeated meaningful relationships where the volunteers leave them after a day or a week, they face emotional damage that is difficult to reverse.

Given the strong belief that volunteers can “do good” in Cambodia and the ironic truth of the harm they cause, this thesis will focus on volunteer tourism through a study of Cambodia and organizations within it.

There is also a personal reason for the choice of Cambodia. When I was 15, I made the first of four volunteer tourist trips of my own, two of which were to Cambodia. On my first trip to Cambodia, I was part of a committee focused on breaking down the barriers between volunteers and host community members through song, dance, and games. On my second trip to Cambodia, I was in charge of a committee teaching women (about my age and older) from the host community how to sew and run a business. None

of these trips were completed through any of the six organizations mentioned in this thesis.

SCHOLARSHIP ON VOLUNTEER TOURISM

As volunteer tourism continues to grow worldwide, so too does interest in research on this topic. This comes as part of an increase in social-justice based research on tourism (Cohen and Cohen, 2186). Scholars across numerous disciplines have written on volunteer tourism, exploring everything from effects on institutionalized children living in orphanages and the crossing and breaking down of cultural boundaries, among other topics. I will focus mainly on research intended to help understand the intended and unintended effects of volunteer tourism on both visiting volunteers and local residents.

The practice of volunteer tourism spreads across the world and into developing countries in all areas. Research focuses largely on areas in the Global South, Africa, Central America, and parts of Asia. While there are many studies on countries such as Thailand and India, volunteer tourism in Cambodia has not been explored in as great of depth. Research on volunteer tourism thus far has mostly focused on the volunteer tourists themselves as opposed to the local communities in which these volunteers work (Woosnam and Lee, 310). This poses a problem, as scholarship in the area disproportionately emphasizes the Western tourists instead of the residents in the countries affected by the practice. In this way, the Western benefits from volunteering abroad are overrepresented and overshadow the often negative effects experienced by local communities and destinations.

While much research remains to be done in the area of voluntourism, there is debate across academic fields about the merit of the practice. In many ways, these arguments and issues are complex, intertwined, and difficult to separate from one another. First, I will look at the effects on local communities and volunteer tourists. Then, I will explore some of the communication research about volunteer tourists and humanitarian organizations.

Effects on Volunteer Tourists and Host Communities

Research on volunteer tourism has typically focused more on how it affects volunteers in a positive way (Woosnam and Lee, 310). While tourists usually desire to contribute to positive change on an international scale, there are often self-oriented factors that drive people abroad to do volunteer work (Guiney, 410). These self-oriented factors provide benefits for volunteers, but often at the cost of real change within the communities to which they travel. While much research on volunteer tourism comes from a Western viewpoint that highlights benefits for tourists themselves, some research has shown that the effects on host communities in developing countries has not been as positive. While Westerners experience many beneficial effects from their time abroad, the burden is often borne by locals in the communities they claim to help. Through community-based studies, researchers have uncovered more about the dark side of volunteer tourism.

In a 2016 study Tess Guiney looked at volunteer tourism in Cambodia and the effects, both intentional and unintentional, that volunteer tourists cause. Guiney noted both positive and negative consequences of volunteer tourism, but ultimately pointed to the fact that many volunteers are unwittingly committing acts that contribute to the very

system they want to improve. Guiney observed that while tourists do have the potential to bring funding, special skills for particular jobs, and resources to build physical facilities, they do not always meet these lofty goals (413). Instead, Guiney pointed out that the needs of local communities are not taken into account by volunteer programs. Many volunteers come for a holiday or vacation, and they are not fully committed to the roles they will be fulfilling once they are in country. They are often not prepared for their tasks or are not properly trained on how to perform them. They come with presuppositions that their knowledge as Westerners is more valuable than locals' knowledge, and visitors believe they can help despite their lack of training or preparedness (Guiney, 413-414). Guiney found that organizations are not doing enough to prepare participants, and she looked at the participants themselves as part of a corrupted system. In order for volunteer tourist efforts to be successful, both the organizations and the tourists themselves must work more closely with local communities to ensure that the work they do is helping rather than hurting, she concluded (Guiney, 416).

Volunteers seek intimacy in their volunteer experiences. Mary Conran discussed the desire and expectation for human connection and asserted that "The consumption of intimate experiences is at the heart of volunteer tourism" (1459). In fact, the presence of intimate experiences is viewed as proof of the "authenticity" of their experiences abroad (Conran, 1462-1463). Without bonding between volunteers and locals, volunteers often feel disappointed in their experience. This forces locals to give performances of intimacy in order to provide volunteers with the feeling that they are "helping." Additionally, these performative intimate relationships often reinforce a binary of "us," the volunteers, and "them," the local community (Conran, 1464). This binary contributes to the idea that

Westerners are needed to address local problems and strengthens the belief that volunteers are the only ones who can help local communities rise from poverty.

Research has suggested that one way to minimize these problems is to use service-learning as a tool to help Western volunteers critically engage with their involvement in developing countries. However, even service-learning contains a complex web of issues. Melissa Bocci discussed how service-learning reinforces the norms and privileges experienced by white people. It is important to note that service-learning is a very specific type of volunteer work in which students actively learn and process the work they are doing, whereas most volunteers do not have this type of processing as a part of their program. Service-learning is primarily carried out and experienced by white people and aimed at serving communities of poor people of color. Despite the emphasis on processing, oppressive systems and power dynamics are still reinforced through systems of service-learning (Bocci, 5). Although Bocci discussed service-learning within the United States, these concepts can be applied to international service-learning. It is primarily Westerners who journey to developing countries. Much as white people inadvertently reinforce practices and systems of oppression within the US, they can support similar systems on an international scale through volunteer tourism abroad.

Robbin D. Crabtree studied the outcomes of service-learning abroad. The impact of service-learning abroad is complex and varied, producing some intentional positive impacts and many unintentionally harmful impacts. The intent of service-learning is often to expand viewpoints and expose students to cultures, lifestyles, and places that they would not otherwise experience. If given the proper care and reflective aspects of service-learning, students can have experiences that alter their perception of the world and cause

them to strive for more just actions (Crabtree, 57). But, Crabtree pointed out that “It is also important to acknowledge that the impact of our work is not all positive, regardless of our intentions” (51). The outcomes of service-learning projects often address only short-term goals and fail to recognize or change institutional failures within host countries (Crabtree, 49). Crabtree argued that the difference between a successful service-learning experience and an unsuccessful one is critical reflection on the experience and the empowerment of volunteers as agents of change in the world (62).

Although many scholars have discussed the benefits of volunteer tourism as a way to overcome cultural boundaries and form positive relationships, some argue that this cross-cultural exposure actually works to reinforce stereotypes. Kyle M. Woosnam and Yoon Jung Lee looked at how volunteers’ uninformed preconceptions of local residents may actually deepen during volunteer tourist trips. Additionally, residents within local communities were less accepting of volunteers who appeared to have a higher degree of social distance, both physically and culturally (Woosnam and Lee, 310). However, if approached in a sensitive way, volunteers and local residents may both experience a breaking down of stereotypes and prejudices through close interaction and exposure (Woosnam and Lee, 311).

Communication and Volunteer Tourism

Jenna N. Hanchey studied Western volunteers at an NGO and considered their involvement with Western supremacy, American exceptionalism, and the white savior complex. While most of the volunteers Hanchey interviewed recognized and understood the problems associated with these practices, they found ways to distance themselves from them and construct a fantasy in which they were unaffected by these problems.

Because volunteers thought of themselves as an exception to the rule instead of a part of the postcolonial system, they could not see the problems they were perpetuating and did not grasp the true context of their work abroad. Hanchey describes this irony: “The very white supremacist and neocolonial attitudes that underlie the fantasy of white saviorism counterintuitively provide grounds for volunteers to avoid recognizing themselves as partakers of the fantasy, and instead posit themselves as different or exceptional volunteers” (10). Hanchey pointed out that Western volunteers might never fully break out of these contradictions. However, the only way that people can work against the postcolonial system is by actively attempting to confront it and their part within it (Hanchey, 14-15).

Simon Cottle and David Nolan investigated the impact of media on global humanitarianism. They argued that the presence of media in an area can be a decisive factor in the desire of people to offer humanitarian aid or services. However, news media face an impossible task; they must inform the public of global events without losing public interest. So, media coverage tends to jump rapidly from one event to the other, leaving past crises to be forgotten in favor of newer and more exciting coverage. Consumers of news respond to the “pornography of suffering,” in which the most recent and most tragic events attract the most attention. Because of rapidly changing news coverage and public interest, humanitarian organizations are confronted with the challenge of staying relevant in the eyes of media consumers (Cottle and Nolan, 863). In order to attract the media and the restless public eye, they must participate in the “pornography of suffering” or risk falling into oblivion. This results in the perpetuation of Western supremacy and white saviorism because aid organizations must seek monetary

donations and support. When organizations are the subjects of news coverage, they emphasize the plight of the less fortunate and, implicitly, the need for help from “superior” people.

Much research remains to be done concerning the practice of volunteer tourism and its effects on both volunteers and local populations. This thesis seeks to make an important contribution to the research on volunteer tourism, because little or no research yet exists to analyze the online presences and persuasive strategies of volunteer tourist companies for their postcolonial impacts. This research is particularly important in order to understand postcolonialism and its effects on developing countries through the practices of recruitment used by international service work providers. By analyzing these strategies through a postcolonial lens, this thesis will add to the research surrounding the growing practice of volunteer tourism.

POLITICAL THEORY AND VOLUNTEER TOURISM

In order to understand the complex workings of international relations in the form of international aid-giving and volunteer tourism, it is necessary to give a brief overview of several of the main theories used by political researchers. The theories discussed in this section are realism, liberalism, radicalism, and post-colonialism.

Realism is based on the core belief that people are fundamentally self-serving. Realists believe that people are selfish and will ultimately choose the option that benefits them the most, regardless of the effects on others. This extends to the national entity as well. A nation is assumed to act the part of an individual in the context of global politics, serving its own interests before consideration of others. In realism, these nation-states are

unitary entities which are the primary actor in international politics, including war and alliance-making. These nation-states are assumed to be rational actors that have the ability to use logic and decision-making to determine the best course of action, usually the option which will help them enhance their own security and minimize potential threats (Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 79-80). Realism rarely takes into account the actions of humanitarian aid groups or NGOs, because in a realist view closely collaborating with these activities or organizations would be an illogical thing for a nation to do. In a nation's self-interest, it would choose to remain an independent and solitary actor to maintain its own wealth and power. While realists acknowledge the fact that nations will form alliances and join organizations with other countries, they attribute this to the desire of each nation to multiply its own power (Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 242).

Liberalism is nearly the opposite of realism in their core belief: As opposed to realism's view of human nature as selfish and calculating, liberalism supposes that humans are well-intentioned creatures who desire to do good in the world. In an international context liberals believe that nations primarily want to do good as well. For example, liberals believe that forming alliances, engaging in international trade and commerce, or participating in other such agreements will ultimately benefit all countries involved by increasing the ultimate cost of war and decreasing the likelihood that it will break out (Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 86-88). In this way, liberals believe that collaborating with NGOs or assisting with humanitarian aid will ultimately be the best course of action by building up the international community and lowering the likelihood of conflict among parties.

Radicalism draws from the writings and beliefs of Karl Marx, emphasizing how relationships are defined in terms of control over the means of production, social standings, and the distribution of power. Above all, radicals look at the effects of economic organization and wealth distribution. Radicals believe that those who control money and the means of production are those who hold the most power in society. That is, the wealthy “bourgeoisie” class hold most of the power and the working “proletariat” class holds very little. In international relations, radicals look at a hierarchical structure of nation-states, the order of which is an effect of imperialism. They believe that developed countries expand into developing countries to find new markets. However, the positive effect for imperialist countries is more often than not a major problem for the developing countries that are being exploited by wealthier nation-states (Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 92-94). For radicals, the phenomenon of international aid and volunteer tourist activity is a product of wealthy and powerful countries looking for ways to expand their influence into other areas of the world.

The last theory, postcolonialism, is the most important to this thesis and constitutes the primary lens that I will apply to the research conducted here. Postcolonialism is a relatively new political theory compared with the others mentioned above, but it has become widely studied, especially in the context of developing countries that were formerly colonized by European powers (Tyson, 399). In essence, postcolonialism looks at former colonizers and the ways in which they still influence former colonies. This includes an acknowledgement of the history and continuance of exploitation of developing countries (Huggan, 23). Colonialism itself was based on the colonizer’s assumption of their own superiority, which was contrasted with the perceived

inferiority of “savages” dwelling outside Europe (Tyson, 400). Although colonization formally ended in the decades after World War II, there are lingering effects (Tyson, 409). Cultural colonization has left behind colonizers’ structures of education and government, erasure of local languages in favor of European languages, and values that often degrade the traditional cultures of local people (Tyson, 400). Postcolonial analysis also identifies the phenomenon of neocolonialism, or “the domination and exploitation that occurs after a country has decolonized” (Bruce, 15). Neocolonialism functions through coercion as opposed to military force or actual colonization, instead using measures such as economic policies or threats of withheld aid (Bruce, 15).

In many political and international relations theories, it is suggested that humanitarianism, aid, and development assistance are ways to fix the problems experienced by developing countries. However, postcolonialism scrutinizes the ways that these theories contribute to assumptions about what makes a “developed” country based on Western ideals, and how this aid is often a way for former colonizers to relieve guilt associated with their colonial periods (Dunne et al., 225). In the context of volunteer tourism, postcolonialism acknowledges that there is often exploitation involved in tourism to developing countries and their tourist destinations. This is exacerbated by the struggling economies of developing countries and corruption of elites (Tyson, 412-413). Both international aid and individual volunteer work serve as an emotional affective function to assuage guilt associated with exploitation of developing countries by former colonizers and Western countries that still rely on developing countries to bolster their own wealth and comfort. Additionally, tourism and volunteer tourism perpetuate the

images and cultural hegemony created by colonizers, and these images are often exploited as a form of marketing by tourism organizations (Park, 115).

It is important to note that most of the scholars mentioned in this section come from Western countries. Postcolonialism considers the biases of Western scholars, and some have even suggested that the only true postcolonial research is conducted by non-Westerners (Tyson). Indeed, even theorists originating from non-Western countries are often educated in Western institutions, thereby accidentally reproducing these hegemonic Western power structures and ideas. As stated, this thesis will rely primarily on the theoretical perspective of postcolonialism with particular attention paid to the issue of neocolonialism. These theories are the most relevant to the phenomenon of tourism and international volunteering, as they help explain the extension of former colonizers' influence over previously colonized countries.

A SUMMARY OF CAMBODIA'S RECENT HISTORY

In order to understand Cambodia's current situation, it is important to review the recent history of the country. Between 1975 and 1979 Cambodia suffered under a genocidal regime led by the communist Khmer Rouge, during which an estimated 2 million Cambodians died (Power, 143). But this was not the beginning of Cambodia's struggles. This bloody regime followed a long colonization by France, a tumultuous claiming of independence, and a civil war that ultimately resulted in the communist takeover. As France colonized the region, it primarily had one goal: to slow the widespread influence of Britain while building its own beneficial colonies (Chandler).

While Britain dominated the Western world, France's influence spread across Asia and Africa, including Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Kwon).

France controlled Cambodia between 1863 and 1953, nearly a century (Chandler). In 1863 the French, who had already been steadily advancing their influence through Catholic missionaries, signed a treaty with the unpopular ruler Norodom, giving them control of the nation in exchange for protection and coronation (Chandler, 71-72). Cambodia filled the role of an agricultural nation whose export revenue filtered straight into the hands of the French (Chandler, 71). In exchange for crops and money, France offered only "guidance" and "civilization" (Chandler; Kwon). When Cambodia's agricultural revenue failed to satisfy France's need for more money, it began to finance their colonial activities by placing heavy taxes on crops and demanding expensive fees for all government services rendered (Chandler, 78).

In 1941, Prince Sihanouk was placed on the throne by France (Chandler, 84). He was largely considered a puppet of the French, working closely with them and strongly favoring their governance over any of Cambodia's emerging political parties (Chandler, 87). For France, World War II marked the beginning of the end of colonial activities in Indochina. With France weakened by involvement in the war and Vietnam's increasing power in the region, it was only a matter of time before Cambodia gained independence (Chandler, 82). In 1946 French and Cambodian officials began negotiations to decrease France's involvement. Cambodians won the right to a constitution and were allowed to form political parties, but France maintained control over finance, defense, and foreign affairs (Chandler, 86).

In 1952, Sihanouk and his advisors finally turned towards independence, staging a peaceful coup and putting him in the position of Prime Minister (Chandler, 91). France acquiesced and handed over control of the armed forces, judiciary, and foreign affairs in October 1953. They continued, however, to keep a strong influence on the economics of the country (Chandler, 92). Sihanouk is credited with Cambodia's independence, earning him popularity across the country and a continuing legacy as one of Cambodia's greatest rulers. Unfortunately, France's colonial system left Cambodia ill-equipped for economic, political, and educational development. In fact, France's colonial strategies helped set up its Asian colonies for failure across the board. French concern for monetary gain from their colonies and restriction of trade with other colonial powers crippled Cambodia's economy even after it gained independence (Kwon). Additionally, France left behind an educational system that was focused not on learning but on the assimilation of Cambodians into French culture and the "civilization" of the country (Kwon, 62-63). For these reasons, Cambodia and other former French colonies have developed far more slowly than other Asian nations.

As France weakened during World War II, Vietnam began its steady uprising. In July 1946, the communist Viet Minh began a guerrilla war against France. In July 1954, the Geneva Accords officially establish North and South Vietnam as different entities, the South led by US-backed Ngo Dinh Diem and the communist North under Ho Chi Minh. As the US became progressively more involved in the war, bombings and attacks against communist forces steadily expanded into surrounding countries, including Cambodia. Between March 1969 and May 1970, the US conducted "Operation Menu," a series of secret bombings targeting communist camps based in Cambodia. On January 27, 1973,

President Richard Nixon signed the Paris Peace Accords, withdrawing the United States of America from the war. Hostilities continued in Vietnam until the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops captured Saigon in April 1975. In July of that year, the war ended as North and South Vietnam were officially joined as the communist Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam War Timeline).

The United States bombings during the secret “Operation Menu” had kickstarted a five-year-long civil war in Cambodia between the pro-American dictator Lon Nol and the Khmer Rouge. The combination of bombings by the US and the civil war sent Cambodia’s economy into a massive downward spiral, destabilizing markets and leading to dependence on foreign aid. The country virtually stopped trade with the outside, leaving their rice exports to crumble, unable to feed even its own citizens. After the long Vietnam War and the civil war within Cambodia itself, Khmer Rouge promises of peace appealed to Cambodian citizens, who resented the violence faced by their country. They promised to free Cambodia from imperialists at last and restore their country to justice.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge captured the capital city of Phnom Penh and began their bloody regime. Their goal was to bring the country back to “year zero,” to an ideal where agriculture was the only profession and the government took care of citizens (Ung). To fulfill this plan, drastic and violent measures were taken. Immediately after the takeover, the Khmer Rouge began to evacuate the city, claiming that American bombers were planning to attack. Over 2 million people were forced to leave, including the elderly, the sick, and children (Power). After marching for days, families were placed in small towns in the countryside. Their belongings were taken away and they were given Khmer Rouge-approved black outfits and red plaid scarves. The Khmer Rouge promised

that it would take care of relocated people and provide them with food and shelter. In exchange, they were to work for the new government. Children and adults were forced to labor long days in the rice fields with little food and no break from the beating sun. If they fell behind or did not work, they were beaten or killed by Khmer Rouge soldiers. People were given extraordinarily small rations of food, often less than a tin of rice a day. Many starved to death, and mothers became unable to produce milk for their young babies (Power).

The Khmer Rouge regarded the hard-working farmer to be the most pure embodiment of an ideal citizen, and wanted to purge the country of anyone who posed a threat to the plan to bring Cambodia back to “year zero” (Ung). They sought out former government officials, foreigners, people of mixed heritage, religious leaders, anyone who disagreed with the Khmer Rouge government, and people of a higher economic class. The abuses went so far as to include anyone who wore glasses, had soft hands, or were literate because these traits were associated with power and potential threats against the regime (Ung, Power). As the regime progressed, the Khmer Rouge began to employ child soldiers. They would separate children from their families early on and submit them to harsh training and indoctrination. Sometimes, as a symbol of allegiance to the government, children were told to kill their own parents and families (Ung).

These atrocities were largely concealed from the outside world. The country was tightly controlled, and foreign media received news only from formal press releases and intercepted messages. The first photographs from the regime were not smuggled out of Cambodia until April 1977, and their contents shocked the world. They depicted forced labor camps and starvation, death and cruelty, but still they did not show the extent of the

genocide happening within the country (Power, 121). It was only after Vietnamese forces invaded and overthrew the Khmer Rouge government on January 7, 1979, that the outside world began to get a picture of what had really happened during the Khmer Rouge's four-year-long slaughter (Power). Mass graves were uncovered, some containing hundreds of people. Rotting corpses were found in Tuol Sleng and other torture centers. Victims began to speak about the terrors that they had faced. Yet, even after the true nature of the Khmer Rouge regime was unveiled, many world powers, including the United States, backed a new government headed by former Khmer Rouge officials rather than allow the Soviet-backed Vietnamese to take over the country. Khieu Samphan, former head of state of the Khmer Rouge, was appointed as the new Cambodian prime minister in December 1979 and denied abuse by the regime, citing "mistakes" and "shortcomings" and promising future reform (Power, 147-148).

It wasn't until 1985 that the United Nations allowed for a formal investigation of the genocide in Cambodia (Power, 153). Since then many former officials, including Samphan, have been tried in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), "a Cambodian court with international participation that will apply international standards" (Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia). These trials are still going on more than 30 years later, a fact which many believe is a testimony to the inefficient handling of the criminal offenses of those involved.

These developments over more than a century left Cambodia vulnerable to the effects of a postcolonial world. Practices like humanitarian aid, volunteer tourism, and international meddling in Cambodian genocide investigations contribute to the postcolonial and neocolonial effects felt throughout the country. Weakened by former

French colonization and war, Cambodia now experiences different forms of Western influence. These influences continue to keep Cambodia in a weakened state, relying on outside assistance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

This thesis is informed by previous scholarly research on similar topics. Adriana Campelo, Robert Aitken, and Juergen Gnoth researched ethics in destination marketing using a visual rhetorical strategy, focusing on the visual rhetoric and ethical representation of social and symbolic capital when branding (7). They examined landscape, people, and culture as three elements used to generate awareness of a destination (Campelo et al., 4). Many organizations put an emphasis on the landscape of a country, the characteristics of its people, and its heritage and culture when presenting the destination to potential visitors. This includes the use of feelings about being “at home” and generating friendship and companionship with local community members (Campelo et al., 8-9). Their interdisciplinary and mixed-method approach is useful for the analysis of the marketing, branding, and persuasive techniques used to promote volunteer tourism. Heejun Kim researched the persuasive methods used by tourism companies and how the internet has affected the way people search for information when planning a trip. His emphasis on persuasive presentations helped to highlight the ways tourists are influenced in an age of technology use.

This thesis combines the disciplines of political science and communication to take an interdisciplinary approach to the function and problems of volunteer tourism. These two fields together provide a more comprehensive picture of the effects of

volunteer tourism on host communities. As noted above, this research analyzes volunteer tourism through a postcolonial lens, because Cambodia spent nearly a century under French colonial rule, and suffers distinct negative effects on economic, political, and educational structures (Kwon). From a communication perspective, this thesis examines rhetorical strategies, especially in relation to white saviorism.

This thesis poses two questions:

What are the persuasive strategies of voluntourism organizations?

How does the practice of voluntourism contribute to postcolonialism and the white savior complex?

While this thesis does not undertake a formal rhetorical study, it does incorporate a qualitative and descriptive analysis of the persuasive techniques employed by volunteer tourist companies. More specifically, I looked at the websites of six different volunteer tourism organizations and analyzed their pictures and words used to communicate with potential volunteers. These organizations were chosen by examining academic literature, reports from international agencies like UNICEF, and the results of online searches and popularity. As noted above, young people are the typical recruiting demographic for volunteer tourism organizations. Considering the ubiquity of Google in young people's lives, I used it to search for various volunteer tourism-related terms. These included "Education volunteer trip Cambodia," "Orphanage volunteer trip Cambodia," and "Medical volunteer trip Cambodia." During these searches, several organizations were recurring and contained volunteer opportunities in a number of different disciplines, including education, orphanage assistance, and medical work. Together, these methods resulted in the selection of these six organizations: Volunteering Solutions, New Hope

Volunteers, International Volunteer HQ, Plan My Gap Year, Love Volunteers, and Projects Abroad.

Once these volunteer tourist organizations were selected, I examined the information provided on each organization's home page, "About" section, and similar sections. I analyzed the persuasive techniques used on each organization's website via wordage and imagery. Then, I drew conclusions based on these findings.

ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

Organization	Base Location	Function	Website
Volunteering Solutions	India	Varied international volunteer work, including: childcare, teaching, medical and healthcare, community development, and marine conservation	https://www.volunteeringolutions.com/
New Hope Volunteers	United States (Texas)	Varied international volunteer work, including: teaching, medical, orphanage, and wildlife conservation	https://www.newhopevolunteers.org/
International Volunteer HQ	New Zealand	Varied international volunteer work, including: teaching, childcare, construction, environmental conservation, and community development	https://www.volunteerhq.org/
Plan My Gap Year	United Kingdom	Varied international volunteer work,	https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/

		including: teaching, childcare, medical and healthcare, wildlife conservation, and mental health	
Love Volunteers	New Zealand	Varied international volunteer work, including: childcare, medical, women's empowerment, teaching, and education support	https://www.lovevolunteers.org/
Projects Abroad	United States (New York)	Varied international volunteer work, including: childcare, teaching, conservation, business, and healthcare	https://www.projects-abroad.org/

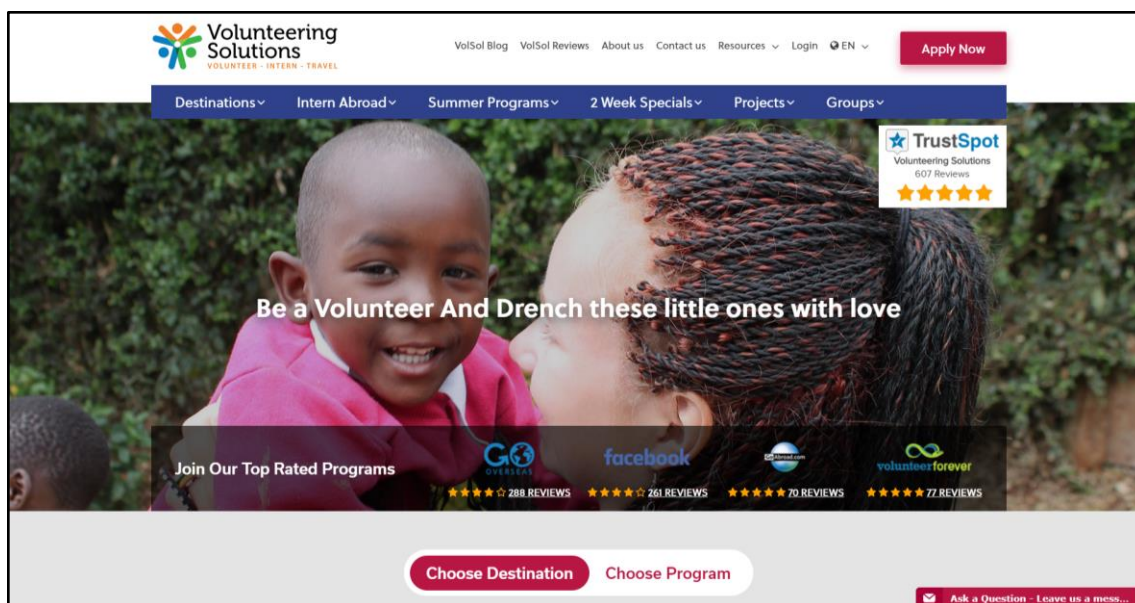
Information in the following sections was drawn from the organizations' websites.

Volunteering Solutions

Volunteering Solutions began in 2006 with the goal of “changing the face of volunteer traveling.” Since then, it has had over 13,000 volunteers participate in a tourist trip through the organization. Most volunteers are high school students, couples, corporate groups, and people traveling abroad for a school break or gap year. Volunteering Solutions offers volunteer opportunities in over 20 different countries, including Cambodia, and boasts more than 100 different options for volunteer work or internships. These programs range in length from two weeks to six months. The longer programs are typically internships, and the shorter ones are typically volunteer tourist

experiences. Their internships are for medical and healthcare or journalism and media. Volunteer experiences include medical work, women's empowerment, childcare, language-learning, environment and wildlife conservation, sports coaching, disabled care, community development, and teaching. Volunteering Solutions claims to adhere to responsible, ethical, and sustainable volunteer tourism practices, and it presents the concept of a "socially impactful journey" in which volunteers and host communities receive maximum benefits through their work with Volunteering Solutions. As a part of these efforts, Volunteering Solutions has a cross-cultural setup in their offices, which are located across the globe, and employees come from a variety of countries, cultures, and ethnicities. It also has designated coordinators at each volunteer site who work with host organizations and volunteers.

In Cambodia, Volunteering Solutions programs range from two weeks to 24 weeks and cover a range of opportunities including teaching English, childcare, medical work, and NGO support. These programs are based out of the capital city, Phnom Penh. The costs of these programs range from \$450-600 for two weeks with an additional \$100 cost for each additional week the volunteer will be staying. It is worth noting that the NGO support program is a minimum of five weeks in length, starting at \$700. This cost includes food, accommodations, airport pickup, program orientation, pre-departure information, and in-country staff support.

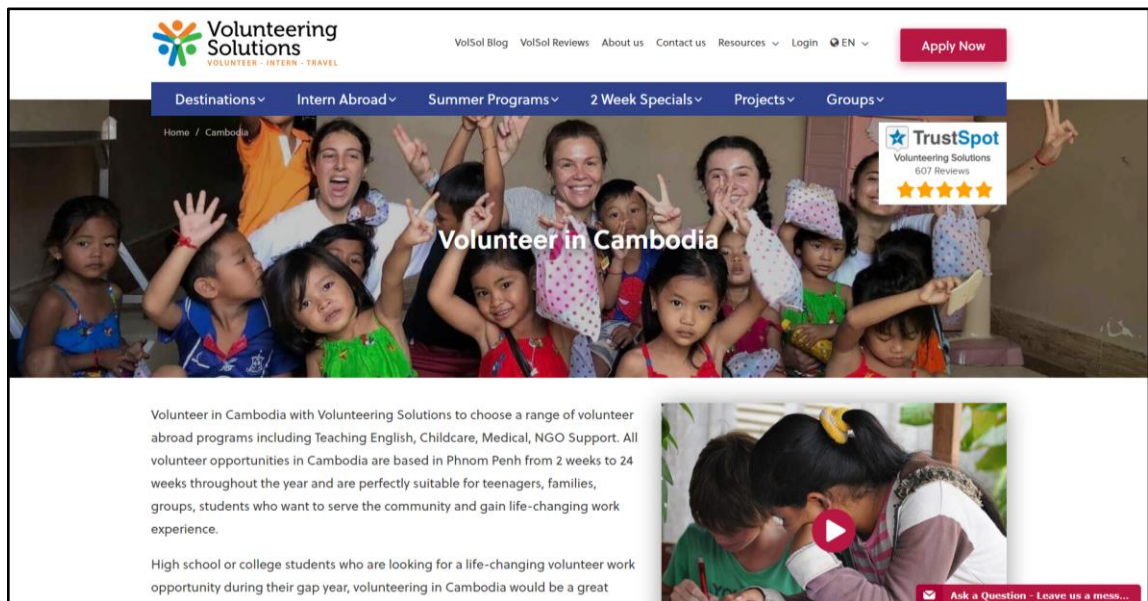


Volunteering Solutions homepage, March 23, 2019

The Volunteering Solutions homepage displays a large image of a Western volunteer tourist holding a young black child. The young child is wearing a bright pink shirt. The Western volunteer appears to be Caucasian and has a weave. The volunteer is looking at the child affectionately, and both of them are smiling. Superimposed on this image are the words “Be a Volunteer And Drench [sic] these little ones with love.” There are also logos and 4-5 star ratings from five websites which advertise the success of the programs based off of the reviews of former volunteers. As one scrolls down further, the website highlights several of its locations and programs, and visitors can browse by destination or program using a toggle feature. There is a small section towards the bottom showcasing three recent blog posts: “Top 10 Affordable Volunteering Abroad Destinations to Explore in 2019,” “How to Volunteer Abroad—A Comprehensive Guidebook,” and “Top Summer Volunteer Abroad Programs for 2019.” Each blog post is accompanied by a picture of a volunteer participating in a program with Volunteering

Solutions. Finally, the home page has a section titled “Why Volunteer Abroad With VOLSOL?” This lists the organization’s arguments for their opportunities, experience, affordability, and in-country team. They claim that with more than dozen years of experience and many opportunities to choose from, their participants have “effectively contributed to the development of the projects and made a change in several lives.”

Volunteering Solutions also focuses on the affordability of their project fees, and how “a certain amount of the money also goes to the project fund.” Additionally, they emphasize that the safety of their volunteers is their “top priority” and is supported by an in-country staff and team at each destination, which gives support to volunteers during the entirety of their stay.



Volunteering Solutions: Volunteer in Cambodia, March 24, 2019

On the Volunteer in Cambodia page, there is a large picture of three volunteer tourists surrounded by young children making peace signs and holding what appear to be

gift bags. Below is a brief description of the projects in Cambodia and the benefits that can be experienced by volunteer tourists. Next to this is a short video about volunteering in Cambodia with Volunteering Solutions. In this portion, there are buttons leading website visitors to Volunteering Solutions' social media pages. Below this, there are some quick facts about Cambodia and a map of the country's location. Finally, there are four tabs to explore further: "Choose Affordable Programs in Cambodia," "Weekend Travel Options List," "Reviews," and "FAQs." The only time the Khmer Rouge regime is referenced on this page is under the Weekend Travel Options List. This section talks about potential options for weekend travel around Cambodia. One of these options is a weekend trip to Phnom Penh, and the description briefly mentions that people can learn more about "a place where millions of Cambodians were killed during the 1970s" on a visit to the Killing Fields.

Volunteering Solutions relies heavily on imagery that features volunteers interacting with host community members while participating in various volunteer projects. The volunteers pictured appear to be primarily young, attractive, white women, and the host community members pictured appear to be mostly smiling young children. Many of the volunteers shown are in close and intimate positions in regards to the community members, often holding them in an embrace or helping them with tasks such as homework or learning. Some examples of this imagery are shown below.



Picture from the Volunteering Solutions Volunteer in Cambodia page, "Teaching English Program,"
March 28, 2019



Picture from the Volunteering Solutions Volunteer in Cambodia page, "NGO Support Program,"
March 28, 2019



Picture from the Volunteering Solutions homepage, “Ghana,” March 28, 2019

This intimate and caretaking imagery is coupled with language that reinforces the benefits for the volunteer. Programs are described as “life-changing” and potential volunteers are assured that through their service, they will be transformed by this opportunity. Visitors to the Volunteer in Cambodia page are assured that, in addition to their valuable experience volunteering, Cambodia “has a lot more to offer to the visitors” as they “explore the beauty of the country, and know more about the lifestyle and culture of the locals.” In fact, the needs of the volunteers are addressed even more than the supposed benefits of the projects for host community members. One example of this is the description of medical volunteering found on the “Volunteer in Cambodia” page. This short project description fails to mention benefits for host community members, and

instead is described as “specifically designed for medical Students or practitioners who are looking for international work.”

Volunteering Solutions draws future volunteers into the program by displaying a combination of photographs depicting nurturing relationships and the assurance that visitors themselves will experience a unique and life-changing program focused on them. Through these persuasive techniques, potential volunteers are led to believe that not only will they be performing a good service during their time abroad, but that they themselves will experience gratitude from host community members and “life-changing” benefits as a result of their participation in the program.

New Hope Volunteers

New Hope Volunteers is a U.S.-based 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. It offers volunteer opportunities, language learning programs, and internships in 18 countries. Internships last from two to 12 weeks, according to the volunteer’s desires. Language learning programs are typically a week long. New Hope Volunteers’ volunteer programs last from one to 12 weeks. Their internship opportunities include social work, healthcare, education, women’s issues, language and culture, and environment and conservation. Their volunteer opportunities include orphanage work, teaching English, community development, healthcare and medical projects, and nature conservation. New Hope Volunteers claims that it offers a quality trip at one of the lowest prices in the industry. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in the United States, it does not operate to make money from the volunteers and the work that they do. Because of this, New Hope Volunteers claims that they are able to keep their prices as low as possible and contribute most of their proceeds to its international volunteer causes.

In Cambodia, volunteers can participate in an orphanage project, teach English in rural schools, engage in community development, help a local NGO, and assist with healthcare and medical projects, including HIV/AIDS care. These projects are primarily based in the capital city, Phnom Penh, but some take place in the rural regions of Battambang and Pursat. The program cost is \$350 for a two-week program, with an added cost between \$85 and \$110 for each additional week. The exception to this is the medical projects, which require a minimum of four weeks and start at \$750. For all programs, there is an additional registration fee of \$279. The program fee pays for accommodation, food, airport pickup, program orientation, in-country support, personalized project costs, pre-departure information, certificate of completion, and fundraising assistance.



New Hope Volunteers homepage, March 23, 2019

New Hope Volunteers home page features a large picture of a female Western volunteer holding a young child. The volunteer's face is tilted down towards the child. The child looks directly into the camera as he snuggles into the volunteer's shoulder. The image is overlaid with the words "Humanitarian Work To Make a Difference: Together We Volunteer To Help Poor Communities & Children, And Change The World For The Better." Below this image, there is a short description of New Hope Volunteers and a section showcasing their different kinds of projects. Off to the right, there is a column with two lists: "Top 10 Popular Trips," and "11 Reasons To Choose Us."



New Hope Volunteers: Volunteer In Cambodia, March 24, 2019

The "Volunteer In Cambodia" page starts with a list of why potential volunteers should choose a program in Cambodia. This list overlays an orange-tinted image of a couple of small Cambodian children. Below this, there are a few paragraphs describing Cambodia and its people, and what makes Cambodia a particularly meaningful

destination volunteers. This section mentions the Khmer Rouge regime, but fails to give any information about what exactly occurred or why it was important in Cambodia's history and refers only to "its ill-fated past under the Khmer Rouge regime." Next to this description, there is a picture of a white female volunteer smiling with a young boy and a baby girl. After this, there is a list of the volunteer programs offered in Cambodia. This is followed by a description of New Hope Volunteers' program fees and a list detailing prices based on how long the volunteer wants to stay. Next, there is a short description of the provided meals and accommodations. Finally, there is a list of FAQs with links to more detailed answers. In total, there are six buttons on this page inviting visitors to "Find a Program Now."

New Hope Volunteers uses surprisingly few photographic elements, leaning more heavily on the written word. The few images that it does use depict either smiling and happy host community members or primarily white volunteers interacting with host community members during a project. The host community members are pictured as either grinning and happy, or intensely focused on the pictured volunteer. The volunteers are in the foreground of the pictures and seem to be the focal point where the viewer's eye is automatically drawn. The focus on the volunteer puts the volunteer in a place of high importance by making them the center of attention not only in the eyes of the host community members, but in the picture itself. Some examples of this are below.



Picture from the New Hope Volunteers homepage, “INTERNSHIP ABROAD,” March 29, 2019



Picture from the New Hope Volunteers homepage, “VOLUNTEERING ABROAD,” March 29, 2019

The Volunteer in Cambodia page opens with the words “Are you seeking a meaningful volunteer experience in one of the most mystical countries in South East Asia?” The use of the word “mystical” plays into stereotypes surrounding many Asian countries, a stereotype that has drawn many Westerners towards the area as a way to find themselves or their spirituality. New Hope Volunteers embraces this idea, promising volunteers will be “changing the world and at the same time, changing yourself.” It promises volunteers that the trip will “bring a difference in you, the way you perceive the world, accept differences and adapt to changes.” By embracing the mysticism associated with Western depictions of Asia, New Hope Volunteers gives the potential volunteer

strong reasons to believe that their trip will be a transformative and life-changing experience for them.

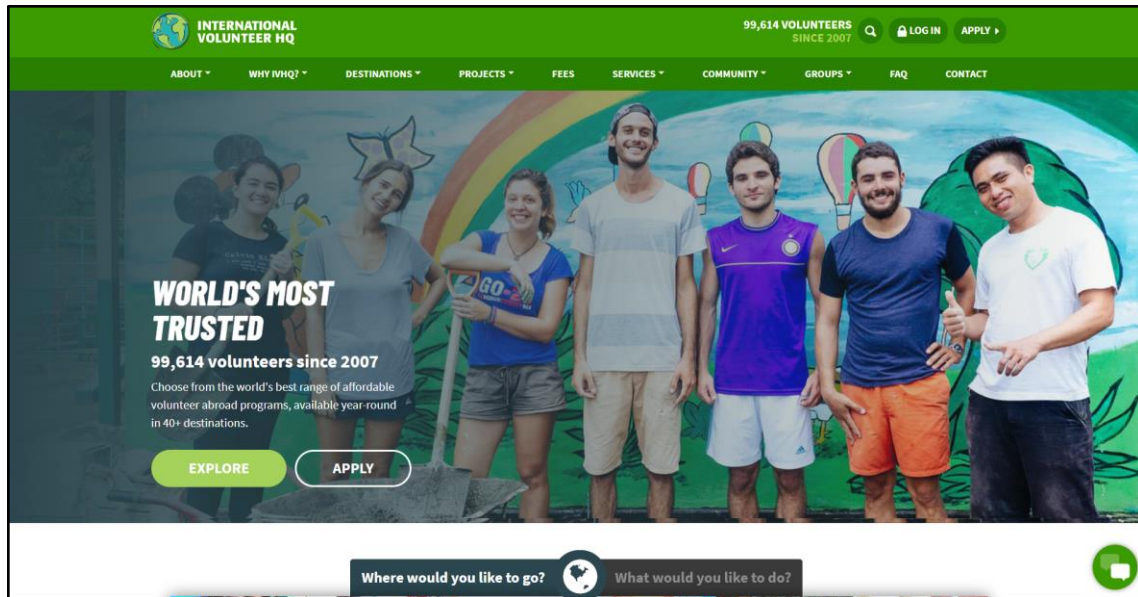
On top of this stereotypical portrayal of the East, New Hope Volunteers assures potential volunteers that Cambodians will welcome them with joy. Their description continues: “Cambodians are one of the friendliest and most welcoming people in South East Asia, making it a growing tourist hotspot. Behind their wide and perpetual smiles however, many Cambodians still live very arduous lives. Volunteer in Cambodia, and put a true smile on the faces of Cambodians.” This puts the potential volunteers at ease, assuring them that the “magnanimity” of the Cambodian people will make them feel welcome. This depiction of Cambodians as smiling and happy people obscures factors like personal individuality and the tragedy of Cambodia’s recent past. Additionally, the suggestion that volunteers will be the factor that will give Cambodians a “true smile” leads potential volunteers to believe in the altruism of volunteering abroad and the hope that they can make a positive difference in the world.

International Volunteer HQ

International Volunteer HQ began in 2007 and has “grown to become the world’s leading volunteer travel company” with over 40 destinations around the world. Each year, International Volunteer HQ sends thousands of volunteers to international destinations, and it states that it has served 99,614 volunteers in its lifetime. International Volunteer HQ was founded by New Zealand entrepreneur Dan Radcliffe after he went on a volunteer trip to Africa in 2006. When he returned from his trip, he wanted to start an organization that would make international volunteering “responsible, high quality, and affordable.” Thus, International Volunteer HQ was born. International Volunteer HQ

asserts that its approach makes the company “different” from others. According to their materials, this approach pays special attention to host community involvement, affordability, transparency, volunteer support, best practices and volunteer training, a consistent number of volunteers, community values, and a traveler experience. Additionally, International Volunteer HQ states that it adheres to its own responsible volunteering practices, which include a long-term commitment to each site, a code of conduct including child protection, animal welfare policies, and sustainable projects.

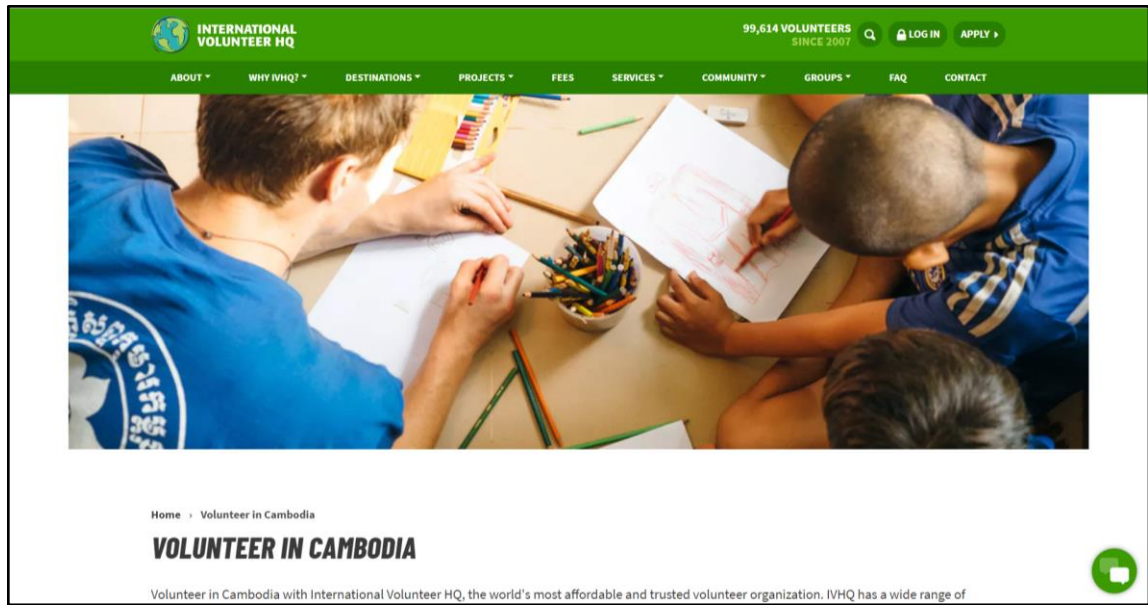
In Cambodia volunteers can choose among eco-oriented volunteering, teaching English, childcare, NGO projects, medical work, computer support, special-needs care, and animal care. Volunteers stay in Cambodia from one week up to one year and spend time living in volunteer houses and homestays with local community members. The program fee starts at \$360 for two weeks, and each additional week costs between \$95 and \$115. The exception is the medical project, which has a minimum length of three weeks and starts at \$675. There is a registration fee for all programs of \$299. The program fee covers in-country support, airport pickup, program orientation, volunteer placement, accommodations, and meals.



International Volunteer HQ homepage, March 23, 2019

The International Volunteer HQ homepage shows a large image of seven young adults. Three are female and four are male; the three women stand on the left side of the picture and the four males stand on the right. Two of the young women are holding shovels, one of which rests in what appears to be a wheelbarrow filled with cement, implying that these volunteers are participating in some sort of construction project. It is interesting to note that in the opening picture on the homepage, the only volunteers holding tools for their project are the female volunteers on the left, and the male volunteers on the right are not holding anything. On the wall behind the volunteers, there is a colorful mural depicting what appears to be Mickey Mouse standing in a green landscape next to a rainbow with hot air balloons and butterflies. On top of this image are the words “WORLD’S MOST TRUSTED,” “99,614 volunteers since 2007,” and “Choose from the world’s best range of affordable volunteer abroad programs, available year-round in 40+ destinations.” There are also two buttons website viewers can select,

one to explore the program further and one to fill out an application. Below this, potential volunteers can scan through options based on where they would like to go or what kind of project they are interested in doing. Next is a section titled “VOLUNTEER ABROAD WITH THE WORLD’S LEADING VOLUNTEER TRAVEL ORGANIZATION,” which describes International Volunteer HQ and contains another button that interested parties can click to apply. In this section, there is also a graphic advertising that if a person applies now, they will be entered in a drawing for 100% volunteer fees to celebrate International Volunteer HQ’s 100,000th volunteer. Next, there is a slideshow showcasing prestigious institutions that previous volunteers have come from and media sources in which International Volunteer HQ has been featured. After this, there is a section titled “Volunteer abroad inspiration and tips” that showcases three recent blog posts: “QUIZ: Where Should You Volunteer Abroad In 2019?” “Best Volunteer Abroad Programs,” and “Top Volunteer Programs For Solo Travelers.” Each blog post is accompanied by a picture of volunteers participating in a project with International Volunteer HQ. Next there are two pictures of volunteers interacting with children accompanied by two buttons, one leading to the application page and one leading to a page about why potential volunteer tourists should choose International Volunteer HQ. After that, there are three reviews from previous volunteers with International Volunteer HQ: Alicia, a female volunteer from Australia; Sidney, a female volunteer from the U.S.; and Craig, a male volunteer from the United Kingdom. Finally, there is a section titled “How to get started,” which outlines steps for potential volunteers wanting to get involved and includes yet another “Apply” button.



International Volunteer HQ: Volunteer In Cambodia, March 24, 2019

The International Volunteer HQ Volunteer In Cambodia page has a large picture at the top of a male Western volunteer coloring with a couple young Cambodian children. The child next to him is drawing what appears to be a figure wearing a button-up and a tie. Below this image, there is a description of the different projects offered in Cambodia and the affordability of International Volunteer HQ. Next, there is a short video about volunteering in Cambodia with International Volunteer HQ. Below this, there is a section with brief facts about volunteering in Cambodia, focusing on the affordability of the program as well. Then, there is a quote from Annie, a former volunteer from New Zealand: “I have been put out of my comfort zone and in return I am more wise, confident and warm. It was an absolute privilege to live with my host family for 2 months. I enjoyed playing with the children and teaching them. I also enjoyed coming home to a delicious meal, eating with the other volunteers, learning Khmer and meeting local people.” Last, there is a click-to-expand index with more information about the

programs, costs, schedule and activities, volunteer requirements, and other pertinent details. There is not a single mention of the Khmer Rouge or Cambodia's violent history anywhere on this page.

The images used by International Volunteer HQ focus on volunteers participating in various projects and the scenery and tourist attractions that can be experienced in the projects' host countries. The volunteers pictured are mostly white and mostly female. Many of the volunteers in the pictures are interacting with children, and several of the pictures appear to show volunteers giving homework help or teaching. These pictures appear to be showing nurturing scenes, where volunteers are helping children and therefore improving their lives. These nurturing images reinforce the idea that as a volunteer generously giving time to children in need, one can help such children better their lives through the projects that International Volunteer HQ offers. It is also interesting to note the hyperfocus on tourist destinations. In fact, on the home page, several of the destinations listed did not show any pictures of volunteers or projects, and instead showcased a nearby tourist attraction. This indicates a focus that is not necessarily on the host communities, but on the once-in-a-lifetime experiences that International Volunteer HQ will provide to volunteers. Some examples of these images are shown below.



Picture from the International Volunteer HQ homepage, “Costa Rica,” March 30, 2019



Picture from the International Volunteer HQ homepage, “Kenya,” March 30, 2019



Picture from the International Volunteer HQ homepage, “Italy - Rome,” March 30, 2019



Picture from the International Volunteer HQ homepage, “Thailand - Hua Hin,” March 30, 2019

The language used by International Volunteer HQ focuses on the trustworthiness of the organization and the importance of the volunteer to host communities.

International Volunteer HQ claims to be the “world's most affordable and trusted volunteer organization.” They claim this is due to their focus on volunteer safety and support systems while in country. This leads potential volunteers to believe they are in good hands and will be taken care of while abroad, giving them a sense of security as they enter into a new country, and perhaps a country where stereotypes have led them to believe that they will be in danger while there.

International Volunteer HQ portrays the role of the volunteer as one who is invaluable to the host community in which they work. For example, the project description for teaching English in Cambodia open with this paragraph: “The level of education in Cambodia is considerably low, leading to a high level of poverty and unemployment throughout the country, and many families cannot afford to access education for their children. By Teaching [sic] English in Cambodia, you will play an important role in helping increase opportunities for Cambodians to learn the English language, which is a requirement for employment in their futures.” This paragraph opens

by blaming Cambodia's extreme poverty on low education rates in the country. Then, it says that the high levels of poverty are the reason that parents cannot afford to send their children to school. Finally, it tells volunteers that by helping to teach English, they are breaking the cycle because when a child knows English, they will be able to get a job later in life.

Another example of this can be found in the description for the childcare project in Cambodia. This description says that childcare centers in Cambodia are "typically underfunded and in need of volunteer assistance." This sets up the volunteer to believe that their presence will make a huge difference to these childcare centers and the children within them. However, the description later says that "As you will be volunteering alongside the local placement staff, you do not need to hold any specific qualifications or experience to participate on this project." This is an interesting dichotomy, as the unskilled and unqualified volunteers may not have the knowledge to provide useful assistance, and they may be unprepared for the less desirable tasks needed at a childcare center. Despite this, the website indicates that their presence and assistance are vital for these centers.

Plan My Gap Year

Plan My Gap Year is an international volunteer tourist organization that focuses on providing international service opportunities for young people taking a gap year—time between life stages—or choosing to travel overseas. Plan My Gap Year offers opportunities in 17 international locations. International volunteers can choose from a variety of projects, including childcare, English teaching, community development, family projects, medical and healthcare, mental health and psychology, and wildlife

conservation. In order to participate in a trip, volunteers with Plan My Gap Year must be at least 18 years old and undergo a criminal background check. Plan My Gap Year states that it takes pride in the social element of its programs, where volunteers are able to meet like-minded travelers across the globe. They believe that by living and working with other volunteers, people will develop strong and lasting relationships.

In Cambodia, volunteers can choose between teaching English or volunteering in an orphanage. These programs are located in the region of Takeo and last between two and 24 weeks, depending on the volunteer's preferences. There is also an option for a "PMGY Real South East Asia Encounter," which takes volunteers to Vietnam and Bali, Indonesia, in addition to Cambodia. For consistency in the comparisons conducted in this thesis, I have excluded the PMGY Real South East Asia Encounter. During their trips, volunteers stay with other volunteers in dormitory-like rooms near the project's location. On the weekends, volunteers can travel to other areas for sightseeing. Programs start at £240 with an additional £25 to £50 for each week after that. For each program, there is also an additional registration fee of £149. The program fee pays for accommodation, meals, airport pickup, in-country orientation, and in-country support.



Plan My Gap Year homepage, March 23, 2019

Volunteer Abroad’s homepage has a video at the top displaying clips of volunteers working on their projects, smiling host community members, dances and performances in the host country, tourist activities, and wildlife. On top of this video are the words “VOLUNTEER ABROAD: OPEN TO ALL NATIONALITIES WITH PLAN MY GAP YEAR,” “17 DESTINATIONS | 1-36 WEEKS | FEES FROM £150” and a seal that declares the program is protected by ATOL (Air Travel Organiser’s Licence), a British form of travel insurance. Below this image is a section about Plan My Gap Year and the positive experience volunteers will have. This section also includes six pictures, each of which can be clicked to learn more about different projects, and a video about the organization. These pictures depict volunteers having fun in their locations, volunteers working with host community children, and wildlife. Next, there are four recent reviews of Plan My Gap Year, all of which rate it 4-5 stars. Then, there is a map highlighting all the countries that host projects for Plan My Gap Year. Next, there are three panels titled “SOLO VOLUNTEER PROJECTS,” “WHY VOLUNTEER ABROAD WITH PMGY?”

and “SCHOOL VOLUNTEER EXPEDITIONS.” These three panels offer information and brief facts about the program for potential volunteers. Finally, there are six short videos highlighting projects located in Cambodia, Tanzania, Morocco, Indonesia, Ghana, and Vietnam.



Plan My Gap Year: Cambodia, March 24, 2019

Plan My Gap Year’s page on Cambodia is dominated by a panoramic picture of Angkor Wat, a famous and beautiful ancient Buddhist/Hindu temple that draws enormous crowds of tourists to the country. No information about the volunteer programs in Cambodia is immediately visible. As one scrolls down, there are a few paragraphs describing Plan My Gap Year and what a volunteer should expect from programs in Cambodia. There is also a longer video, nearly 10 minutes, which showcases the programs. Below this, there are two lists with key features of the program and destination highlights for Cambodia. There is also a button linking the potential volunteer to a Plan

My Gap Year Facebook group, as well as a button linking to options for weekend travel while in Cambodia. After this, there are short descriptions and pricing for the program options in Cambodia. This is followed by a gallery of Instagram posts from volunteers. After the Instagram gallery, there is a click-to-expand section with more information about flights, safety, transportation, weather, and other pertinent details. On the right side of this section, there is a column with volunteer reviews for Plan My Gap Year programs in Cambodia. Finally, there is another Instagram gallery with more content pulled from Plan My Gap Year's accounts. Again, this website neglects to mention the Khmer Rouge or Cambodia's violent recent history.

The pictures used by Plan My Gap Year appear to picture mostly young, attractive, white female volunteers. These volunteers are often pictured teaching or helping young children with homework. There are also many pictures depicting the volunteers having fun with other volunteers where no host community members are present. These pictures may carry gendered connotations. Despite the heavily female population, the only picture where a male volunteer is the center of attention is the picture used on the homepage to advertise for medical volunteer projects, whereas the childcare projects are advertised by displaying a female volunteer. On the Cambodia page, there is a heavy focus on scenery and tourist destinations. As mentioned above, the primary visual element on this page is a large and beautiful picture of the most famous Angkor Wat temple. This focus on Angkor Wat as the key image overshadows pictures of volunteers or projects, indicating that the main interest of potential volunteers is likely directed towards this temple and the projects themselves may be more of an afterthought. Some examples of other photos used can be seen below.



Picture from the Plan My Gap Year homepage, “MEDICAL” March 30, 2019



Picture from the Plan My Gap Year homepage, “CHILDCARE” March 30, 2019



Picture from the Plan My Gap Year Cambodia page, “CAMBODIA ENGLISH TEACHING VOLUNTEERS” March 30, 2019

The words used by Plan My Gap Year focus on the authentic experience that each volunteer will supposedly have during their time working on their chosen project. Specifically, they emphasize how the time abroad will bring the volunteer closer to the true essence of their host country and give each one of them a “unique cultural

experience.” In Takeo, the province where the projects in Cambodia are located, volunteers engage with rural life and interact with host community members in a way that is seen as more authentic than a traditional tourist experience. In this way, volunteers are able to “immerse themselves in the roots of traditional Cambodian life.” The impoverished agricultural region is hailed as the authentic representation of Cambodian life and culture. Thus, when volunteers choose to engage in international volunteer service in this place, they are assured that “a true Cambodian experience is awaiting you!”

Love Volunteers

Love Volunteers was started in 2009 by a brother and sister, Julian and Kelly Phillips. They said they were shocked by the expensive prices that many volunteer tourist organizations charged for their trips, and they were inspired to create an affordable international volunteer program. Since then, they have expanded their service to 38 countries across the globe. Their program types include childcare and development, community development, construction and outdoor work, healthcare and medical, specialized placements, and teaching and education. To participate in a program, volunteers go through nine steps, as presented on the Love Volunteers website:

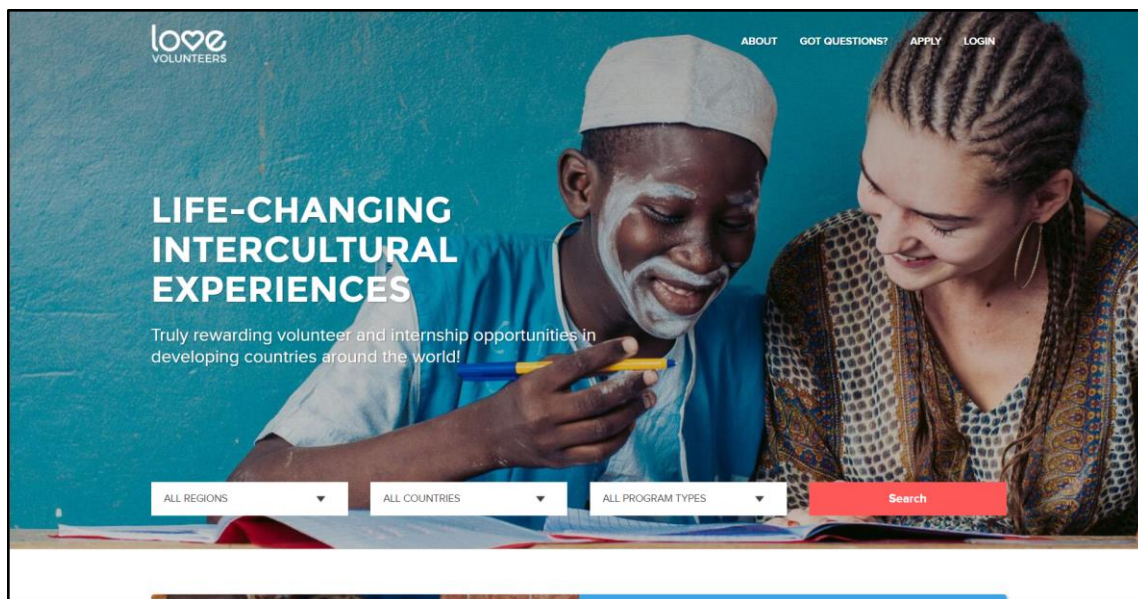
1. Choose where you’d like to go and what you’d like to do.
2. Once you’ve chosen your perfect program, click Apply.
3. We’ll review your application and respond within 48 hours.
4. Pay the registration fee to secure your place.
5. We’ll finalize your placement with the local team.

6. Once the local team confirms, you'll get full access to your Volunteer Dashboard so you can learn more about your program and start planning your trip.
7. Follow the step-by-step guide in your Volunteer Dashboard to prepare for your trip.
8. Pay your program fee and receive your placement details.
9. Start your life-changing adventure!

Love Volunteers prides themselves on affordable prices and transparent fees.

They claim that there are no surprise fees added to the program fee. They also claim that 90% of the program fees go to local charities and organizations in host communities.

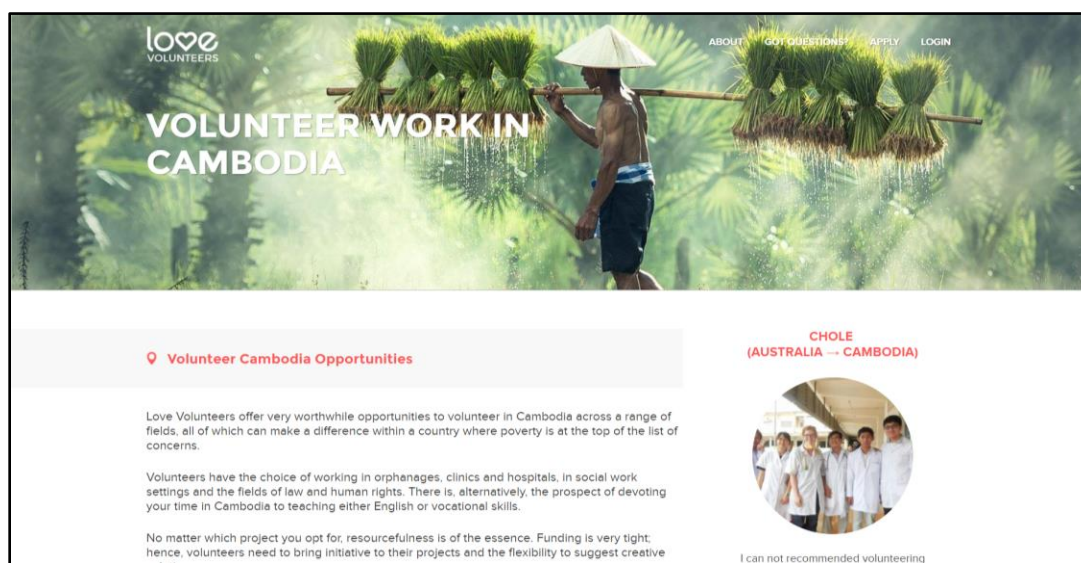
In Cambodia, volunteers can choose from childcare and development, community development, education support, law and human rights, or medical projects. These program range in length from two weeks to four weeks and are based out of Phnom Penh. Prices vary for each project. The childcare program starts at \$389 for two weeks, with an \$70 to \$120 for each additional week. The community volunteering program, teaching program, and human rights program all start at \$609 for four weeks, with an additional \$70 to \$120 for each week after that. The healthcare volunteer program starts at \$609 for two weeks, with \$100 to \$200 for each additional week. Each program also charges a registration fee of \$299. Program fees cover airport pickup, orientation, safety briefing, accommodations, food and meals, local support, project placement, onsite supervision, and local transportation.



Love Volunteers homepage, March 23, 2019

The Love Volunteers homepage features a large image of a female Western volunteer and a male teenage host community member. The teenage boy is wearing a blue shirt and a white cap, and he has white markings on his face. The Western volunteer is wearing a patterned shirt, and her hair has been styled into cornrows. They are seated at a wooden table, and both of them are looking down at an open notebook and smiling. The host community member is holding a pen, implying that the volunteer is assisting the teenage boy with his schoolwork. On top of the image are the words “LIFE-CHANGING INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES” and “Truly rewarding volunteer and internship opportunities in developing countries around the world!” Towards the bottom of the image there is a search bar where potential volunteers can browse by filtering for regions, countries, or project types. Below this, there is a video about volunteering with Love Volunteers. The image for this video is a different female Western volunteer surrounded by four young black children. Next to this, there is an unattributed quote that says, “Great

projects. Awesome service. Lowest fees. Love Volunteers is the REAL deal!” and a button that site visitors can click to read volunteer stories. Below this, there is a section titled “FEATURED DESTINATIONS” where one can scroll through the different locations that Love Volunteers goes to. Each of these destinations is accompanied by a scenic picture of a tourist destination, local resident, or wildlife. Next, volunteers are invited to choose their destination on a map featuring the names of all the countries in which Love Volunteers has projects. Each of the names redirects the site visitor to a page about volunteering in that location. After the map, the site visitor can browse through “FEATURED PROJECTS,” all of which are accompanied by a picture of host community members or volunteers participating in a project. Next, there are three reviews of Love Volunteers from Miguel, a male volunteer from the United States, an unnamed female volunteer from Canada, and Victor, a male volunteer from the United States. Finally, there is a section at the bottom titled “SEE WHO’S TALKING ABOUT US” with four seals from different organizations that have recognized Love Volunteers.



Love Volunteers: VOLUNTEER WORK IN CAMBODIA, March 24, 2019

The information about volunteering in Cambodia is accessed through the search function on the homepage for Love Volunteers. The opening image is of a rice farmer carrying rice plants over his shoulder on a long pole. He is wearing a cone-shaped hat, black shorts, and no shirt. It is interesting to note that none of the projects offered in Cambodia have anything to do with rice farming or agriculture. Next, there are a few short paragraphs about programs in Cambodia with Love Volunteers and why volunteering abroad is a good experience. To the right, there is a short quote from Chloe, a female Australian volunteer, which reads, “I can not recommended [sic] volunteering highly enough. It really is the experience of a life time [sic] and Love Volunteers made it easy and hassle free.” Below this, there is a list of the five programs in Cambodia that volunteers can choose from. Each of these programs is accompanied by a picture of a volunteer with some host community members or working on a project, some fast facts about the project, a short description, and a button to learn more. There was no mention of the Khmer Rouge regime or Cambodia’s violent recent past on this page.

Most of the pictures used by Love Volunteers depict either volunteers assisting with a project or aesthetically pleasing views of the host country, particularly if the host country contains a popular tourist destination or famous site. The volunteers pictured are predominantly female, young, and white. Most of the host community members pictured are young children. Particularly on the Volunteer Work in Cambodia page, the volunteers and the children are in close and intimate positions, embracing or snuggling. They are usually smiling or posing for the camera and appear happy and engaged. The positioning of the volunteers and host community children signifies the extent to which Love

Volunteers portrays their volunteers as nurturing and loving, giving back to their host community and making authentic connections. The emphasis on the aesthetics of the destination may cater to the young volunteer looking for a unique and beautiful setting for their international experience. In addition, the young volunteer may be focusing on the aesthetics of the location as a way to please their social media audiences. Some examples of the pictures used may be found below.



Picture from the Love Volunteers VOLUNTEER WORK IN CAMBODIA page, “Childcare & Development,” March 30, 2019



Picture from the Love Volunteers VOLUNTEER WORK IN CAMBODIA page, “EVA (SPAIN → CAMBODIA),” March 30, 2019



Picture from the Love Volunteers homepage, “Guatemala,” March 30, 2019



Picture from the Love Volunteers homepage, “The West Bank,” March 30, 2019

Love Volunteers uses language to highlight the authenticity of the experience, and how it will be a genuinely life-changing adventure for their volunteers abroad. On their homepage, they describe their projects as “Truly rewarding volunteer and internship

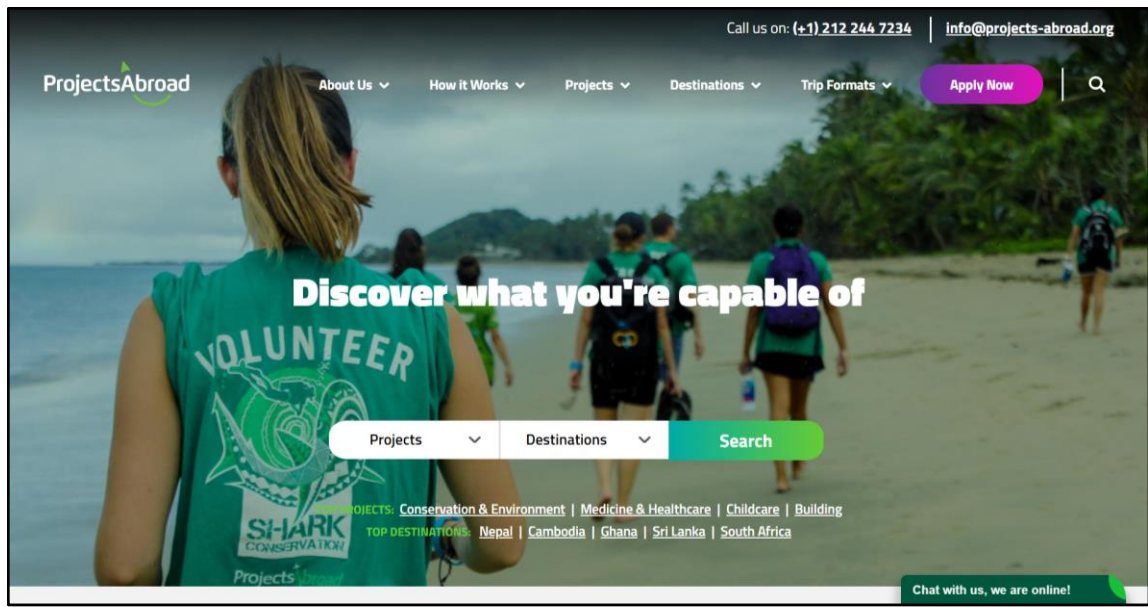
opportunities in developing countries around the world!” By presenting these projects as “truly rewarding” they are sending a message to the volunteer that their time volunteering abroad will be more genuinely beneficial for them than it would be with other organizations. Additionally, they back this message up with a quote that presumably comes from an unnamed past volunteer, saying, “Great projects. Awesome service. Lowest fees. Love Volunteers is the REAL deal!” They highlight the attributes of their program that they feel will be convincing to people looking into the program while using the words of a previous volunteer to seem more trustworthy. Finally, they refer to their projects as “life-changing” and “unforgettable” experiences to further reinforce the benefits that participating in their program will bring for volunteers, promoting it as “one of those times in your life when you feel most alive.” Interestingly, benefits to the host countries and communities are barely mentioned, and this is done almost as an afterthought. By catering their persuasive strategies towards the egos of the volunteers and their desire for an authentic experience, they are erasing consideration of their effects on local communities in favor of ensuring that the volunteer is satisfied with their experience.

Projects Abroad

Projects Abroad was created 25 years ago by an English university professor and his overseas colleagues in order to give young people the opportunity to volunteer overseas. They believed that by giving young people the ability to volunteer abroad, they could learn new skills and contribute to host communities at the same time. Over the years, 115,000 people have volunteered globally with Projects Abroad. The organization offers trips to 25 locations across the globe. They have 64 different volunteer and

internship projects in areas including, archaeology, building, childcare, conservation and environment, business, journalism, law and human rights, medicine and healthcare, social work, teaching, and veterinary care. Project Abroad's stated mission is: "We're here to provide the gold standard of support and safety, so our volunteers and interns can fulfill their potential, discover themselves and create positive change in the world." They believe that the process of volunteering abroad is transformative and empowers people to explore the larger world, encounter different cultures from their own, and gain an understanding of the places they visit and the communities they work in.

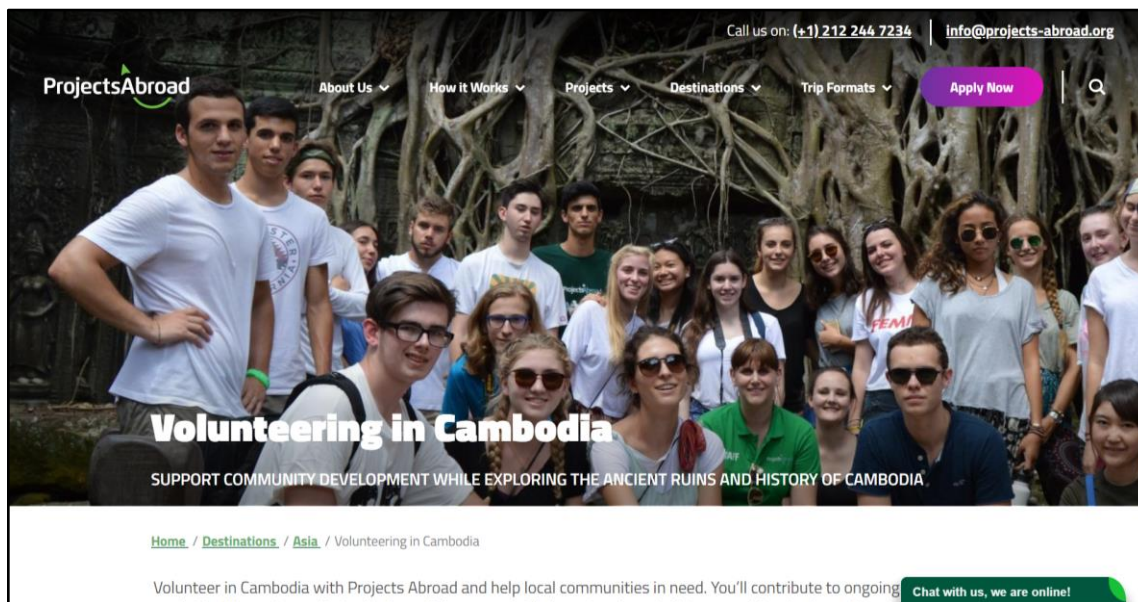
Cambodia is one of Project Abroad's top five destinations. The organization has 13 projects in Cambodia, including childcare volunteering, Khmer cultural immersion, medical internship, micro-finance, and teaching. These programs range in length from one week to four weeks, and there is a set length for each project. They are based out of Phnom Penh. These projects range in price from \$2,020 to \$3,155. Project fees pay for accommodation, food, travel and medical insurance, airport pickup and drop-off, orientation, transport to and from volunteer locations, in-country support, emergency assistance, project equipment and materials, training and workshops, social events and community activities, internet, visa support, fundraising support, and personalized fundraising website, pre-departure preparation, cultural awareness course, and membership in Projects Abroad volunteer social media groups.



Projects Abroad homepage, March 23, 2019

The Projects Abroad homepage shows a group of volunteers walking along a beach. The image is shot from behind and the viewer can only see the backs of the volunteers, not their faces. The closest volunteer is the only one in focus and the rest are blurred. The closest volunteer appears to be a female, and her blond hair is pulled up into a ponytail. Her shirt, which seems to match the blurrier shirts of the other volunteers, is a Projects Abroad shirt declaring that she is a volunteer for the shark conservation project. Superimposed on the image are the words “Discover what you’re capable of” and a search bar where one can browse through Projects Abroad opportunities by filtering for projects and destinations. There are also links that the website visitor can click to learn about top projects and top destinations. Below this image, potential volunteers can look through the three different kinds of projects that Projects Abroad offers: “Volunteer Abroad,” “Intern Abroad,” and “Under 18s.” Next, there is a section titled “Volunteer and Intern Abroad with Projects Abroad,” which gives a short summary of what Projects

Abroad is and what they do. Then, there is a section called “What makes us different?” which outlines three reasons why Projects Abroad believes they are the best international volunteer tourist company: the gold standard of staff support, a hassle-free approach, and making a real impact. Each of these reasons includes a link where potential volunteers can read more. Next, there are three reviews from volunteers, one male and two females. Their countries of origin are not listed. Below this is a section encouraging volunteers to call for support if they cannot find what they are looking for so that Projects Abroad can help them create a custom project. Scrolling down further, there is a section called “Meet Us,” which lists events hosted by projects abroad, career fairs and other events they will be at, and how to schedule one-on-one meetings. Next, the section “Trip Formats” lets potential volunteers peruse the different styles and packages for trips. Finally, Projects Abroad displays the logos of various media sources that it has been featured in.



Projects Abroad: Volunteering in Cambodia, March 24, 2019

Projects Abroad's volunteering in Cambodia page features a large picture of a group of volunteer tourists at Angkor Thom, a famous temple in the Angkor Wat temple complex. Superimposed on the picture are the words "Volunteering in Cambodia" and "SUPPORT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WHILE EXPLORING THE ANCIENT RUINS AND HISTORY OF CAMBODIA." As one scrolls down, there is a short description of the projects offered in Cambodia by Projects Abroad. Below this description, potential volunteers can browse through the 13 different projects offered in Cambodia. Next, there is a section that duplicates a portion of the home page, encouraging volunteers to call for support if they cannot find what they are looking for so that Projects Abroad can help them create a custom project. After this, page visitors can "Meet the team in Cambodia" by looking through pictures and job titles of the Projects Abroad staff in Cambodia. This is accompanied by a section about safety and support while in country. Finally, there is a description of Phnom Penh and a map showing where it is in Cambodia to get potential volunteers more acquainted with the location. This section briefly mentions that there are historical sites in Phnom Penh where one can learn about the events of the Khmer Rouge regime, but there is no explanation of the regime or what happened during it.

Interestingly, Projects Abroad made the choice to use relatively few images on their home page and instead rely more on graphic design. These images are light and fun and appeal to younger audience, even using images with the Facebook like icon and a red heart similar to the Instagram like button. This speaks to the fact that the typical volunteer tourist demographic is younger and more likely to engage in social media. This also indicates that Projects Abroad hopes volunteers will share their experiences abroad on

social media. However, this often turns the host community and its members into a spectacle to be enjoyed by the Western volunteer and their social media audience.

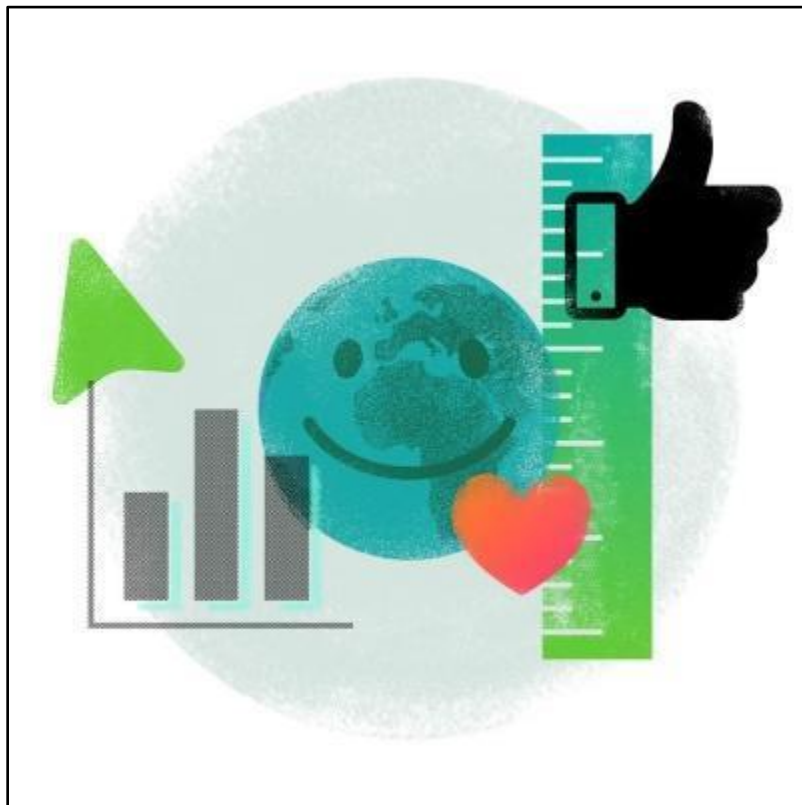
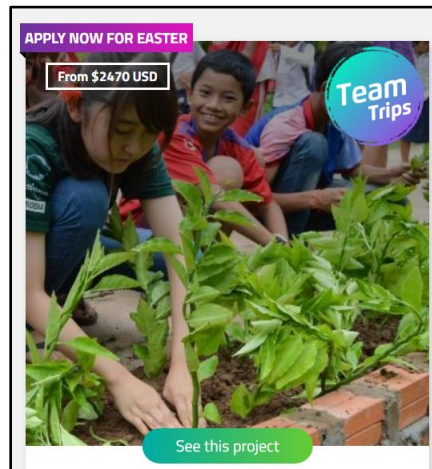


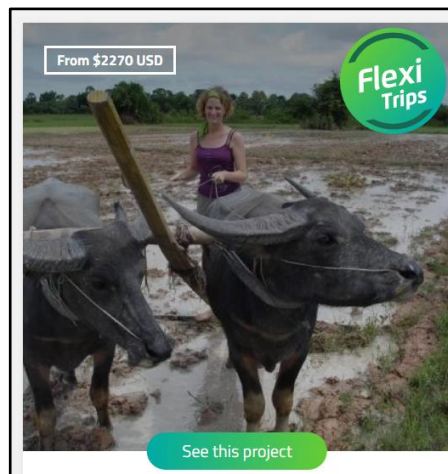
Image from the Projects Abroad homepage, "Make A Real Impact," April 1, 2019

Projects Abroad uses more imagery on its Volunteering Abroad page. They include images of volunteers engaging in projects and various activities. These volunteers are primarily young, white, and female. The primary image is of a group of volunteers standing in front of Angkor Thom. Similar to the other organizations, they also depict volunteers engaged in projects with the organization. Projects Abroad displays a wide variety of activities, for which volunteers might not have the skills needed. Volunteers are pictured farming rice, walking water buffalo, and assisting with medical work. This can be problematic because of how it reinforces the fact that most volunteer tourist

organizations do not require volunteers to come with any prior training, leading to low-quality projects. Some examples of this imagery can be found below.



Picture from the Projects Abroad Volunteering in Cambodia page, “Childcare Volunteering for Groups in Cambodia,” April 1, 2019



Picture from the Projects Abroad Volunteering in Cambodia page, “Khmer Cultural Immersion Project in Cambodia,” April 1, 2019



Picture from the Projects Abroad Volunteering in Cambodia page, “Khmer Cultural Project in Cambodia for Volunteers over 50,” April 1, 2019

The words used on the Projects Abroad website highlight their focus on the customer’s safety and support, the benefits the volunteer would receive from working with Projects Abroad, and the tourist experience. The website mentions often that they hold the “gold standard of safety and staff support.” This promotes the idea that their program provides the highest level of safety in comparison with other programs, and it subtly tells potential volunteers that they need professional protection in order to be “safe” in their host country. While there are, of course, safety concerns, Projects Abroad indicates that they distrust the host community. Similar to the other websites, Projects Abroad emphasizes the benefits that volunteers will experience through their time abroad. On the homepage, they claim that “With our help you’ll learn new skills, meet new people, make a real difference, and have the experience of a lifetime. You’ll grow as a person and become a truly global citizen.” This is a wide array of benefits ranging from personal growth, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and new skills that the volunteer can add to their repertoire and resume. One example of this is the description of the physiotherapy internship in Cambodia, which claims that volunteers can “gain practical work experience

in a rehabilitation centre.” This implies that unskilled or inexperienced workers are able to use their volunteer work as a resume builder and get experience in the field that they would likely not be qualified for in their home countries. Finally, Projects Abroad emphasizes the tourist aspects of their projects as a way to further draw in potential volunteers. Coupled with the picture of the volunteers at Angkor Thom on their Volunteering in Cambodia page, they advertise that volunteers can “SUPPORT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WHILE EXPLORING THE ANCIENT RUINS AND HISTORY OF CAMBODIA.” Further down, the organization describes the areas of Phnom Penh where their projects are located, saying that “As you walk the streets, you’ll be greeted by saffron-clad monks, chaotic traffic, and friendly people.” This provides a picturesque mental image of Phnom Penh while still blanketing the area in visions of Asian mysticism and uniform friendliness, leading potential volunteers to believe that they can expect a magical personal transformation in the midst of a crowd of friendly and grateful host community members.

DISCUSSION

In this section, I will examine the visual and textual elements used on the websites of these six volunteer tourist companies to illustrate how they connect with the scholarly literature examined above. As noted in the methods section, this thesis examines two broad questions:

What are the persuasive strategies of voluntourism organizations?

How does the practice of voluntourism contribute to postcolonialism and the white savior complex?

First, I will more fully investigate the observations I made in the previous section via their visual and textual persuasive strategies. Then, I will discuss these general findings through the lens of postcolonialism and neocolonialism.

Visual

Many of the websites used similar visual components, especially when looking at the demographics of the volunteers and the activities that they are engaged in. Most of these websites displayed volunteers who were mostly young, attractive, white, and female. This is consistent with the observations of scholars such as Mary Conran, Jenna Hanchey, and Jacob Henry about the typical volunteer tourist: young, white, Western, and well-educated. One example of this representation is the image below.



Picture from the Volunteering Solutions Volunteer in Cambodia page, “NGO Support Program,” April 2, 2019

Two of the websites studied, Volunteering Solutions and Love Volunteers, featured images at the tops of their homepages which displayed white female volunteers

wearing hairstyles which are often considered to be forms of cultural appropriation when worn by white women. In the context of a volunteer trip abroad, one can only wonder if these hairstyles were intentional fashion choices made by these women or part of a cultural exchange that they took part in with the host community members at their volunteer site. Either way, the active choice by these organizations to use these images may point to a lack of understanding or consideration of the complexities of these issues of cultural appropriation. This expectation of implicit cultural exchange (presumably benefiting both community members and volunteers) is similar to Cori Jakubiak's 2016 research findings, where she suggests that the possibility of cultural exchange is often part of the promotional material and advertisements used by volunteer tourism companies.

Volunteers were most often pictured interacting with host community members during projects or enjoying tourist activities on excursions. Many of the host community members pictured were young children. They were frequently displayed in positions of reliance on, and intimacy with, the volunteer. Examples of this are images where the volunteer was hugging or snuggling a child, or where the volunteer was teaching the child or helping them with homework. The stark contrast presented between the educated Western volunteer and the reliant young host community member being helped with their homework symbolizes that these young people need volunteers to progress in their education and, more broadly, the "civilization" of their societies. These images illustrate the fantasy of intimacy and caretaking. By showing what appear to be close relationships between the volunteer and the host community members, particularly children, Volunteering Solutions offers a convincing visual argument of the merits of their

program and the heartfelt connections that volunteers will supposedly make. This helps potential future volunteers subscribe to the fantasy that they, too, could have these relationships and make positive differences in the lives of disadvantaged children. The depictions of these dependent relationships align with the concept of white saviorism. Because volunteer tourism organizations perpetuate the idea that their Western volunteers are changing lives and saving people, these volunteers hold the belief that they are the key to the change the world needs to see. As Jenna Hanchey observes, even those volunteers who are familiar with the concept of the white savior find a way to distance themselves from it, further entangling themselves in the fantasy (6).

The visuals that were not focused on volunteers interacting with host community members often highlighted tourist experiences in the host country. Four of the six pages about volunteering in Cambodia included images of scenic activities that could be experienced on excursions. Three of the six Cambodia pages included images of Angkor Wat or other structures in the Angkor Wat temple complex. One example of this is the primary image used by Plan My Gap Year, picturing a stunning view of Angkor Wat in front of a bright blue sky.



Picture from the Plan My Gap Year Cambodia page, April 2, 2019

The imagery emphasizing the tourist opportunities offered in host countries is beautiful, but for volunteers acting under the facade of performing volunteer service they might account for more of a distraction. This imagery intentionally or unintentionally overshadows pictures of the volunteer projects, and volunteers sometimes are more focused on the location they are traveling to than the people they are serving. This may lead to some distraction away from the purpose or goal of the trip itself as volunteers wait in anticipation for their tourist excursion days.

Textual

Most of the organizations analyzed highlighted the low costs of their programs, the safety and security of their volunteers, and the benefits experienced by volunteers through authentic experiences abroad. Five of the six volunteer organizations mentioned the affordability of their programs. The only one that did not was Projects Abroad, the most expensive of the six organizations. Many of the origin stories of these organizations mentioned that their creators wanted to make international volunteer trips more

accessible. One example of this was the origin story for International Volunteer HQ, which appeared on the History of IVHQ page. The founder, Dan Radcliffe, participated in a volunteer tourism trip to Africa in 2006. He was surprised by the high prices that many companies charged and wanted to create a company that was more affordable. The focus on the cost of the programs correlates with the increasing desire for affordable programs that middle-class people can participate in, as pointed out by Conran, as well as by Cohen and Cohen. Some examples of this focus on affordability included New Hope Volunteers, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization. They claimed that as a nonprofit, more of the money they collect from volunteers goes straight to the projects they are working on. They also asserted that since they are not able to make money as a nonprofit, they are able to charge lower prices than their competitors. Amid this discourse on affordability is an ironic twist. While these lower costs do enable more people from middle-class families to participate in an international program, there is still a huge income gap between these people and the host community members they are journeying to help.

Beyond the focus on affordability, many of the organizations also put a heavy emphasis on the safety and security that they provide for their volunteers. For example, Projects Abroad's mission statement promised, "We're here to provide the gold standard of support and safety, so our volunteers and interns can fulfill their potential, discover themselves and create positive change in the world." They stress support and safety and claim that this is the reason that their participants are able to have the incredible experiences they claim to provide. Projects Abroad wasn't alone in their emphasis on safety and security for volunteers. All six organizations assured safety for their volunteers, and four of them included a promise of safety on their homepages.

Considering that the majority of volunteer tourists are young, this focus on safety may be a ploy to convince parents that a trip will not pose any danger for their children, making it more likely for them to agree to allow their children to participate in a program abroad.

Another common element of organizations' text was to highlight broader benefits to volunteers. In fact, every single organization studied mentioned some aspect of a life-altering experience, using language like "life-changing," "the experience of a lifetime," "changing the world and at the same time, changing yourself," and "unforgettable," along with the more modest claim of "satisfaction of the giver." This language promises volunteers that their time abroad will bring lasting benefits to them even after they return home. This life-altering experience is apparently achieved through the intimate and authentic relationships that volunteers are promised on their trips abroad. This illustrates the work of Mary Conran, who explored how intimacy, or at least performed intimacy, leads the volunteer to believe that they are truly helping the host community. Promoting close ties between volunteers and host community members makes a dual claim: Helping others yields "life-changing" effects for volunteer tourists. These volunteer tourism organizations draw potential volunteers into the fantasy that not only will they be helping change the lives of host community members, they will be changing their own lives as well. But, when volunteer tourism organizations direct their persuasive strategies towards the egos of the volunteers and their desire for an authentic experience, they downplay consideration of their effects on local communities in favor of ensuring that the volunteers feel empowered and satisfied with their experience.

As discussed above, such text reinforces the idea of white saviorism. As noted, New Hope Volunteers assures potential volunteers will be welcome by Cambodians,

whom the organization describes as “one of the friendliest and most welcoming people” in the region. This description makes it seem that all Cambodians are the same, and all Cambodians are happy to have volunteers and the supposed good they bring with them. This description sets up the expectation that Cambodians will play the part of smiling and grateful recipients. Host communities may cater to the volunteers’ desire for intimacy and allow them to live out their savior dreams of helping the less fortunate who cannot help themselves. By acting in any other way, they risk alienating volunteers and losing funding or other benefits.

While this section has focused on what the text on these websites says, it is just as interesting to note what has been omitted. One example is International Volunteer HQ’s omission of the reasons why teaching English is important for young Cambodians. This project description failed to mention any systemic or institutional problems with education in Cambodia, instead focusing on how the contribution of the volunteer will bring children out of poverty. Additionally, it failed to address the fact that volunteers often teach only low-level lessons, and it did not mention any higher-level lessons or continued English learning after these basics. The sole focus on the volunteer’s ability to help leaves much to be desired. Can any real change occur for the Cambodian children as a result of these English lessons? Another example is the contrast between the mention of Angkor Wat and the omission of the Khmer Rouge. While five out of the six websites referred to the Angkor Wat temple complex, only three mentioned the Khmer Rouge regime. Of these, Plan My Gap Year only mentioned it in part of a volunteer review, and Projects Abroad and New Hope Volunteers devoted only a single sentence to the topic. There was no mention of any of the details of the regime or the atrocities that occurred.

There are a few reasons that could help explain the neglect of the Khmer Rouge regime on volunteer tourism organization websites. First, this may support the emphasis on the safety which is advertised to potential volunteer tourists, as discussed above. Second, the historical influence of the Khmer Rouge on Cambodia has contributed to continuing poverty and systemic problems in Cambodia. By neglecting to discuss certain historical events and their modern-day influences, volunteer tourism organizations shift the problems from historical and systemic issues to small individual issues. Volunteer tourists are helpless to change an entire system, but they may believe they can change individual problems in small communities if the issues are not deeply rooted. This gives volunteers the idea that, as helpers and mentors, they can counteract the negative influences within the community and provide the means for real change.

Analysis Through A Postcolonial Lens

These words and visuals point to even deeper issues of postcolonialism and neocolonialism. As discussed above, postcolonialism is concerned with the lingering effects of colonialism on formerly colonized countries (Tyson). Neocolonial analysis argues that these countries are still being dominated and exploited by former colonizing countries (Bruce). The visuals and language discussed above place volunteers in the center and host community members in the periphery. The persuasive techniques used to address the volunteer tourist while neglecting the host community may contribute to postcolonial and neocolonial attitudes and effects. When volunteer tourism organizations use these kinds of words and imagery to attract potential volunteers, they are perpetuating the postcolonial character of international volunteer service in host countries and host communities.

This is reinforced by the way that host community members are depicted as dependent on volunteers. When volunteer tourism organizations show host community members as being taught, receiving gifts, sharing physical affection, and so on, they strengthen the idea that these communities need help from volunteers in order to advance. On a larger scale, these portrayals perpetuate the narrative that Westerners must provide aid, advice, and assistance in order for developing countries to become developed. These ideas contribute to a postcolonial worldview because it reinforces the idea that developing countries, often former colonies, require the presence of Westerners, often former colonizers. By pushing the idea that developing countries are reliant on the charity of developed countries, continued domination and exploitation of these countries is implicitly justified. The idea that “the West knows best” — that Western development is a universal model — fails to consider systemic and cultural differences may make such methods impractical or even impossible.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented an analysis of the visual and textual persuasive strategies employed by volunteer tourism companies to advertise and draw in potential volunteers, and has shown how these strategies contribute to postcolonialism, Western supremacy, and the white savior complex. I examined the websites of six volunteer tourism organizations to see how their images and words sought to persuade volunteers to participate in one of their programs. Each website’s home page and page about volunteering in Cambodia were reviewed and described thoroughly, providing a picture of the similarities and differences in how they use their online presences. Many of the

websites displayed similar methods of persuasion. The volunteers pictured on all websites were predominantly young, attractive, white females. Volunteers were usually pictured with young children, usually teaching or embracing them. Other pictures often portrayed attractive landscapes or tourist destinations as another way to lure potential volunteer tourists to their programs. These organizations invoked similar themes and even used similar language. There was a focus on safety and security, low program costs, and life-changing benefits to volunteers through “authentic” experiences abroad.

The persuasive techniques used by the six volunteer tourism companies draw heavily on postcolonial attitudes and the white savior ideal. By painting a picture of the developing country and its host communities as dependent on the goodwill of the volunteer tourist, these organizations actively perpetuate feelings of American exceptionalism and white saviorism. This could lead to a sort of guilt or duty felt by Westerners to “save” these developing countries by asserting Western ideas of development on them, with little regard to the actual needs or desires of the host countries themselves. Additionally, many of these organizations did not require any sort of experience or expertise for their projects. This implies that, although these volunteers are inexperienced and lack practical knowledge of the projects they are doing work on, their presence and assistance is valuable anyway simply because they are Westerners.

This research seeks to make a timely contribution to the scholarly fields surrounding volunteer tourism by analyzing the online persuasive techniques of volunteer tourism organizations. Considering the fact that volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing industry, and that most volunteer tourists are young people, this analysis of online persuasive techniques aims to provide more insight into how volunteers are recruited.

Understanding online advertising and persuasion can help shed light on why volunteer tourism is such a rapidly growing industry. Additionally, it helps to explain some of the postcolonial and white savior ideas that influence volunteers before, during, and after their participation in a trip.

Although this thesis has addressed areas of volunteer tourism that have not yet been explored, there are many other areas that deserve further research. One possibility is a similar study using the approach of critical rhetorical theory, where the researcher would be an active observer within the system. Such researchers could stay in the locations they are studying with the subjects they are studying, gaining trust over time and immersing themselves in projects. A study such as this would focus on a critique of the systems governing domination and freedom, and work to identify specific power imbalances within these systems. It would also look at how these systems of power are reinforced by rhetoric used by institutions and people involved in volunteer tourism. This methodological approach would be especially important in instances where the research concerns contrasting parties and complex cultural relations, which is precisely what is involved with volunteer tourism. A critical rhetorical theorist could also apply this research over a longer period of time and analyze the sentiments of volunteer tourists and host community members concerning the persuasive strategies used online by volunteer tourist companies. Other future research questions could include: How do persuasive strategies by volunteer tourism companies differ on social media platforms? Do benefits for Westerners override the burden on the Global South? How can we better prepare participants for international service in order to amplify the positive effects? How can we

bring an awareness of Western supremacy and the white savior complex? How can Westerners better support local communities and their needs?

In the meantime, as scholarly research works to document the rapidly growing field of volunteer tourism, there are other voices speaking up about the issues of international volunteer tourism. As a high school student, Pippa Biddle participated in a volunteer trip abroad to Tanzania, where she and her fellow volunteers worked to build a library at an orphanage. Originally, they believed that the local men who helped them every day would show up late because they were not invested in the project they were working on. But, one morning, Biddle saw something that changed her view entirely. She woke up early to go outside and run laps along the wall of the building where she and the other volunteers stayed. Biddle was on a cross country team at home, and she wanted to make sure she practiced while she was away. On one of her early-morning runs, she noticed a group of local men laboring at the site of their construction project. It was apparent that the local men had to redo the labor that the group of volunteers had done the day before, and redo it early enough that the volunteers would not notice when they arrived. In effect, the volunteers had increased the workload on the local community. This was why the men were always late to help with construction: they needed a break after their early-morning labor. Now, Biddle is just one of many individuals and organizations working to publicize the problems associated with volunteer tourism. She tries to raise awareness about issues with volunteer tourism abroad, including the ineffectiveness of many programs and the burden placed on host community members.

Biddle has sparked a global debate on the ethics of voluntourism, and her story is a cautionary tale for would-be volunteers (Biddle; Brown). As people consider the text

and images of various websites, they need to carefully weigh not only the benefits they might gain from their volunteer tourist experience abroad, but also the impact of their visits on host communities.

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