
EMBODYING HOPE:
INTERCULTURAL
ENCOUNTERS IN THE
(B)ORDERLANDS OF
VOLUNTEER TOURISM

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Thesis by publication

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List of publications included as part of the thesis in order of where they appear in the thesis. Everingham, P (2012) 'Teaching English as Voluntary Tourism: Intercultural Communication and the "Third Space"', *Global Studies* 4 (4) pp. 39-47.

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Abstract

Embodying hope: Intercultural encounters in the (b)orderlands of volunteer tourism

This thesis brings an embodied and affective analysis to existing critiques of volunteer tourism: one that demonstrates intercultural encounters as messy and complex yet also hopeful. In order to comprehend the intangible aspects of embodied encounters in the volunteer tourism experience, the study mobilises the affective turn in the social sciences including hopeful geographies and hopeful tourism literature, alongside decolonial critiques of Eurocentric and universalist ways of understanding the social world.

This thesis, including the four published papers that partially comprise it, presents the volunteer tourism experience as more nuanced, ambivalent and complex than much of the existing critical research on volunteer tourism. It argues that while intercultural encounters are embedded in colonial relations, they are nonetheless filled with moments of empathy and connection. The thesis argues for a remaking of how we analyse, measure and come to know the everyday in volunteer tourism. It is a remaking that is attuned to the importance of affect and emotion in these embodied intercultural encounters. This study offers new insights into how conceptualising the future as 'not-yet-become' disrupts Eurocentric temporalities that perpetuate development aid discourses and linear structural notions of social change, opening up parameters of possibilities for hopeful decolonial futures in volunteer tourism.

The decolonial approach that frames this thesis demands a situated perspective and attentiveness to my positionality within the geopolitical landscape. Through autoethnography, I draw on my embodied positionality as a key source of knowledge production and as a way of problematising subjectivities as fixed binary categories. A methodological positionality of 'in-betweeness' underlies the research trajectory, where I move in-between the (b)orderlands of minority world researcher and 'privileged other', woman/*gringa*/traveller/volunteer/researcher. I argue that it is within the embodied, affective and emotional lived experience of volunteer tourism, that binaries between 'us' and 'them' can be transgressed.

Ethnographic fieldwork from two organisations in South America: Otra Cosa Network Peru (a non-government organisation) and Arte del Mundo Ecuador (a not-for-profit organisation), are two examples of 'decommodified' volunteer tourism. Qualitative data including field notes and reflective diary records of participant observation of the volunteering spaces, alongside semi-structured interviews, reveal that while many of the volunteers themselves drew on development aid discourses to frame their experiences, these particular organisations provide a context where fixed helper/helping dualisms can be subverted. This is because the organisational activities and programs engender intimate relational exchanges between local community members and volunteers. One example is the connectedness and mutuality accompanying language exchange through the medium of Spanglish (a mixture of Spanish and English). In these intercultural encounters volunteers are challenged as their 'helper' subjectivities are questioned and their limited cultural and linguistic understandings exposed. These moments of ambivalence represent opportunities for empathetic intercultural communication and understanding.

Drawing together theories of emotion and affect with decolonial theory, this thesis contributes to both the 'hopeful tourism' and 'hopeful geographies' research agenda by attending to practices of mutuality between 'different others', highlighting particular stories of intercultural encounters and affective connections. Hope in volunteer tourism is defined within these intangible processes and relationships.

Map of fieldwork locations

