Feel-good tourism: An ethical option for socially-conscious Westerners?

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Abstract

Public awareness on how tourism contributes to the economic, cultural, and environmental demise of the global South has increased in recent years. Consequently, many socially-conscious people from the "first world" or global North have come to regard conventional tourism as a gratuitous and crass form of exploitation and are opting for more socially responsible alternatives. This paper brings together critical studies on ethical tourism with critical race, postcolonial and feminist theories to examine one example of "alternative," socially responsible tourism. Drawing upon narrative data collected through in-depth interviews conducted with five women who participated on a "Reality Tour", this article considers some of the ways in which racialized relations of power might be disrupted or reproduced through this type of socially responsible tourism. Specifically, it focuses on some of the experiences and perspectives of people who have participated in it to examine its affective and meaning-making dimensions. With a focus on the North/South racialized relations of power that these tours give rise to, this article also raises some broad ethical questions related to socially responsible tourism with the objective of engaging a larger debate about the paradoxes of using tourism as a means toward social justice.

Public awareness on how tourism contributes to the economic, cultural, and environmental demise of the global South has increased in recent years. Consequently, many socially-conscious people from the "first world" or global North have come to regard conventional tourism a gratuitous and crass form of exploitation. Indeed, owing largely to critical writing on the effects of tourism (Nash, 1977; Kincaid, 1989) it has now become commonplace in some "left-leaning" circles to regard tourism as a form of neo-colonialism (Brazier, 2008). In response, various tourism options under the descriptors of "ethical," "eco", "volunteer," and "charity" (Fennel & Malloy, 2007) have proliferated, offering compelling alternatives to tourists who have concerns about social justice. What generally unites these alternative types of travel (herein referred to as "socially responsible tourism"[2]) is that they are premised upon "the idea that tourism-related actors can develop a sense of ethical and moral responsibility that has resonance beyond self-interest, and that there is at least a possibility that this could change behaviours and contribute to more sustainable development" (Bramwell, et al., 2008, 253).

Socially responsible tourism is rapidly on the rise and is offered both by commercial tour operators[3] as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work on global human rights issues. It is estimated that around a million "responsible holidays" were taken in 2006 and industry forecasts predict that figure will top 2.5 million by 2010 (Brazier, 2008). In addition to quickly gaining momentum, socially responsible tourism is receiving a lot of praise and is seen favourably as an ethical and pragmatic way of teaching tourists about injustice and resistance (Comerford, 2006; Blore, 2007; Montgomery, 2001). Many contend that while conventional tourism perpetuates global inequalities, responsible forms of tourism are not only less invasive, but also the means through which global inequality can be overturned (McLaren, 2003). As an article on ethical travel in the progressive *Utne Reader* magazine (Bergeson, 2005, 88) states, "proponents of ethical travel believe that continuing to travel the globe is not only necessary, it's vitally important". Similarly, the staff of an American-based not-for-profit international human rights NGO called "Global Exchange" explain that what motivates the tours they offer is the belief that travel is not only educational and fun, but also that it can "positively influence international affairs" (2010a). While they concede that the tours they offer "are not designed to provide immediate solutions or remedy the world's most arresting problems", they aim to "to educate people about how we -- both individually and collectively -- contribute to global

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[2] As it is used here, the term refers specifically to short-term trips (averaging 10-14 days) and which are primarily intended as educational holidays, as opposed to trips in which tourists actively participate in the communities visited as is the case with some types of "solidarity" or "volunteer" tourism.

[3] For example see http://www.responsibletravel.com/?gclid=CICOj8uWp6ICFV195QodWBvVQg Retrieved on June 21, 2010

problems, while realizing our ability to generate solutions" in ways which can "facilitate lasting social change"(Global Exchange, 2010b).

In what follows, I will examine the specific type of socially responsible tourism that has been offered by Global Exchange since 1989, travel packages they refer to as "Reality Tours" (Global Exchange, 2010c). While Global Exchange's Reality Tours share several common features with other forms of responsible tourism insofar as they claim to promote sustainable development, local economies, and minimize impact on the environment, what sets them apart is their explicit aim of offering tourists a glimpse at certain "realities". In other words, as their name suggests, these tours aim to show, rather than to conceal, the harsh realities of poverty and oppression that many of the local and indigenous communities in the global South face, as well as displaying their agency and resourcefulness. Framed as educational vacations, a Reality Tour consists of visiting various local communities to see and learn about the social conditions people live in. As the director of Global Exchange's Reality Tours explains:

> Our program is also built on the principals (sic) of experiential education (thus all of our tours incorporate learning as part of the travel journey). Our programs are also transformative and we believe that experience can be the basis for change (individual and thus social) (Everette, 2005).

Typically, Global Exchange's Reality Tours last approximately ten days. The tour is all-inclusive in the sense that, apart from the international flight to the destination, the tour price includes local transportation in the country, accommodations, two meals a day, entrance fees, honoraria, translation, and speaker fees[4], as well as donations to the organizations/people that are visited. The tours are designed to make use of locally-owned businesses. They also focus on communities that are involved in various social movements to emphasize their resilience. Global Exchange's website states that they provide opportunities for people to travel as "citizen ambassadors" and to build "people-to-people ties" (Global Exchange, 2010a). It explains that they take US citizens to places like Cuba, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Palestine, and Iran, so that they can come home "and explain to their friends and neighbours that the Cubans [for example] are not our enemies" (Global Exchange, 2010b). They also go to areas known for their human rights violations so that tour participants can "act as eyes and ears for the outside world" by disseminating what they learn when they return to their home countries (Global Exchange, 2005).

Drawing upon narrative data collected through in-depth interviews conducted with five women who participated on a 2007 Global Exchange "Reality Tour" to a

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[4] These tours involve meetings with local activists and community leaders who are offered honoraria by Global Exchange.

country in South America[5], this article focuses on some of their experiences and perspectives to consider the affective and meaning-making dimensions of such tours. Of particular interest are the ways in which racialized relations of power might be disrupted or reproduced through this type of socially responsible tourism. Furthermore, with a focus on the North/South racialized relations of power that these types of tours give rise to, this article also raises broad ethical questions with the objective of engaging a larger debate about the paradoxes of using tourism as a means toward social justice.

At the heart of this study are questions of power, capital, space, and how subjects are constituted through encounters with the Other and through racialized discourses and practices (Said, 1978; Frankenberg, 1993). The analysis presented here is thus premised upon theories that have shown that travel and tourism is invariably and inevitably asymmetrically structured within the globalized world (Trask, 1999; Kincaid, 1989; Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007). As anthropologist James Clifford (1997) points out, while it is easy to presume that the whole world is in motion, the mobility of the majority of the world's population is highly disciplined, restricted, and or forced. Similarly, for Zygmunt Bauman (1998), the practice of tourism reproduces boundaries, suggesting that geographic mobility may exaggerate status distinctions of class, gender, nationality, or race, rather than override them. Some key tenets of this theoretical framework include spatial theories that show processes of racialization (especially whiteness) in relation to particular places and within historical global relations (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; McKittrick & Woods, 2007). In this sense, the idea of "Westerner" or "Northerner" is theorized as a racialized relational positioning put in place through political economic agendas that shape global power relations, and not necessarily to a geographical positioning (Mohanty, 2003). Furthermore, borrowing from Alexander and Mohanty's (1997) notion of "colonial legacies," along with other postcolonial scholarship on knowledge production and self/Other relations (Said, 1978; Ahmed, 2000; Huggan, 2001), the study explores some tourists' experiences and understandings of themselves in relation to the people and places they visit. Lastly, integral to this framework are feminist perspectives on the production of *intersecting* racialized and gendered identities and on the challenges of transnational alliances within contemporary global economic conditions (Kirby, 1996; Kaplan, 1996). This literature is also of interest because it has shown that women's relationship to travel is very complex. Cynthia Enloe's (1990) work on the gendered dynamics of travel is especially useful because as she puts it, "space and race, when combined, have different implications for women and men, even of the same social class" (23). Enloe's work reveals that historically for women, tourism was about power as much as it was about pleasure because it served to empower them, while at the same time it enabled them to actively participate in the project of imperialism (see Grewal & Kaplan, 2006). Also of particular resonance

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[5] To respect confidentiality of the participants, the specific country in question will not be named.

are recent studies that have examined the continuities between women's contemporary well-intentioned travel vis-à-vis the legacy of woman explorers and missionaries (Heron, 2004; Cook, 2005).

In what follows, I will consider how these gendered and racialized imperial dynamics may be perpetuated today through responsible tourism. To this end, I will present my discussion in four parts. Part one examines some of the motivations and desires of those who participate in socially responsible tourism. It proposes that motivations of people who are attracted to these tours do not radically differ from those who are seeking regular pleasure travel (i.e. tourism experiences that do not claim to be socially responsible). In particular it draws from scholarship on tourism to show that, in recent years tourists in general are drawn towards more educational travel, as well as the desire to distance themselves from the "typical" tourist persona.. Part two focuses specifically on the question of privilege. It shows that some compelling contradictory tensions emerge in the ways in which the women narrated their understandings of their privilege (usually in direct response to a question about it). While on the one hand, they were clearly aware and cognizant of their privilege, on the other hand, they did not question the most fundamental privilege of access and mobility. In other words, they never questioned what they perceived as their right to be tourists.

Building on the idea of privilege, part three examines the prevalent discourse about the non-material wealth of the locals and the idea that "we" Westerners stand to learn from "them" – a familiar Orientalist discourse (Said, 1978). Showing that this theme emerges consistently in the tourists' narratives, I argue that such discourses of reversal and equation provided the tourists with a means to reconcile the inequity they are participating, and being complicit, in. In part four, I explore the fact that all those who took part in this study had a pleasurable experience on the tour. I argue that their pleasurable experience was largely achieved through the fact that they were made to feel comfortable in their surroundings and I consider the implications of the tourists' comfort on the tour. The article then ends with a discussion of the notion of innocence and moral comfort that can be gained through socially responsible travel.

Methodology

As previously mentioned, the empirical bases for this analysis are interviews I conducted with five women who had participated on a Global Exchange Reality Tour to a country in South America in 2007. I went on this tour as a participant-observer My role was fully disclosed from the very beginning so that all the tour participants and the organizers were made aware of my goals and explicitly told that "I am especially interested in how issues of power and privilege (in terms of race, gender, class) are negotiated on these tours." In other words, there was no deception and no ambiguity about what the aims of the study were and, therefore ,

those who volunteered to be interviewed did so because they wanted to share their views and experiences on these particular issues.

The tour was comprised of fifteen people: five men and ten women whose ages ranged from 25 to 68. All but me were living in the United States (I live in Canada). Eight of the fifteen were travelling with their heterosexual partners. The group was mainly comprised of upper middle class professionals, although many were retired. Amongst us were two university professors, a lawyer, two doctors, a social worker, and a couple of students. Most referred to themselves as "activists" and were variously involved in community or political organizing in the United States. In particular, most of them were very vocally critical of the Bush administration and US foreign policies. Importantly too, at least five had previously been on Reality Tours with Global Exchange.

On the last day of the trip, I asked for the names and contact information of those who are willing to volunteer for a confidential interview that would take place by telephone about a month after they had returned to their homes. Based on the responses I received, I conducted interviews with five of the women because I was especially interested in considering how their gender might have impacted their experiences. Of the pool of volunteers, these particular five women were selected because they were the ones I had developed a rapport with on the trip (i.e. I had had some prior informal conversations with them about some of the issues of privilege that I was interested in pursuing) and I believed that would allow me to gain deeper insights into what they shared with me in the interviews. Some of the questions I asked them in the interviews included: What were your motivations in joining this Reality Tour? What are the limitations of alternative tourism? How did you negotiate your Western privilege on this tour? (i.e. how did citizenship, race, gender, class, or any combination thereof, come up for you?) What did you learn about social justice on this tour? The interviews were semi-structured in order to create an opportunity for participants to speak about matters of importance to them that extended beyond the interview protocol. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed.

It goes without saying that given the small sample size, this article does not attempt to make generalized claims or to give a comprehensive account of the experience of Reality Tours on the whole. Rather, the analysis I present of the five interviews I conducted is meant to offer some in-depth insights into the ways some people experience the tours and to draw out a few of the questions of the complex positioning of reality tourists that this experience can produce. In particular, some of the clear commonalities between the five interviews examined here and the fact that they represent a third of the people on the tour (five of fifteen) strongly suggests that some of these tentative findings may be indicative of larger trends that are worthy of further exploration and research.

Part 1 – Reconciling tourism: "I find that just being a tourist is boring. I never liked being a tourist."

When asked about their motivations for participating in socially responsible travel, the women I interviewed variously indicated boredom with conventional tourism and a desire to set themselves apart from typical tourists. One said: "I find that just being a tourist is boring. And I never liked being a tourist" [Participant 1]. Similarly, a second woman stated: "We found it an interesting way to travel. I think I've been on one cruise, but that really isn't our thing – on beaches, lying on the beaches isn't our thing" [Participant 2]. And in another instance, the racialized dynamics were explicitly cited as reasons why the Reality Tour had more appeal:

> I often feel like when I'm doing more vacation-oriented luxury travel, it's [more] about them [the locals] serving folks who are travelling, serving tourists, than it is necessarily about actually learning about those cultures. ... I think I've always had a lot of discomfort around that. And I think especially being a white person, I think there's a lot of weird race dynamics that play into that situation. ... I feel increasingly uncomfortable with that dynamic and I choose not to travel that way when I can. [Participant 5]

Another said, "I have friends who go down to Mexico and lay on the beach and they're served and their rooms are cleaned by the local people who live down the hill. And I just never … it has never occurred to me to live like that" [Participant 3].

What these responses reveal is that those who are drawn to Reality Tours share very similar motivations with tourists more generally. In her study on pleasure travel, Julia Harrison (2003) argues that most tourists now desire to get beyond superficial tourism and to be beneficial. Moreover, the tourists in her study all wanted to have an educational component to their trips. Harrison explains:"many tourists have become more sophisticated in their expectations of the travel experience: simply getting away from home for a break is not enough. Tourists want intellectual, physical, even spiritual stimulation from their travels" (23). Dean MacCannell (1973) has similarly pointed out that to some degree, most tourists want a deeper involvement with the societies and cultures they visit; it is a basic component of their motivations to travel. Thus far, then, the narratives of the women I interviewed indicate that their desires and motivations are commonplace and are by no means exclusive to those seeking to foster change through their travels.

Yet, the women I interviewed believed themselves to be different from ordinary tourists. This too is a very common dynamic. In his book *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan (2001) explains that "one of the central ironies of tourism, in fact, is that it is motivated in part by its own attempted negation - by tourists' plaintive need to dissociate themselves from other tourists" (179). So common is the figure of the angst-ridden "anti-tourist" that he/she

appears as a trope in fiction on tourism. For example, focussing on the 1992 novel T*he Edge of Bali* by Inez Baranay, Huggan points out that the author satirizes the "flagrant hypocrisies" of the anti-tourist figure which she describes as "that sensitive, sometimes tortured soul whose felt contempt for the vulgarities of package tourism and romantic belief in the myth of an unsullied Native culture – a culture that s/he feels duty-bound to protect from the ravages of consumer society" (198). Huggan draws attention to the fact that in her novel, Baranay also pokes fun at ecotourism and the consciousness-raising activities of a Bali-based group, who are described as being "upset about tourism [but] not upset enough not to be tourists" (Huggan 2001,199).

Huggan's discussion of Baranay's writing on the desires and motivations of anti-tourists shed important insights on the pull towards socially responsible tourism. Very specifically, Huggan (2001) draws on Dean MacCannell's work to argue that encounters with the Other facilitate "a broader mechanism of denial - to the process by which the tourist disclaims his or her touristic status" (194). Huggan explains that this attempt to distance oneself from the figure of the tourist is ironic insofar as it merely reinforces his/her own conspicuously privileged touristic status. He argues that both the motivation to have meaningful educational experiences in travel, as well as the anti-tourism discourse, generate a rhetoric of moral superiority. As Huggan explains, "tourism is by definition a pleasure-seeking activity; yet it provides ample opportunity for the expression, not to mention the projection, of liberal angst" (196). Borrowing from Mary Louise Pratt, Harrison (2003) has put forward a similar idea which she captures with the words "seeing for innocence" (23). Harrison explains that the meaning-making processes of some travel enthusiasts "foster this desire for innocence, and consequently they willingly accept, and at times truly believe, that they have transcended the realities of commodification, consumption, and commercialization that implicitly infuse their travels" (23).

Two points can therefore be tentatively gleaned thus far. The first is that while the women that I interviewed were, to varying degrees, committed to social change, what also attacted them to socially responsible tourism was curiosity, as well as boredom with conventional travel. The second, perhaps more important point is that, notwithstanding their concerns for social justice, the socially responsible tourism option of the Reality Tour enabled them to claim some moral ground . In drawing attention to this, the point is not to throw into question their individual commitments, rather it is to illustrate that they share some remarkable similarities with the more common desire to relieve tourist angst through claims of innocence. Furthermore, and as I will demonstrate, the idea of moral superiority is a prevailing discourse that can be found in socially responsible tourist narratives.

Part 2 – Reconciling Privilege: "that you get an experiential understanding of their life experience outweighs whatever the negative aspects are"

Since this study is concerned with the voluntary movement of people who have the resources of money, time, and official documents to undertake leisure/educational journeys, questions of race and class privilege and positioning are pivotal. As such, this section focuses on the ways in which the notion of privilege was explicitly addressed both in the materials Global Exchange distributes, as well as in the interviews I conducted.

To participate on one of Global Exchange's reality tours, one has to agree to abide by a code of conduct which reminds the tourists of some basic protocols such as asking for permission before taking photographs of people. Similarly, the information that Global Exchange sends to participants before they go on a tour attempts to raise awareness about power imbalances. For instance one document states: "As visitors, we must be conscious of and sensitive to not only the power relations existing amongst us and the people we engage abroad, but also those existing amongst us and our fellow travellers."[6] These efforts to make participants conscientious about their privilege and power are laudable and certainly go beyond the efforts of most conventional tour operators. Yet, one of the women I interviewed observed that in practice, Global Exchange contradicts their claim of wanting participants to examine their privilege in any meaningful way. She noted that the tour leaders did not initiate any discussions of privilege on the tour itself. Rather, it was only in the pre-trip stage that the issue of privilege was raised. She said she would have appreciated having the opportunity at the beginning, at the middle, and at the end of the tour to "process" privilege. " She explains:

> Because I don't really feel like we ever talked about that. I think individual people brought it up in their sort of personal reflections on what was going on, but I don't think we ever really had a sort of collective conversation about, you know, what does it mean to go into *this* community being largely a group of Caucasian folks and, you know, what sort of privilege do we bring to that situation? And, you know, sort of how to negotiate that. I just don't feel like we ever talked about that. ... And I don't know if it's intentional that they don't have them, or not, but I think having that piece be a little more present, I think, would be my recommendation to them. [PARTICIPANT 5]

A few of the other women responded to the question of privilege in the interviews by pointing out, for example, that with Global Exchange one stays in modest hotels rather than in luxury accommodations. For them, attending to privilege meant not displaying themselves as rich North Americans. As one of them explained:

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[6] Taken from a welcome letter sent to Reality Tour delegates

> I thought they [Global Exchange] did pretty well as far as not, you
> know, they didn't put us up in a four star hotel. I would have felt really
> weird if we had been in a really fancy place. ... So I think they did a
> pretty good job on that score – not trying to make everybody extremely
> comfortable. [PARTICIPANT 3]

Such responses illustrate a shallow understanding of the relations of privilege that emerge on the tours. For one thing, in such understandings, what matters is not that inequalities exist, but that the inequalities are not flaunted. Secondly, there is also a redemptive element to this kind of response (Roman, 1997) insofar as in having to adapt to less comfortable conditions than they are accustomed to, the participants believe that are sacrificing some of their privilege.

The more complicated and compelling responses to questions of privilege were ones that reflected very ambivalent understandings. For example, in response to my asking her to tell me about times when she felt self-conscious about her privileged positioning, one woman replied:

> I felt the economic privilege virtually every moment of every waking
> day. I mean, that just never left me ... in relation to the people who
> worked at the hotel where we were, wait staff that worked on us, the
> bus driver that drove us, to the students that we talked with, to just
> virtually everyone that we came into contact with. So that was just sort
> of a steady chronic awareness. [PARTICIPANT 1]

Yet, while she believed that this acute "chronic" awareness was always with her, a curious, if not contradictory, blind spot about privilege emerged further along in the interview. In response to my asking her to comment on the idea that Reality Tours can be a form of voyeurism into poverty, she replied:

> I understand the perspective. I don't know. I don't know another way
> to get any kind of firsthand knowledge or experience of it though. So
> even though there is an element of peering in from the outside, there is
> also an experiential learning that you take away from it, which I found
> balances it. The fact that you connect with people that you wouldn't
> connect with otherwise, and that you get an experiential understanding
> of their life experience outweighs whatever the negative aspects are.
> [PARTICIPANT 1]

What is clear in this response is that despite her awareness of her privilege, at a very fundamental level, she takes as given the entitlement and privilege of access and mobility of people like herself from the "first world". In other words, while she was self-conscious of the local people serving her, her understanding of privilege stopped short of her seeing the network of power relations that enables her to assert their right to gaze upon the Other. Nor did she question the assumption of natural curiosity that is embodied by the tourist who is free to explore at will (Harrison, 2003, 30 - 31). Indeed, she clearly reinforced this assumption.

Another compelling account of privilege emerged through one woman's description of an experience she had had on a previous trip to Central America. She explained that one of the people who lead that tour was a local priest who was clearly unhappy about the group of Americans coming into his village and had in fact tried to cancel the visit. As she understood it, the priest "would rather have had the money that it cost to bring all of us down there" which he felt would be better put to use for installing a well in the village (which was having a serious drought at the time). This woman said that she agreed with his practical point of view and admired his efforts to protect the village from invasive tours. Yet, here too what is curious about her awareness is that in spite of it, she subsequently took part on another similar tour. Thus, it demonstrates another instance in which the most basic issues of privilege as they emerge through these tourist encounters are minimized or somehow reconciled. As with the characters in Baranay's novel (Huggan 2001), this is a salient example of someone who can appreciate the concerns about the effects that tourists can have on a community, yet is not concerned enough not to go.

Leslie Roman (2003),Barbara Heron (2005), and Sara Ahmed (2004) have cautioned that proclamations of awareness of privilege can have the effect of re-constituting power imbalances because, Ahmed explains "the declarative mode involves a fantasy of transcendence" which in turn, also valorizes those who express them (para.16). In other words, white privilege can be reproduced through its very articulation because such acknowledgments can serve as evidence of a commitment to social justice. As Heron (2005) puts it, these declarations simultaneously reify the systems that are being acknowledged because they have the potential of leaving those who name racial privilege, "in a place of double comfort: the comfort of demonstrating that one is critically aware, and the comfort of not needing to act to undo privilege" (344). Aware that the tourist project, as a whole, is enabled by economic and political systems which permit the activist to freely cross state boundaries, some of them had to reconcile and justify their right to be there. This was done largely through what Heron (2004) refers to as "intentionality," that is, they justified travel through what they perceive to be "honourable" motives and objectives. For this reason, rather than take at face value the women's awareness of privilege as a sufficient indicator of ethical tourist practices, in what follows, I will show that it is both necessary and interesting to examine very specifically *how* the tourists go beyond statements about being aware of their privilege to reconciling it.

Part 3 – Reconciling inequality: "They have things that we don't have too, they have such community"

A consistent theme that emerged in the interviews I conducted was that all five of the women variously commented on the social, emotional, and spiritual wealth of the community they visited:

> It feels to me as though, in traveling through Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela, that the people in those countries look to me, for all their economic vulnerability, to actually be happier. They seem to me to be more connected to each other, to life. They seem to me to have, to be much better skilled at kind of being in the moment, enjoying what is happening right now. [PARTICIPANT 1]

> … sometimes these people have more than we have. ... you go to these third world countries and they have such community ... I mean they have things that we don't have too. [PARTICIPANT 2]

> They understand. They have a real basic understanding of community … much more than I do. ... I think what I've learned from them was that we have a lot to learn from people in other countries. ... they really get it. They really understand what it's all about, what living here on this earth as human beings is all about. [PARTICIPANT 4]

Similar articulations can be readily found in writings about travel to the global South. For example, in a *Los Angeles Times* (Spano, Sep. 25, 2005, L1) article on tourist encounters with acute poverty in India, Jeff Greenwald, author and executive director of *The Ethical Traveler* website is quoted saying: "Despite a lack of the material wealth we so value in the West, many people in developing countries have fulfilling lives. So maybe we've missed the boat. Maybe happiness is not about affluence." A little further along in the article, this idea is expressed again. This time it is the author of the piece who asks: "Could it be that pavement dwellers in New Delhi understand life in a way we fail to, a way that makes them richer in non-materialistic ways than we are?"

Certainly, these are but a few examples of a very familiar and longstanding Orientalist discourse that emerges in travel narratives (Said, 1978) and is a clear continuation of what Mary Louise Pratt's has called the "anti-conquest" strategies of representations. Focussing on travel writing of the mid 1700-1800s, Pratt uses this term to show that representations that imply reciprocity or generosity were instrumental in creating a "utopian, innocent vision of European global authority" (Pratt, 1992, 38-39; also see Harrison, 2003, 22). That these discourses emerge in the narratives of the women I interviewed clearly shows the persistence of imperialist, romanticized representations of the Other. Importantly, however, while the relations of power between the traveller and the locals were more clearly and unapologetically delineated in earlier colonial versions of this discourse, in its contemporary manifestation, this discourse effectively equates or reverses the conditions that are encountered by the Northerner in travel. The equation occurs by the women variously but consistently implying that global conditions are not as one-sided as one may think. In other words, through such articulations, the relationships between the people from the global North and those from the global South are discursively levelled insofar as such responses effectively highlight gaps on both sides: *we do not have some things, while they do not have others*. Recalling

that the primary aim behind Global Exchange's Reality Tours is to expose participants to the harsh conditions that people live in, what is especially troubling about this recurrent discourse is that it obscures inequalities in an educational setting that is explicitly meant to highlight them.

Similarly the discourse of reversal suggests that it is *us* that can learn from, if not envy, *them*, not the other way around. Thus, in different ways and to varying degrees their narratives imply that the Westerner is burdened with stuff – whereas the poorer people being visited are free of that burden. In other words, the sentiment is that *while we have wealth, they have what truly matters: hope, understanding, and community*. In highlighting the prevalence of this discourse, I am proposing that there is a fantasy at play (Roman, 1997) that not only enables the Northerner to reconcile the inequality they see, but more importantly, as Pratt's (1992) work shows, also enables them to reconstitute themselves as innocent. This, in turn, produces a level of comfort, a theme that will be explored further in the following section.

Part 4 – Staged authenticity, enchantment and investments

Another theme that consistently throughout was the women's enthusiastic praise of the tour. In response to my question about whether or not they were satisfied with the tour, all five interviewees gave emphatic responses like "absolutely" and said that the tour not only satisfied, but exceeded their expectations. All of them said they would want to participate in another Reality Tour, and in fact, some had already begun to plan their next one. Given the consistency of these responses, it is interesting to reflect upon what may have contributed to the fact that the Reality Tour was such a positive experience for all of them. To begin with, it helps to consider what might have resulted in negative experiences for the tourists. Another study on socially responsible tourism conducted by Cravatte and Chabloz (2008) reveals that people usually expressed disappointment or dissatisfaction with socially responsible tours for one of two reasons: 1) because the asymmetrical nature of their relation to the locals is brought to light (i.e. when they were brought back to their role of affluent Westerners and merely perceived as consumers by the locals; or, 2) when they felt that the "authentic" encounter they had been promised does not really exist, and that they had been misled by the tour operator.[7]

With Cravatte and Chabloz's (2008) findings in mind, one can infer that the positive experiences of the women in my study were brought about, at least in part, by the fact that they had been persuaded by the authenticity of the experience that Global Exchange produced for them. That said, this sense of satisfaction warrants

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[7] This study describes a participant observation trip in 2004 that was comprised of eight French tourists during their 10-day stay in Doudou village of Burkino Faso. The tour was organized by an NGO called *Tourisme & Developpement Solidaires* (TDS).

further investigation in terms of the notion of authenticity. Most useful is Dean MacCannell's (1973) discussion of Goffman's idea of "back" and "front" spaces, which elaborates the degrees of authenticity that are constructed in tourist settings. What MacCannell's illustrates is that authenticity needs to be understood as a subjective perception devised by the tourist or what the tourist *imagines* as real. Despite their promise of showing "reality," then, the tours organized by Global Exchange, are classic examples of what MacCannell terms "staged authenticity". Moreover, since studies have shown that tourists are aware that authenticity can be faked, the result is often what Andrew Alan Johnson (2007) has referred to as "an arms race of style where the tourist reaches for ever more powerful abilities of discernment, and the tourist industry attempts to stage more and more believable displays of authenticity"(158).[8] In other words, as Julia Harrison (2003) puts it, tourists see "only what they want to see, only what is in the mind's eye rather than what is often really there" (31).

Certainly, this seems to be the case in Global Exchange's Reality Tours insofar as the all-inclusive or paid in advance structure radically decreases any monetary exchange between tourists and locals. In this sense, the tours paradoxically obscure the most foundational of realities: the fact that the participants are there as consumers. Furthermore, the fact that many still walk away from the experience believing in its authenticity despite its staged nature suggests that it is not merely a question of tourist gullibility, but that it is more about their personal "investments" in what they believe (Hollway1998). By "investments" I am referring to the personal rewards that come with producing discourses of satisfaction about the tour. Although, as Hollway explains, the feeling of satisfaction may be in contradiction with other feelings and may not even be conscious or rational, it is purposeful insofar as the person stands to gain from this investment (238). With respect to the women I interviewed, this suggests that there were some emotional stakes for them to *want to* perceive their experiences as authentic.

Returning to Cravatte and Chabloz's (2008) analysis of tourists' levels of satisfaction with socially responsible tours, it is important to recall that authenticity was only one determining factor. A second, related, and equally important factor pertained to the degrees to which the asymmetrical nature of the tourist/local relation was brought to light. That is, people expressed disappointment or dissatisfaction when they were made to feel uncomfortable due to somehow being reminded (by the "locals") that they are rich Westerners and treated accordingly. Cravatte and Chabloz use the idea of "enchantment" to explain how "organizations that promote community-based tourism seek to create situations of enchantment, where the relations between people are characterized by a state of euphoria that

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[8] Writing about sex tourism in Thailand, Johnson refers to "open ended" sex work whereby the person paying for sex plays along, seemingly wanting to believe that the relationship is not a commercial one.

eliminates any feeling of falseness or embarrassment".[9] In other words, efforts are made to avoid the discomfort that such an encounter can bring. The emphatic praise of the tour articulated by the women in my study therefore suggests that they too were somewhat enchanted by their tour and that this was not disrupted by the asymmetries of power they saw or experienced. Indeed, if one considers that the tour in which they participated is such a highly racialized encounter, and that they are women with a social justice consciousness, one has to question how the experience can be so gratifying and comfortable.

Conclusion: White women, ethical tourism, and innocence

When taken together, the ideas explored in this paper – the motivations to participate in alternative forms of tourism, the ambivalent understandings of privilege, the satisfaction with the authentic experience, and the comfort levels of the tourists – have a complex relationship to each other. . In particular, my analysis has shown that certain understandings of privilege are redemptive and that at the level of subjectivity, racialized understandings of self in relation to the Other can easily be sustained through these types of tours. Moreover, having examined how the women negotiated, minimized, and otherwise managed the power imbalances between them and the "locals" -- processes that I characterize as offering comfort -- and showing that the women were not overly conflicted by their dominant positioning, I suggest that through various subject-making processes, the women were able to reconcile their positioning. By integrating critical tourism studies literature with critical race, postcolonial and feminist theories, and applying them to the interview data that was collected, this article indicates that the socially responsible tourism activities of white Northerners are often driven by a desire for moral comfort and reinforce positions of innocence.

The analysis presented here thus cautions that certain displays of so-called "socially responsible" tourist practices can reinstate the very power relations they seek to address. Recalling that, overall, these women were self-conscious about their power and positioning and that an important feature of the tours is that they urge participants to carry on with organizing and promoting social justice after they return from their trips, one can see that "for all its appeals to world peace and the need for intercultural understanding, tourism continues to feed off social, political and economic differences" (Huggan, 2001, 176).

Importantly, the findings here corroborate a dynamic that has been explored in scholarly research on the gendered and racialized aspects of other well-intentioned transnational travel. We learn from Barbara Heron's (2004) work on Canadian women development workers in Africa, for example, that good intentions

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[9] Here they are drawing upon Winkin's (1996) definition.

and collaborative efforts obscure power relations insofar as they falsely imply that a "common ground" is being shared. Similarly, Nancy Cook's (2005) work reveals the insidious ways in which Western women in Pakistan reconstructed Orientalist binaries in their interactions with locals. The analysis presented here, however, is not only meant to illustrate yet another instance of these imperialist dynamics. Rather, the primary objective is to highlight that this subject-making dynamic is now operating on *short-term* tourist experiences as well. Whereas in both Heron's and Cook's studies women had constituted themselves both as superior and as innocent   gradually through lengthy stays and in some cases, life-long commitments to international development, what I have shown is that a similar sense of superiority and innocence can now be secured after just ten days.   In other words, through "socially responsible" tourism alternatives, innocence can be more readily attained than ever.

In sum, since there is every indication that various forms of socially responsible tourism are on the rise, the analysis presented here suggests that they offer socially and politically conscientious Northerners a quick and easy feel-good way to reconcile their discomforts about travel. While one can certainly take hope in the fact that conventional tourism is being questioned and is losing its appeal, we should not be too quick to praise and celebrate the so-called "responsible" alternatives. The preliminary analysis presented here suggests that these tours may be only superficially different from conventional tourism, and therefore that one should be sceptical about claims that these tours "can and do change the world" (Global Exchange, 2010d).

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