

Live from “Africa”

Representations and Reflections in Volunteer Weblogs

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ABSTRACT**Live from “Africa”**
Representations and Reflections in Volunteer Weblogs

Ashley Dallas Curow

This thesis investigates the role of Canadian *weblogs* or *blogs* (personal, chronological records of thoughts published on a web page) and the *blogosphere* (the online community of blogs) in discourse concerning Western representations of “Africa.” It examines potential relationships between concepts of international integration that animate much of the discussion of the World Wide Web, and the concept of foreign aid at the level of the individual volunteer. This thesis also seeks to contextualize the writing within wider narratives of travel and tourism, and questions whether or not foreign aid discourse within the blogosphere can be used as a site for investigating the intersection between issues of social justice and new media technologies for expanding notions of volunteerism, international inter-responsibility and global citizenship.

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This thesis has its origins in my experiences as an intern in Mwanza, Tanzania, and the process of writing this made me realize the poignancy of the Kiswahili idiom I learned while there: “haraka haraka hamna baraka,” which roughly translated means that haste makes waste, or that no blessing comes from rushing. As this thesis focuses on Western representations of “Africa” — that are so often inaccurate or incomplete — I felt it was important to research and write about that very subject carefully and thoroughly. I thank all of the friends I met in Mwanza, for teaching me the value of slowing down and of putting one’s whole heart into the things that matter most. Thank-you to Leslie Shade, my fantastic supervisor, whose guidance and sense of humour made the road to completion both challenging and enjoyable. I could not have asked for a better supervisor. I am also grateful for the help of Monika Kin Gagnon and a Rae Staseson, the two other remarkable people on my committee. Additionally, I owe a great deal to Sandra Smeltzer and Keir Keightley, my mentors from the University of Western Ontario, who always encouraged me to broaden my horizons, both geographically and academically. I appreciate greatly the financial assistance of the Department of Communication Studies, the Faculty of Arts and Science, and of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Thank-you to my fellow “Thesis Club” members for many evenings of inspiring conversation. To my family, who has supported me in every way possible during my entire academic career. I am grateful for everything you’ve given me. And finally, thank-you to Brian, with whom I am lucky enough to share so many experiences, including this MA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter One — Representing Africa, Reflecting Ourselves | 8 |
| Africa in the Western Imagination | 10 |
| Types of Representation | 31 |
| Reflecting Ourselves | 31 |
| Chapter Two — Blogalization | 39 |
| Blog: Definitions, History & Development | 39 |
| Uses, Potential and Criticism | 42 |
| Context: Globalization and Postmodernity | 50 |
| Community and Communication | 51 |
| The Self in Blogging | 56 |
| Chapter Three — Blogging the “Authentic African Experience” | 62 |
| Methodology | 62 |
| Part One — Overview and Observations | 65 |
| Part Two — Recurring Themes | 69 |
| Part Three — Reflections on Voluntourist Blogging | 90 |
| Conclusion | 96 |
| Bibliography | 113 |
| Appendix A | 121 |
| Appendix B | 123 |
| Appendix C | 127 |
| Appendix D | 130 |
| Appendix E | 134 |

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with how Western representations of “Africa” found in volunteer blogs relate to the idea of the global community. The process of globalization is closely connected to, and has evolved alongside the evolution of the World Wide Web; in fact the word “web” exemplifies globalization's defining technologies: “computerization, miniaturization, digitization, satellite communications, fibre optics and the internet, which reinforce its defining perspective of integration” (Friedman 2000, 8).

This topic relates to the wider field of communication studies on several levels, and is informed principally by theories of new media technologies, journalism and the public sphere (Atton 2004, Gillmor 2004, Reece et al 2007), representation, and globalization; as well as issues of race, ethnicity and post-colonialism as they relate to the former realms. This research refers to previous literature that has identified inadequacies within the mainstream North American press’ communication of problems such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and gender inequality that are currently facing many African countries (Lewis 2005, Nolen 2007, Patton 1990, Wertheimer 2004). As informed by the aforementioned work, this thesis will interrogate and explore the use of the word “Africa” in Western discourse.

Additionally, this thesis refers to existing work on the relationship between such issues as the media in the context of globalization (Agger 2004, Giddens 1990), as well as to theories of communication and community (Drori 2006). Drawing upon studies that warn of utopian ideologies and technologically-determinist perceptions of the internet (Mosco 2005, Sustain 2007), this study also acknowledges that global communication infrastructures have been changing in important ways, “enabling (1) the production of

high-quality information content by ordinary people, (2) the creation of large-scale interactive networks engaged by that content, (3) the transmission of that content across borders and nations"(Bennett 2005, 25). Although the idea of the internet as a virtual public sphere—wherein citizens can "express and publish their opinions about "matters of general interest"(Habermas 1989, 102)—has been debated, and the idiosyncrasies of the blogosphere have been explored (Blood 2006, Lovink 2008), there is a lack of critical communications research on the proliferation and potential of the blogosphere as pertaining specifically to foreign aid and volunteerism.

I have decided to focus on weblogs (commonly known as blogs), as they exemplify non-mass media —also known as alternative, independent, non-mainstream, radical, grassroots, or community media— and are based on citizen participation (Downey and Fenton 2003, 185). This research addresses several social contexts of significance and pertinence, namely the evolving concept of foreign aid, race and gender representation in the international online community, and also the internet as a site for international development discourse. Related goals of this research are to provide an overview of the origins, uses, and potential of blogs, as well as to specifically explore the discursive formations of volunteer blogs. Additionally, this thesis investigates links between the discourse of volunteer blogs and the intersection between international and personal development.

In this thesis I argue that the concurrent rise of international travel and the development and deployment of information communication technologies (ICTs) has led to the proliferation of Western representations of the African continent. Moreover, this

thesis looks at voluntourist blogs as an example of the intermingling of technological progress and international integration.

Rationale for topic

It is personal experience that has brought me to and qualifies me for this area of research. I spent the summer of 2005 in Tanzania in a Canada Corps funded internship, working with a women's rights organization to study uses of media for the dissemination of information concerning HIV/AIDS. While there, I participated in workshops, AIDS awareness festivals, and also worked as a liaison between my Tanzanian colleagues and ambassadors from Oxfam Canada, who were filming a documentary for the Live 8 concert series. I maintained two blogs during my internship; one project-related¹, one personal², and both reflected my experiences as a volunteer. I have also shared my knowledge and experiences through public speaking at occasions such as AIDS Awareness Week, International AIDS Day and a World Vision panel on International Reporting and the Poor. In addition, my experiences as a student journalist and editor, and my undergraduate training in political economy and cultural studies motivated me to research this topic for my thesis.

While researching and writing this thesis, I was careful to consider my situation as a privileged, white Westerner. Particularly in regards to Chapter Three, which investigates the blogs of Westerners writing from African countries, I was in a unique position as a researcher, having kept a travel blog myself. Although my blog writing was

¹ http://www.westernheadseast.ca/daily_journal.htm#DallasJonathan.

² http://rationalpassion.blogspot.com/2005_06_01_archive.html,
http://rationalpassion.blogspot.com/2005_07_01_archive.html,
http://rationalpassion.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_archive.html.

based on my observations and experiences in Tanzania, and in that sense I wrote what I knew, I was also very aware of what I did not know. I recognized my ignorance about the country I was visiting, and I therefore tried to maintain a tone of humility in my writing. Despite occasionally expressing frustration with the cultural differences and confusions I encountered, I attempted to respect the culture I was learning and writing about. I recognized that my blog might be the closest to Tanzania some of my readers would ever come, and I wanted to make sure my representation was honest and balanced, and did no disservice to the country.

My blog thus represents my own challenge to learn about and represent a tiny portion of the giant continent to my audience. Likewise, through my research I have found that each blog shows an individual's attempt to do the same. This thesis does not attempt to understand "Africa," but rather, to shed some light upon how we try to learn and share more about other countries using new media forms, and lastly, how observations therein reflect upon our own culture.

This thesis explores the way that the intersection of travel and technology (in the form of travel blogs) has led to a new avenue for representations of the African continent. In this introductory chapter, I will provide some background information to expand on the rationale for the topic, and to further explain why fair and accurate representation of Africa is important.

In addition to being a geographically and culturally diverse place, the continent of Africa faces many challenges. One major challenge that has been of primary importance over the last few decades in Africa has been the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The pandemic—specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa—has wreaked medical, social, economic and political

havoc on the region. As the area most gravely affected by the pandemic, the leading cause of death south of the Sahara is AIDS (UNAIDS 4). UNAIDS estimates that in 2007, approximately 22.5 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in the region, with an overall adult (15-49 years) prevalence of 5.0% (Ibid 7). The effects of the epidemic have left an estimated 11.4 million children orphaned (Ibid 8). There is a strong gender issue to HIV/AIDS infection in sub-Saharan Africa, where unlike other regions, the majority of people living with HIV (61%) are women (Ibid 15). Also, women bear the burden of caring for the sick, and the orphaned, which further exacerbates the gender inequality (Lewis 136).

In the fight against HIV/AIDS, clear and accessible information for prevention provides the strongest basis for hope. It is vital that people in this affected region receive the best possible prevention information. Moreover, in order for organizational bodies such as the United Nations to provide international aid, it is paramount that the social aspects of the pandemic be understood, so that prevention and treatment plans can be culturally appropriate.

Cultural appropriateness is increasingly being recognized as an essential factor to the success and sustainability of foreign aid projects. Countries receiving the aid often reject transplanted Western solutions, when even the best-intended plans fail to address their true needs. In *The White Man's Burden*, William Easterly makes the distinction between "planners" and "searchers" in international aid (Easterly 4). He explains the differences between the two when he writes:

In foreign aid, Planners announce good intentions but don't motivate anyone to carry them out; Searchers find things that work and get some reward. Planners raise expectations but take no responsibility for meeting them; Searchers accept responsibility for their actions. Planners determine what to supply; Searchers find

out what is in demand. Planners apply global blueprints; Searchers adapt to local conditions. Planners at the top lack knowledge of the bottom; Searchers find out what the reality is at the bottom. Planners never hear whether the planned got what it needed; Searchers find out whether the customer is satisfied (Easterly 5).

Favouring the approach of the “searcher,” Easterly articulates some crucial deficiencies in the traditional approach (i.e. the “planner”) of Western foreign aid. Easterly’s notion of the searcher’s approach, which tailors aid to meet the needs of local cultures, would necessitate communication between Westerners and Africans to elucidate the best objectives.

With more Westerners traveling to African countries, and in many cases as volunteers with aid-related organizations, an opportunity has arisen for people “on the ground” of development work to share their thoughts on what they see working, and what they do not. Bearing in mind that most volunteers are in positions of privilege, and are not likely to fully grasp the context of need of the visited countries, they can perhaps understand some things that Western aid officials sitting in office towers cannot. They can make observations and ask questions at the ground level, and also provide constructive criticism about their own and other development and/or aid projects. New and emerging communication technologies allow volunteers to share their thoughts, suggestions and criticism with a wider audience than ever before, which is perhaps one step towards more comprehensive understanding of an aspect of international aid.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis contains three chapters. Chapter One will discuss the representation of “Africa,” especially within the context of an increasingly globalized world. Moreover,

this chapter will investigate representations of “African AIDS,” of “Others” and of foreign countries. By examining the proliferation of Western-produced information about Africa, the increase in global travel, the rise of *voluntourism* and greater-than-ever access to foreign imagery as aided by technology, this chapter will look at the tropes and patterns that are surfacing. To trace contemporary phenomena back to historical examples, this chapter will briefly touch on the genre of travel writing, colonial narratives, and more recent post-colonial theories.

Chapter Two will explore the history and development of blogs, and their use(s) as a form of online communication. It will consider the debate over whether or not blogging can be considered a new form of journalism. Furthermore, it will look at issues of access that limit which parts of the world and sectors of society can and do participate in blogging.

Chapters One and Two will provide a theoretical foundation that will inform the original research of Chapter Three, which investigates how the self figures into a discussion of blogging, and of the greater online environment. It is comprised of original research on the blog corpus, and includes a discussion of methodology, an overview of the sample, a discourse analysis of the blogs’ text, and a summary of the interviews of four bloggers. Moreover, this final chapter explores the relevance of the narratives in these blogs to discourse concerning international communication and development.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I will summarize the preceding chapters, and discuss ideas and questions for further and related research. The conclusion poses questions about the future of blogging, and whether or not the uniquely subjective narratives of travel blogs are appropriate texts for examining the intersection between

issues of social justice and new media technologies for expanding notions of volunteerism and international inter-responsibility. Moreover, the conclusion looks at the commonalities in the promotional rhetoric of the voluntourism and ICT industries, namely the idea of technologically enabled global citizenship. It explains, lastly, how voluntourist travel blogs are an effective site for exploring the aforementioned issues.

CHAPTER ONE — REPRESENTING AFRICA, REFLECTING OURSELVES

“Africa” is a term, a concept, and an idea of a place that captures the imagination of the Western world. Ever since early travelers and colonizers began to explore the African continent and interact with its peoples, they have been writing home about their encounters. Each time a person has conveyed an observation or judgment about some aspect of life in Africa (through letters, travel literature et cetera), he or she has represented it to their fellow citizens. This chapter will first explore the semantic boundaries of the term “Africa,” through its conception and continued use in contemporary Western discourse. It will discuss the ways that Africa is represented by and for the West, paying particular attention to individuals such as envoys and celebrity activists who tend to speak on behalf of Africa. Moreover, it will consider the many questions regarding representation that are raised in an era where privileged Westerners have the means to travel extensively, and—through continuing technological advancements—to share their impressions with a potentially international audience.

Lastly, building on Neta C. Crawford’s contention that “images of Africa may be about self-images of North America,” (Crawford 40) this chapter will investigate the idea that representations of Africa in Western writing are often more revealing of the self-reflexivity of reporters than of their subjects. Furthermore, mediations of place through representations not only inform Westerners about themselves, but also inform the decisions and actions that are taken towards Africa that have material impacts on the citizens of its countries.

When issues pertaining to “Africa” are discussed in mass media and scholarly texts, too often there is no specification as to which country’s issues are at hand. People write about Africa as if it were a unified body, instead of a massive continent. As Cindy Patton points out, “in Western discourse, Africa, a continent of roughly 11 ½ million square miles and 53 countries, is treated as a homogenous socio-political block” (Patton 77). This relatively unknown continent is much more diverse than either North America or Europe; thus it is not only incorrect but also harmful to combine “the many cultures of the African continent into the invention, ‘Africa’” (Ibid). Stephanie Nolen points to the nonsensical way of discussing Africa “as if it were one place, one country, one homogenous story,” as she notes that “prosperous South Africa has more in common with France than it does with anarchic Somalia or the deserts of Mali” (Nolen 11).

The first person to refer to Africa as an invention was Congolese scholar and poet Valentin Y. Mudimbe. In an interview titled “Africa Remains the Absolute Difference,” he explains that the continent of Africa was qualified at the end of the 15th century during its early encounters with European colonialists. At this point, he states, “its characteristics are given in books and in papers as if Africa is unified. And with that African cultures, which were different, collapsed” (Palmborg 251). Here Mudimbe summarizes a fairly complex process into a simple effect: a heterogeneous collection of places is compressed (largely through colonial processes and rhetoric) into an invented idea of a place.

Despite the fact that many African countries have since achieved independence, and that we are now living in an arguably post-colonial era, Sophie Wertheimer claims that little has changed in terms of the “Western 'knowing' of Africa,” and the continent

continues to be both described and viewed in a predominantly negative light (Wertheimer 43). Such negative representations create marginality between what is understood to be the “primitive” African way of life, and the supposed modernity of colonialist projects (Mudimbe 5). According to Mudimbe, it is in this margin between the West and Africa, in the tension between modernity’s claims of development and myths about primitive traditions that the “major signifier of underdevelopment” lies (Ibid). When Africa is discussed in Western discourse, it is oftentimes explicitly narrowed in scope to mean Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, when Africans are mentioned, this does not refer to all people who live on the continent, “but rather people who are black and live on the African continent.” (Hawk 8). Beverly G. Hawk asserts that “African” is a colonial term. She notes that this racialized definition not only makes sweeping claims about people across a vast land, but also “tells readers and viewers that the continent has a simple, homogeneous culture” (Ibid). That the idea of Africa is invented and consistently presented in such a way illustrates that Africa is indeed a Western creation. As Stephen Chan writes, “it is united as an ‘Other’ that confronts [the West] and its own sense of self (Chan 3). This chapter will later address how Western representations of Africa reflect on the West. At this point, however, it is pertinent to further investigate the characteristics of these representations.

AFRICA IN THE WESTERN IMAGINATION

The most widely circulated representations of the African continent are seen in the mainstream media. Broadcast and print media are the primary means through which

North Americans learn about events from various African countries. Many scholars have expressed disdain for the way the continent is presented to the North American public. Hawk, for example, argues that Africa is “covered” by the press purely in the sense that the press fails to report on the majority of important long-term events, focusing instead on brief coverage of tragedies (Hawk 6). She argues that to analyze coverage of African events, one must consider that many events are simply not visible in international news coverage, and so one must look at what is absent in addition to what is present (Ibid). Those events that *are* covered by foreign media tend to be ones that are easy for foreign correspondents to access and summarize in the period of a brief stay, and are digestible for the North American audience (Ibid). Reportage under these constraints often relies on metaphors that are not indigenous to the country at hand, but rather from the culture of the news consumer. As Hawk explains, “The simplest way to communicate the African story in comprehensible form in limited space is by colonial metaphor familiar to the reader” (Ibid 7). For example, when it comes to a conflict in a given country, the tensions between opposing groups are often referred to as tribal conflicts.

Such a characterization carries heavy connotations of “primitivism,” painting the conflict as something that is “pre-nationalist, premodern, divisive and opening easily into violence and slaughter” (Chan 39). When conflicts are linked simply with tribalism, and not given sufficient historical context, it makes the problem seem naturalized, even eternal. Most importantly, by failing to contextualize the conflicts within an unfolding legacy of colonialism, it avoids any link of the West to the problem (Ebo 18). Bosah Ebo explains that, “much of the political strife in Africa results from the collision of distinct cultural groups arbitrarily thrown into political entities by colonizers in their scramble for

Africa” (Ibid). In addition to evading tying the issues to a post-colonial legacy, North American reportage on African events is mostly short-lived and focuses on flare-ups of violence and/or political crises. Ebo contends that such coverage dissipates just as soon as the drama of the events fades or is resolved (Ibid). As a result, the mainstream media rarely present successful or positive phenomena. The North American public seldom sees the triumphs of African countries, and instead is given an image of “Africa” “as a romantic tragedy in which poverty is so total, so basic, that there is nothing to be done to save the continent” (Patton 83). The predominance of this kind of incomplete and inaccurate portrayal of the continent seems to extend a recurring message to the North American audience: “Africa is a failure and needs our help”(Hawk 6). Such a message is both unfair and incomplete.

How is it that such convoluted representations are disseminated to the North American audience? First of all, the use of the Western constructed term “Africa” itself is extremely problematic. In order to illustrate the absurdity of the term, Patton intentionally uses what she deems “equivalent constructions” — North America and Euro-America — “to indicate the collection of relatively homogenous Northern administrative states as we appear to our southern neighbours” (Patton 78). She adds that North Americans will likely be uncomfortable with her discursive reduction of their culture, and that their discomfort should elicit a realization on the inappropriateness of referring to people as Africans (Ibid).

Secondly, most of the stories and accompanying images of Africa transmitted to North America are produced by Westerners. In *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS in Africa*, Paula Treichler notes that many visual

representations are presented from the Western standpoint, and reinforce illusions of truth, “in part because they reproduce familiar representations of the Third World and reinforce what we think we already know” (Treichler 104). Such images are often taken out of context to be used as stock icons that can be “seamlessly decontextualized and appropriated by the First World narrative voice” (Ibid 109).

Furthermore, since a great deal of African media depends on “First World” news agencies, they often receive stories about themselves that have been filtered through a Western lens (Ibid). Stories are selected according to what the Western media feel are important for their audiences. Hawk contends that because stories are selected according to Western values and priorities, African successes or challenges measured by Africans themselves are rarely reported³ (Hawk 7). Ebo explains that this process deculturalizes news from Africa “by stripping it of its social relevance and value” (Ebo 20). As an example, the labeling of a news story about the AIDS epidemic in a given country as “Africa’s AIDS epidemic” reveals Western ignorance of how cultural, medical, and political situations vary from country to country within Africa. An editorial decision to use Africa in a headline instead of naming a specific county for ease of reader understanding implies an assumed ignorance of the readership. Moreover, poor editorial practice perpetuates such ignorance.

Representations of Africa reveal Western cultural values, and also shape Western perceptions of the African continent and its issues. From a political standpoint, it is critical to examine these representations and to acknowledge their potential influence on the international aid agenda. Barbara Bender asserts, “it is through our experiences and

³ Several other factors such as issues of translation, the differences between state-controlled and private media, and greater issues regarding the political economy of the media in Sub-Saharan Africa.

understanding that we engage in the material reality of the world” (Bender 4), thus, Western understanding of the myriad issues that face African countries, and their conceptualization of Africa as more than the sum of its parts, will in turn shape how international aid agencies approach it in terms of policy.

TYPES OF REPRESENTATION

This section will consider the word representation in two senses: the first sense, as a description or portrayal, and the second sense as the act of speaking on behalf of others. It will look at how these two senses of representation manifest at the intersection between tourism, discourse and communication. This juncture “offers a useful transdisciplinary mix of assumptions and techniques for a sustained and critical exploration of the possibilities, tensions, conflicts and representations which characterize a phenomenon which is frequently described as one of the most important global industries and cultural activities” (Pritchard and Jaworski 2). An examination of this intersection is especially important in light of the potential negative outcome that can result from misinformation by way of poor representations.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, for example, is a strong example of how vital accurate representation is. As John Erni explains, the AIDS pandemic is actually comprised of two parallel pandemics: “a pandemic of the infection of the body in a worldwide scale, and a pandemic of the infection of cultural meanings of the human body” (Erni 74). This “epidemic of meaning,” as he terms it, has been exacerbated by the process of globalization (Ibid). Hence, to address the issue of representation is to confront

the multitude of information and misinformation that is coursing through global channels of communication.

Representation as Description or Portrayal

To consider representations of Africa in the first sense—as a description or portrayal—it is pertinent to look at the discursive tendencies of Western representations of Africa, both historically and in more contemporary examples. Western portrayals of Africa date back notably to when the early colonialists traveled to the continent from Europe. As they encountered foreign landscapes and people, they described what they saw. As a foreigner, one looks upon the destination as something out of the ordinary from one's own land. Sociologist John Urry explains that “when we ‘go away’ we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so. In other words, we gaze at what we encounter” (Urry 1). Urry formulates the notion of the “tourist gaze,” which is the way of looking upon a setting that is unfamiliar. It is not so much the tourist gaze that this chapter is concerned with, but rather, how the things that are viewed through the tourist's gaze are then described or portrayed for the tourist's home culture. In the early encounters between Europe and Africa, it was often a colonial message that was woven into the representations.

Imperial projects involved a great deal of rhetorical proposition for European rule in African countries. Mudimbe explains that many colonial writers put forth an ideological discourse for modernizing Africa and Africans (Mudimbe 20). This writing, he notes, contained both “theories of colonial expansion and discourses on African

primitiveness,” and while it said nothing about Africa or Africans, it justified “the process of inventing and conquering a continent and naming its ‘primitiveness’ or ‘disorder,’ as well as the subsequent means of its exploitations and methods for its ‘regeneration’” (Ibid). Thus the way Africa was represented was as an enormous potential colony; description was focused on its use for the empire as opposed to its virtuous qualities. Its “primitiveness” was given as the basis for intervention, and modernization the rationale for colonialism.

This type of colonial-era description is now the fodder of post-colonial theorists. Steve Clark notes that post-colonial scholarship has taken to studying travel writing “particularly in its most racist and imperialist guises” as a way of investigating the representational styles of colonial-style narratives (Clark 3). Such narratives, contend many post-colonial scholars, are part an ongoing tradition of travel literature. Hawk notes that the view of “primitive” Africa that has previously been discussed in this chapter is by no means new, nor limited to the mainstream media. She argues that, “its origins can be found in colonial texts, justified by pseudo-scientific research” (Hawk 9).

Mudimbe purports that it is incorrect to get caught up in insignificant differences between realms such as travel literature, ethnology and anthropology; fundamentally, they all gaze upon and then represent Africa in a similar manner (Mudimbe 22). Despite slight ideological differences, they all claim to contribute to “African knowledge” (Ibid). Mudimbe argues that “travelers in the eighteenth century, as well as those of the nineteenth and their successors in the twentieth (colonial proconsuls, anthropologists, and colonizers), spoke using the same type of signs and symbols and acted upon them” (Ibid 22). Furthermore, written from the standpoint of privileged visitors, these narratives

function as a kind of ethnographic writing, which Caren Kaplan states, “is a kind of technology of power that exercises dominant relations through representation” (Kaplan 61). Whereas in the colonial period the power dynamic included a view of Africa as morally inferior and “justified intervention and cultural surgery,” contemporary accounts of its inferiority are “more likely to be couched in terms of economic degradation, and the envisioned cure is described as economic intervention” (Hawk 9). So, just as colonial era explorers ranked Africa’s standard of living in comparison to European norms at the time, present-day journalists are “empowered to paint an image of Africa by listing its deficiencies with respect to Western norms ... and create an image of Africa in the [North] American mind that is a chronicle of its deficiencies to the Western standard” (Hawk 9). The ongoing combination of media images, advertising pictures, and the collection of tourist gazes that have looked upon and then portrayed “Africa” to the Western world as a land of wild animals and natives dressed in brightly coloured clothing have built an idea of a place for tourists to consider visiting (Urry 7).

In this tradition of translating Africa through the tourist’s gaze to one’s own culture, a certain type of informant is involved. In this situation, a “First World” tourist is writing home about foreign experiences. In order to understand the paradigm from which the narrative is written, it is necessary to discuss the traveler himself [sic]. Kaplan argues that the description of the traditional Euro-American traveler is “characterized as a Western individual, usually male, ‘white,’ of independent means, an introspective observer, literate, acquainted with ideas of the arts and culture, and, above all, a humanist” (Kaplan 59). This kind of traveler’s presence in Africa is part of a long tradition of the incidence of Westerners arriving as colonists, missionaries, writers and photographers who are, as

postcolonial author Malek Alloula describes, as “thirsty for exoticism” and “folklore” (Alloula 317). Dean MacCannell famously wrote in his 1989 book *The Tourist*, that all tourists “embody a quest for authenticity, and this quest is a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred” (quoted in Urry 9). He views the tourist as a contemporary pilgrim, one who ventures away from his everyday life to search for the authentic (Ibid). The Western tourist’s search for things authentic often results in the kind of travel narrative that can be considered Orientalist, a descriptive tone that is criticized by postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said (1978), who contend that the West’s literary and pictorial representations of non-occidentals have perpetuated a colonial fantasy through the “deployment of phantasms” (Alloula 317). Historian Paul S. Landau notes that the compilation of colonial-style tourist imagery of Africa constructs an “‘image Africa,’ paralleling Edward Said’s discursive ‘Orient’ constructed by European travelers” (Landau 3).

Furthermore, a representation wherein Africans are simultaneously exploited and pitied is described by anthropologist Renato Rosaldo as “imperialist nostalgia,” which is a complex paradox that occurs when “somebody deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained the same” (Rosaldo 70). In this case, the tourist mourns the loss of a culture or place that colonialism has affected. Imperialist nostalgia, states Rosaldo, “erases collective responsibility, replacing accountability with powerful discursive practices: the vanquished or vanished ones are eulogized (thereby represented) by the victor” (Kaplan 34). In this sense, travel writing would then be conceived as a “vehicle for the transmission and consolidation of ‘colonial discourse’” (Holland and Huggan 141). Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan point out that travel writing remains a

useful realm for the critical analysis of “ethnocentric arrogance and for the displacement or estrangement of received ideas and wisdoms about ‘other’ cultures” (Ibid). Therefore they argue that by looking at travel writing, one can garner a great deal about the writers’ concepts of their own cultures, the foreign cultures, and the relationships between the two.

There is an inherent power dynamic in the descriptive sense of representation; the one who describes has power over the one who is being described. Treichler contends that when a Western individual reports on HIV/AIDS in an African country, for example, the writing is the tradition of:

the privileged First World informant of conventional anthropological, ethnographic, and travel literature, the stranger in a strange land whose representation of AIDS in the Third World is legitimated by its claim to be an objective, scientific account of phenomena observed or experienced firsthand (Treichler 101).

Despite claims to objectivity, such narratives have a clear bias. First of all, the travel narrative addresses itself to the home culture, so it will be slanted to relate to that audience. Secondly, its first person, anecdotal style refers to events and observations that cannot usually be verified, so the writer holds power in his or her position to tell the truth to suit specific purposes (Clark 1). Moreover, as Clark points out, narratives of encounter are predominantly told by the more mobile culture, which is almost always the First World culture (Ibid 5). The traveler usually has a greater access to both transportation and technology, which implicates their belonging to a more “developed” culture (Ibid 3). If one considers representation in the sense of portrayal, to represent is to document observations and perceptions. The idea of documentary itself, of presenting such observations and images as truth, is controversial. Martha Rosler points out that the notion of documentary “carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to

another group addressed as socially powerful” (Rosler 263). Essentially, to be in a position to represent postcolonial Africa is to be in a position of power.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse goes farther to say that image and power interact in global representation when “postcolonial imagery presents the Third World as spectacle” (Nederveen Pieterse 235). The non-Western world, he says, is exploited for the sake of Western adventure. Common imagery, he says, reveals a stark contrast: “Next to Bacardi-rum beaches, images of suffering, starvation and bloodshed circulate through the media networks of the world’s electronic Coliseum” i.e. the internet” (Ibid). Tourism itself, argues Kaplan, “must not be separated from the colonial legacy” (Kaplan 63). In fact, Western tourism to new countries dramatically increases after these countries are made affordable or “subject to development,” after a state of disaster or relative poverty (Kaplan 63). This disparity between wealthy tourists and relatively poor countries inspires Western narratives that carry tones of superiority. Moreover, it corroborates the type of negative coverage seen in the press.

As Western reportage typically focuses on crises and occasional calls for aid, an image of a floundering, dependent place is consistently put forth. Wertheimer is concerned that through depictions of Africa at the mercy of Western aid, “the West continues to define itself as ultimately superior and knowing” (Wertheimer 84). Post-colonial readings of such travel writing and press narratives would assert that these texts “promote, confirm and lament the exercise of imperial power; and that this ideology pervades their representational practices at every level” (Clark 3). For the purposes of this chapter, Rosaldo’s “imperial nostalgia” will not be presumed to be at play in all representations of “Africa.” Though it is undoubtedly important to examine the power

structures inherent therein, it is also important to search for commonalities *and* differences between colonial era and contemporary Western portrayals of Africa.

Many postcolonial theorists tend to focus on the similarities and continuity between colonial and contemporary narratives. Mudimbe, for example, purports that, "when you read some new books on Africa, you will find the same presuppositions that we find in traveller's narratives of the 18th or the 19th century" (248). The presuppositions to which Mudimbe is referring include assumed differences between the Western writer, and the African other. He argues that despite shifts in styles of writing, Africa "remains today the absolute difference" from Western society (Ibid). As Africa is viewed as one of the last bastions of authenticity in terms of tourist destinations, people go there seeking the absolute difference from their own lives. In *Guilt and Pleasure on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography*, Chloe Chard contends that travelers, in their search for the authentic, "impose on the foreign a demand that it should in some way proclaim itself different from the familiar" (Chard 3). Following Chard's logic, it can be argued that travelers seek an exotic or "authentic" experience by visiting a culture that is expressly different than their own. Moreover, they define their own task—as tourists and as storytellers—to grasp the differences (Ibid).

The problematic representation arises when binaries such as same/different, normal/abnormal, and self/other appear in the texts. Mudimbe defines racism as "the apprehension of oneself as norm," thus representations which portray Western authors as norm, and Africans as "other" are inherently racist (Palmberg 250). The problem is intensified when portrayals in which Africans are shown as the "other" are disseminated on a global scale. As Kaplan explains, when the Western mediation of reality is

disseminated, “it results in the universalization of those mediations on a global scale” (Kaplan 61). In other words: the Western tradition of representing its perceptions as “reality,” and the proliferation of such representations as hegemony in an increasingly global era, has consequences beyond Western borders.

Self-Representation?

Understanding that Western depictions of “Africa” are likely to rebound to African countries through a variety of channels (such as international news agencies), it is relevant to briefly discuss the response of African countries to Western discourse on Africa. Furthermore, the predominance of Western-produced portrayals begs the question: “Why do we not hear about Africa from Africans themselves?” The political economy of global communication is discussed by many scholars such as Robert McChesney and Dan Schiller (2003), however an in-depth analysis of this issue is outside the scope of this chapter. At this point, it is timely to briefly consider the factors that limit the amount and content of African self-representations that reach the Western world. Primarily, it is an issue of access, particularly access to the different kinds of infrastructure (e.g. technical, social, economic) that enable the widespread transmission of information.

First of all, access to the internet — or electricity for that matter — is extremely limited in many African countries. Additionally, one cannot equate access to ICTs to knowledge (Erni 78). As Erni explains, “One is no less informed by being denied access than by being technology-illiterate (not to mention language-illiterate)” (Ibid). ICT literacy (or lack thereof), according to Erni, has deepened historical divisions in many

African societies. He contends that, "when viewed as a type of social and cultural capital, the access and knowledge of [ICTs] possessed by the information-elite class has caused a social division reminiscent of an older aristocratic society" (Ibid). He claims that where print literacy once advantaged the literate while leaving others behind, ICT literacy leaves more people disadvantaged. The lack of access to ICTs, coupled with the dominance of Western-produced reportage and travel narratives, leaves African individuals and media at a clear disadvantage when it comes to self-representing to the Western world. There are, however, individuals and organizations (such as AllAfrica Media, with the website AllAfrica.com) that attempt to portray "Africa" in a more accurate light, to sustain and promote indigenous knowledge, and to encourage Westerners to learn more about the continent.

Representation as the Act of Speaking on Behalf of Others

During the summer of 2007, *Vanity Fair* released a special issue for its July edition. Guest-edited by Irish rock star Bono, the "Africa" issue was ambitious, provocative, and controversial. It was ambitious in that it sought to provide a status update on "Africa" through a magazine that generally provides commentary on aspects of popular culture. It aimed to provoke people to become interested in a continent they have likely only known through representation in the media, which in itself is scarce and inconsistent. □ In his introductory letter, Bono urges readers to familiarize themselves with ways to help Africa. Such acts of charity, he argues, "all relate to the same place and the same idea: That Africa is the proving ground for whether or not we really believe in equality" (Bono 32). Bono tells readers that interest in helping Africa is a way to gauge Western desire for

a better world. He explains that he recruited a large team of contributors for this issue in order to help □ "in describing the continent of Africa as an opportunity, as an adventure, not a burden" (Ibid). Additionally, he concurs with many others to admonish the Western habit of reducing "this mesmerizing, entrepreneurial, dynamic continent of 53 diverse countries to a hopeless deathbed of war, disease, and corruption" (Bono 32). What Bono and *Vanity Fair* were doing with their Africa Issue exemplifies representation in the second sense: the act of speaking on behalf of others.

The examples that will be considered in this chapter involve Westerners who have—for a variety of reasons—taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of Africa, thus becoming representatives of a certain cause. In Bono's case, he sought to promote knowledge of the continent, and to encourage readers to familiarize themselves with the good news coming out of African countries, such as the positive effects of anti-retroviral drugs in treating patients with HIV/AIDS, or the impressive work of young poets and authors. The issue, as mentioned, was controversial in that it promoted "Africa" within a consumerist message. It encouraged the purchasing of products (such as those associated with the (RED) campaign⁴ in order to make donations to various charities. Nowhere did it feature the chance to make charitable donations or explain how to do volunteer work that was not associated with a purchase (or corporate profits).

Furthermore, it juxtaposed images of poverty-stricken villages with advertisements for luxury brands including Emporio Armani, Rolex, Cadillac, and Louis Vuitton.

Despite the more contestable aspects of the issue, it did give a voice to people from

⁴ Product (Red) was founded by Bono and Bobby Shriver as a cause-related marketing campaign that raises money for the Global Fund through consumer purchases. Customers buy products that are part of the (RED) brand, and part of the profit from that purchase is donated to the Global Fund, which helps provide anti-retroviral treatment to women and children in African countries. (<http://www.joinred.com/red/>).

African countries (such as Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina and South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu) who, in articles or interviews, expressed *their* opinions, albeit in a Western publication.

Another individual who speaks on behalf of Africa is former United Nations Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis. In his Massey Lecture Series-turned book titled *Race Against Time*, Lewis gives a scathing account of the way the West has continually failed to help Africa, especially in regards to the AIDS pandemic. He explains his rhetorical approach, stating that he has intentionally used anecdotes as his narrative vehicle, “in order to give the pandemic an accessible face, rather than rely on the dehumanizing swamp of numbers” (Lewis 46). He admonishes listeners and/or readers to key into how all of the stories “illumine an aspect of Africa’s desperation” (Lewis 46). Most vehemently, he urges his audience that the attention of the rest of the world is needed to help deal with crises such as the AIDS pandemic, insisting that, “if only the world were to care, Africa can be brought back to the life it once had” (Lewis 66).

Furthermore, Lewis has brought the extremely important issue of gender to the forefront of his writing and speeches. He decries gender inequality at the level of discrimination within international organizations such as the United Nations (a body he asserts should be driving the gender agenda), which he argues has long kept highly qualified women “invisible, living in the refracted shadows of the glass ceiling” (Lewis 111). Lewis is moreover gravely concerned with gender inequality on a global scale, but especially in Africa and in terms of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. He contends:

The incredible assault of HIV/AIDS on women in particular has no parallel in human history. Women are the pillars of the family and community — the mothers,

care-givers, the farmers. The pandemic is preying on them relentlessly, threatening them in a way that the world has never yet witnessed (Lewis 136).

Lewis explains in his introduction that he wanted to do the *Race Against Time* lectures for the women and girls of Africa, who have been most savagely affected by the pandemic, and most damaged by gender inequality and the neglect of “those who have always pretended to care, and have never really cared” (Lewis 36).

In *28 Stories of AIDS in Africa*, journalist Stephanie Nolen carries the stories of 28 HIV positive individuals from throughout Africa, to a Western audience. A few years before its publication, she persuaded her editors at *The Globe and Mail* that the paper was missing something important in its coverage of African issues. Nolen notes that although her editors did not yet understand the urgency of the story, they agreed to let her attempt to tell it (Nolen 3). At that point, Nolen became *The Globe and Mail*'s correspondent for all of Africa. It is from this position that she has written and spoken on behalf of the continent, giving voice to African people (such as the ones in her book) and using information she has gleaned in the field to advise readers how they can best help with issues such as the AIDS pandemic. Moreover, since the beginning of her time as Africa correspondent, she has watched as “the pandemic has started, very slowly, to attract political attention, media coverage and serious funding” (Ibid 15). She attributes this development mostly to the work of thousands of African activists, but also mentions “a few high-powered champions of the cause in the West, particularly Irish rock star Bono, former U.S. president Bill Clinton, software billionaire Bill Gates, and Stephen Lewis” (Nolen, 15).

All of these individuals use their own wealth, resources, political clout, or their fame to advocate for Africa. As celebrity philanthropists, or “celebrity diplomats” as

political scientist Andrew Cooper describes them, they are asking their Western peers to *care* about the continent: to care enough to learn more about it, and eventually to care enough to help it in some way (Cooper 1). The fact that they are speaking on behalf of Africa implies that Africa is not able to speak loud enough for itself, or that people are not listening to what it has to say.

It also brands the continent, to a degree, as a hot topic people in the West should care about. As an example, Nolen explains that when Bono launched the [Red] campaign, a marketing campaign that donates a portion of sales from [Red] products in support of the Global Fund against AIDS, “suddenly the crisis was trendy” (Ibid). In an article for the *Catholic Times* titled “Lewis-Palooza: AIDS, Aid and Celebrity,” author Renée Bondy writes about the phenomenon of celebrity advocates for Africa. Inspired by a talk by Stephen Lewis, where he argued that “the most focused, committed, recognized and efficacious leadership in AIDS-ravaged Africa today is exercised by celebrities” (quoted in Bondy) who use their positions to promote social justice and aid to Africa. She acknowledges that their work is not only philanthropic, but provides “vision, direction and leadership in the midst of a global crisis” (Ibid). She warns, however, that it is important to consider the implications of celebrities as visionaries. She is concerned that reliance on celebrities as advocates for Africa often detracts from political (in)action on the part of governments (Ibid). Moreover, she worries that Western citizens, “placated by the notion that our adulation of celebrities and support for their causes is somehow ‘enough’ might feel they have done their part for ‘Africa’” (Ibid).

Nolen also laments that despite the temporary surge in interest of celebrity attention that AIDS in Africa has garnered, the actual response to the pandemic remains limp: “few

people outside of Africa seem to understand the scale or the epic gravity of what is happening here” (Nolen 15). Celebrity advocates for Africa may be attracting attention to the continent, but the attention unfortunately seems to be in the form of popular culture fads, which risk fading once the marketing campaigns do.

Western individuals outside the realm of popular culture also speak on behalf of Africa. Some even have explanations for its problems, and offer prescriptions. Robert Calderisi’s *The Trouble with Africa Why Foreign Aid Isn’t Working* is largely informed, he says, by his personal experiences working in a senior position at the World Bank and with other development agencies including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). He calls his book “the first to tell the inside story of African development over the last thirty years through the eyes of an international official” and says he feels obliged to share his experience, “hoping it will serve the continent” (Calderisi 5). □He expresses “impatience with the political correctness that has kept Africa in confusion and turmoil” and believes it is “time to move beyond the hand-wringing and politeness that dominate most discussions of Africa” (Ibid 6). For this approach, he expects criticism and anticipates being called a “neo-racist” (Ibid 7). He goes ahead then, by stating that it is only the failures of Africans that have “forced close observers of Africa to ask themselves, once again, what was fundamentally wrong with Africa?” (Ibid 2). In a condescending tone, Calderisi asserts that, “unfortunately, Africa has exposed itself to generalization through its own spectacular failures. The very diversity of Africa makes the ‘African problem’ more striking” (Ibid 4). The tone of this book does not bode well for the present or future of Africa. Although the book does contain some statements of hope for the future of the continent, such positivity is

overwhelmed by Calderisi's focus on analyzing its problems from his privileged position.

Where Calderisi speaks on behalf of Africa's problems from a Western perspective, other organizations, such as the Commission for Africa, attempt to counterbalance such perspectives. Written on the eve of the 2005 G8 Summit, which is "the most powerful forum of global economic governance," the Commission presents recommendations for addressing issues facing Africa as a continent (Nash 168). The introduction notes that the Commission sought to begin "by telling the world how the problem looks through African eyes, for the cultures of the continent are all too easily brushed aside in the rush to offer pre-packaged solutions from the developed world" (Commission for Africa 11). This is an example of the kind of elusive self-representation to which this chapter earlier referred. It should be noted, however, that although the Commission is predominantly African, it also contains some prominent Westerners (and celebrities at that) such as then British Prime Minister Tony Blair and musician and activist Bob Geldof. Thus, it still contains an element of Western representation of Africa.

In response to all those who speak on behalf of Africa, Stephen Chan wrote

Grasping Africa: A Tale of Tragedy and Achievement to make sense of:

the terrible ambiguities of Africa, to decipher what the policy-makers say, what the Commission for Africa says, what the international civil society groups say, what the scholars say, to try to decipher what I think after 25 years of traveling, working and, off and on, living in Africa (Chan ix).

Despite his extensive experience working in and writing about the African continent, Chan is very cognizant about his lack of knowledge of the continent. In fact, his entire book works towards grasping just the contours and dead ends of his questions. His curious perspective rests in between the writing of those Westerners who speak on behalf of the "Africa" they claim to know, and the actual residents of the continent who *do*

know their respective countries, but who simply lack access and resources to share their wisdom with the West. His standpoint, therefore, is somewhat unique in its ambivalence. He is open about his mixed feelings, musing, "You get jaded because you have fallen in love with a continent that consistently disappoints you. The jadedness allows you to get on with your life in Europe, but also allows you to keep loving Africa" (Ibid). He adds that it is a difficult continent to love, writing, "all 53 countries, disparate, exotic even to one another, emit a common capacity for joy and disappointment" (Ibid). One of the most interesting things he states is that he has no desire to write an academic book, proclaiming that he does not want "to be part of the academic industry that depends in fact on Africa being poor and Other" (Ibid 4). Instead, he sets out to write a book that humanizes Africa for an audience that includes the general public and policy makers. He hopes that he will avoid writing a colonial style or "adventurist" narrative: "outsiders trooping all over the continent as if they owned it and, afterwards, claiming an ownership to its interpretation, often on the basis of 'experience' and its stories; and these stories may distort things as much as seek to humanize them" (Ibid). He fears, however, that his African audience may feel he has succumbed to such a style, which is perhaps unavoidable for a Westerner speaking on behalf of Africa.

Increased Representation

Since the first travelers ventured onto the African continent, both the prevalence and reach of Western representations of Africa have steadily increased. The continuous increase can be attributed to the simultaneous rise of tourism and technology.

Tourism experienced a surge in the latter half of the twentieth century due to

several developments. First of all, the post-war period saw an increase in leisure time, as well as disposable income (Mann 7). At this time, the cost of air travel was decreasing, especially during the 1970s as planes increased in size and speed (Ibid). This change allowed for more chartered flights and package deals at more and more remote destinations (Ibid). Towards the end of the century, the tourism industry began to involve itself in independent travel plans, such as the sale of round-the-world tickets (Ibid). According to Statistics Canada, for example, there was a 31.1 % increase in Canadians traveling to Africa between 1991 and 2000 (Statistics Canada 5). Travel guidebooks, which provided guidance for independent travelers in many countries, “with little or no knowledge of the local language or culture” became hugely popular (Ibid).

R. W. Butler (1990) provides an excellent examination of alternative tourism, especially in contrast to its less desirable counterpart: mass tourism. He explains that the two have traditionally been compared as “hard” (mass) and “soft” (alternative or green), with notable differences in the general features, tourist behaviour, and tourist development strategies (Butler 42). Stephen Wearing contends that alternative tourism is a phenomenon of the end of the twentieth century, and notes that, “tourists began searching for new and exciting forms of travel in defiance of a mass-produced borne out of the Industrial Revolution” (Wearing 243). Some examples of early alternative tourism were backpacking, adventure tourism and eco-tourism (Ibid). Over the last few decades, their popularity has not only sustained, but also expanded (Ibid).

One of the most recent types of alternative tourism is known as *voluntourism* (volunteer tourism), a type of tourism that involves a mix of volunteer work and sightseeing (Fitzpatrick 37). It involves a personal vacation while also serving as “an

organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing 24). While some critics classify voluntourism as “overpriced guilt trips with an impact as fleeting as the feel-good factor,” enthusiasts insist that these tours are an altruistic alternative to the resort vacation, and a tangible way to make a difference (Ibid). Business analysts, on the other hand, see voluntourism from a different viewpoint: as an emerging niche market that is “an inevitable consequence of a restless society, jaded from the homogeneous nature of traditional tourism products and seeking alternative tourism experiences” (Callanan and Thomas 183).

Butler views alternative tourism rather skeptically, arguing that much of what is marketed as alternative tourism is “really a disguised class prejudice” wherein “large groups of middle or lower class tourists are not welcome, nor are ‘hippies’ in any number, but small numbers of affluent, well-educated and well-behaved tourists are welcome” (Ibid). The popularity of alternative tourism, and most recently voluntourism has directed more international traffic towards the developing world, especially the poorest countries in Africa, increasing the number of Westerners who are there to “experience,” perceive, and represent that which they encounter.

The reach of such representations, already boosted by increasing frequency of international travel, is further amplified by the innovative development and deployment of ICTs. Through the use of ICTs such as email, blogging software, and text messaging on cell phones, people can rapidly relay their representations back home. The increases in tourism and technology are part of the ongoing process of globalization, which is

essentially defined as “a matter of increasing long-distance interconnectedness, at least across national boundaries, preferably between continents as well” (Hannerz 17).

Susantha Goonatilake prefers the term “global integration” to globalization, which he explains is brought about by “people sharing their thoughts, actions, ideas, in short, their culture, across vast distances” (Goonatilake 227). No longer limited to interacting with one’s immediate, physical community, a person is often a member of a virtual online community, as well as a “transborder expatriate community” and thus the idea of citizenship can potentially expand beyond the boundaries of a country, an ethnicity, or a religious belief system (Goonatilake 232). Ulf Hannerz contends that because of the pervasiveness of a growing range of media, which “reach across borders to make claims on our senses,” people find it progressively easier to fathom foreign landscapes and cultures (Hannerz 105). With tourism rising in tandem with ICTs, the “form of cross-border cultural traffic” that tourism constitutes is taken to further extents when tourists’ experiences are shared across borders (Goonatilake 227). Without a doubt, these factors have led to the rise in the amount of Western representations of Africa.

REFLECTING OURSELVES

In examining how different types of Western representations of Africa function, and why they are becoming more prevalent, one can glean many ideas about the juncture of increased global travel and the proliferation of Western travel narratives. However, as one critically analyzes these representations, a recurring theme becomes apparent. In sharing portrayals of “Africa,” and in the act of speaking on behalf of Africa, Westerners

are revealing more about themselves than their subjects. Whether it is a voluntourist blogging about her experience in Gambia, or a prominent actor promoting adoption in Namibia, these representations, and the images associated with them, expose a great deal about Western values, rather than any universal truth about the African countries.

Crawford contends that such representations are “more like a mirror held up to assist in an imaginative reconstruction of ourselves...our history, our dreams and fear for the present and future in a multicultural society increasingly ill at ease with itself” (Crawford 31). In a similar vein, Wertheimer maintains that, “Western representations of Africa do not coincide with an actual reality, but rather are the product of a self-serving and often biased Western imagination” (Wertheimer 16). She adds that while they cannot be relied on for truth about Africa, “these representations certainly speak volumes about the West” (Wertheimer 16).

For example, a common topic in Western representations of Africa is development, or rather, Western prescriptions for African economic, political and social development. In *The Whiteness of Power: Racism in Third World Development and Aid*, Paulette Goudge claims that the Western notion of development actually contributes to global power imbalances, “because it contains within it the necessity for its own opposite: by definition, describing oneself, or one’s country, as developed necessarily entails characterizing other as less developed” (Goudge 29). Developed nations buttress their own self-perceptions as developed against worlds that they deem underdeveloped. Goudge also contends that the West defines the moral and practical “problems” of the Third World, but that “the solution is invariably one which exculpates the West from any kind of involvement in causing the problem” (Ibid 115). Moreover, these assessments and

prescriptions are based on Western standards, not on African ones.

On another level, Western discourse concerning issues such as the AIDS pandemic are also instructive. Nolen argues that the pandemic in Africa is “a mirror held up to the cultures and societies we build” (Nolen 4). She says that Western response to and representations of it force Westerners to face issues of inequality, and that the virus’ unyielding spread “raises difficult questions about why we do the things we do, why we believe what we believe—about who we are and what we value” (Ibid). Western understanding and representations of the pandemic are especially revealing in terms of international aid discourse. Moreover, the discourse has implications for foreign policy decisions and trajectories. As an example, The Bush Administration launched the \$15 billion, five-year President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa (Copson 42). Although this plan pledged impressive amounts of funding, it received criticism for failing to take into account the cultural circumstances of many of the African countries. Its HIV prevention aspect was perhaps the most contested, as it was highly influenced by values of the Christian right, and included such factors as: “highlighting abstinence-until-marriage programs, limiting condom distribution programs, and discouraging prevention services for prostitutes” (Ibid). Instead of taking into account the cultural practices of various cultures in order to offer culturally appropriate prevention programs, PEPFAR’s policies made funding contingent upon the imposition of conservative Western values onto African recipient organizations.

From a theoretical standpoint, it is valuable to use Western representations of Africa as tools with which to examine Western systems of values. Urry asserts that one

can regard the tourist gaze as a way to make sense of the society of the tourists themselves (Urry 2). He explains that, “to consider how social groups construct their tourist gaze is a good way of getting at just what is happening in the ‘normal society’” (Ibid). In other words, how Westerners gaze upon a foreign culture reveals the viewpoint from which they gaze. In addition, Urry adds that, “the gaze in any historical period is constructed in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness” (Ibid 1). Thus, the tourist gaze reveals the everyday life specific to the given historical context. That which the tourist seeks from a foreign country is indicative of that which she finds lacking in her own. Goudge asserts that the Western world has always turned to the Third World to fulfill its needs, and further contends that the current popularity of voluntourism in Sub-Saharan African “is actually a continuation in a different guise of the old colonial relationship whereby the colonies were regarded as essentially providers of what the ‘mother-country’ needed and desired” (Goudge 35). She adds that although the needs have changed from resources such as sugar and diamonds to character-building explorations, the Third World continues to be exploited. Goudge believes that the new forms of domination are mostly found in the forms of tourism, development, and aid work (Ibid).

Privilege, Power and the Personal

As global travel becomes more accessible for a small portion of the world’s population, it is accompanied by a great amount of cosmopolitan rhetoric. While the idea of “global civil society” wherein all the world’s people interact with each other as global citizens is championed, Craig Calhoun (2003, 92) cautions against unthinkingly

embracing such rhetoric. He points out uncanny similarities to “the civilizing mission behind colonialism,” particularly when promoted by international corporations as opposed to local groups (Ibid). It is easy, Calhoun explains, to see the world as accessible when Westerners “imagine the world from the vantage point of frequent travelers, easily entering and exiting polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards” (Ibid 90). From this perspective, global citizenship would be quite appealing. Voluntourism exemplifies the cosmopolitan ideal; it allows tourists to travel widely and interact with a foreign community, and learn about oneself in the process. The question must be raised, however: who are the people who decide to be voluntourists?

The ability to vacation at all is the privilege of a leisure class; voluntouring is an example of a search for a new way to spend one’s ample free time (Johnson 222). Voluntourists almost always pay their own money in order to volunteer, often more than the average tourist would for a normal vacation (Wearing 241). Kaplan asserts that this kind of tourism is part of the Occidental modern’s search for “markers of reality” and “authenticity” (Kaplan 34). Bored with the conveniences of the developed world, the voluntourist seeks a reprieve from modern society, and is compelled “to move further and further into what are perceived to be the margins of the world” (Ibid 34). Journalist Laura Fitzpatrick called this trend “Vacationing like Brangelina,” after the well-publicized jaunts of actors Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt as volunteers into developing countries, and their high profile adoptions of children from said countries. While one aspect of these trips contributes to projects that are designed to benefit the local communities, “the second dimension focuses on the development of the participant through the intrinsic

rewards of contributing to such projects” (Callanan and Thomas 184). Many people have argued that too much emphasis is placed on the latter, that the transient nature of the trip “is more suited to making participants feel like do-gooders than to doing good,” and ultimately fails to have a long-term impact on the community (Fitzpatrick 39). Fitzpatrick quotes director of Tourism Concern (a UK-based tourism industry watchdog) Tricia Barnett referring to voluntourism as “a new form of colonialism,” run by profit-oriented tour companies who care little about the effects of the tours on the destination communities (Ibid).

Despite such criticism, voluntourism is a rapidly developing industry, buoyed by travelers with the cosmopolitan inclinations of Generation Y. This generation includes the cohort born between 1981 and 1999, and is characterized by “a passion for social justice and a burning desire to make a difference,” that donates “more of its time to charitable causes than perhaps any other generation in history” (Johnson 221). Raised in the era of self-esteem-based parenting, and community-minded messages in school curricula, Generation Y has been taught that giving one’s time and abilities is more valuable than simply donating money (Johnson 220, 222). In addition to being helpful for a given cause, volunteering has less altruistic value as well. The motivation to volunteer is also motivated at least in part by rhetoric of personal development and self-concept.

The travel narrative of voluntourists thus entails not only representations of the foreign, but also involves a personal narrative. Clark writes that travel writing contains “a combination of observations and learned facts along with narratives of self-comprehension and parables of rectified ignorance”(Clark 14). Moreover, the differences between the traveler’s own cultural biases and customs and those of the foreign culture

often create comedic situations: “misunderstanding, presumption, and the catalogue of errors and endemic lack of dignity to which any cross-cultural exchange must take place” (Clark 14). Moreover, when travelers write about their attempts to understand the other, they often use metaphors and analogies from their own country, which do not accurately describe the other at all. Mudimbe calls these attempts to perceive and empathize with the other the act of “projecting *the self*” (Palmberg 249). Wearing maintains, however: “in the volunteer experience the other becomes a part of the self” (Wearing 249). The tourist gaze takes in a great deal, and retains memories of encounters that are at some point imprinted onto a traveler’s personality. This situation, argues Wearing, “allows an explanation of the volunteer tourist experience, which is about dialogue, interpersonality, boundaries, travel and self” (Wearing 252). Hence the personal component of the travel narrative is a rich realm for the investigation of how the personal plays into the perception of the other in representations of the foreign.

Travel narratives and other representations of the foreign are important cultural texts, especially in the context of globalization. Moreover, the interchange between globalization, modernity, and culture is a crucial site of scholarly examination. Globalization is a primarily economic term which “promotes the idea of a global market, defends the virtues of neoliberal economic growth and the utility of allowing capital, commodities and labour to move freely across borders,” (Ulrich 9) while cosmopolitanism (to return to the term) might better describe the aspects of cultural change that the world is currently undergoing. Beyond the global citizenship idea, cosmopolitanism “must be interpreted as a multidimensional process with has irreversibly changed the historical ‘nature’ of social worlds and the standing of states in these worlds”

(Ibid). Through phenomena such as increased travel narratives and imagery, citizens around the world are hearing and seeing more about each other. Since a lot of this information comes in the form of personal narratives and/or Western-biased reportage, the truth of the representations is often contestable. Holland and Huggan explain that the aforementioned nostalgic tone of travel writing is partly a response to modernity, particularly to the forces that threaten authenticity and heterogeneity of the world's cultures (Holland and Huggan 139). In that sense, it rebels against global culture.

At the same time, technological advancements associated with globalization have helped introduce people to staggering cultural diversity that exists on the planet. Holland and Huggan lament, however that Western representations that persistently use clichés and colonial-style descriptions lock other cultures in a past that bears no indication of their current existence (Ibid). What nostalgia essentially reveals, they contend, is traces of the power disparity between those cultures that have been in a position to describe and/or speak on behalf of others, and those who have been represented (Ibid). Awareness of the tensions and power dynamics within travel narratives is a starting point towards understanding intercultural interaction in a global era.

Conclusion

Mediations of place through representations not only inform Westerners about themselves, but also the decisions and actions that are taken towards the African continent that have material impacts on the citizens of its countries. The way that Westerners perceive Africa—hopefully as a diverse continent instead of as a homogeneous country—will shape how they choose to represent it. As physician and

author Helen Epstein says, given all of the negative representations the West receives, “It’s easy to be pessimistic about Africa” (Epstein xiv). “But,” she adds, “sometimes helplessness is in the eye of the beholder” (Ibid). That Africa is often viewed as helpless is more indicative of Western ignorance than of the standard of living in any of the 53 countries that make up the continent.

CHAPTER TWO — BLOGALIZATION

The development, growth, and popularity of the weblog—or *blog* as it is more commonly known—illustrates the remarkable effects that occur when the human desire to communicate is supported by powerful ICTs. Through the use of blogs, people can post their thoughts from anywhere in the world, so long as they can find an internet connection. International travel can therefore be chronicled online, to be read by the blogger’s friends and family, or by internet surfers who stumble upon any random travel blog. The previous chapter discussed how Western representations of “Africa” have become more prevalent, due to a simultaneous rise in international travel (especially to the developing world) and in the development and use of ICTs. Travel blogs written by Westerners visiting the African continent are a perfect example of the junction between international travel and communication technology. This chapter will provide an overview of the history and development of blogs, as well as the debate over the uses, potential and credibility of blogging. In addition, it will examine the ideas of blogging, online, and international communities, and how the idea of the self figures into a discussion of ICTs and community.

BLOG: DEFINITIONS, HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

Before blogs became as easy-to-use and popular as they are now, they were nothing more than a few links on a basic website. Web savvy individuals began

communicating with each other by occasionally posting links to interesting websites or specific news items, and providing bits of commentary along with the links (Blood). During the late 1990s, a list of these websites—which all consisted of lists of dated entries—was compiled by web designers Cameron Barrett and Brigitte Eaton. The only criterion was that the sites contained a list of dated entries. As the community developed, the amount of commentary accompanying the links increased, and some of these original bloggers began to make their web pages more akin to personal journals (Ibid). While at first weblogs were only available to those with web design skills, they became more accessible to internet users when Pitas offered the first weblog tool (Ibid). More notably, in 1999 Pyra launched Blogger, free, easy-to-use blogging software, and the popularity of blogging grew exponentially (Ibid).

The original versions of blogs (as lists of links) are what long-time blogger Rebecca Blood calls “filter type” blogs. Still very popular, filter-type blogs offer readers a short cut to news and events both online and offline. Users are drawn to these types of blogs, Blood explains, because “the web has been, in effect, pre-surfed for them” (Ibid). Furthermore, she adds that through the act of filtering the web, “weblog editors participate in the dissemination and interpretation of the news that is fed to us every day...[and] begin to redefine media as a public, participatory endeavour” (Ibid). The other principal type of blog, the diary type, emerged out of the commentary that originally accompanied the lists of links. As mentioned, many bloggers gradually began adding more personal commentary to their sites, and some began eliminating the links altogether, posting more personal information. Blood believes that it was with the advent of Blogger that blogs as short-form journals emerged. She explains that diary type blogs,

“often updated several times a day, were instead a record of the bloggers thoughts: something noticed on the way to work, notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some subject or another” (Ibid).

According to Michael Keren, after 9/11 bloggers were able to provide first-hand accounts and images of events, and the potential for blogging as a communication form was truly revealed (Keren 5). He argues that the availability of blogging software, and the crisis of 9/11 precipitated the practices of sharing experiences and thoughts online. As Blogger places no restriction on content, users are able to share any images or information they so wish, and to post them online for anyone to stumble upon. During a series of events such as 9/11, citizen-generated images and stories supplemented those provided by the mainstream media. Furthermore, blogs provided people with an outlet with which to reflect upon the aftermath. The blog may be just another communication medium, but its usability and online publishing potential amplify the message of the user. David Kline and Dan Burstein suggest that blogging is another example of the human tendency to express and discuss, and that “it is part of human ‘biological and cultural DNA’ to want to articulate ourselves and publish it” (Kline and Burstein xvii). Maintaining a blog and posting regularly gives an individual a platform from which to share and publish, and to discover in turn what countless other individuals have shared and published.

The collective efforts of all bloggers combine to form what is known as the *blogosphere*. The term, which was first coined in 2002 by technology journalist Stephen Levy, essentially stands for “the aggregation of millions of online diaries known as ‘blogs,’” (Keren 1). Despite being widely used in both popular and academic discourse

about online communication, the term blogosphere as it is understood is not easily definable. Many people dismiss the use of the term as a singular unit. Blogger Chris Anderson of www.thelongtail.com asserts that there is no one blogosphere, rather “there is an infinite number of blogospheres” that reflect the varied interests and political spectrum of the real-world population that shapes it (Banks 20). Furthermore, he adds that when anyone generalizes about the blogosphere (to claim, for example that it is right-wing or left-wing), this implies that they do not “understand a truly heterogeneous, unbounded marketplace of opinion, which is what the blogosphere is” (Ibid). One of the main reasons why it is so difficult to characterize the blogosphere is the lack of infrastructure of the blogging community. Although search engines for blogs such as *Technorati* enable users to search for specific keywords and blog titles, they require users to a certain extent to know what they are searching for. Moreover, although links between blogs guide users to related blogs or the blogger’s own community, there is no guide or map to the blogosphere. In fact most blogs go unlinked (Lampa). A survey conducted in 2004 by the Perseus Development Company called “The Blogging Iceberg” concluded that:

the blogosphere takes on the form of an iceberg whose vast bulk floats out of sight and out of mind. Blogs above the waterline—which are frequently updated, widely read, and consistently linked—may represent the conception of blogs in the public mind, but they are not representative of blogs in general” (Lampa).

Thus, the idea of the blogosphere as a cohesive group of blogs is misleading and incorrect. While the widely known blogs have readerships of hundreds of thousands or even millions, the majority of blogs have what the study terms as “nanoaudiences” composed of the blogger’s family and friends (Ibid). Despite smaller audience sizes, many personal blogs may have a very loyal readership, and a lot of activity in the

comments section. As such, they can provide a rich cultural text for scholarly examination of a new type of online communication.

USES, POTENTIAL AND CRITICISM

In the book *Uses of Blogs*, Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs argue that critical discourse on blogs must become more sophisticated (Bruns and Jacobs 3). As they point out, “it makes as little sense to discuss the uses of blogs as it does to discuss, say the uses of television unless we can clearly specify what genres and contexts of use we aim to address” (Bruns and Jacobs 3). In order to fairly examine blogs, therefore, one must first decide which type of blog is most relevant to the study at hand. This thesis therefore focuses on travel blogs kept by Canadian volunteers in African countries. The bulk of these blogs are diary type blogs that have *nanoaudiences*: friends and family reading from home about the bloggers’ adventures abroad. The next chapter will explore those blogs in greater depth. At this point, however, it is relevant to first begin to explore the uses and potential of blogging as a practice.

With a plethora of new ICTs constantly emerging, why would a critical look at blogging be fruitful for communication studies scholarship? As previously discussed, blogs are easy to use and provide an instant publishing tool for any writer. Michael A. Banks contends that blogging “is a communications tool that encompasses all communication models: one-to-one, many-to-one, and many-to-many” (Banks xx). He adds that having a blog is also a means of “establishing and maintaining a presence in cyberspace,” something that goes along with the current trend of social networking online

(Ibid). Increasingly, people are creating a place (or places) for themselves online. A blog, like a personal website, is like a home for an individual's online presence. With a list of favourite links (many of which are usually connected to other blogs), it is also a starting point from which the blogger can frequently visit his or her immediate online community. Moreover, with the inclusion of a comments section, the blog is more interactive than the basic personal website, as it encourages and facilitates discourse between the blogger and readers.

The growth of cyberspace in general, notes cultural philosopher Pierre Levy, "is the result of an international movement of young people eager to experiment collectively with forms of communication other than those provided by traditional media" (Levy ix). The practice of blogging expands upon traditional forms of communication and expression such as letter writing, or publishing a column in the school newspaper, and propels the work into various online venues. Bruns and Jacobs cite the low barriers to entry, lack of censorship, and ease of linking to external information as some of the main reasons for blogging's popularity (Bruns and Jacobs 5). They also purport that blogging—what it makes possible, what it produces—is indicative of current cultural needs, meaning that in a time of opposing belief frameworks and value systems, blogging is an opportunity for people to "question their understanding of issues, engage in discussion, present their ideas, seek out approval for their notions, and grasp some sense of purpose, order, and hope" (Ibid). Blogging, like other publishing and social networking tools, actually requires people to become active participants, as opposed to being just passive web surfers. In publishing, commenting, and discussing, say Bruns and Jacobs, "bloggers turn into what we can usefully describe as *producers*—a hybrid of

producer and user” (Bruns and Jacobs 6). The *producer* is a valuable term to consider, especially as internet users become more proficient, and more interested in having control over their online presence and contributions.

It is also a very accurate term for the many bloggers who perceive themselves as part of what Clemencia Rodriguez terms “citizen media,” a process wherein “a collectivity is enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape” (Rodriguez 20). By sharing their thoughts online and linking to a community of peers and traditional news sources, bloggers are indeed shaping the ever-evolving online mediascape.

Blogging as Journalism?

The debate over whether or not blogging can be considered journalism is a fascinating site of contestation: a simultaneous comingling and clash between traditional and emerging forms of media. Kline and Burstein point out that blogging is part of a larger “explosion” of citizen-created media, as well as a continuation of a tradition of oral storytelling (Kline and Burstein 247). The ultimate appeal of blogging is the empowerment of the citizen to participate in news discourse (Ibid 248). Through this technology, the former audience is able to comment on news stories, to do its own fact checking and following up, and to combine snippets from various sources to compose its own news *mélange*.

According to journalist Dan Gillmor, blogging is evidence that “the collision of journalism and technology is having major consequences for three constituencies: journalists, newsmakers, and the audience” (Gillmor 237). Due to the lack of censorship,

bloggers are guaranteed more freedom of speech than most professional journalists. This allows them to write from the point of view of activists, as they are not constrained by news assignments and instead are free to cover topics for which they feel a passion. As Chris Atton points out, the former actors in the stories are becoming the storytellers (Atton 40). He argues that this shift “challenges the expert culture of both the news journals and the ‘expert’ columnist” (Ibid). People who wish to comment on news stories or current events do not have to have their comments moderated through channels of mainstream media, such as writing letters to the editor.

Citizens are able to share their opinions on their blogs, or in the comments section of other blogs, and “in a new twist, amplify the ‘conversations’ among journalists” (Reece et al 2). For example, if a blogger is interested in a topic such as the Bush Administration’s policies for aid to Africa, she can compare and contrast stories pertaining to the issue from dozens of journalistic sources, and also add her own commentary. She could also write about her own observations of how these aid policies are working in Uganda for example, by blogging from the field while working as a volunteer. A person in this position could report on the situation as an amateur journalist, employing journalistic practices such as using sources to give herself more credibility (McIntosh 387). As Stephen D. Reece et. al. note, due to the way that the internet has augmented the speed and reach of communication, “the online environment ‘deterritorializes’ news, such that the user, creator and news subject need no longer to share the same national frame of reference” (Reece et al 2). Thus, a Norwegian blogger could also be “reporting” on the effect of American foreign aid policies in Uganda.

If one looks back, however, it becomes apparent that blogs are by no means the first new technology created in response to the human urge to express and discuss. In *We the Media*, Gillmor lends historical context and perspective to the appearance of grassroots journalism. He claims, for example, that America's very origins as a country were formed by vocal dissent, and that freedom of speech has been the most important virtue in the formation of the country (1-2). He provides a chronology that begins in the late 18th century with political pamphleteer Thomas Paine, progresses through the other forms of media such as the telegraph, to radio and television broadcasting, as well as the availability of cable, and then personal computers, and finally leads up to the creation of the World Wide Web. He explains how all of these forms of media were used as sites for information sharing and discussion. Like Blood, Gillmor asserts that the events of September 11, 2001 were the "catalyst" which—through the use and proliferation of personal videos, accounts, and opinions online—brought the importance of grassroots media to the forefront (Gillmor 18).

Looking to blogs is becoming a way to gauge public opinion. Mainstream media such as BBC and CNN are now referring to the blogosphere, and "coverage of 'what the bloggers are saying' has begun to replace the traditional vox-pop interview with the person on the street" (Bruns and Jacobs 1). Many scholars have even labeled the blogosphere as the newest incarnation of the Habermasian public sphere, wherein individuals come together to discuss matters of common interest (Keren 9). Indeed, features of the blogosphere do (to an extent) mirror Habermas' ideals for his notion of the public sphere: "access that does not depend on economic resources, autonomy from both state and market forces, and the ability of participants to communicate across

professional, political and geographic boundaries on the basis of reason” (Reece et al 25). Such features pique public interest in the potential of the blogosphere(s), especially in an era that has been characterized as one of centralized and converging media.

On the other hand, several scholars including Cass Sunstein argue that “matters of general interest” will become a thing of the past as peoples’ internet experiences become more and more individualized. Sunstein contends that in the near future, “you [will] need not come across topics and views that you have not sought out. Without any difficulty, you are able to see exactly what you want to see, no more and no less” (Sunstein 3). He claims that general interest intermediaries such as daily newspapers, that expose audiences to all types of stories, are fading in popularity (Ibid 14). Currently, bloggers can choose only to visit their own links. General internet users, moreover, can customize their homepages so that they contain links and feeds only relating to their specific interests or political inclinations. In effect, asserts Sunstein, “they can design something very much like a communications universe of their own choosing” (Ibid 5). Indeed, specialization and fragmentation of the online world will continue to be an issue for communication scholarship over the coming years.

A Question of Credibility

As a relatively new form of communication, however, blogging has not yet established the same level of credibility as mainstream journalism. In fact, credibility in blogging is decidedly different. As Chris Atton points out, “For the weblog, trustworthiness springs from the setting-up of a subjective position from which to write about one’s own experiences—it is less to do with the facticity of the reporting” (Atton

43). Thus, a blogger's subjective position is clear; objectivity is not the *raison d'être* of blogging. Moreover, one's expertise in the offline world (e.g. a Ph.D.) is not as important as the demonstrated knowledge and writing style in the context of the blog or comments section (Barlow 4). In the setting of the blogosphere, this different understanding of credibility functions well enough, but does not always stand as credible information when taken offline. In *Digital Media, Youth and Credibility*, editors Andrew J. Flanagin and Miriam J. Metzger discuss the problematic nature of using online sources (such as blogs) for research. Their concerns arise from the lack of standards for "quality control and evaluation," and that "there are not universal standards for posting information online, and digital information may be easily altered, plagiarized, misrepresented, or created anonymously under false pretenses" (Flanagin and Metzger 13). Flanagin and Metzger are most concerned by young peoples' relationship with online media, and the authors contend that Generation Y "is different from any before in its relationship to information technology, and also in its relationship to information sources" (Ibid 6). Although youth are remarkably media savvy, they argue that they lack the experience to evaluate credibility and authenticity (Ibid).

Furthermore, Flanagin and Metzger argue, Generation Y has an ethos of sharing and collaborating, as "the interactivity afforded by digital media has set up an expectation among many young people to play roles of both information source and receiver simultaneously," which sometimes leads to plagiarism (intentional or not) (Ibid). In the online environment, proper etiquette seems to be swallowed up by all the enthusiasm for sharing.

Criticism of Blogging

Despite its place in grassroots media, and its information sharing potential, the legitimacy of the blog as a journalistic source is contentious. Blogging as a medium is often criticized. Keren, for example, questions the political implications “of the exposure of large numbers of people to an unprecedented amount of news selected for them by trusted virtual figures” and how the “blurring of the private/public divide, while intensifying the digital divide, affect[s] global political discourse” (Keren 6). He asks whether the blogosphere can really be considered a “new political arena,” where action transpires, or rather, can become “a gathering place for the ‘low and pathetic’” (Ibid 5). Access to a soapbox does not necessarily mean a person is a great orator. Or, as Geert Lovink points out, “Mere empowerment does not automatically lead to worthy content” (Lovink 3). In an especially harsh criticism, Keren asserts that, “millions of individuals write their lives while giving up on living them, if only because of the long hours they spend at their computers” (Keren 15). He also points out that the blogosphere is by no means a utopia; it has plenty of bigots, gossips and extremists, who ensure that the medium “continues to resemble the world at large” (Ibid 151).

Kris R. Cohen takes an avid interest in the criticism of blogging, noting recurring themes in critiques of the medium, and looks at how “blogs and their critics encounter one another in the period of blogs’ emergence, and what the stakes of this encounter are for blogs, as well as for critics” (Cohen 162). Through his research, he has concluded that humans struggle when they encounter new things, especially new technologies. It can be understood he contends, “as a struggle over recognition” (Ibid). For each new popular technology, people essentially ask: “does it pervert what was good, what we once had

(even though it might not have been much)? Or will it finally realize our wildest (and usually oldest) dreams?” (Ibid 170). Furthermore, according to Cohen, no new technologies appear “as if by magic, out of thin air,” but rather they emerge within a specific socio-political milieu (Ibid). Therefore, when studying blogs, it is useful to look at the context in which they have emerged and developed.

CONTEXT: GLOBALIZATION AND POSTMODERNITY

Blogging achieved popularity at the cusp of the 21st century, a time when globalization is becoming more than just a buzzword. The globally connected are those who have access to the means of capital for heightened communication via ICTs and global travel opportunities. Ben Agger contends that although he feels this stage of history is called modernity, postmodern theoretical categories are required to “help explain how our media culture and information technologies get inside our heads, position our bodies, and dictate our everyday lives” (Agger 1).

A postmodern approach is useful for an examination of travel blogs, especially since it entails what Anthony Giddens refers to as “time-space distancing,” and what geographer David Harvey calls “an intense phase of time-space compression” (Giddens 64, Harvey 284). Giddens describes one of the phenomena of postmodernity as the effect of globalization: “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 64). The vast network of blogospheres linking people in different countries has come in turn to be known as *blogalization*, which of course is a

play on globalization and localization, and represents the seemingly globally interconnected world. Agger feels that the postmodern approach is an important way to consider contemporary life because of what he terms “the worldliness of selves”; in other words, the increasing rapidity with which people move, think, decide, consume, work and communicate (Agger 4). Modern technology enables many humans to move around and learn about the world more quickly than ever before. Despite technologically mediated progress, however, there is a limit to what humans can do. Furthermore, there is a huge disparity in speed between the ways that the virtual and real worlds function, and therefore also between those who are on and offline.

Annabelle Sreberny is skeptical of contemporary rhetoric that “suggests that we live in a unitary world in which space and time have collapsed and the experience of distance [has] imploded for ever” (Sreberny 93). Access to the internet is by no means universal; the sensation of interconnectedness afforded to those online is not shared by those left behind by the digital divide (Norris 2001). Sreberny alleges that the “rapidity and complexity of change in the media environment” is such that scholars require a new set of theoretical tools with which to analyze contemporary life. She contends that older perspectives, such as the aforementioned terminology of Giddens and Harvey “often seem frozen in a bygone era” (Ibid). A principal change that has been part of the process of globalization is the widening gulf between the global rich and poor, to the connected and unplugged, and therefore theories of space-time compression arguably apply only to the elite (Castells 2000). Those blogging are certainly those who have the time and access to do so.

COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATION

Though the effects of globalization are uneven, large parts of the world's population have had their lifestyles drastically affected by the proliferation of technology and travel. Gili S. Drori argues that globalization has condensed social space, "linking with people and cultures far away and far removed from us," creating a "network society" (Drori 1). Some people can now travel the world, staying in close e-contact with friends and family, international businesses can send virtually instant updates from country to country, and journalists working for international press agencies can email their reports from the field to the headquarters at remarkable speeds. Communication technology is thus becoming progressively more embedded in human interaction.

Blogging to a Global Community?

This fusion of culture and technology, argues Mark Poster (2006), challenges many assumptions of modern society, such as the belief that "cultures are in essence national" (Poster 9). Poster believes that the "emerging mode of information, tethering humans and machines, is recognizably global" (Ibid). It must be remembered, however, that humans are driving the development of digital technology — not vice versa. As Drori cautions us to keep in mind, "digital technology—and thus the social divides that it creates—is the ultimate global technology, mostly because global actors were its main motors of diffusion" (Drori 10). Another interesting point to consider is that the living environment of humans depends on what constitutes "living." If one is to consider that business, socializing, and even shopping are increasingly moving online, it can be argued

that a great deal of life activities are happening online. As Levy asserts, “We inhabit (or will inhabit) cyberspace just as we do the geographic city, and it will become a significant part of our global living environment” (Levy 177). Thus, the online and mobile environment will be an interesting realm to study over the next decade.

Global Citizenship and “Pop Cosmopolitanism”

After reflecting on the way globalization is arguably forging an interconnected global community, it is timely to consider an idea of citizenship that transcends borders. Drori believes that globalization has expanded societies from national to global, that people increasingly feel that international matters affect them, and that we humans consequently “stretch our loyalties to reflect our new status as ‘citizens of the world’” (Drori 4). The previous chapter discussed how the privilege of inhabitants of the first world allows them to feel like global citizens. For the world’s elite, geography is easily conquered, either by plane or by personal computer, or as Zygmunt Bauman phrases it: “in both its ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ renditions” (Bauman 88). He adds that the feelings of close and far become ambiguous, “at least to those whose actions can move with the speed of the electronic message” (Ibid 13). According to Bauman, “global businessmen, global culture managers or global academics,” are the ones who tend to have the easiest access to the global community (Ibid 89). In an especially brilliant insight, Bauman contends that distance is actually a social product, and “its length varies depending on the speed with which it may be overcome” (Ibid 12). It is for this reason that the world’s

elites—with money and time at their disposal—are the most likely to adopt a cosmopolitan outlook.

The kind of cosmopolitanism commonly lauded by popular culture, or worked into corporate slogans such as Microsoft's "Where do you want to go today?" promotes what Henry Jenkins terms "pop cosmopolitanism" (Jenkins 164). Jenkins carefully separates his notion of pop cosmopolitanism from McLuhan's theory of the *global village* and also distances it from the concept of media imperialism (Ibid 156). Pop cosmopolitanism, he claims, "walks a thin line between a dilettantism and connoisseurship, between orientalist fantasies and a desire to honestly connect and understand an alien culture" (Ibid 164). The next chapter will discuss the ways in which travel bloggers exemplify Jenkins' descriptions. At this point, however, it is fair to say that travel bloggers—existing as they do between home and abroad, between participation and voyeurism—subscribe to a pop cosmopolitan ideal. Travel bloggers may have an honest desire to learn more about other cultures, but their ability to travel in order to do so is indicative of their privileged position.

Blogo-Citizenship

The idea of the global village and global citizenship has been explored, but what about citizenship in the blogosphere? Does a blogging community really exist? If so, how does one come to belong to it? As previously mentioned, the relative accessibility, lack of censorship and ability to comment and discuss make blogs a good forum for online expression and interaction. Graham Lampa argues that the very process of blogging "has a democratizing effect that can evoke feelings of shared experience" (Lampa). Through

posting, receiving feedback, and visiting others' blogs, users are able to feel a part of an online community of sorts. He uses Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of *imagined communities*—which postulates that all communities not face-to-face are imagined—to explain how illusions of cohesiveness between groups of people are formed. He explains that, “In the case of the blogosphere, the sense of community is coaxed into existence within the minds of its members in a style that stems from the instant publishing's medium itself to create a discursive, transnational, online imagined community (Ibid).

It has already been established that there is no one blogosphere; rather, there are countless smaller blogospheres. As Lampa explains, within the online blogging community, there is a clear separation “between an active, highly social core and a large periphery that is disengaged from that core” (Ibid). While acknowledging this division, this thesis is concerned primarily *with* the periphery, the tiny communities of travel blogs, each with their own *nanoaudiences*. After all, as Lampa points out, “it is among these small, tightly knit bundles of blogs where a kernel of real interactive community lies” (Ibid). Most bloggers use their blogs as diaries to perpetuate existing close relationships from the offline world (Ibid). This form of use is the rule of blog use, while large readerships and hyperactive discussions are the exception. For these reasons, contends Lovink, blogs tend to create “communities of like-minded people” (Lovink 17). People with shared social ties, common interests or political sympathies tend to link to each other, often mirroring divisions and groupings found in real life.

Limited Access

Unfortunately, many of the inequalities that exist offline limit access not only to computer and internet use, but to the blogging communities as well. Although almost anyone can start and maintain a blog, it is difficult to expand beyond one's *nanoaudience*. It would be technologically deterministic to say that blogging is inherently democratic—it is not. On the contrary asserts Levy, behind blogging technology itself, “ideas, social projects, utopias, economic interests and strategies of power—the entire range of humankind’s activities in society—can be seen as acting and reacting” (Levy 5). When one considers issues of access and usage on a global scale, it can be seen that the blogging community “represents a relatively small number of global elites who have the luxury of time, talent, and expendable wealth,” and while blogging is easy once online, the majority of the world’s population is offline (Lampa).

Furthermore, even amongst those people online, there is a gendered division. A study titled “The Gendered Blogosphere: Examining Inequality Using Network and Feminist Theory” by Dustin Harp and Mark Tremayne concluded that a survey of the most linked political blogs (according to blog indexes) “suggests a disproportionate number of male writers” and that this dominance within the “virtual political space” mimics the gendered inequalities in actual political spaces (Harp and Tremayne 247). Although the scope of this chapter does not allow for an in-depth examination of the blogosphere’s glass ceiling, it is important to acknowledge that such barriers to access exist. Issues of access and audience attention will become especially important as the

blogosphere continues to develop and new writers try to garner readerships and build communities.

THE SELF IN BLOGGING

With a clearer understanding of the blogosphere's communities, it is pertinent now to look at the smallest unit of the community: the individual blogger. How does the self figure into this discussion of blogging, and of the greater online environment? The blog is a reflection of the blogger, and "directly represents the intent of the person who produces it" (Lampa). Unbound by journalistic guidelines or corporate mandates, the blogger is free to express, and does not have to shroud the self through "detached objectivity" (Ibid). Wearing their own interests, agendas and hearts on their sleeves, bloggers are autobiographical writers; the self is always engaged in the writing.

Ideas of the Online Self

Many scholars have conceptualized ideas of the self in the online environment. Poster, for example, refers to the self as "the digital subject," which is "located automatically in the global space of the network" (Poster 42). He believes that humans are eager to base their online identity on their real life self-concept, and contends, "many if not most online users pursue with unambiguous assurance their territorial identities, seeking to find and to engage those of similar characteristics" (Ibid).

Another conceptualization comes from Agger, who uses the term "cyberself" to describe "this self-assembled, manipulated experience of the world" (Agger 100). Agger,

who ascribes the self less agency than Poster does, feels that online selfhood is the same kind of selfhood “always required of subordinate people throughout history” (Ibid). He believes that people are no more than servants of the capitalist internet project, who define their identities within the confines of the manufactured online environment, accepting its terms and conditions (Ibid). Moreover, Agger purports that capitalism actually *invented* the self “to manipulate it into frenetic, ceaseless citizenship, corporate obedience, and shopping” (Ibid). He argues that in the online environment, selves “position themselves as cyber citizens able to ‘access’ the world simply by going online as well as to the mall” (Agger 100). While both Poster and Agger believe that humans desire and are able to create online counterparts, the two theorists attribute drastically different degrees of agency to the subjects/selves.

Yet another theory of the self is outlined by Frederick Jameson. In his essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Jameson presents the radical postmodern position that the older bourgeois idea of the self is either dead, or that it was a social construction and never really existed in the first place (Jameson 196). The skepticism towards the self, along with the “the death of the subject” or “the end of individualism” is a component of postmodern theory (Ibid 195). He explains that the death of the subject is first and foremost an aesthetic dilemma. Whereas modernism had a “personal, private style of expression,” the postmodern style involves pastiche, collaboration and publicity (Ibid). Since classical modernism was underpinned by the ideology of the unique self, it expected each individual artist to be able to make a unique contribution. If the idea of the self is expired, however, “then it is no longer clear what the artists and writers of the present period are supposed to be doing” (Jameson 196). On a somber note, Jameson

contends that stylistic originality is no longer achievable, and thus “all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Jameson 196).

Other contemporary theorists take issue with some of these postmodern doctrines, thinking them outdated. Sreberny, for example, refutes the notion of the death of the subject (Sreberny 93). She asserts that from the late twentieth century onward, identity has come to the forefront of politics and culture (Ibid). As the internet has become more ubiquitous in modern life, people have been staking their place in the online environment.

Some scholars attribute the enthusiasm to connect online to a kind of response to the “alienation, powerlessness, and crushing anonymity that seem to be such overpowering features of modern life” (Kline 247). By starting a blog, one has real estate in the online market, a digital home of sorts from which to start one’s online life. Since the onset of blogging, Blood has noted the rise in cults of personality in the blogosphere(s). She writes that, “it was, and is, fascinating to see new bloggers position themselves in this community, referencing and reacting to those blogs they read most, their sidebar an affirmation of the tribe which they wish to belong” (Blood). Group association is a key part of belonging in the blogosphere of one’s choice.

Private Lives turn Public Online

Although the power of the blogosphere may be an issue of strength in numbers and the millions of people who now have the power to dissect the products of mainstream media, this thesis is more concerned with the role of the individual blogger. In this case, studying the ordinary person is crucial. With so many people sharing more personal

information more publicly than ever before, diary type blogging offers a rich cultural text for the investigation of the intersection of private and public. Blogs are written by ordinary people who have made themselves very visible. Cohen says that this visibility nullifies the blogosphere's chance at being the next public sphere (Cohen 166). From his viewpoint, bloggers have become too visible "precisely in their self-interested individualism" to qualify for the Habermasian public sphere, in which:

the body which is able to present itself as racially, sexually and economically unmarked—that is, as white, straight and middle class—is granted the right to produce an apparently disinterested version of itself, a version which, by virtue of its negativity (its lack of contingency), could circulate as appropriately dispassionate, as worthy of public speech, as betokening, in and of itself, the common good (Ibid).

In other words, bloggers are too self-interested, too clear about their identities, tastes, belief systems and political leanings to be considered neutral. They bring too much of their private life into the public realm, such that the public is no longer "public" in the Habermasian sense. It must be remembered that many blogs are essentially public diaries, "a term that expresses the productive contradiction between public and private in which bloggers find themselves" (Lovink 6).

Until this point almost all diaries have been private (Lovink 6). Carlin Flora discusses how the "nation" of diary bloggers contains over 65 million people, explaining that many bloggers have profited from their highly personal style of writing in a very public forum, some even being offered book deals for their stories (Flora 82). She points out that people have always been willing to tell their secrets to strangers, but "in times past these admissions were aimed at confidants — priests, soul mates, diaries" (Ibid). The online environment, with its inherent sense of detachment, has a disinhibiting effect on people. According to Flora, "electronic disclosure eliminates the normal self-censorship

mechanisms that have evolved over human history” (Ibid 85). At a deeper level, the diary type blog allows an individual to celebrate and broadcast his or her individual adventures, and even their more banal aspects of daily life.

This process of sharing turns an ordinary person’s life into a published story, and allows the individual to feel like “something more than an anonymous drone in a technological and impersonal world” (Flora 85). By reading others’ public diaries, bloggers can reflect on the subjects at hand, and learn more about themselves in the process. If not always objective or truthful, public diary blogs represent what Blood terms “an unprecedented opportunity for individual expression on a worldwide scale” (Blood). What is more, for all his criticism of blogs, even Keren admits that studying blogs is a critical step in the rethinking of the public/private divide, that was “traditionally affected by an abstract notion of the individual, and lack of means to penetrate his or her private sphere or lack of incentive to do so because it was considered irrelevant” (Keren 11). A critical look at blogs and blogging practice brings a discussion of the individual into the realm of public discourse.

Conclusion

When considering the potential of blogs, it is also important to consider the temporal context, in the sense that most blogs only last a few months. The phenomenon of abandoned blogs is referred to as part of an “internet graveyard,” made up of deserted blogs known as “ghost blogs,” (Allen-Mills 2007). The transitory nature of blogs, notably the tendency for posting to be finite, is an important issue to keep in mind in regarding the potential long-term impact of blogs on realms such as foreign aid discourse. Levy

argues that by the time users, the media, and scholars begin to pay attention to a technology, its moment has already passed. He writes that, “while we are still questioning its utility, other technologies are emerging on the nebulous frontier where ideas, things and practices are invented” (Levy 8).

So what is the significance then, of studying blogs or other transient, evolving technologies? The value lies in what they reveal about the greater context from which they emerge. In the case of travel blogs, they represent a moment in time wherein individuals used technology to share their stories from abroad. From this, we can glean information about the incidence of increased international travel, and technologically facilitated representations of foreign countries. Furthermore, as Lovink points out, “there is a quest for truth in blogging. But it is truth with a question mark. Truth here has become an amateur project, not an absolute value, sanctioned by higher authorities” (Lovink 13). Blogs are unique in that they do not claim to know or to tell the “truth,” but seek it through expression, sharing, self-reflexivity and interaction within a limited online community.

CHAPTER 3 — BLOGGING THE “AUTHENTIC AFRICAN EXPERIENCE”

This chapter focuses on a sample of blogs written by Canadians who have traveled to various African countries as voluntourists. Each person in the sample employed the easy-to-use technology of the blog in order to publish and share personal experiences abroad with friends and family back home, or with whoever happened to come across their site. By analyzing several aspects of these travel blogs, this chapter investigates a medium that exists at the intersection of travel and technology, and explores the representations and reflections that arise from narratives of Canadians in Africa

Furthermore, this chapter includes a three-part analysis: Part One of the analysis provides a general overview of the subject matter of the corpus. It includes general information about the blogs themselves: who the bloggers are, in which countries they volunteered, average length and frequency of posts, et cetera. Part One also features a survey of the topics discussed. Part Two is a discourse analysis of the blog text. During a close reading of the blog posts, recurring themes were identified. Discursive formations from the blog texts were thus selected and sorted, an analysis that comprises the bulk of this chapter. In Part Three, several of the bloggers, through e-mail interviews, reflect on their experiences keeping a blog while abroad. The final section also explores the potential for blogging as a part of international communication and development.

METHODOLOGY

While the original intention was to look at 30 blogs, upon beginning the research, it quickly became apparent that each blog was a rich cultural artifact and yielded plentiful information. Based on this realization, the corpus was reduced to the more manageable number of 15 blogs (see Appendix A for a list of the blogs). The blogs were selected through a snowball sampling technique, and many blogs were discovered through the links on other volunteer blogs. In order to qualify for the sample, the blog had to be maintained by a Canadian citizen who wrote about his or her experiences as a voluntourist in an African country between the years of 2003 and 2008.

It is challenging to approach any new form of media, especially one that varies so much depending on the author. The blog is different from many other forms of online media, which might be hosted and updated by businesses, organizations, or groups of people with shared interests. A blog is typically maintained by only one person, and usually has nothing to sell or promote besides the stories of the blogger. Furthermore, the personal, diary-type blog with which this thesis is concerned has a very different, less formal narrative form than most online media, as its focus is primarily personal events and reflections. As Lovink points out, "A weblog is the voice of a person...it is a digital extension of oral traditions more than a new form of writing" (Lovink 10). Thus it must be approached as a form of personal expression, rather than simply as a new form of online communication. For this reason, it is difficult to use common research methods in a study involving blogs. For example, as Keren notes, one cannot use random sampling to

make generalizations “in the absence of a clear, stable, finite universe of blogs to be sampled” (Keren 7). Since blogs exist online, studies in which traditional sampling techniques used to “make general statements about the gender or socio-economic composure of bloggers” are not accurate” (Ibid).

Keren suggests that a more useful approach to blogging is to inform one’s study with the approach of life writing, which “derives theoretical and historical statements from autobiographical works, whose unique character is acknowledged, and whose range incorporates both real and fictional writings” (Ibid). While in the past having one’s life writing published was only available to people of a higher social class, blogging allows anyone with computer literacy and internet access to publish their life stories. In this way, it allows for “liberation from the authority of parents, peers, governments, institutions, or publishers who, in the past, decide about which life-story was worthy of print and which not” (Keren 7). Marlene Kadar explains that life writing approaches autobiographical literature while keeping in mind “that ‘autobiographical’ is a loaded word, the ‘real’ accuracy of which cannot be proved and does not equate with either ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’ truth” (Kadar 10). This approach is especially interested in the subjectivity of an individual’s stories, as influenced by his or her place in a specific social, political, economic, temporal, racial and gender milieu. Texts wherein the author writes primarily about his or her own experiences, and “does not pretend to be absent from the (black, brown or white) text himself/herself” therefore constitute life writing (Ibid). The life writing approach is useful for a study of blogs written by Canadians in African countries, many of whom find themselves suddenly thrust into a situation that differs completely

from their own, and who share how they come to terms with the differences they encounter.

While many of the bloggers maintained more than one blog during their trip—often one official blog affiliated with their host organization, and a personal one—the latter was always chosen, as this research is most interested in reflection on personal experiences. In addition to using a life writing approach, this chapter will examine the blog texts through a discourse analysis in the tradition of Foucault, which aims, “not at the individual productions of a single and canonical author, but at the collectively produced discourse surrounding and constituting a particular matter of social interest or action” (Campbell 262). In other words, this chapter looks at common themes that arise from the collective discourse of the sample.

PART ONE — OVERVIEW AND OBSERVATIONS

Before delving into the discourse analysis, it is pertinent to give an overview of the blogs, beginning with some information on the people who maintained them, as subjectivity and authorial perspective are two key components of this analysis. Based on the information gleaned from the blog text and photographs (see Appendix B for basic information about the blogs), I have made several observations about the bloggers. First of all, most of them appear to be in their twenties and are either students or recently graduated from some form of post-secondary education. Of the bloggers in this study, nine are male, six are female, and as a group they are predominantly Caucasian. They are

all voluntourists, which means that they are on a trip that combines some form of philanthropy with tourism.

Some examples of organizations with which the bloggers are affiliated include: Engineers without Borders, The Africa Hope Foundation of Ghana, Western Heads East, Journalists for Human Rights, and the Mennonite Economic Development Associates. To give an example of the kinds of mission statements of voluntourism organizations, Youth Challenge International (YCI) has promotional literature that is fairly exemplary. Although it is an international development organization, its promotional literature emphasizes the personal development to be gained from participating in its programs. In its “Travel with Purpose” section YCI notes that its trips “do focus on achieving development results, but it also become a fantastic travel experience that you would never be able to replicate on your own” (Youth Challenge International).

The Engineers without Borders (EWB) organization (with whom several of the bloggers were affiliated) notes on its website that it encourages its volunteers to engage friends, family and strangers back home by sharing their stories online (Engineers without Borders). By doing so, contends EWB, volunteers are “ultimately helping to bridge the gap between Canada and the developing world. Focused on their impact both overseas and in Canada, this group is helping to drive extraordinary change” (Engineers without Borders). This kind of rhetoric positions the volunteers as unofficial foreign correspondents, whose amateur ‘reportage’ is mediated through the blog format.

Journalist Rebecca McKinnon has termed people who blog from a country and have an understanding of its issues, “bridge bloggers” (cited in Kline and Burstein 332). The notion of the bridge blogger can be applied to voluntourist bloggers, as they are

writing from the field, ostensibly to share with people in their home countries what they are learning about a given country.

Given that the voluntourist bloggers of this study tend to write more based on observation than interviews, and more about their personal experiences than events of the countries they are visiting, they are more akin to travel writers than political journalists. Though not explicitly focused on politics, travel writing does bear important representations. As Elfriede Fursich points out, it is in travel journalism that “representing the Other is the constitutive part of the work” (Fursich 58). As part of the cultural practice of journalism, travel writing is done by “professionals who use their cultural and interpretive authority to shape cultural memory and the production of knowledge in general” (Ibid 59). Fursich believes that “non fiction entertainment” such as travel journalism will play an increasingly large role in informing audiences about other cultures, especially “as traditional international journalism loses authority” due to decreased budgets for foreign correspondents and greater changes in the news industry (Ibid 61).

Interestingly, Fursich does not believe that travel journalists need be objective; rather, she suggests that journalism should “actively embrace a role of in-betweenness,” or what she terms “liminoid journalism” (Ibid 79). Her idea of liminoid journalism entails journalists taking part in the postmodern act of challenging status boundaries, and representational roles. Instead of acting detached, travel journalists who are in the field should share their own perspective and observations, as well as the input of those they have encountered in the community. This, she argues “is the only way for audiences and ‘locals’ to understand the ideological point of reference of both journalists and

journalism” (Fursich 79). The voluntourist blogs in this chapter are often highly personal, deeply opinionated and candid. Seeing as the blogs are predicated upon the bloggers being strangers in strange lands, and are based on the blogger’s expressly subjective style of ‘reporting’ on what he or she sees, it is fair to say that voluntourist bloggers exemplify Fursich’s notion of liminoid journalism.

In their writing, the bloggers are incredibly self-reflexive. Not only do they show a heightened awareness of the problematic nature of being Westerners voluntouring in the developing world, they also seem to expect to encounter certain struggles due to their position. Many of the bloggers make reference to some form of pre-departure cultural training, which attempted to prepare them for some of the challenges and frustrations that they would likely encounter in a foreign country. They seemed prepared to experience or at least be aware of the phenomenon of culture shock, as well as “reverse culture shock” that often arises once travelers are reintroduced into their own culture. Moreover, almost every blogger mentioned culture shock in one of their first posts upon arrival in the African country, and nearly all those who posted after returning home referred to reverse culture shock. The bloggers’ discussions of culture shock will be explored in greater depth in Part Two of this chapter.

Another issue that the bloggers seemed to be aware of—even before leaving for their trips—is the inaccuracy and/or incompleteness of many representations of Africa. Several of the bloggers give the impression that they are fully expecting and looking forward to having their pre-conceived notions of Africa debunked. For example, Luke Brown notes on his blog *I’ll Alight at the This Thing* that until arriving in Ghana, his image of “Africa” was based upon what he had seen in World Vision commercials — a

picture that he felt was hopeless and over-simplified (Brown, February 13, 2006). He explains his excitement to have the opportunity “to meet and talk with normal people living here, to understand that, just like anywhere else in the world, people here go to the store to buy food, go to work, spend time with friends, bike through the city, care for their children, fall in love” (Brown, February 13, 2006). Part of the reason the bloggers may be so conscious of the mythology surrounding the continent of Africa is that, according to Mary Blaine Campbell, post-secondary students in English speaking countries are now taught to read against the grain of what are seen as “situated and ideological texts” (Campbell 262). Campbell argues that increasingly, higher education encourages students to become media literate and critical, to dissect the texts and imagery they encounter (Ibid). Therefore these bloggers, many if not all of who are university educated, have been taught to be aware of different kinds of misrepresentation.

Most of these blogs were started especially for the purpose of the trip. Although some of the bloggers continued posting about their everyday lives (and sometimes sharing further thoughts about their time abroad) once they returned home, in most cases, the blogs ended when the trips did. As Matt Walton explains in one of his last posts on his blog *Matt's Trip to Kenya*, “Since I am no longer in Kenya, mattinkenya will cease to exist and mattincanada seems pretty boring” (Walton, June 19, 2006). The lifeblood of the travel blog is comprised of: the new, the novel, the confusing, the frustrating and the fascinating, all of which are best found when the writer is in an unfamiliar place where she is tuned-in to her new surroundings. The familiar and the banal of home do not provide the same degree of inspiration. Ultimately, while taking into account the diverse

subject matter of these blogs, the story being told each time is the tale of the voluntourist's personal journey abroad.

On average, the bloggers posted bi-weekly, with an average post length of 100-500 words. All of the bloggers enabled their comments sections, and almost every post received comments, mostly from family and friends. In a few cases, some of the comments were from strangers. Nearly every blogger included links to other blogs, many of which were written by other voluntourists for the same organization.

In order to give an overview of the subject matter of the blogs, a record was kept of topics mentioned. Each time a post was predominantly about one (or more) topic, the topic(s) was counted in a spreadsheet (see Appendix C and D). The spreadsheet thus provides a reference as to which topics were discussed and how often. Of the 31 categories, the 5 themes discussed most often (though not necessarily in greatest detail) were: volunteering, travel, culture/tradition (both of one's own culture and the visited culture), politics and entertainment.

PART TWO — RECURRING THEMES

Through a close reading of the blogs in their entirety, several recurring themes emerged. Although these themes were not necessarily the ones brought up the most often, they tended to be discussed in greater depth than other issues, and furthermore appeared in almost every blog. The themes this section will explore are: Race & Visibility, Relative Privilege, Development, Authenticity, and Returning Home. All of these themes exemplify issues that the bloggers dealt with during their travels, and—in many cases—

upon returning to Canada. Although these themes emerged from what the bloggers have written about life in the visited countries, they reveal more about the bloggers' self-reflection and issues related to voluntourism than about the African countries. That is, through opining about what they encounter, the bloggers are exposing their own values and priorities as travelers and as participants in international development projects.

Race & Visibility

As previously mentioned, nearly all of the bloggers featured in this research are Caucasian. The two exceptions are one blogger who is a Kenyan-born Canadian citizen of Indian parentage, and another blogger whose parents are Caucasian and Asian respectively. While searching for appropriate blogs, race was not a factor that led me to choose one blogger over another. The blogger needed only to fit the characteristics of being Canadian, and keeping a blog while traveling to an African country in the given time period. That being said, I did not encounter a great deal of racial or ethnic diversity in my research. Almost all of the original 30 blogs intended for this research were written by Caucasian individuals.

Perhaps this is reflective of the racial demographic most attracted to voluntourism, or simply that race and class privilege make it more feasible for relatively wealthy Caucasian young adults to pay to volunteer. Voluntouring can be quite costly. For example, another voluntourism organization, Canada World Youth, explains on its website that its volunteers are responsible for: "A \$250 participation fee; pre program expenses: medical exam, passport, vaccines; a minimum of \$2,100 in fundraising...[plus] your own spending money" (Canada World Youth). This high cost would pose a huge

barrier for most young people, unless their family and friends were willing and able to support them financially. The success of fundraising relies on the wealth of one's community. Therefore, raising money to volunteer would be much more difficult for those in lower income communities. An in-depth exploration of these issues, however, is outside of the scope of this research. The issue at hand relates to how a voluntourist blogger's race played into his or her experience in an African country, and how he or she chose to express issues pertaining to race.

One of the first realizations the voluntourists have upon arriving at their African destination is an awareness of their racial difference, or the visibility of their (in most cases) whiteness. Many of the bloggers state that they have never before felt visible because of their race, however, in their African destination, they are suddenly uncomfortably aware of their difference. Walton explains that it feels strange to be a minority, "to stand out amongst everyone else and to be treated unfairly based on the colour of your skin. It's not exactly oppression, but I am still treated very differently which is a weird feeling." (Walton, February 21, 2006). Though conscious that he is not disadvantaged, he is clearly uneasy with being singled out for his race.

Another blogger, Sarah (last name unknown), has become so accustomed to the race of people in her visited community, that she claims she often forgets her own racial identity. She notes on her blog *Sarah's Summer in Ghana* that "my compound doesn't have a bathroom sink never mind a mirror, so I rarely see my own reflection. So sometimes I forget that I'm not actually black like everyone else." (Sarah, July 2, 2006). She recognizes, however, that no matter how at home she feels in Ghana, there would always be people aware of her foreignness, calling her "White" as she walks down the

street (Sarah, June 18, 2006). She reports feeling “bizarre” when approached differently based on her skin colour, even though the attention she receives is generally friendly (Ibid). Sarah feels that as a Canadian she often takes living in a multicultural society for granted, forgetting that “there are places in the world where people have never seen people who look different than themselves” (Ibid). Another interesting aspect noted by Sarah is a perception she encounters in Ghana of a racial binary. At one point during her stay, she is trying to explain to a man that her parents are different races: Caucasian and Asian. The man responds that there are only two races: black and white, and that everyone who is not black is considered white. She reports having heard similar views during her stay, that “there are blacks and then there’s everyone else. Africa and the rest of the world” (Sarah, July 25, 2006). She reflects that although she herself has always been aware of different races, she could see how a person raised in an isolated, rural Ghanaian community, “where possibly the only foreigners you see are white people driving by in white SUVs or white people in nice clothes posing for photos with the new hand pump they paid for,” would have a very different concept of other races (Ibid). In these examples, voluntourists have suddenly become aware of the visibility of their race, the shock of which also says something about the predominance of whiteness in their own countries.

In *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, author Shannon Sullivan argues that a person’s race is “the product of transaction with her world due to her social ‘location’ within it, which means that other people help constitute the racialization of her experience through their perceptions of and reactions toward her” (Sullivan 159). Moreover, she adds that a person cannot “erase her whiteness,” even by

seeking to identify with other cultures, or by distancing oneself from one's own culture (Ibid). In these blogs, we see many of these voluntourists become conscious of their racial difference, or Otherness, due to the reception they receive in the visited countries. Their "habit" of blending in is disrupted when they stand out dramatically because of their colour. Steve Garner asserts in *Whiteness: An Introduction* that the realization of one's whiteness often comes from being in "an unusual setting through mobility" (Garner 44). He adds that for the majority of white people, whiteness "is so unmarked that in their eyes, it does not actually function as a racial or ethnic identity," until they find themselves to be a visual minority (Ibid 35). Sullivan and Garner's theories on whiteness are exemplified in many cases in the voluntourist blogs, whenever the bloggers note a sudden awareness of their racial difference.

Once the bloggers are conscious of their own Otherness, they often note the different ways in which locals react to them. In the first case, when they are received with wonder, they seem to welcome the attention they receive. On her blog 525, 600 in *Ethiopia*, Kate Jongbloed says that her different appearance brings people in a remote village to ask her "are you a man or a woman?', 'Can you talk?', 'Can you laugh?'"(Jongbloed, October 30, 2006). She adds that each time she left the village, a scene would unfold as follows: "children would run after me, yelling, "Farenj Farenj" ("white person white person") I would reply "Habisha Habisha" ("Ethiopian Ethiopian") and they would laugh uncontrollably" (Ibid). She is amused by this attention, and seems fascinated, in turn, by the wonder her difference evokes. Similarly, Gillian Edworthy notes on her blog *A Beacher's Tidal Thoughts*, that she has begun to respond to the word "obruni" (the Twi word for white person) as if it were her name (Edworthy, January 11,

2007). She does not feel the attention she receives is negative, only the product of curiosity, since, like many of the bloggers, Edworthy finds herself surrounded by children who are infinitely curious about who she is and why she is in Ghana.

Many of the bloggers even report feeling like a celebrity at times. Jongbloed confesses that, “Sometimes I feel like a rock star here because of all the attention I get, and once my friends bought me a souvenir scarf in Ethiopian colours, that attention doubled” (Jongbloed, October 15, 2006). In an amusing anecdote, Jared Penner of the blog *Jared’s Mozambique Adventure* explains how his race and specific appearance garner him ample attention, especially around Christian holidays. He writes that, “white guys with beards and long hair are a pretty uncommon sight in Maputo and are almost unheard of in these all-black communities. As a result, a lot of Mozambicans think I look like Jesus so you can imagine how popular I was on Easter Sunday!!” (Penner, April 17, 2006). In this quote, it is clear that Penner embraces his resemblance-related celebrity. Additionally, Walton also notes the frequent attention his racial difference attracts, asserting that, “When a mzungu [Swahili word for white person] walks into a place here, everyone looks at you, well that’s the way it feels anyway. Being white is like instant celebrity status everywhere, especially bars” (Walton, April 3, 2006). He recounts a story of attending a Kenyan wedding:

I was the only muzungu [sic] (white guy) there and it was hilarious. Some of the kids had never seen a white person and their reactions were priceless. Some were so happy and others ran away from me. I think I was a guest of honour, they wanted me to give a speech. Fortunately my colleague told them that I would not. But the camera filming the ceremony seemed to spend a lot of time on me
(Walton November 14, 2005).

In this instance, Walton is amused, albeit uncomfortably so, with the attention he receives, a reaction that is shared by most of the voluntourists when this kind of situation arises.

In the significantly titled blog *I'm Even Whiter in Africa*, Graeme Burrows frequently notes feeling “naked” or “a spectacle” as a white person (Burrows, October 13, 2006). He writes that when he and a group of other white people went to a market, “everywhere we went a little herd of people followed, just staring. It's a lot like being in a zoo” (Burrows, October 26, 2006). Burrows in particular seems hyper-conscious of his race, almost anticipating the attention he would receive by naming his blog before even departing for his trip. Perhaps because of his pre-conceived notions of how he would stand out, Burrows is more apt to notice reaction to his racial difference in any given situation.

Other bloggers are made aware of the significance of the attention they receive from locals. Kate Daley writes in her blog *A Fine Mess of Contradictions* that while dancing at a bar one night, she was thankful to be accompanied by a group of local men, as if to detract attention she might have otherwise received. She notes that, “As an obruni (white person), Ghanaian men will want to marry you because they think you are rich-said one guy I met that night (but of course he just wanted to give me his email... riiighht)” (Daley, February 9, 2007). In this case, she is told that it is the combination of her race, gender and assumed wealth that guarantees her attention from locals. In Daley's recounting, we see that a voluntourist is made aware of the connotations she carries with her. Despite the positive nature of a lot of the attention the voluntourists receive, they are certainly conscious of the fact that their visibility might also elicit less positive reactions.

The second sense in which the bloggers write about their race and visibility is that of being treated as a target, with contempt, or more generally as an outsider. Kartick Kumar, who is Kenyan-born Canadian citizen of Indian heritage, describes feeling unwelcome due to his race. In his blog *A Journey to Africa*, he describes a “look of hopelessness” in the eyes of his fellow Kenyan citizens and purports that “although born here, the brownness of my skin and my Asian features draw looks of contempt” (Kumar, August 22, 2005). It is difficult to know whether the looks Kumar interprets as contemptuous are truly meant to be so, however, one cannot really deny his feeling ill at ease. While at times the attention the voluntourists receive is harmless, at other times they interpret it as harassment. In her blog *Kelly Christine*, Kelly C. Anderson calls the harassment of white people “a sport” in Kigali, Rwanda (Anderson, October 25, 2005). She recounts being followed by a shoe salesman down the street, while he yelled “mzungu” at her for several minutes straight (Ibid). Though accustomed to being greeted by the local word for their race, the bloggers often express frustration at the incessant use of the term. Daley feels haunted by the word “obruni,” feeling she needs no constant reminder of her obvious foreignness. She exclaims: “I know that I stand out and that I’m a foreigner, but I have been here for a month now! They see white people or foreigners all the time, so whyyyy why do they feel the need to yell at me whenever they see me?” (Daley, March 3, 2007). Many of the bloggers are especially aware of children’s reactions to their racial difference, noting their dismay at the tendency for young children to be afraid of their appearances. Sarah contends that most Ghanaian children are “naturally blood-curdling-ly terrified of ‘white’ people,” noting that they react in two ways: “petrified shock – fear seizes their joints and they freeze as if someone pressed the

pause button, or screaming in absolute terror for someone to hide this ghastly thing” (Sarah, July 2, 2006). She and other voluntourists describe this phenomenon as amusing but heartbreaking.

From the standpoint of the bloggers, the most troubling reactions to their ‘whiteness’ are instances where they feel they are targeted or victimized. In his blog *GhanaBryn*, Bryn Ferris states that he feels “ill-at-ease” in the face of excessive attention, as he suspects people are looking to take advantage of him” (Ferris, May 9, 2006). Walton, straight to the point, asserts that, “When you are white, they see you coming and jack the price to whatever they can get away with so you have to be careful or you will get ripped off” (Walton February 21, 2006). A lot of the bloggers’ worries about being taken advantage of or ripped off are likely a product of the warnings they received in their pre-departure training. They are in fact taught to keep their guard up, and expect to be harassed and even endangered as visible minorities. Penner explains that he originally shrugged off such warnings, and scoffed at “many of the ex-pats living in Maputo, who lock themselves in gated houses and never venture out after dark. The whole time that I’ve been here I felt that their paranoia was unjustified” (Penner, October 7, 2005). He recognizes the seriousness of such warnings when he is later robbed at knifepoint, going so far as to say: “What’s worse is that I feel I was targeted specifically because of the colour of my skin” (Ibid). Penner expresses his anger at not being able to feel safe in his neighbourhood, and his lack of desire to live in fear. In this situation, one is apt to point out that Penner should have been aware of the circumstances of the country he was visiting, and to accept that as a visible minority he could very well be targeted.

Sullivan argues that white people have a habit of “claiming a ‘right’ to project themselves into any and all spaces,” but that many of these spaces do not necessarily welcome them (Sullivan 165). Furthermore, she contends that the psychological discomfort they experience in such places reveals the fact that “space is not racially neutral or empty and that white people do not have a legitimate claim to all space” (Sullivan 165). The above examples, and the way the visibility of race is a universal issue in the blogs of this study points to an awareness that the countries visited are in no way racially neutral; rather, the “racialized” spaces the voluntourists visit force them to confront their own race(s) and the uncomfortable realizations that entails.

Relative Privilege

A second main theme that arose in almost every blog was recognition of the inequality that exists between different parts of the world, and being confronted by one’s relative privilege. Many of the bloggers seem quite aware of these issues before traveling to their visited country, though they realize them to a fuller extent upon arrival. Writing in her blog *8 Months in Nairobi*, Sara Nics acknowledges that her “white skin, education and the Canadian social welfare system have meant a life of privilege and, as far as most Kenyans are concerned, wealth” (Nics, September 4, 2007). In Kenya during the violence surrounding the 2007 Presidential election⁵, she believes that skin colour and privilege have kept her and her peers out of the way of immediate danger, an injustice that does not go unnoted (Nics, January 6, 2008). In accordance with the way Nics acknowledges her privilege, Brown often makes reference to his recognition of the power

⁵ On December 27, 2007 Violence broke out in Kenya after the re-election of President Mwai Kibaki was contested by opposition leader Raila Odinga, who claimed the election was rigged. Violence broke out over the election results, and many people were killed (BBC News. International Version. Africa. December 31, 2007).

divide that exists between him and most Africans. His recognition is apparent when he writes: "The colour of my skin shouldn't grant me privileges anywhere, but it's the sad truth that in the developing world, it does" (Brown, April 30, 2008). Brown, moreover, is aware of the privilege inherent even in his ability to be a voluntourist. He adds that many times he has been approached by Ghanaians who have said, "It's easy for you to come to our country, but why can't we visit yours?" (Ibid). He does not provide his answer to their question, but it would be interesting to know what he might have said. Would he have gotten into a conversation about privilege with the people who have drawn the short straw?

Many of the bloggers touch upon issues that have serious power implications. Several bloggers, for example, have observed the trade of sex (on the part of an African) in exchange for money (from a Westerner). Nics observed this while on a beach vacation. She sees a middle-aged white woman fraternizing with one of the local "beach boys," and learns that such vacation relationships are a common occurrence. She thinks of the situation as "doubly exploitive," as "the boy or girl is sexually exploited because of his or her economic status. I wonder if the visiting man or woman is also exploited because of the emotional isolation of the over-developed world[?]" (Nics, September 4, 2007). In another example, Penner discusses how the prevalence of the "sugar daddy" phenomenon (wherein young African girls pair up with Western men, an exchange of sex for financial support and gifts) makes it difficult if not impossible for him to have any kind of power-free relationship with a Mozambiquan woman (Penner, May 17, 2006). From his viewpoint, the dynamic between rich and poor, white and black, further complicated by gender inequality, always looms above romantic interaction.

At many points, the voluntourists write that they are made extremely uncomfortable by being given special treatment, such as being skipped ahead of other patients in hospital lines (Daley, February 26, 2007), being the only fed guests at a church service (Burrows, October 26, 2006), or simply being able to afford food during a nationwide food shortage (Penner, November 24, 2005). Penner's statement that "there are many here that can only dream of the luxuries that I take for granted on a daily basis," is widely echoed in the blogs within this study (Ibid). Contrary to the voluntourists being ignorant of their relative privilege, a close reading of these blogs has shown that they are entirely aware of it, and often guilt-ridden about their position. In one post, Ferris confesses:

The fact is that I feel guilty. I feel guilty about being a rich white kid in an area where 80-90% of the people live on less than a dollar a day. I feel guilty about living a life full of possibilities and opportunities that people here will never have (and that I take for granted). I feel guilty for always telling myself that this placement and its hardships are only temporary. I feel guilty about spending most of my time like a tourist who's having a summer of a lifetime touring through people's poverty and writing self-aggrandizing entries about it (Ferris, June 17, 2006).

In the above paragraph, it is clear that Ferris is not only aware of his privilege, but also of the problematic nature of the kind of vacation he has chosen, *and* the act of writing about it. The fact that similar sentiments are expressed throughout most of the blogs in this study is indicative of a general awareness of inequality, and a willingness to emotionally and intellectually engage with the struggle of dissecting it. Far from denying or ignoring the disparity between themselves and the people in many African countries, these voluntourists show that they are tuned-into and willing to look critically at their own privileged positions.

Based on these postulations, it is pertinent to examine some theories of whiteness and privilege that were briefly touched upon at an earlier point in this chapter. According to Garner, conceptualizing “whiteness as a system of privilege,” is very difficult for white individuals (Garner 5). He believes that addressing whiteness and other inequalities causes people to “feel defensive about their social location” (Garner 36). Although some of the voluntourists describe feeling indignant when targeted or taken advantage of based on their skin colour (and assumed wealth), for the most part they are not overly defensive. Moreover, although coming to terms with their privilege in relation to the poverty they observe distresses them, they are overwhelmingly open and self-reflexive about the process.

Goudge reflects upon her first visit to the African continent as a development worker. She contends that the fact that she was able to go to a country, of which she was fairly ignorant, and assume the position of a development expert because her “whiteness was a badge of superiority” forced her to recognize the “whiteness of [her] power” (Goudge 8). Furthermore, she purports that aid-based trips such as hers are not only indicative of power dynamics between different parts of the world, but also contribute to “the maintenance of those power relationships” (Ibid 9). As mentioned, many of the bloggers indicate that they are quite alert to the inherent power dynamic of the voluntourist trip. Moreover, they are also careful about their representations of this power relationship in their writing. Ferris, for example, notes his disapproval of the way certain Western organizations “always portray African children as helpless and Westerners as their saviours” and vows not to perpetuate this kind of inaccurate representation (Ferris,

May 11, 2006). The bloggers are, for the most part, concerned with representing their visited country positively, and also presenting themselves as culturally sensitive.

In light of the discussion on privilege, it is important to mention that many of the bloggers argue that wealth is culturally relative. Arriving in the various countries prepared to be filled with pity and guilt, many report being surprised by the happiness of the people they meet, despite abysmal standards of living. Jongbloed recounts expecting to encounter “an extremely difficult year of cultural difference, heart wrenching poverty, and loneliness,” but is instead “moved daily by the universal generosity here” (Jongbloed, November 22, 2006). Upon his arrival in Mozambique, Penner notes that he is “struck by the poverty but also impressed by the cheerful nature of everyone we passed. No matter where I look around here everyone seems to be having a good time in their own way” (Penner, September 4, 2005). In another example, Daley finds herself re-thinking her understanding of poverty in general: “I realized my concept of poverty here is so much different than actual poverty here. What I consider poor is nothing compared to the reality. But people here don't seem to dwell on it” (Daley, February 7, 2007). The idea of relative prosperity complicates the notion of privilege, as it raises questions about the subjective nature of wealth and the various conceptualizations of development.

Development

Related to the theme of privilege and relativity, the effectiveness and sustainability of development is another recurring theme in these voluntourist blogs. As was just discussed, many of the bloggers are struck by the happiness and generosity in spite of their poverty that is exhibited by so many people in the various visited African

countries. This paradox appears to have a profound effect on many of the bloggers, causing them to question issues such as the value of money (Mason, October 23, 2007), the necessity of their own volunteer work, and the legitimacy of “development” in general. Ferris, asserting that in terms of community, morals and spirituality, Ghanaians are much more advanced than Canadians, wonders, “how, exactly, is the West trying to ‘develop’ these people? By trying to ‘raise their standard of living,’ dragging them into our crazy consumerist/capitalist system?” (Ferris, May 27, 2007). Ferris is unsettled by the probability that a culture may not need the kind of help he is there to give. Similarly, Brown questions whether or not his trip was an effective use of Canadian resources. He asks: “with all the money spent financing this trip, how many development projects could theoretically have been funded?” (Brown, December 9, 2006). Furthermore, he suggests that such voluntourist trips might simply encourage self-congratulation among Canadians in regards to development (ibid).

Other volunteers wonder what will become of the projects they have worked on, once their trips come to an end. Anderson, for example, is unnerved by the fact that the money that funds her NGO is American, and that the funding source directs the trajectory of the project. She confesses her concerns about the project’s sustainability when she writes: “I am scared that Rwandese priorities are becoming Western ones; I am scared that the capacity here is so low; I am scared that there is very little transfer of skills, I am entirely clueless about what will happen when the American money ends” (Anderson, November 11, 2005). In some cases, lack of sustainability is realized when the bloggers follow up with their host organizations after returning to Canada. Kumar, for example, is dismayed when he finds out the NGO he was working with has collapsed since he left

(Kumar, April 4, 2006). Similar concerns about the ineffectiveness of Western solutions for the African context appear throughout many of the blogs featured here.

Concerns about international development also raise questions about one's responsibility as a global citizen, and specifically as a Canadian citizen. Daley contends that being Canadian has allowed her to remain very naïve about the rest of the world (Daley, February 3, 2007). She notes that the standard of living in Ghana "is so dramatically different [from her life in Canada] that it's actually incomprehensible," (Daley, February 3, 2007). Sarah believes that it is the relative wealth and power of Canada that allows her to have an impact on the international community. She explains that, "At home, our voices are much louder and can be used to tell our leaders how we think Canada should act on the global stage" (Sarah, June 4, 2006). She is happy to be greeted with kindness because of her nationality, but points out that Canadians "can't live on reputation forever," suggesting that her country must emphasize the eradication of poverty in its foreign policy (Ibid). In his blog *Celluloid in Cinders Sold Slowly*, Douglas Keddy argues that there is definitely a value to Canadians volunteering abroad. He contends that, "the more we can learn about people in other parts of the world, the easier it can be to understand where we can help and what we can learn from them" (Keddy, October 23, 2007). In other words, though development and aid efforts are not always as effective or ideal as they could be, by having Canadians on the ground, hopefully learning from mistakes, progress is being made. Similarly, Ferris argues that Canadians should make every attempt to help the people in struggling African countries, "whether driven by good intentions or simple 'white guilt'" (Ferris, July 3, 2006). Whatever the

voluntourists' exact reasoning for volunteering may be, a sense of responsibility, as a Canadian citizen certainly seems to be a motivating factor.

Another motivating factor may be possibilities for personal development that can be achieved through international development. Goudge purports that the decision to do some kind of foreign aid is often based "albeit unconsciously" on one's own interests, rather than pure altruism (Goudge 9). While reading through all of the blogs, it becomes obvious that each person has his or her own unique motivations for choosing a voluntourism trip. Each person, however, could just have easily chosen an all-inclusive beach vacation, or sought a paying job overseas. In addition to a level of desire to partake in some kind of international development work, personal development would certainly be an attractive feature. Kumar, for example, sought to reconcile his hybrid cultural identity, looking for the "missing puzzle" that might be found by returning to his birthplace in Kenya (Kumar, April 7, 2007). Anderson writes that she chose to put off finding a well-paid job in Canada in lieu of the challenge of going to Rwanda, explaining, "deep down I know it is because I will not settle for less than the most personal development I can attain during my lifetime" (Anderson, August 15, 2005). Others find a sense of fulfillment just from getting to know people in their African communities. Penner writes of the elation he feels when spending time with a certain local family, saying it fills him with "a simple happiness and a fresh outlook on life" (Penner, May 3, 2006). In a very different example, Walton found his personal identity became pronounced abroad. He explains that, "when you are at home, everyone is 'that drunken Canadian guy' so you don't stand out as much and lack that identity that can only be

realized by stupid behavior abroad. But here, it was my calling, my niche” (Walton, June 15, 2006).

Some voluntourists, such as Nics, decide to extend their stay beyond the intended length. After the completion of her placement with Journalists for Human Rights, Nics explains that she has decided to remain in Nairobi indefinitely, for “the inexplicable happiness,” and the “myriad professional and personal challenges I face here every day” (Nics, March 18, 2008). The combination of international and personal development forms the basis of voluntourism, so it is appropriate that many of the bloggers focus just as much on personal fulfillment as they do on discussions concerning foreign aid.

Authenticity

Voluntourism is a type of travel that offers the very specific experience of almost guaranteed authenticity. A person who chooses such an endeavour — when they could just as easily travel without the volunteering aspect — is clearly seeking something outside of the travel norm. Voluntourism, on top of catering to those privileged enough to pay to volunteer, necessitates travel to regions of the globe that are sufficiently “underdeveloped” to give the travelers something to improve upon. To be brutally frank, the industry depends upon the relative poverty of areas in the developing world in order to provide an “authentic aid experience.”

Many of the bloggers in this research have confessed their desire to have a truly unique experience, but suspect that all other interns and volunteers go through similar “intern emotions and revelations” while abroad (Jongbloed, April 26, 2007). Some

voluntourists even go beyond their usual volunteering duties to seek out deeper experiences. Ferris, for example, describes his plan to take a special excursion:

The plan is to spend the week living 'exactly' like (as close as possible) a farmer in the village. I've told them I don't want any special treatment with foods, beds, or workload; I'm sure my requests will largely be ignored but I'm going to try and emulate their lifestyle as much as possible...it goes without saying that I will learn a hell of a lot and likely develop a true appreciation for the lives of rural farmers (Ferris, July 18, 2006).

For those voluntourists such as Ferris who have a chance to travel around the less-populated areas, they often describe being enthralled by the "wildness" to the land. Kumar provides a visual image of the countryside around Nairobi, noting, "There is an undistilled rawness to its beauty that is so alluring" (Kumar, February 20, 2006). In another example, Walton describes Lamu, Kenya as "officially the greatest place on Earth," though adding, "but sshhhh, don't tell anyone; we don't want to spoil it with too many tourists. There are already a bunch of the worlds richest buying and building places here" (Walton, May 2, 2006). Voluntourists who have come for an "African" experience commonly express frustration when their expectation of authenticity is polluted by the unsightly presence of throngs of other tourists.

A tension seems to exist between various types of tourists who encounter each other in African countries. Based on the writing in the blogs at hand, one can glean that there are two types of foreigners in the field: voluntourists (and other travelers), and expatriates, the former of which are quick to distinguish themselves from the latter. Kumar describes laughing during a visit to Masai Mara, when noticing that many of the tourists still dress similarly to the way "stuffy colonial types" would have fifty years earlier (Kumar, January 16, 2006). Brown contends that tourists who "visit 'Africa' and spend their time in the beautiful hotels along Accra's beaches, who dine in the foreign-

owned restaurants, who drive about in air-conditioned vehicles with the windows firmly clamped shut,” fail to see the “truer face of Ghana” (Brown, May 26, 2007). His tongue-in-cheek use of ‘Africa’ illustrates his awareness of the way Westerners tend to refer to the continent as a homogeneous entity. Although as a foreigner himself he is arguably not intimately familiar with Ghana, his writing style rhetorically separates him from such kinds of tourists. In another example, Nics recounts an observation her colleague has made about expatriates: “They don’t live in Africa...they are right next to the pulse, but they can’t feel it” (Nics November 5, 2007). Nics herself admits that despite the large foreign community in Nairobi, she finds many Western expatriates “prickly” and has not taken a particular liking to any of them (Ibid). She suggests, however, that their unfriendliness might be “a shield in the daily battles to pay a fair price, be understood and get work done within a Western time frame” (Ibid). Similarly, Anderson describes expatriates with some degree of distaste, saying, “the expat scene is strong and overpowering, but involves no local people whatsoever. Expats come here for years and bubble themselves into this very Americanized existence” (Anderson, September 17, 2005). To many of the bloggers in this study, expatriates seem to represent an old-school type of foreigner, something left over from the colonial era. Thus, to these bloggers — many of who pepper their writing with their working knowledge of postcolonial theories — the insular expatriate existence inspires an uncomfortable reminder of their own foreignness, something they are trying to downplay.

As has been discussed, many of these voluntourists presumably went to African countries searching for a genuine experience. Western living in cloistered, privileged communities are the antithesis of how the voluntourists seek to behave. Certain travelers

consciously distance themselves from expatriates of this kind. For example, Brandon Currie writes in his blog *Lusaka Sunrise* that during a special event when he was assigned to the foreigner's table, he felt that, "I wasn't even in Africa anymore - I'd been transported into some expat purgatory which was entirely more terrifying than my attempts at local integration" (Currie, November 21, 2007). He adds that he spoke to his Zambian friends, saying "Bwera, tiyen (Come on, let's go)...I'll take riding the mini-bus over this any day" (Ibid). Currie's use of the local language to express his distaste for the foreigners clearly represents his desire to distance himself (physically and in terms of identity) from the expatriates. Nics explains that certain Westerners who adopt the local dress and language "are on a great safari, hunting rare prey: the Authentic African Experience" (Nics, November 5, 2007). Nics' insight here encapsulates the kind of experience many voluntourists are seeking.

Returning Home

The last theme that arises in nearly every blog is the issue of returning home after one's voluntourism jaunt has ended. Before leaving the African continent to head back to Canada, several bloggers admitted to feeling apprehensive about their return. The main thing that the bloggers dreaded upon their return is being asked "How was Africa?" (Jongbloed, April 26, 2007). Currie, for example, actually posts a list of rules for his return instructing his friends and family not to ask him the dreaded question, saying: "I wouldn't ask you about North America. Zambia, fine. Lusaka, better. But not the entire continent" (Currie, January 24, 2008). Another issue some bloggers seem to anticipate

arising is everyone back at home expecting them to have become an activist of some kind. In the same post, Currie assures his readers:

I haven't become a bleeding-heart 'save the world' type: I'm not about to organize any benefit concerts, toy drives or go on any Bob Geldof-approved rants about how we need more foreign aid. If anything, I'm more skeptical about the West's attempts to help places like Zambia, including things like CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency] internships, media training and importing our idea of human rights (Currie, January 24, 2008).

As previously mentioned in the discussion of the common “Development” theme, many of the bloggers expressed frustration and doubt regarding Western aid to the African continent. In spite of the skepticism, judging from their writing, it appears the importance of a continuing dialogue about foreign aid was impressed upon the bloggers.

Another source of anxiety for the departing voluntourists was the phenomenon of “reverse culture shock” that often occurs during re-integration into one’s home country after an extended international trip (Sametband). Many bloggers are aware of this process, and confess their fears about what re-entry will be like. Jongbloed admits that she is afraid to return to North America, where poverty is not as prevalent, noting that, “I feel like I’ll walk into a shopping mall, shiny and orderly, and get overwhelmed by just how much we have in Canada, compared to the people that live in corrugated iron boxes on stilts, that hold all their worldly possessions, just outside my house [in Ethiopia]” (Jongbloed, April 26, 2007). Upon her return, she is struck by cultural differences concerning food, observing that, “everyone is always eating here. In the airport, everyone passed the time before their flights by snacking. I bet most of them weren’t even hungry” (Jongbloed, July 4, 2007). Penner also writes often of reverse culture shock, noting that, “the things that hit me the most were once again being in such large crowds of white people, being surrounded by green trees and green grass lawns and of

course the huge box stores that define our rampant North American consumer culture” (Penner, July 20, 2006). Cultural differences related to whiteness, consumption and food were some of the most frequently discussed “shocks.”

Along with the reverse cultural shock, the voluntourists who blog about their return home note feeling just as foreign at home as they did in various African countries. Moreover, the idea of “home” is called into question entirely. Jongbloed, for example, wonders why she has returned to Toronto. She writes that, “people keep saying things about “home” and “safe” in their conversations with me now that I’m back, but I find that those words don’t really apply” (Jongbloed, July 4, 2007). Similarly, Edworthy notices that, “home doesn’t feel the same as it did when I left, and that after my experience in Ghana it never will” (Edworthy, March 5, 2007). Penner also describes not feeling at home in Canada. Struggling with the transition from being in the field to working in an office, he explains that, “It’s as if my spirit is still hovering somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean, yearning for distant lands, while my body tries to carve out a new existence here in Canada” (Penner, May 29, 2007). Of all the bloggers, Daley spends the most time writing about the re-integration process. One post is especially revealing:

Life outside of Africa so far seems too cold, sanitary and quiet. It feels almost lonely...Ghana was so bright all of the time- the clothing, the people, and of course the amazingly hot sunshine...Culture shock is like having a cramp in your brain. You can push through it and start to feel normal or you can make it worse by trying not to get over it. I was kind of stuck between whether I should just not think twice about these things that were once normal and get over it, or whether I should really just hold onto how I felt. I always knew that Western society was drastically different but it's worse coming back ...I don't want to forget a single thing that I learned in Ghana. Everything was so different and when something is so dramatically different from what you're used to it is a great way to contemplate the way that you live your life (Daley, April 4, 2007).

Daley's quote exemplifies the way in which travelers try to integrate all the things they have learned abroad into their lives at "home," while at the same time reintegrating themselves back into society.

All of the themes explored in this section trace aspects of the voluntourist's journey that entail struggle and coming to terms with something about the self. Each theme raises questions about the voluntourist's presence in the visited community, his or her motivation and expectations for this kind of trip, and about the nature and challenges of international development in general.

PART THREE: REFLECTIONS ON VOLUNTOURIST BLOGGING

In order to discuss the significance of the voluntourist blogs on which this chapter focuses, it is important to take into account the viewpoints of the bloggers themselves. A list of questions was composed, that sought to learn more about the voluntourists' motivation for starting and maintaining their blogs, and about their experiences with and reflections on doing so. The bloggers were contacted via email and asked if they were interested in participating in an interview (which would also be conducted through email). Of the six bloggers who were contacted, five agreed to be interviewed, though only four (Brown, Daley, Edworthy, and Nics) followed through with their answers. Some questions yielded more responses in greater detail than did others.

The first question, which asked about their motivation for starting a blog, elicited a lot of feedback from the respondents. All of the bloggers responded that the first reason they chose to start a blog was to share their work and experience with friends and family

at home. Edworthy notes that she was surprised to find out how large her audience of older relatives was, speculating that the reason for their interest was “primarily because it was a place that had always seemed so far away, and mysterious to them, whereas in my generation Africa can feel at your doorstep (if you are fortunate to have the resources to get yourself there that is)” (Edworthy).

A second factor that motivated both Brown and Daley to start a blog was to have the opportunity to present an alternative, progressive representation of “Africa” to people in the West. Brown notes that most of the information his family receives about Africa is based on charitable commercial programming and international news that tends to focus on the negative. He explains that while the imagery in such sources should not be ignored, he wanted to “send home stories that painted a more balanced picture of Ghana and Malawi, so that people back home wouldn’t characterize all of Africa as a decrepit hellhole” (Brown). Daley also wanted to dispel some of the misconceptions about the African continent that abound in the West. She contends that, “people see Africa as a mess of poverty, disease and AIDS, and while it does have some of those elements there is also so much more” (Daley). She intended for her blog to be a “window” through which people could see a different view of the continent. All of the respondents seem to regard their blog as a medium for keeping in contact with people at home, and for transmitting their specific descriptions and experiences.

The second question to which all of the respondents replied asked about the issue of censorship, i.e. did the bloggers ever find themselves self-censoring or framing their posts in a certain way, and if so, why? All of them admitted to both censoring and framing their writing, and each offered a variety of reasons. Brown admitted to trying an

approach of “radical positivism,” wherein he would attempt to counterbalance the predominant negativity of Western representations of Africa by writing about only positive things. He purports, however, that he realized this approach was just as inaccurate as a purely negative portrayal. Eventually, he found a framing strategy that he was more comfortable with. He explains:

In general what I tried to do was, any time I described a negative thing (e.g. flooding in northern Ghana which displaced thousands of people), I would then try to provide a human and empowering face to that by describing a farmer or local leader who was trying to fix the situation on his/her own. At least this helps downplay the paternalistic relationship that most Westerners feel towards Africa: the idea that it’s our duty to help them because they can’t help themselves (Brown).

Being extremely careful about one’s tone was a common aspect of self-censorship for the bloggers. Nics responded that her journalistic training has taught her to keep her language neutral (especially in terms of the work she did for Journalists for Human Rights). Moreover, keeping in mind that the blog is publicly accessible, she states that, “I am careful not to share information that I wouldn’t want a stranger to know” (Nics).

Daley and Edworthy both responded that they refrained from posting negative things about their host communities. Edworthy felt indebted to her hosts, and felt that any criticism, which she “could always contribute to feeling culture shock, was inappropriate and disrespectful” (Edworthy). Daley was very aware of her limited understanding of Ghana, and was thus very worried about “coming off like some colonial white know-it-all who had an inside track on what was going on in Ghana...I was really afraid of my naiveté coming off as racist — that was a huge fear” (Daley). She admits that while she is embarrassed to look back at some of the things she wrote, she is pleased that she avoided perpetuating stereotypes and was honest about how much she had to learn.

Additionally, both Edworthy and Brown responded that they avoided any topics that might cause their families to worry about them. The respondents were all very open and clear about the types of things they censored, and their reasons for doing so.

The third question that engaged many of the bloggers asked about the benefits and drawbacks of keeping a blog during their time abroad. Brown and Nics both responded that writing on their blogs allowed them to produce African coverage that might not otherwise appear in the media. Nics feels that by doing so, she is “contributing positively to global discussions about Kenya, East Africa, development and other topics” (Nics). Brown, on the other hand, contends that as a trusted source for his friends and family, his blog provided “a direct avenue into changing their perceptions about and knowledge of Africa” (Brown). Daley and Edworthy both list having a record of their trips and emotional journey as a benefit. They both replied that re-reading their posts enables them to reflect on how the experience changed them, and how they evolved throughout the course of their time there. In terms of drawbacks, the almost unanimous response was the amount of time blogging took, factoring in the slow and unreliable internet connections. The bloggers used internet connections on shared computers either at their host organization’s offices or at internet cafes. Brown and Daley also worry that some of the things they wrote about or the ways in which they portrayed their African friends and co-workers might be inappropriate or oversimplified.

Lastly, when asked if they would choose to blog again were they to take a similar trip, they all responded yes except for Nics who, still in Kenya, replied: “I don’t have any plans to stop blogging” (Nics). Based on information culled from the interviews, in conjunction with the blogs themselves, one can conclude that all of the bloggers felt that

writing about their experiences as voluntourists was a worthwhile venture.

CONCLUSION

Tons of things happen that are more than worth writing about, and I'm constantly fighting intense feelings of guilt, pity, joy, hope, and frustration. But for some reason I don't write or post about this because I'm afraid of the 'message' that I'll send home about Ghana. But you know what? It's not my duty to adequately sum up the essence of an entire country in a few short entries to everyone back home. It is, however, my duty to be honest with myself and, subsequently, with the people who read my thoughts (Ferris, June 17, 2006).

What exactly is the significance of these blogs in the grander scheme? First and foremost, what do these blogs reveal about the potential for blogging as a communication medium? In the above quote, Ferris touches upon a central point. As a voluntourist blogger, Ferris has been given an opportunity to send a "message" about an African country to a Western audience. Voluntourist bloggers are in a position to provide a much richer, more nuanced and *personal* depiction of "Africa" than can most traditional journalists. As Ferris admits, it would be a daunting if not impossible task to accurately portray the fundamental spirit of a country and its people. What is more important is that he, as an unofficial foreign correspondent, be honest with himself and with his audience regarding his experiences, feelings, and opinions.

As mentioned, most of the bloggers in this chapter are (or have recently been) students, and are at a point in their lives where they have the time and resources to take an extended trip. What is more, this is a transitional time of life — a time to ask questions and to challenge the self — for many of the bloggers. Their self-reflexivity is thus an integral part of their writing, and provides a distinct descriptive style. Shawn McIntosh contends that the "blogosphere promises a rich landscape for research among media

scholars,” as it provides a new arena for the analysis of topics such as “changing conceptualizations of the audience, public discourse...symbolic capital formation and media political economy” (McIntosh 388). Indeed, research involving voluntourist blogs certainly involves these said topics.

Furthermore, looking at voluntourist blogs is also a progressive addition to theories of travel writing. Campbell argues that, “recent attention to globalization, diaspora, ‘nomadism’ and cyberspace” illustrates the need for new theoretical work to replace outdated models that focus on “mostly locatable cultures, bounded by nations and an imperial past” (Campbell 262). Travel bloggers straddle the boundaries between countries, and are both global and local in scope. They represent the ideals of cosmopolitanism, while also exemplifying through their privileged position the disparity between global rich and poor. At the very least, voluntourist bloggers contribute to the advancement of a more comprehensive dialogue about foreign aid and international communication.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated the role of travel blogs in discourse concerning Western representations of “Africa.” In order to properly examine these contemporary examples of travel narratives, it has been beneficial to refer back to the origins of Western writing about the African continent in colonial travel writing. Through doing so, it has become clear that the idea of “Africa” as a unified entity is nothing more than a Western conceptualization, or as Mudimbe describes, an “invention.” The political economy of Western media is such that the West receives very few in-depth stories about events in African countries. Moreover, much coverage of the continent is just that: of *the continent*, rather than of individual countries. For example, stories focusing on HIV/AIDS often refer to “AIDS in Africa” despite drastically varying prevalence and related social issues between different countries.

Representation is a central theme of this research, particularly in regards to depiction, and as the act of speaking on behalf of others. With the simultaneous rise of international travel (specifically the popularity of voluntourism in the developing world), and the development and deployment of ICTs, we are seeing the proliferation of Western representations of Africa, as amplified by technology. This area of scholarship should continue to develop alongside the aforementioned factors. Furthermore, although this thesis does not focus on self-representation of people in African countries through blogs or other ICTs (particularly through technologies such as cell phones and radios that are more popular in sub-Saharan Africa), that would be a fascinating research topic to explore.

Another principal theme of this research has been the relationship between representation and reflection: Western depictions of, and policies concerning Africa are nearly always more revealing of the West than of Burkina Faso or Ethiopia, for example.

After discussing the manners and channels in which the West represents Africa, this thesis explored the blog as one example of an ICT that allows rapid transmission of ideas across borders and oceans. While the uses and potentials of blogging are continually discussed and debated by bloggers and scholars, there is as of yet little agreement about whether blogs have evolved into a new media form. At this moment, however, it is fair to say that they provide a useable tool for individuals to express and share in the online environment. In addition to enabling people to have an online presence, blogging is evolving into an industry in its own right. Banks contends that writing and editing blogs “are the cottage industry of the 21st century,” and points out that, “it is becoming more and more common for bloggers to earn a living by creating content” (Banks xxi).

One such example is the blogger Heather B. Armstrong, of the mommy blog (a blog written from a mother’s point of view primarily about parenting) *Dooce*. Armstrong writes almost daily about her personal life and family in Salt Lake City, Utah. She makes a living from the money she earns from companies who advertise on her site. In an interview for ABC4 Utah with journalist Chris Vanocur, she and her husband, Jon Armstrong discuss the nature of blogging as a career, as well as what they feel might be the future of blogging. When Vanocur asks if blogging can be considered “life online,” Jon Armstrong agrees to an extent, adding:

But I think this is a much more intimate, in some ways, way to present yourself online, if you choose to. And that’s kind of the beauty of it: you can choose it to

be whatever you want it to be. If you want to make it personal, you can. You can make it be however you like. I mean, however deep you want to go, or however revealing you'd like to be, you can do it. It's your space. You can do whatever you want" (Jon Armstrong).

The nature of diary blogs is such that they are not only personal, but also explicitly subjective. The diary blog ethos allows bloggers use their sites to provide their unique view of the world. When this writing philosophy is carried into a travel blog, the same principle applies; bloggers provide readers with a uniquely subjective view of another country. As told from a Western perspective, this narrative style of a travel blog might make learning about a foreign place more digestible. It must be remembered, however, that despite the apparent "authenticity" of a first-person travel narrative, personal and cultural biases certainly influence the depiction. Thus, the information within travel blogs cannot be accepted as gospel, but rather as an interesting and culturally specific perspective on a foreign space.

To return briefly to the aforementioned interview, in regards to the future of blogging, the Armstrongs predict that the blogging industry will continue to offer opportunities to people. Heather Armstrong argues that, "if the last few years have proved anything, people can make good livings or good part-time livings, from their bedrooms, writing stories about their lives" (Heather B. Armstrong). Jon adds that over the next 5-10 years, he believes that the first initial wave of blogging as a trend will quickly end, but new voices will continue to appear from the blogging industry. He purports that, "we'll see some people emerge from blogging, and either cross over into things like television or other media, and blogging itself will become more of a mainstream destination for people online" (Jon Armstrong). Undoubtedly, the nature and reach of blogging will evolve dramatically over the coming years. Perhaps blogs will

even merge with newly appearing ICTs (particularly with mobile technologies such as cell phones), or increasingly integrate features such as video to make them more engaging and immersive. Whatever the future of blogging, the medium has enabled more people in certain parts of the world to express themselves, and connect with each other online.

The last section of this thesis focused on a sample of blogs written by Canadian voluntourists. One of the main conclusions that one can make based on the discursive formations of the blogs is that the bloggers in this study are very mindful of the problematic nature of Westerners representing “Africa.” At the same time, they are also aware of the opportunity afforded by blogging software to write and share progressive and honest representations of their own thoughts and feelings about the culture and events they encounter in African countries. While some of the bloggers explicitly state that they are using their blogs as windows through which their readers can view an alternative representation of an African country, they also recognize the limitations of this.

Though by no means expert reporters or ethnographers, Kline and Burstein contend that bloggers “are often eloquent in the way that those who are not self-consciously polished often are—raw, uncensored, and energized by the sound of their newly-awakened voices” (Kline 238). They also point out that the ritual of writing one’s thoughts regularly can bring forth insights and observations that might otherwise be missed or forgotten, which is especially relevant in a lifestyle that involves travel.

Additionally, Kline and Burstein caution against technological determinism. They argue that although it is possible that blogging will stimulate dramatic change in the media industries, in approaching the scope and nature of change,

we would do well to remember that tomorrow's possibilities are always forged upon the anvil of today's social and economic realities. Change, in other words, comes to the world on the world's terms, constrained by the limits of our political economy and human nature" (Ibid).

In accordance with Kline and Burstein, Atton also warns against viewing internet technologies only as "the novel, the undiscovered and what we might call an eternal, millennial present," and urges people to consider the social, political and economic context from which the internet has developed (Atton 5). Keren is even more skeptical and concerned about the championing of blogging and related communication technologies. He argues that the idea of solving real problems online,

may account for some of the symptoms of melancholy we encounter in the real world: a general feeling of helplessness and disenchantment toward politics enduring in an age of increased democratization...widespread resort to escapist and delusional substitutes for problem solving (such as rock concerts substituting for the rescue of the dying African continent (Keren 17).

Keren sees the idea of blogging as any kind of social action as escapist and deceptive, comparing it to rock concerts that claim to save dying children (Ibid). He contends that, "the greatest deceit concerns Africa where millions are dying of malnutrition, AIDS, malaria, and war while the world indulges in the apparent attention being given to the continent, especially by rock musicians, with minimal results" (Keren 150). It would be foolish to regard blogging as revolutionary for contributing to wide social change, especially in the case of the voluntourist blogs of this study.

The bloggers, however, make no claims to be revolutionaries, or to have unearthed any sacred truth about African countries or their peoples. The blogs are used as a means to an end, as a medium through which a story can be told. Perhaps they are self-indulgent, but they are honest. As Levy points out, "technologies project our emotions, intentions, and projects into the material world. The instruments we have built do provide

us with power, but since we are collectively responsible, the decision how to use them is in our hands” (Levy xv). Blogs are not inherently negative or positive, and offer no solution or problem, only opportunity. Blood believes, however, that when used in the right way, blogs can be used to “transform both writers and readers from ‘audience’ to ‘public’ and from ‘consumer’ to ‘creator’” (Blood). She believes that they are one tool that helps the general public participate in an otherwise “media saturated culture” (Ibid).

The blogs featured in this thesis, which document the experiences of 15 Canadians doing volunteer work and traveling in various African countries, provide a glimpse of the trend of voluntourism. A study of the voluntourism industry and its promotional strategies would be an excellent area for further research. Essentially, what is marketed is the idea of global citizenship, wherein the traveler receives the added bonus of feeling like he or she is contributing to the betterment of the international community. The website for VolunTourism addresses potential travelers with the following message:

This may be the first time that you have ever considered combining travel and service. Prior to this you may have been unsure that these two experiences, and the joy and fulfillment associated with them, could be synergized and harmoniously blended into one consumable opportunity (<http://voluntourism.org>).

What is most interesting about the above text is the use of the phrase “consumable opportunity.” This type of marketing strategy, which is very typical of voluntourism promotional literature, ironically presents benevolence as consumption. In this sense, voluntourists can buy the opportunity to give, and then receive the resulting personal benefits and sense of accomplishment.

As Goudge points out, there appears to have been a decision made by those who write the promotional material for voluntourism organizations, “that appealing to altruism

does not work any more, whereas directly hooking into a range of personal interests and desires will be more successful” (Goudge 15). The voluntourism industry is also expanding into the corporate sector. One such example is the company Exit West, which claims to blend corporate citizenship, professional development and personal growth by taking “the people, the resources and the learning experience outside of our luxurious ‘Western bubble’ into an environment of authenticity and transformation” (<http://exitwest.org>). Exit West offers packages of corporate development programs wherein clients can take their employees on approximately one-week trips to the developing world. The trips involve team-building exercises alongside helping local community partners with projects such as building walls or washrooms. Exit West describes how its programs benefit clients, explaining that, “allowing an employee extra time off to go to Africa on a ‘voluntourism’ program gives the employee a warm personal feeling – and provides photos for the PR Communications department” (Ibid). Emphasis is placed on the benefits for the clients (notably photo opportunities), rather than for the host community. Furthermore, for a company that presents itself as global citizenship oriented, the use of “Africa” as a single place is certainly suspect.

Using the idea of global citizenship as a marketing technique is not unique to the voluntourism industry. Lisa Nakamura asserts that Microsoft’s former slogan “where do you want to go today?” which promises users the opportunity for new and unexplored spaces, is a “seemingly open-ended invitation for travel and new experiences” (Nakamura 17). She calls this kind of slogan, “a sort of technologically enabled transnationality,” which addresses first-world users with the imagery and iconography of traveling (Ibid). Moreover, she contends, it “places the viewer in the position of the tourist” (Nakamura

17). This is an example of how part of the overlap between travel and technology exists in terms of rhetorical tropes. The promotional literature for both international travel and new ICTs, often invokes McLuhan's notion of the *global village* — selling the ideal of transnationality as a consumable commodity.

Susan Douglas argues that new communication technologies have actually done the opposite of creating a *global village*, and have instead “ironically, led to a fusion of ethnocentrism and narcissism, best cast as a ‘turn within’” (Douglas 620). She argues that many emerging media technologies are based on the combination of the ethnocentric characteristics of news media, and the narcissistic emphasis of entertainment media, which contradicts claims that new technologies will bridge gaps between cultures (Ibid 621, 625). She does not believe in the inherent enlightening potential of technology, arguing that, “there is much evidence to refute, or at least to seriously undermine, the technological conceit that increasingly sophisticated media technologies have led automatically to increased awareness of and sympathy for other cultures” (Douglas 625). Technological determinism is particularly problematic when applied to the idea of an international community.

Although the trend of voluntourism and the use of travel blogs as new sites for Western representations of “Africa,” are questionable, they are also valuable texts for scholars to examine. By looking critically at these two interconnected phenomena, one can garner ideas about the continuing dialogue on technological progress and international integration.

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APPENDIX A: BLOG CORPUS

1. Blog Title: 8 Months in Nairobi
Address: <http://commonco.typepad.com/>
Administrator: Sara Nics

2. Blog Title: 525,600 Minutes in Ethiopia
Address: <http://www.cpar-ethiopia.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Kate Jongbloed

3. Blog Title: A Beacher's Tidal Thoughts
Address: <http://tidal-thoughts.blogspot.com>
Administrator: Gillian Edworthy

4. Blog Title: A Fine Mess of Contradictions
Address: <http://finemessofcontradictions.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Kate Daley

5. Blog Title: A Journey to Africa
Address: <http://kartickinafrica.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Kartick Kumar

6. Blog Title: Caked in Red Clay
Address: <http://christophermason.wordpress.com/>
Administrator: Christopher Mason

7. Blog Title: Celluloid in Cinders, Sold Slowly
Address: <http://celluloidincinders.blogspot.com>
Administrator: Douglas Keddy

8. Blog Title: GhanaBryn
Address: <http://ghanabryn.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Bryn Ferris

9. Blog Title: I'll Alight at the This Thing
Address: <http://luke-brown.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Luke Brown

10. Blog Title: I'm Even Whiter in Africa
Address: <http://graemeburrows.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Graeme Burrows

11. Blog Title: Jared's Mozambique Adventure

Address: <http://jpmozambique.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Jared Penner

12. Blog Title: Kelly Christine
Address: <http://kellycanderson.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Kelly Anderson

13. Blog Title: Lusaka Sunrise
Address: <http://lusakasunrise.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Brandon Currie?

14. Blog Title: Matt's Trip to Kenya
Address: <http://mattinkenya.blogspot.com>
Administrator: Matt Walton

15. Blog Title: Sarah's Summer in Ghana
Address: <http://sarah-in-ghana.blogspot.com/>
Administrator: Sarah (last name unknown)

APPENDIX B: CODING FRAME FOR BLOG CORPUS

Blogs in the spreadsheets:

- 1) 8 Months in Nairobi
- 2) 525, 600 Minutes in Ethiopia
- 3) A Beacher's Tidal Thoughts
- 4) A Fine Mess of Contradictions
- 5) A Journey to Africa
- 6) Caked in Red Clay
- 7) Celluloid in Cinders Sold Slowly
- 8) Ghana Bryn
- 9) I'll Alight at the This Thing
- 10) I'm Even Whiter in Africa
- 11) Jared's Mozambique Adventure
- 12) Kelly Christine
- 13) Lusaka Sunrise
- 14) Matt's Trip to Kenya
- 15) Sarah's Summer in Ghana

1. Basics

- a. Blog Title
- b. Blog Address
- c. Administrator
- d. Hosting service
 - Blogger (1)
 - Wordpress (2)
 - Moveable Type (3)
 - Affiliated with Organization (4)
 - Other (5)
- e. Purpose of blog (keywords)
- f. Mission statement (keywords)
- g. Gender
 - Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Transgender (3)
- h. Age
- i. Ethnicity
 - White (1)
 - Black (2)
 - Asian (3)
 - First Nations (4)
 - Hispanic (5)
 - Other (6)

- j. Level of education
 - High School (1)
 - College (2)
 - University (3)
 - Graduate School (4)
- k. About me (keywords)
- l. Images (y/n)
- m. Realm(s) of volunteering
 - Technology (1)
 - Medical/Health (2)
 - Education (3)
 - Agriculture/Food (4)
 - Social Justice (5)
 - Journalism/Communication (6)
 - Legal (7)
 - Economic (8)
 - Religion/Spirituality (9)
 - Other (10)
- n. Duration of trip
 - Under 1 month (1)
 - 1-3 Months (2)
 - 3-6 Months (3)
 - 6 Months – 1 year (4)
 - Over 1 year (5)
- o. Duration of blog
 - Under 1 month (1)
 - 1-3 Months (2)
 - 3-6 Months (3)
 - 6 Months – 1 year (4)
 - Over 1 year (5)
- p. Host organization (name)
- q. Number of posts
 - Under 10 (1)
 - 10-25 (2)
 - 26-50 (3)
 - 50 + (4)
- r. Frequency of posting
 - Daily (1)
 - Every few days (2)
 - Weekly (3)
 - Bi-weekly (4)
 - Monthly (5)
- s. Comments enabled (y/n)
- t. Average post length
 - short (less than 100 words)
 - medium (100-500 words)

long (over 500 words)

u. Number of links

2. Content

Themes

a. Travel

b. Volunteering

Positive comment (1)

Negative comment (2)

Neutral comment (3)

c. Language

Mother tongue (1)

Indigenous language of visited country (2)

d. Food

Restaurant (1)

Street Food (2)

Home Cooking (3)

e. Entertainment

f. Medical

g. Standard of Living

h. Politics

i. Race/Ethnicity

Blogger's own race/ethnicity (1)

Other race/ethnicity (2)

j. Gender

k. Safety

l. Violence

m. Learning

n. Teaching

o. Legal

p. Religion

q. Family

r. Environment

s. Community/Friendship

t. Foreign

Being in a foreign country (1)

Being a foreigner (2)

u. Homesickness

v. Financial/Economic

Blogger's own financial issues (1)

Blogger's country's economy (2)

Economy of visited country (3)

w. Culture/Traditions

Blogger's own culture/traditions (1)

Culture/traditions of visited country (2)

- x. Shopping
- y. Sexuality
- z. Foreign Aid
 - Positive comment (1)
 - Negative comment (2)
- aa. Technology
- ab. Scenery/weather
- ac. Transportation
- ad. Personal
- ae. History

APPENDIX C: BASIC INFORMATION ON BLOG CORPUS

See Appendix B for coding frame.

| 1a. Blog Title | 1b. Blog address | 1c. Administrator |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 8 Months in Nairobi | http://commonco.typepad.com | Sara Nics |
| 525,600 Minutes in Ethiopia | http://cpar-ethiopia.blogspot.com | Kate Jongbloed |
| A Beacher's Tidal Thoughts | http://tidal-thoughts.blogspot.com | Gillian Edworthy |
| A Fine Mess of Contradictions | http://finemessofcontradictions.blogspot.com | Kate Daley |
| A Journey to Africa | http://kartickinafrica.blogspot.com | Kartick Kumar |
| | | Christopher |
| Caked in Red Clay | http://christophermason.wordpress.com | Mason |
| Celluloid in Cinders, Sold Slowly | http://celluloidincinders.blogspot.com | Douglas Deddy |
| GhanaBryn | http://ghanabryn.blogspot.com | Bryn Ferris |
| I'll Alight at the This Thing | http://luke-brown.blogspot.com | Luke Brown |
| I'm Even Whiter in Africa | http://graemeburrows.blogspot.com | Graeme Burrows |
| Jared's Mozambique Adventure | http://jpmozambique.blogspot.com | Jared Penner |
| Kelly Christine | http://kellycanderson.blogspot.com | Kelly Anderson |
| Lusaka Sunrise | http://lusakasunrise.blogspot.com | Brandon Currie |
| Matt's Trip to Kenya | http://mattinkenya.blogspot.com | Matt Walton |
| Sarah's Summer in Ghana | http://sarah-in-ghana.blogspot.com | Sarah |

| 1d. Hosting service | 1e. Purpose of blog | 1f. Mission statement |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| typepad | Journalism | "build the capacity" of Kenyan journalists to report on human rights abuses. |
| blogspot | Journalism | CPAR's Moving Beyond Hunger program, and CAPAIDS Safe Livelihoods for Older Orphan's project. |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | HIV/AIDS educator |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | HIV/AIDS education |
| blogspot | Gov't. | NEPAD, development, publication and distribution of a policy book for the Canadian gov. programming in Africa |
| wordpress | worker | |
| blogspot | Journalism | |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | Rural Aid Action Program |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | monitoring water supply and quality |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | Assessing the success of fuel efficient stoves |
| blogspot | research | |
| blogspot | associate | The relationship between HIV/AIDS and microfinance |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | sex education |
| blogspot | Journalist | writing on a variety of issues affecting Zambia, ie, farming practices, foreign aid, AIDS/HIV |

| | | |
|----------|------------|---|
| blogspot | Volunteer. | helping to increase the IT capacity of this organization by facilitating training sessions, constructing a website and various other networking and support activities. |
| blogspot | Volunteer. | to work on a water and sanitation project with Engineers Without Borders. |

| 1g.Gender | 1h.Age | 1i.Ethnicity | 1j.Level of education | 1k.About me | 1l.Images (y/n) | 1m.Realm of volunteering | 1n.Duration of trip |
|-----------|--------|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 2 | 30's | 1 | 4 | student | y | 6 | |
| 2 | 24 | 1 | 4 | student | y | 6 | |
| 2 | 24 | 1 | 4 | student | y | 3 | |
| 2 | 24 | 1 | 4 | student | y | 3 | |
| 1 | 30's | 6 | 4 | lawyer | y | 10 | |
| 1 | 30's | 1 | 4 | journalist | y | 6 | |
| 1 | 22 | 1 | 4 | student | y | 2 | n/a |
| 1 | 21 | 1 | 4 | student graduate | y | 3 | |
| 1 | 24 | 1 | 4 | student | y | 2 & 4 | |
| 1 | 20's | 1 | ? | unknown research | y | 1 | |
| 1 | 27 | 1 | 4 | associate | y | 8 | |
| 2 | 20's | 1 | 4 | intern | y | 3 | |
| 1 | 20's | 1 | 4 | journalist | y | 6 | |
| 1 | 20's | 1 | 4 | IT Specialist | y | 1 | |
| 2 | 26 | 1 | 4 | student | y | 1 | |

| 1o.Duration of blog | 1p.Host organization | 1q.# of posts | 1r.Frequency of posting | 1s.Comments enabled? | 1t.Avg post length |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 4 | Rights Journalists for Human | 4 | 3 | y | medium |
| 5 | CPAR Africa Hope | 4 | 2 | Y | medium |
| 3 | Foundation of Ghana Africa Hope | 3 | 2 | y | short |
| 3 | Foundation of Ghana | 3 | 3 | y | medium |
| 4 | CIDA Ugandan News, 'The | 4 | 3 | y | medium |
| 5 | Daily Monitor' CIDA, Western Heads | 4 | 2 | y | short |
| n/a | East Engineers Without | 3 | 2 | y | medium |
| 3 | Borders | 3 | 2 | y | medium |
| 5 | Engineers Without | 4 | 3 | y | long |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----|--|--------------|
| | Borders | | | | |
| 2 | ACTS Mennonite Economic Development | 2 | 3 y | | medium |
| 5 | Associates UWO, MedOutreach, Rwanda National Commission for | 4 | 4 y | | medium |
| 5 | HIV/AIDS Journalists for Human | 4 | 2 y | | short |
| 5 | Rights HRDC, Netcorp, VSO Canada, NOPE, RAY | 4 | 3 y | | medium |
| 4 | project Engineers Without | 4 | 3 y | | medium |
| 3 | Borders | 3 | 3 y | | short/medium |

| 1u.# of links | location |
|---------------|------------|
| 4 | Kenya |
| 1 | Ethiopia |
| 0 | Ghana |
| 0 | Ghana |
| 12 | Kenya |
| 0 | Uganda |
| | Tanzania |
| 20 | Ghana |
| 45 | Ghana |
| 0 | Uganda |
| 17 | Mozambique |
| 8 | Rawanda |
| 14 | Zambia |
| 5 | Kenya |
| 14 | Ghana |

APPENDIX D: BLOG CONTENT

See Appendix B for coding frame.

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | |
|-------|-------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| **** | ***** | | 1**2**3* | | *** | ***** | |
| **** | ** | | 1* | | ** | * | |
| *** | ** | | 3* | | ** | | |
| *** | ***** | *** | 3**** | ***** | ***** | | |
| ***** | ** | | 2*3* | | | * | |
| ***** | ***** | ***** | 1**2**3** | ***** | ***** | ** | |
| **** | **** | * | 1**3** | * | ** | ** | |
| * | ***** | ** | 1* | *** | * | | |
| ***** | ***** | ** | 1*2**3** | ***** | | | |
| *** | ***** | *** | 1*2***3***** | ***** | ***** | ** | |
| ***** | ***** | *** | 1*2*3*** | ***** | ***** | ***** | |
| ** | ***** | ** | 1*2*3* | ** | **** | | |
| ***** | ***** | | 2*3** | ***** | ** | **** | |
| ***** | ***** | *** | 1*2*3* | ***** | | * | |
| *** | ***** | ** | 2*** | ** | ** | ** | |
| | 68 | 86 | 26 | | 60 | 41 | 25 |
| | | | 1(13);2 (15);3(25) 53 total | | | | |

| H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P |
|-------|------|-----|----|------|---|----|---|------|
| ***** | 1*** | *** | * | **** | * | ** | | * |
| ** | 1* | | ** | | | | * | **** |

```

1*
1**
*****
1**,2**
*****
1**
1**
**
1*
***
1*
*
1*****
*****
1***
*
1*****
*****
1****
**
1****
1***
1*****2***
61 1(42);2(5)
total 47
21 23 17 13 10 6 28

```

| R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y |
|------|-----|--------|----|-------|---------|------|---|
| | * | 2* | | 1* | 1**2*** | ** | * |
| | | | | | 1***2** | | * |
| | | 2* | | | 2** | | |
| *** | * | 2* | ** | | 2***** | ** | |
| **** | | 2** | ** | 2*3* | 1*2** | | |
| | | 2*** | | 3**** | 1*2** | **** | |
| * | *** | 2** | | 3* | 2**** | * | |
| * | ** | 2***** | | | 2*** | * | |


```

**      ****      1*2*      *      3*      1*2*****
      *      1**2*****      1*2*      1***2*****
***      *****      1*2**      *****      2*****      1*****2***** *      ***
**      **      1*2*      *****      1**2**
*      1*2***      *      1*3****      2*      *
*      1*2*      **      1*      1***2*****      ****      *
**      ****      1*2**      *      3*      1*2*****      ***
      20      24      1(8);2(30)      19      1(4);2(8);3(13)      1(20);2(56)      20      7
      total 38      total 25      total 66

```

| Z | AA | AB | AC | AD | AE |
|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ***** | *** | * | ** | | ** |
| ***** | * | * | * | * | ** |
| | | | ** | | * |
| | ** | ** | *** | | ** |
| *** | * | | * | | * |
| | *** | ***** | **** | | *** |
| * | * | *** | ** | | ** |
| *** | * | ** | ** | | *** |
| ** | ** | ***** | ***** | * | *** |
| * | ** | ***** | ***** | | |
| ***** | ** | ***** | ***** | ** | ***** |
| | | ** | * | ***** | ** |
| * | *** | * | *** | * | * |
| *** | *** | ***** | *** | | * |
| ** | | **** | ***** | | |

29

24

44

45

11

29

APPENDIX E: ETHICS FORMS**Ethics Form**

Concordia
UNIVERSITY

Summary Protocol Form

- **For faculty and staff research:** *Submit to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC), c/o the Office of Research, GM 1000.*
- **For graduate or undergraduate research:**
 - *For projects covered under a faculty member's previously approved SPF, no new SPF is required.*
 - *For new projects which are supported by external (e.g. Tri-council) or internal (e.g. CASA or FRDP) funds, the supervising faculty member must submit a new SPF on behalf of the student to the UHREC, c/o the Office of Research, GM 1000.*
 - *For new projects which are NOT supported by external (e.g. Tri-council) or internal (e.g. CASA or FRDP) funds, the student must submit a new SPF to the relevant departmental or faculty ethics sub-committee.*

For more information on the above, see
http://oor.concordia.ca/REC/human_research.shtml.
 If using the MS Word form, please tab between fields (do not use the enter key)
 and click on check boxes. If not using the MS Word form, please TYPE your
 responses and submit on a separate sheet.
Handwritten SPFs will not be accepted.

Date: _____

What type of review do you recommend that this form receive? Expedited or Full

Part One: Basic Information

1. Names of Researchers:

Principal Investigator: Ashley (Dallas) Curow

Department/Program: Media Studies – Communication Department

Office address: N/A

Telephone number: (514) 989-7735 E-mail address:
dallas.curow@gmail.com

Names and details for all other researchers involved (e.g., co-investigators, collaborators, research associates, research assistants, supervisors – please specify role):

Dr. Leslie Shade – Supervisor

2. Title of Research Project:

Live from “Africa”: Representations and Reflections in Canadian Volunteer Weblogs

3. Granting Agency, Grant Number and Title OR Contract and Contract Title (if applicable.):

N/A

4. Brief Description of Research:

For funded research, please include one-page summary; otherwise, include a brief overall description. Include a statement of the benefits likely to be derived from project. You can address these questions by including the summary page from the grant proposal.

It is the subject of travel blog written by Canadian volunteers in various African countries, in which they describe their experiences—while negotiating their own cultural, social and racial/ethnic identities—that interests me. The presence of the volunteer/blogger sharing first-hand accounts of one’s time in a foreign country reveals a new kind of foreign correspondent, which is especially interesting as the global communication landscape continues to rapidly shift and evolve. In addition to discussing issues related to the visited country, these blogs also reveal a great deal about the writers themselves, as well as how they fit into the bigger picture of online discourse. Thus, while taking into consideration academic scholarship on issues foreign aid and communication in an era of globalization, as well as ideas of citizenship and identity, I want to talk directly with individuals who have blogged while volunteering in an African country in order to further understand both their motivations for, experiences with, and reflections about doing so.

5. Scholarly Review of Proposed Research:

Complete the Scholarly Review Form (SRF) if you are conducting non-funded or contract biomedical research or any other non-funded or contract research involving more than minimal levels of risk.

N/A

Part Two: Research Participants

1. Sample of Persons to be Studied:

10 – 15 participants, aged 18 or older.

2. Method of Recruitment of Participants:

Voluntary recruitment through contact information listed on the blogs in my corpus, coupled with snowball sampling.

3. Treatment of Participants in the Course of the Research:

A brief summary of procedure, as well an account of the training of researchers/assistants.

The interviews will either take place over the phone or through written questions posed through email. The interviews should contain no more than twelve questions, and at any time the respondent is free to decline answering any or all interview questions. The respondent will have the options of using his/her real names, or a pseudonym in order to protect the identity of the respondent. The respondent will have access to the final project once it is completed.

Part Three: Ethical Concerns

Indicate briefly how research plan deals with the following potential ethical concerns:

1. Informed Consent:

Please indicate how you will obtain consent from your participants. Written consent form and/or oral script must be attached. Please note, written consent forms must follow the format of the sample model provided at the end of this form.

A written consent form will be signed by the interview participant.

2. Deception:

Please describe the nature of any deception and provide a rationale regarding why it must be used to address the research question – i.e., is it absolutely necessary for the design? Deception may include the following: deliberate presentation of false information; suppression of material information; selection of information designed to mislead; and selective disclosure.

There will be no deception used in the interview – the participants know why they are being interviewed, what the motivation is for the interview, and where the final project will be made available.

3. Freedom to Discontinue:

The participants are free to withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation at anytime without negative consequences.

4. Assessment of Risks to Subjects' Physical Wellbeing, Psychological Welfare, and/or Reputation:

This includes low-level risk or any form of discomfort resulting from the research procedure and how it will be dealt with. When it is called for, you should indicate arrangements that have been made to ascertain that subjects are in "healthy" enough condition to undergo the intended research procedures. You should be able to indicate clearly the kinds of risks that may be involved and the action to be taken if someone is unexpectedly put at risk as part of the research efforts.

As the nature of the questions regarding the decision to blog about one's individual experiences can be personal, the potential risks involved in the interview would surround sensitive questions, however in order to protect the respondents from such risks, they are free to decline answering any or all questions at any time during the interview.

5. Protecting and/or Addressing Participant "At Risk" Situations:

N/A

6. Post-Research Explanation and/or Debriefing:

The final results will be made available to the participant.

7. Confidentiality of Results:

The participants will have the options of sharing their real names or using pseudonyms in the final results.

8. Data Handling:

Please describe the path of your data from collection to storage to its eventual destruction/disposal. Include specific details on data handling, data storage (format and location), who will have access, and disposal/destruction method.

Should the interview be conducted over the phone, the participant responses will be recorded by an electronic audio recording device. They will be kept in the sole possession of the researcher until the final results have been written up and published, after which they will be recycled. If the interview is carried out through email, the

participant responses will be saved to the researcher's personal computer (to be solely viewed by her) and the online communication will be deleted.

9. Other Comments:

Bearing in mind the ethical guidelines of your academic and/or professional association, please comment on any other ethical concerns which may arise in the course of this research (e.g., responsibility to subjects beyond the purposes of this study).

N/A

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Interview Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW FOR LIVE FROM "AFRICA": REPRESENTATIONS AND REFLECTIONS IN CANADIAN VOLUNTEER WEBLOGS

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Ashley (Dallas) Curow of the Communication Department of Concordia University (Email: dallas.curow@gmail.com).

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to determine, through the process of interview, the motivations for and experiences with maintaining a weblog (blog) while volunteering in an African country.

B. PROCEDURES

The interview will either be conducted over the phone, or through written questions posed through email on XXX. The interview should contain no more than 12 questions, and at any time the respondents are free to decline answering any or all interview questions. The respondents will have the option of using their real names or pseudonyms in order to protect their identity. The respondents will have access to the final project once it is completed. The final project will be made available to the public through a written report.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

As the nature of the questions regarding the decision to be maintain a blog can be personal, the potential risks involved in the interview would surround sensitive questions, however in order to protect the respondents from such risks, they are free to decline answering any or all questions at any time during the interview. The benefits of participation in the interview include the furthering of knowledge for both the respondents and interviewer regarding the motivations behind blogging practices, a more complex understanding of the respondents' own decisions to maintain a blog, and the contribution to a body of knowledge surrounding travel discourses, involvement in international aid, and online communication.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca.