

Poverty Tourism:

Rhetorical Characterizations of the Other in Study Abroad, Tourism and Missions Marketing

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## Abstract

Contemporary colonialism rides on the back of poverty tourism, shaping Third World Others into traveler's expectations and desires. Study abroad, tourism and missions marketing create eight rhetorical personae (the Cautious Self-Preserver, Dangerous Scoundrel, Modern Attendant, Savior, Needy, Hands-On Consumer, Exotic Consumed, Heroic Adventurer) Western travelers can put on themselves and push onto the Other. These four character pairings reveal stark imbalance between the West and the Rest, the latter's reality conforming to the mischaracterizations the West creates. Through analysis of the marketing text and images presented by top study abroad, tourism and missions programs, this study discusses the personae that emerge and suggests changes in personal and organizational marketing that must be made to ensure the proliferation of human dignity and the ceasefire of contemporary colonialism through poverty tourism.

*Keywords:* study abroad marketing, tourism marketing, missions marketing, Third World marketing, the Other, rhetorical personae, poverty tourism

### Literature Review

At age 21, I have traveled to 22 different countries in multiple capacities: tourism, study abroad and voluntourism / missions. I have bathed elephants in Thailand, sipped tea while discussing politics with my Ugandan host brother and taught various classes in Central Asia. I am thankful for each experience I have to board a plane, yet the more I travel, the more I realize the West has not only impacted much of the world for the worse, but we continue to segment the Rest into categories we can understand and benefit from. Even the stories I tell and adjectives I use to describe my experiences outside of the West have contributed to a long tradition of pervasive and problematic marketing.

Call it what you will, there are many names — Global South tourism, slum tourism, poverty tourism — that all represents the same phenomenon. But even the vogue names like “Third World,” “Two-Thirds World” and “Developing World” denote the recognition and understanding of poverty’s place within that Majority World. Because of this, Third World cities have made their mark on tourist agendas, drawing in droves of people to witness “authentic” life and gain a window into “real culture” (Sanyal, 2015, p. 94).

Instead of breaking down stereotypes, tourism actually reinforces them, and, unless the Other begins to have a say, Wearing & Wearing (2001) warn that the powerful Western voice will eliminate The Other’s culture. Durr (2012) argues that blame should not fall on the “vulnerable poor” (p. 720), as they rarely have a voice within the process. Rather, we should point our fingers at tourist expectations, the stereotypes perpetuated by stories and images of previous travelers. Postmodern travelers begin by creating their ideal image of a cross-cultural experience, choosing the destination and activities that best fit, and then actively participating in a tourism experience

that emphasizes preconceived notions, instead of expanding on their cultural competency (Jelincic, 2009). Guidebooks capitalize on this approach by first taking the reader to a location and then telling them exactly what to observe, instead of letting the culture and moment speak for itself (Feighery, 2006).

In theory, location branding should showcase a destination's genuine people, industry, history and culture (Kerr, 2005). Instead, it brings tourists' imaginations to life. The West has categorized the East as romanticized, archaic, Biblical-style subcultures (Kravanja, 2012), primarily advertising women as sensual motivations for travel (Pritchard, 2001). In tropical destinations, smiling women, blooming flowers, and exotic scenery extend the "paradise" motif, proving imagination as key to both attracting visitors and constructing a "paradise" within the traveler's experience. Previously, "paradise" appeared in religion and art, but now materializes in tourism and consumerism culture (Waade, 2010). Echtner and Prasad (2003) argue that current promotion of Third World tourism proliferates three myths that inform Western consumption of the Majority World on the West's terms: the myth of the Unchanged (old names, ruins, simple people who present a nostalgic timelessness), of the Unrestrained (Westerners can take freely), and of the Uncivilized (untouched and untamed beckoning for exploration). All three myths emphasize tourism marketing's ploy to sell "a particular brand of fantasy to a First World market" (p. 661).

Heritage conforms to tourists' ideas by highlighting elements that tourists expect from the culture and location in lieu of presenting historical fact (Poria, 2001). This proves true in Malindi, Kenya, where Kenyan craftsmen saw fake images of "Kenyan" masks displayed in magazines, and began modeling their own designs after the fabricated heritage depicted. Tourists

readily bought the decorative masks because they fulfilled tourist expectations — they look *just* like the ones they saw in the magazine, therefore they *must* be authentic! Jamison (1999) describes the masks as “representative of a gloss of Africa in which individual country, ethnic group, and historical significance was nearly irrelevant” (p. 16). However, the hosts themselves, those who live in tourist-heavy locations, often prefer traditional, stereotypical portrayals because they bring in money (Boonzaaier & Grobler, 2012).

Even voluntourism — “unskilled, temporally shallow volunteering that moves primarily in a North to South flow” (Jakubiak, 2016, p. 245) — is determined by well-intentioned travelers’ desires and expectations, rather than the host community’s needs, in part because tourists pay for the experience they expect (Lupoli & Morse, 2015). For example, those engaging in “orphan tourism” often expect to enter a Third World orphanage and see swarms of parentless children in need of attention and love. To keep that image alive, some near-empty orphanages pay living parents to board their children on-location. And even if the children reside in an orphanage for reasons beyond image, very few are actually parentless. Most orphans in full-time homes have at least one living parent, sometimes two, who simply can’t afford to keep the child(ren) at home. Not only does the voluntourist’s genuine desire to help others do little to alleviate poverty or suffering, but it also enables the for-profit desires of some orphanage directors (Rotabi, Roby & McCreery Bunkers, 2017).

The intentioned good of voluntourists often produces negative impacts and perceptions rather than positive ones (Lupoli & Morse, 2015; Banki & Schonell, 2018). A study on short-term English language teachers in Tanzania found that not only did the majority view their work as giving students access to the world’s market, but that 38% also saw it as positive cultural

assimilation for students towards American ways. Beyond that overt Westernization, their work was ironic because English had already been implemented into the public school system in the 1980s (Jakubiak, 2016).

Thus scholars began to ask what actually motivates tourists to travel if their work often falls so short? The primary motivation for family voluntourism is not to actually make a difference in the world, rather to instill compassion and understanding in the voluntarist children (Molz, 2017). Voluntourism has also segued into a rite of passage for many university students within faith-based communities, and it serves as a status symbol through social media posts (Rotabi, Roby and McCreey Bunkers, 2017). Students' motivation for short-term exchange rests in first, leaving their comfort zone, and second, altering their self-perception. Because of that, the Global South remains more popular for study abroad than the Global North — participants perceive the former to consist of more challenges for deepening one's self (Prazeres, 2017). Even the trend of backpacking rose to popularity on the hinges of customizability, learning, self-discovery, and connecting with others (Canavan, 2018).

Researchers found that 40 percent of travelers from the UK choose a travel destination based solely on the location's "Instagramability" (Wearing, Mostafanezhad, Nguyen, Thanh Nguyen, McDonald, 2018). One woman, after watching a CNN documentary on Kenya's Kibera slum, decided to seek out the exact locations filmed in order to recreate the images (Ekdale & Tuwei, 2016). The Instagram posts of two backpackers highlights the consumption of one-sided cultural appearances and regurgitation onto social media. The first read: *"Indian wedding. What an absolute privilege to be a part of!! So special to be able to wear traditional Indian dress: I shall wear this sari to the grave"* (p. 191). The second said: *"Last part of the bike-loop and these*

*guys flagged us down. We couldn't speak each other's language but we danced, had water fights, ate noodles and drank beer. Laos knows how to party"* (Canavan, 2018, p. 191). While those posts represent valid interactions with host cultures, they also represent over-generalization and commodification of culture, fitting India and Laos respectively into traveler-centric boxes.

Voluntourists in a Cambodian orphanage cited their own emotional gratification as their favorite aspect of the experience. One voluntourist wrote "*...when I went to the school the first day they were making letters for me that they love me and I was like oh my god they are so happy with me"* (Guiney, 2018, p. 129). One traveling Instagrammer, @jossajohansson, posted an image (that was later deleted after satirical account @BarbieSavior mocked it) of her hugging a child in Kibera with this caption:

*"Dear child,*

*You inspire me. You inspire me to be the best person to everyone around me, even my enemies. Because I would never even want this for my worst enemy. The best thing I could ever dream of is to become successful, to have a big family in a big house in a beautiful country. When I asked you what your biggest dream was, you said "to dance" ...One of the most happiest moment in your life was probably when you met me and my friends, and you asked me when I'm coming back. I am sorry to tell you that there is a very small chance that we are ever gonna meet each other again. In two years you are going to meet a grown up man that you have never met before, you two are going to have a child, and then if you are lucky he's gonna stay with you, but he will probably leave you alone with your*

*child in your small home made of mud and tree's. You will probably sell your body to someone else to earn money for your child.*

*I could keep on talking, but I just want you to know that there is hope, there is. Dreaming could be your saviour, dreaming could keep you alive.*

*Dear child, keep safe."*

As that caption demonstrates, a strong power dynamic fuels the experiences of voluntourists, their consciousness tainted by a savior complex and us-them position (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Breen (2012) writes that "...within the prevailing imperial approach that the US has adopted, the South has been constructed like a magnified other, waiting to be rescued because it cannot remove itself from the long history of abuse, exploitation and underachievement" (p. 92). In fact, the very legitimacy of voluntourism lies in the construction of a Third World in which the hosts have a "need" only Westerners possess the ability and right to fill (Simpson, 2004).

Simpson (2004) criticizes the many participants who consume images of The Other as "poor-but-happy" without questioning the reasons for such poverty, posting pictures on social media captioned "...they don't have TVs, but it doesn't bother them..."(p. 688) without ever asking if the host minded not having a TV, or if they did desire one. Instead of diving into the culture and asking difficult "why" questions, many travelers fall back on the "this is the way things are, and I'm lucky that isn't me" motif.

Even local, full-time orphanage caretakers critiqued voluntourists, saying travelers will often soak up the love and positive emotions, become overwhelmed by the children's living



situations and then break down emotionally, which does nothing to actually help the children (Guiney, 2018). Instead, such a cycle enforces the idea that voluntourism does more for the tourist's emotional gratification and self-actualization than the population they intend to serve.

Postmodern tourism relies on the breaking and blurring of boundaries, and markets as attractive its opportunities for self-actualization, new experiences, activity and education (Jelincic, 2009). Study abroad programs primarily focus on "strengthening students' understanding of international issues, cultural awareness, language skills and developing students' skills as global citizens" (Sally, 2015). Breen (2012), however, argues that instead of accomplishing those objectives, study abroad operates as privileged temporary engagement with The Other. In fact, research showed that one study abroad program advertised host cultures and home cultures as fundamentally different. 80 percent of the analyzed pictures showed members of the host culture wearing or holding items that denote them as "ethnic and traditional." For example, in promotional material, Egyptian men attended an Islamic worship service while wearing galibiyehs and Vietnamese people navigated a human-powered boat in non la hats. The researcher emphasized that while such scenes certainly exist in Egypt and Vietnam, locals also wear jeans and talk on cell phones. They operate motor vehicles and attend sporting events, yet the marketing framed them as distinctly Other (Caton, 2007).

Crossing boundaries means consuming The Other, while the maintenance of such boundaries requires integration and classification of The Other's practices (Bardhi, Ostberg & Bengtsson, 2010). Turkey, for example, represents a location of contention, its rich yet tumultuous history enticing tourists while simultaneously pushing them away. Although many travelers value its unique and interesting culture, they don't perceive the country safe enough to

warrant travel. Respondents in a study reported fear that Turkey “may not meet their standards in terms of facilities and services for basic human needs and comfort convenience” (p.90). Tasci, Meydan and Cavusgil (2006) attributed this dichotomy to Turkey’s confusing East-West identity, its geographical duality in both Europe and Asia. However, my research found that this phenomenon is not unique to Turkey, rather proves standard in the marketing of Third World locations.

What emerges through rhetorical constructions of the Western traveler encountering the Other through travel are distinct, sometimes contradictory, rhetorical personae, or the construction and performance of ethos, roles, identity, authority and image through symbolic action (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016). Personae do not refer to personalities, rather to characteristics that rhetors assume when they don a persona. Much like a mask, personae can be taken off and put on, and individuals can “wear” multiple personae simultaneously. As individuals “put on” personae and enact performances, they simultaneously affirm their community's values and allow the performance to become accepted as reality. Goffman (1959) states that in order to achieve outward “perfect” or pure personae, individuals must conceal contradictory actions and characteristics. Thus, as rhetors control and limit the perceptions they exhibit, they also control and limit contact with others. The outward activities, or dramatizations, validate behind-the-scenes values, yet also prompt false fronts when conversing with others — what a store clerk says to a customer’s face differs from their imitation of the customer to a co-worker once the customer leaves (Goffman, 1959). So what does our marketing of the Other say about them when they’re not around?

This research heeds scholarship's warning that the powerful Western voice will eliminate the Other's culture (Wearing & Wearing, 2001) because tourists pay for the experiences they expect (Lupoli & Morse, 2015) and heritage conforms to tourists' expectations instead of presenting historical fact (Poria, 2001). It also builds upon the foundational understandings that narrative influences an audience to see phenomena in particular ways, and that as rhetors produce symbolic action, they are also produced by it (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016). Alison Bailey (1998) suggests that conscious Westerners should "put our privileged identities at risk by traveling to worlds where we often feel ill at ease or off-center" (p. 40). But first, we must recognize which personae we "put on," and which we force the Other to wear.

Scholars have already published case studies on poverty tourism and its representations in tourism, voluntourism (missions) and study abroad. We've determined time and again that a problem exists in how the West perceives, promotes and approaches "The Rest." However, in a fast and ever-changing travel environment, it proves paramount to further and update scholarship, and to expand the current basis of knowledge. Unlike other scholarship, this paper extends far beyond a case study to analyze tourism, voluntourism (missions) and study abroad side-by-side as a holistic analysis of the West's representations of the Rest. This research stands in the gap between theoretical scholarship and tangible necessity to confront contemporary colonialism. By identifying existing personae, this paper gives Western travelers masks through which to assess the personae they assume when encountering and portraying the Other, as well as characterization pairings to use in diffusing current unequal portrayals between the West and the Rest. Not only does this paper aim to present my findings and further communication

scholarship, but it also seeks to challenge readers' individual portrayals of the Other, offering suggestions for responsible travel and marketing on both organizational and individual levels.

This paper wrestles with the research questions: at the intersection of tourism, voluntourism / missions and study abroad, how is the Other portrayed? In what ways do these depictions further and / or reduce cultural divides? How do key influencers in travel encourage constructive or problematic interactions with The Other?

### **Sample Selection and Methods**

In order to uncover the messages study abroad students, missionaries/volunteers and tourists receive regarding Third or Developing World locations and people, I approached sample selection as a consumer. Using the search engine Google, I looked up best study abroad options and chose the top ranked programs and schools based on their appearance on Google, and by their ranking on various listing articles and posts, much like any prospective study abroad student would. I originally selected 13 samples and reached data saturation after 7. My selection included Global Engagement Institute (GEI), The School for Field Studies (SFS), Knowledge Exchange Institute (KEI), American University Nairobi, American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS), International Studies Abroad (ISA) and Cultural Experiences Abroad (CEA).

In the same fashion, I searched for missions and volunteer opportunities, selecting the top programs regardless of their religious affiliation and duration. I selected 33 samples but reached saturation after 8. My sample included World Vision, World Gospel Mission, Navigators World Mission, Christian Missionary Fellowship (CMF), Operation Mobilization (OM), Pura Vida Missions and Rice & Beans Ministries.

In selecting tourism samples, I employed Google again, choosing the top articles, blogs, and companies that appeared, since potential tourists would see those results first. I began with 22 samples and reached saturation after 8. I analyzed World Nomads, Lonely Planet, World of Wanderlust, Huffpost, Travel & Leisure, The World Pursuit, Anywhere and Nomadic Matt.

I only analyzed Western-produced material to ensure the study of Western perceptions, not destination self-imaging.

This study focuses on perceptions of Kenya and Costa Rica, two countries highly ranked for their study abroad, missions/volunteer and tourism opportunities. These countries offer ample opportunity for travel in all three areas.

Focusing on both text and images, I read through websites, articles, blog posts and Instagram captions, identifying language used when describing Kenya and Kenyans, Costa Rica and Costa Ricans and relationship between the traveler and host country. I focused on the social platform of Instagram, rejecting others such as Facebook and Twitter, because of Instagram's heavy visual content, current popular use by organizations (71 percent of U.S. businesses have an account) and connection to a younger demographic (71 percent of all users are under age 35) (Clarke, 2019). In fact, it is the latter group's interest in temporary voluntourism that led to the rise of short term missions (Rotabi, Roby and McCreey Bunkers, 2017), a category of organizations represented in this study.

I also analyzed images and videos posted on organizations' official websites and Instagram accounts, noting who/what was pictured, how they/it were portrayed, the geographical and cultural context of the image and any relationship dynamic exhibited by picturing Westerners

and locals together. To put everything in perspective, I also analyzed website *About Us* pages and Instagram bios.

After compiling a list of descriptions, quotes and content foci, I identified themes that emerged, compiled results into major categories and analyzed the rhetorical personae that surfaced.

## **Findings**

### **Eight Rhetorical personae**

This study doesn't aim to critique the truthfulness of promotional statements, rather to identify how Western marketing characterizes itself and the Other. From my analysis, four particular pairings consisting of eight rhetorical personae emerged. They intersect and overlap, yet remain distinct rhetorical personae that Westerners can adopt and exchange at will, both for themselves and for the Others they encounter. All eight personae dominate the rhetoric, but this paper arranges them from least prominent to most pervasive.

Note: the Cautious Self-Preserver and Dangerous Scoundrel appear significantly within the text and copy of marketing and social media, but are not represented by images.

### **Cautious Self-Preserver**

The Cautious Self-Preserver identifies as modern, clean and fearful. Much like the travelers to Turkey who feared a lack of comfortable facilities (Tasci, Meydan & Cavusgil, 2006), the Cautious Self-Preserver is not only accustomed to Western accommodations and amenities, but actively fears their absence in Third World locations. At home, they habitually assume roles such as fitness enthusiast, yogi and Internet surfer, and thus expect continuance of those roles in new locations. They take comfort in study abroad's emphatic promises of Western

activities and high quality locations boasting workout facilities, wifi, televisions, pool tables, computer labs and libraries. Wary minds are put to ease with tourism publications' promotion of modern past-times such as museums, global restaurants, bars and yoga studios, all within reach of convenient ATMs.

Cautious Self-Preservers receive expert power (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016) from supporting organizations. Programs present themselves as trusted experts who keep travelers safe, informed and supported throughout the entire trip, highlighting their attention to the health and safety of participants, navigation of risks and simple pre-departure processes. Even when things go wrong, travelers can remain safely preserved and empowered.

### **Dangerous Scoundrel**

The Cautious Self-Preserver's first character pairing gives validity to their fears. The Dangerous Scoundrel's ethos is determined by high statistics of crime and circulated stories of past successful scams. They possess coercive power, becoming empowered through the threat of harm they could inflict (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016). Presented through a variety of roles, Dangerous Scoundrels are depicted as police officers requiring bribes for passage, thieves posing as police officers, disease-ridden insects, fake medicines, undercooked food, reckless drivers who "don't seem to value life" and crafty, wild animals — particularly monkeys — who will steal travelers' belongings. The Dangerous Scoundrel persona encourages a Cautious Self-Preserver's wariness of local transport, food, insects, disease, peoples and nature.

### **Modern Attendant**

Characterized by their friendliness and "warm welcomes," Modern Attendants possess reward power (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016) dependent upon what they can give the traveler. A

Modern Attendant's role shifts in accordance to travelers' needs. They are depicted as street performers, shopkeepers, drivers, guides, chefs, bartenders, repairmen, host families, dance instructors, needy for saving (see *Needy*), spectacles (see *Exotic Consumed*) and knowledgeable experts eager to explain the behaviors of exotic animals.



Image Allison Jennings. (2018). Crime in Kenya: What to look out for. *World Nomads*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/africa/kenya/the-realities-of-kenya-crime>; Images© Clementine Logan. (2018). How to live like a local in Nairobi. *Lonely Planet*. Retrieved from <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/kenya/nairobi/travel-tips-and-articles/how-to-live-like-a-local-in-nairobi/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d276ab8b>

### **Cautious Self-Preserver — Dangerous Scoundrel and Modern Attendant**

In response to the Cautious Self-Preserver, marketing portrays the Other with radically conflicting personae, often centered around the needs and desires of the traveler. Pride in the country's growth and modernity are juxtaposed with negative statistics. In the same sentence, an article named Kenya as one of the safest destinations, but warned that travelers will most likely fall victim to pickpockets and street scammers. Another, again in the same sentence promised travelers can stay safe by asking *locals* for safety advice because Kenyans "are a friendly people," but cautioned that *locals* will often take advantage of foreigners. One tourism blog highlighting Costa Rica spent considerable space praising the government's honesty and proactive measures, but, in the next paragraph, warned of corrupt officials.

Regardless of Kenya or Costa Rica's actual conditions, marketing stumbles over itself portraying contradictory characterizations. When describing local people, travel marketing presents the Other as either a direct threat or benefit to travelers. Native peoples are dangerous



unless travelers need them for a specific purpose, then their persona shifts to friendly host “eager to share their home.”

This problematically conflicting dichotomy characterizes the Other as beyond real relationship, their personhoods reduced to either villains for vanquishing or attendants devoted to service. It feeds the validity of a Cautious Self-Preserver, promising that there is much to fear, but that the Other will shift and shape in accommodation to traveler expectations.

### **Savior**

The Savior’s ethos is driven by a desire to be depended upon and necessary. They feed off of marketing that says “it’s been scientifically proven that giving to a good cause makes you feel better,” and mimic Instagram captions like “*You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.*” You are needed. You are necessary. You are making a difference.

Study abroad students can receive that “good feeling” through program-sponsored volunteering opportunities, and study abroad marketing phrases practicum experience as adding value to the local communities. Such programs self-identify as “mak[ing] significant reciprocal impact,” “create[ing] positive change in the world,” “provid[ing] valuable data to community leaders” and “bring[ing] the world together,” all noble efforts that position the Western students as saviors to Third World individuals and communities.

Saviors possess reward power (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016) based on their ability to give good, life-changing gifts to the Other. When highlighting a local’s success, missions marketing always attributes it to the support a Western sponsor or organization has given. One missions site urges potential donors to “imagine introducing Christ to a future Olympic marathon

medalist,” and another program writes that Kenyans “desperately need” clean water, and their only hope is reliance on the generosity of “those of us who have safe water.” Their feature success story, a young Kenyan girl, skips across the screen while a video explains that, after sponsorship and access to clean water, she is rarely sick, regularly bathes and has time for school. All thanks to the needed, necessary Savior.

Images of the Savior position Westerners as magical heroes within missions marketing. They arrive with bags of food, bouquets of balloons and boxes of face paint. They give piggy-back rides, play games, build structures and repair floors, leaving hordes of smiling children in their wake.



Images from @puravidamissions. (2018, February 28). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BfvKsqFHlyj/>; Rice & Beans Ministries. Retrieved from <https://www.rabmin.org/ministries>

## Needy

The Needy’s roles are characterized by poverty. Locals are depicted as poor and oppressed, beggars, “the least, the last and the lost,” high school dropouts with unplanned pregnancies and individuals “dependent on aid to meet their needs.” When individuals aren’t touted as Savior success stories, they remain hidden within a large population riddled with need. Costa Rican children who can’t afford school fees or uniforms depend on Westerners’ “life-changing” support in order to complete their education.

The Needy are not given social authority - they have no power to act, only to be acted upon.

Images of the Needy highlight tin-slab buildings, huts, dirty water, slums, dirt roads and people in dirty or ripped clothing. Instagram feeds dotted with vulnerable populations tell stories of 3-hour long walks to get water, and of Kenyan children who must eat “bitter” hyena stomach to avoid starvation.



Images from *East Africa, hunger, famine: Facts, FAQs, and how to help*. World Vision. Retrieved from <https://www.worldvision.org/hunger-news-stories/east-africa-hunger-famine-facts>; @worldvisionke. (2017, May 23). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BUb4R6zSIY/>; Rice & Beans Ministries. Retrieved from <https://www.rabmin.org/ministries>; @worldvisionke. (2018, May 14). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BivuzmCgMCw/>; @cmfmissions. (2019, March 13). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bu-Xi2Ahp0B/>; @worldvisionke. (2017, June 23). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BVsFwP7FTNn/>; @rabmin. (2018, December 14)

### Savior — Needy

Over and again, organizations situate themselves as a solution between a wealthy yet unaware West and a Rest that faces serious illnesses and issues. Although, missions organizations display the Savior — Needy characterization more than the other two, the binary remains firmly rooted in the rhetoric of all three. Tourism websites, blogs, *About Us* pages and Instagram accounts highlight the economic influence of tourism with a strong dependency motif. Tourism not only works as a “force for good,” but also, according to one website, is the very reason land preservation exists. One tourism organization states that even though Costa Rica has a 96% literacy rate, excellent healthcare and education systems and a high standard of living, its

“economy revolves around foreign investment and tourism.” A few missions organizations cited Costa Rica’s high literacy rates and great education system, and still claimed Western funding as crucial for children’s access to education. In that instance, as with many others discovered, although no need is identified, the marketing rhetoric still paints Western travelers as economic contributors and saviors.

One study abroad program encourages students to purchase produce and small snacks from local stands because it directly helps someone support their family. This emphasis on supporting local business in order to make a difference distinctly separates the West from the Rest. For example, would a Spanish program encourage buying from local pastry shops, *because* it supported someone’s family?

Furthermore, one missions organization describes its work as bringing the Gospel to every “corner of the world, from the slums of Africa and India, to the universities of Europe.” Africa has universities and Europe has slums, but the emphasis on poor vs. rich, Rest vs. West reinforces the characterization of a Third World and a people steeped in need.

The entirety of a Savior — Needy binary stands on a power imbalance, perpetually tipping the scales in the West’s favor. Marketing depicts the success of local peoples as reliant on the support and sponsorship of Western Saviors, insinuating that nothing can be done well or right without the influence of the West — the West does it best. Essentially it posits that the Needy remain powerless until the West can provide superior knowledge, services and practices. This, my friends, is not only ethnocentrism, but also contemporary colonialism, requiring the Other to pay tributes of culture and native competence to a dominant Western force.

### **Hands-On Consumer**

The Hands-On Consumer's ethos is characterized by a desire to get as close to the Other as possible. Unsatisfied with merely gazing at the jungle from afar, a Hands-On Consumer is pictured readily jumping on opportunities to sleep, bathe and explore in that jungle; to "get up close" to famed animals — such as Kenya's Big Five and Costa Rica's sloths — through rainforest walks, safaris and animal sanctuaries. Repeatedly, images and text highlight exoticism and the access travelers have to novel "untouched" people and places.

Driven by a belief that people, nature and local experiences need not stay at arm's length, Hands-On Consumers actively attempt immersion. Their roles resemble simplified and traditional versions of the roles the Exotic Consumed exhibit. Hands-On Consumers are pictured eating native food, wearing traditional clothing and learning local dances. Marketing promises opportunities to "live like a local," and encourages travelers to Costa Rica to "immerse yourself in the 'pura vida' and let yourself become a Tico!" Hands-On Consumers are depicted building fires, participating in weddings, cooking local dishes and milking cows. As one study abroad student promises "you're entering into another world you didn't know existed." Not only can travelers enter that exotic world, they can also consume it.

Hands-On Consumers retain legitimate power and social authority (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016) — not only do travelers decide how they want to intimately interact with the Other, but they also shape the Other in doing so. Their desire for "interactive sensory experiences" molds the reality of those experiences, the actual country becoming secondary to and a shadow of the travelers' desires and expectations.

Images include “exclusive” experiences such as mountain tours in which men wearing tribal attire lead saddle-clad, tourist-laden camels. Travelers lounge in bungalows and tree house hot tubs, “sleep among the wildlife” and hand-feed exotic animals.



Images from @keiabroad. (2018, September 10). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bnja85egi33/>; @theworldpursuit. (2018, May 16). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bi2WUxsFNAL/>; @keiabroad. (2017, October 17). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BaWkwkuAIQa/>; (2019, March 1). 24 Costa Rica travel tips to know before you go. *The World Pursuit*. Retrieved from <https://theworldpursuit.com/costa-rica-travel-tips/>; @ceastudyabroad. (2019, March 12). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bu6nc5SAMzj/>; @isaabroad. (2019, February 4). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BteMCzDFCNR/>.

## Exotic Consumed

Rhetoric identifies the Exotic Consumed as traditional and untouched wonders awaiting consumption. They are pictured as elephants roaming across yellowed savannah, waterfalls cascading down mossy rock, lions stalking unsuspecting prey and sunsets bursting beyond silhouetted trees. Study abroad and tourism Instagram feeds overflow with pictures of animals, oceans, volcanos, forests, mountains, plants, coffees and locally-grown foods. Across the board, local people appear in pictures far less than animals and nature, but when they do, regardless of other personae, they often appear in traditional clothing.

The roles of the Exotic Consumed, found in wild animals, thunderous nature, ripened foods and traditional peoples, are archaic. Depicted as fisherman, goat herders and followers of indigenous religion, the Exotic Consumed inspire storybook fantasies of “the olden days,” when



water needed carrying from the well and families gathered around firelight to regale the day's happenings. The Exotic Consumed materialize through women swaddling babies across their backs, and through Kenyan men offering prayers at the base of a mountain where "glaciers carve out the throne of Ngai, the old high god of the Kikuyu." Land-drenched tradition and folklore-based religion emanates from the marketing, setting the Other behind the Enlightenment and into a category of exoticism.



Images from @thesfs. (2018, June 29). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BknzUAphNhO/>; (2015, July 23). 6 things you need to know before visiting Kenya for the first time. *World of Wanderlust*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldofwanderlust.com/6-things-you-need-to-know-before-visiting-kenya/>; @thesfs. (2019, February 14). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bt4BNDon2Ez/>; @thesfs. (2018, November 20). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqauCLqHYdh/>; Matt Phillips. (2017, May). Kenya's 10 unmissable experiences. *Lonely Planet*. Retrieved from <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/kenya/travel-tips-and-articles/kenyas-10-unmissable-experiences/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d2769710>; @worldwanderlust. (2016, February 29). Retrieved <https://www.instagram.com/p/BCYmT7qsk7f/>; @thesfs. (2019, February 25). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BuT4uzHnBmS/>.

### Hands-On Consumer — Exotic Consumed

The majority of images on study abroad and tourism websites, as well a large portion of missions website images, depict nature and animals as exotic Others awaiting in-person consumption. In fact, study abroad Instagram feeds primarily picture human-made structures for developed or Western countries, and nature shots for Third World locations.

Across the board, websites, posts and articles primarily use adjectives only when describing nature and animals, and most of these adjectives are loaded. Repeated descriptions

such as “raw and rare beauty,” “sun-drenched plains,” “treacherous rivers and unforgiving jungles,” “lush rainforests,” “stunning beaches,” “snow-capped peaks,” “pristine paradise,” “epic” and “intoxicating,” pepper the rhetoric, evoking images of the exotic. One tourism website promoting travel to Kenya writes that “so much of the country is simply wild, breathtaking scenery meant to be admired.”

Perched upon lavish imagery, marketing segments the Other into even further otherness through opposition to all things Western. Do giraffes cross your biking path at home? They do *there*. Do you grind your morning coffee beans with a mortar and pestle? You can *there*. Does your cab driver hold a spear? He will *there*. Driving a divide between the West and the Rest, marketing allows travelers to not only see the Other as truly other, but to consume such Others at will. All is for the taking — boundaries do not exist. Western hands can operate a fabricated time machine while simultaneously plucking pieces of ripe exoticism for an unbalanced cultural feast.

### **Heroic Adventurer**

The Heroic Adventurer’s ethos is driven by desires for two things: personal growth and adventure. No matter what capacity they travel in, Heroic Adventurers are portrayed in search of transformation, desiring to return “forever changed,” having come face-to-face with opportunities to “ignite personal growth.” One tourism bio explicitly promises that travelers will “explore your boundaries: harness your curiosity, find your own journey and gain a richer understanding of yourself, others, and the world.”

Marketing paints every action of the Heroic Adventurer as inspired by a call to adventure, a “desire to be part of something bigger” and affinity to “go where no one else goes.” They identify as “people who don’t fit the mold [and] don’t sit still.” Narratives of epic hikes and life-

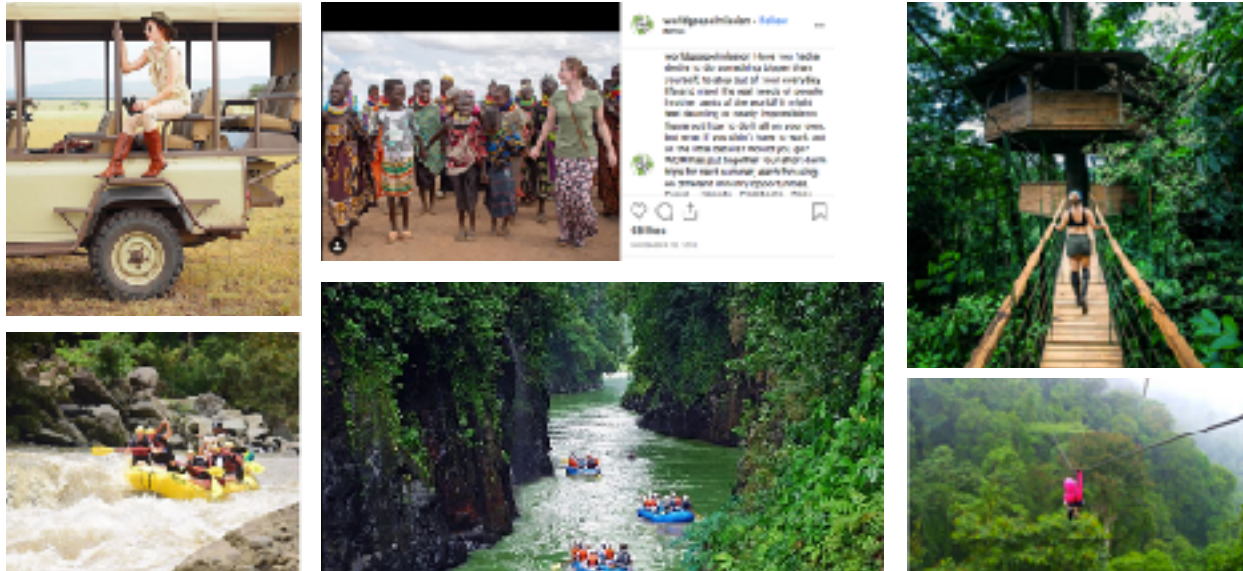


changing safaris propagate themselves throughout tourism text. Even missions activities are framed as “the adventure of serving Jesus.”

Heroic Adventurers have legitimate power and social authority (Palczewski, Ice, Fritch, 2016) because travelers mold reality to their needs and desires to such a degree that students are outright encouraged to “transform the world into your classroom.” By “discovering the pleasures the world has to offer,” travelers are encouraged to manifest the mantra “live the life I love” regardless of the side effects inflicted upon the Other.

Embodying multiple roles, Heroic Adventures are depicted as groups of the elitist called whose adventure changes the host country’s life *and* gives the traveler “opportunity to see and do things most people don’t.” They are pictured as fun servants who combine ministry with surfing and soccer. However, they are also depicted as somber saviors who understand that heroism requires sacrifice, following one mission organization’s call to “sacrificially advance Jesus.” And, above all, they are seen as adventurers eager to experience zip lining, canopy tours, hikes, hot springs, horseback riding, surfing, mountain biking, hot air ballooning, snorkeling and safaris — any form of “epic” adventure.

Images of Heroic Adventurers are usually posed and of high-quality, displaying once-in-a-lifetime experiences such as camel tours, hammocks and books on a beach, safari vehicles, compasses and giraffes running across a biking path.



Images from @worldwanderlust. (2016, March 1). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BCZ01SPMkzS/>; @worldgospelmission. (2018, November 15). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqNLIzIyQf/>; @anywhere. (2018, December 27). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Br5f-F6BEtb/>; @theworldpursuit. (2018, July 6). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk58uSIIQUY/>; @anywhere. (2018, December 20). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BsBAiu9FNvu/>; Pura Vida Missions. Retrieved from <https://puravidamissions.com/mission-trips/>.

### Characters and Scenes

As in every hero’s journey, a Heroic Adventurer requires characters and scenes to enhance their story. However, since mere characters and scenes are not central to the tale or the action, their importance is erased. They are erased, their voices martyred on the story arcs travelers design. Characters and scenes embody Third Personae negated and alienated by their silent and powerless appearance within the text (Wander, 1984). They are reduced to mere shadows of existence that float in and out of reality in accordance to the travelers’ needs. One Instagram blogger personifies animals as approaching her vehicle to say hello — she is not flitting into the lion’s habitat and life, rather the lion is a piece of *her* story, bending to the narrative she decides to spin. Essentially, Others do not exist unless they serve of direct use to a Heroic Adventurer’s story arc; they are singularly bound to the rhetorical narrative travelers bestow upon them.

### **Why Does This Matter?**

Marketers want potential travelers to see themselves in the rhetoric, thus all eight personae overlap and coexist. Travelers can “put on” different rhetorical personae in order to achieve certain goals, each drawing power from various sources. As organizations promote Third World locations with these personae embedded in their marketing, they mold travelers’ expectations and perceptions of the locations. Media creates an Other with imagined lives out of “image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality,” (p. 224), which blurs the lines between reality and aesthetic fiction (Appadurai, 1999).

Western travelers take on various personae in relation to the Other, and those Others are then forced into becoming what travelers understand. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) posit that you can only define whiteness by what it is not, that “one can only be white by not being anything else,” (p. 299). Similarly, travelers know who they are based on what they are not: Other; and those Others are then defined by what travelers understand and know: archaic dangers and attendants in need of saving.

As individual travelers, our own depictions and descriptions of Third World countries shapes future travelers’ expectations as well. For some people, the representations of the Other in media (both organizational and personal) encompass all they will ever know of that place and its people. As these organizational and personal advertisements spread, they do more than sell physical experiences, they also teach social and personal values (Williams, 1999).

Since heritage conforms to traveler’s expectations (Poria, 2001), what you say about a country — how marketing characterizes the Other — shapes not only the expectations of future travelers, but also the destination itself. It’s imperative to heed the warning that the powerful

Western voice may eliminate the Other (Wearing & Wearing, 2001), and make the conscious decision to intentionally depict the Other in honest and dignified ways. The West is in danger of molding the Other into our desires and away from actual reality, a phenomenon precariously close to contemporary colonialism. We can get lost in the shiny images and lose sight of how problematic some of these findings are — we can lose sight of the fact that we as Westerners have an obligation to not harm the Other through mischaracterizations we create.

### **What Do We Do?**

Relevant to both organizations and individuals, these suggestions build from my public relations and marketing background, and from a few positive examples discovered in my research. In each of the three traveling categories, roughly one organization or article stood out as moderating the severity of its persona pairing. Each example illustrated the potential for positive depictions of the Other by minimizing the gap between paired personae. These pictures show local doctors and workers as the providers of healthcare and clean water, lessening the divide of Western Savior and Needy Other.



Images from (2019, January 28). East Africa hunger, famine: Facts, FAQs, and how to help. *World Vision*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldvision.org/hunger-news-stories/east-africa-hunger-famine-facts>; Heather Klinger. (2019, February 15). Matthew 25: Pray for the thirsty. *World Vision*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldvision.org/clean-water-news-stories/pray-thirsty-clean-water>.

**Respect the Other.** When traveling, honor the culture, don't just experience and consume the country for a story. Still go on safari and still hike through the jungles, eat local foods and try to learn the dances, but approach everything with respect. The people and places you encounter are more than pieces of your travel stories or guides to help you along your way. They don't live in any state dependent upon your existence: the animals do not wake up in the morning so that you can see them, and the people do not wait everyday for you to save them. Respect the people, and don't take pictures of anyone unless you ask.

**Partnership and learning are the great equalizers.** Highlighting locals at work and positioning travelers as learners allows the Other to possess their own reality. The rhetorical personae Westerners embody consistently poses more social authority than the personae given to the Others. Thus, by relinquishing some social authority, emphasizing partnership and demonstrating dedication to learning, travelers can begin to equalize the potential divide from the rhetorical persona pairings.

The basis for good missions is individual partnership that equally supports both communities instead of a Western church deciding to just go and "save." Fostering a genuine cross-cultural community not only exemplifies the mission of a church, but also empowers each physical church campus to ask for specific assistance when a need arises.

**Be real.** Public relations is built on a foundation of open and honest two-way communication. In order to maintain transparency and trustworthiness, organizations should thoughtfully communicate both positive and negative attributes in *truthful* ways. When traveling to a Third World location, taking and posting pictures of elephants is not bad. Telling story after story about your honest experience with children in an orphanage is not bad. But, since your description may

be the closest your audience ever gets to that country, make sure you attempt to honestly capture your *entire* experience. Keep an open mind, attempting to see and portray a holistic view of the country. Continuously ask yourself “Why do I want this experience or this picture?” Is it for emotional gratification? Replication? Position as a Heroic Adventurer? There’s no right or wrong answer, it’s simply a way to check yourself and the personae you wear.

Travel can perpetuate stereotypes, so be sure you portray the location and all it entails as accurately as possible. Would you say the same thing of a Developed country? Would you encourage travelers to buy from the local shops in Spain *because* it supports the owner’s family? Does your statement, like “from the slums of Africa to the universities of Europe”, segregate the West from the Rest? I have never heard someone return from a trip to London and *only* talk about Big Ben, so why do travelers visit Kenya and *only* talk about safari?

Try to analyze your own internal motivations and consider how you would portray the Other if you weren’t trying to raise money, support an ego or show off a “perfect” life? What if, in missions, we really didn’t let our left hand know what our right hand does? What if we didn’t feel the need to receive affirmation for serving God? What if we were conscious of the ways even our briefest descriptions of the Other actually shaped the Other’s reality?

**Overall, be conscious and intentional.** What might your portrayal of the Other say that you don’t intend it to? What persona are you wearing? What personae are you attributing to the Other through your description? Are you fostering dignity?

On an organizational level, this requires rewriting much of the promotional content and finding new images to portray the Other. Since such an overhaul would disrupt the descriptions travelers expect to find, it may temporarily cause ripples in the lucrativeness of organizational

campaigns. However, marketing trends are already shifting to rely more heavily on word-of-mouth advertising, *and* traveling will not become unpopular simply because tourism, missions and study abroad marketing decided to empower the Other instead of rhetorically conquer them.

### **Limitations**

Although this study includes leading missions organizations, a few of the most popular require an application and active interest in becoming a full-time missionary before releasing information about locations and programs. This protects the privacy of their missionaries and their operations, but it also excluded a few dominant missions organizations from this study.

### **Future Study**

Future research should analyze the comments on Instagram posts and website articles to determine if the travelers' responses also generate the eight personae outlined in this paper. Such a study would provide a deeper understanding as to the proliferation of the messaging, asking how participant perceptions of the Other align with the promoting organizations' as a result of the marketing's presentation of the Third World.

Along that line of thought, it would also prove fruitful to conduct a survey or focus group to discover what thoughts, emotions, words and descriptions Western participants use to describe the Other when presented with marketing depictions.

Research should address the fact that Instagram posts of Third World locations predominantly feature nature, whereas those of the West and Developed World primarily focus on human-made structures. In order to determine if pictures of Third World locations receive different levels of engagement than their Developed World counterparts, one could determine the

impact of location on engagement, as well as uncover the public's bias for certain portrayals of the Other.

Scholars should also analyze the self-marketing of Third World locations to potential travelers in order to compare the Others' self-perception in relation to stereotypes and these eight personae.

### **Conclusion**

Today, the West faces an obligation to either change how we market Third World locations, or accept that our promotions proliferate Western expectations through contemporary colonialism. Accept that extreme examples of these personae pairings characterize the Other as mere characters and scenes in our dominant stories, pushing Others beyond the capacity for real relationship. Accept that marketing posits that Others should remain powerless until the Western best can appear and save the day. Accept that we further ostracize the Other through our portrayals, manipulating culture for Western fantasized gain. For responsible and socially-minded humans, accepting such things is not an option.

Within travel marketing, eight rhetorical personas emerge, the strength of each pairing reliant on how heavily the West consumes the Rest. Through respect, honesty, transparency and a dedication to fostering human dignity, the West can begin to step back and allow the Rest to have a voice. Others are currently erased, their voices martyred on the story arcs travelers design. But by continuously checking our own portrayals, and challenging organizations in the depictions they create, we can begin to balance out the scales and allow the Other to empower themselves. They don't need saving, they need us to step back.



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