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Writing the Other: An Analysis of Travel Writing Discourses by Western Women Bloggers

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Abstract

This thesis works to interpret the discourses produced through the travel writings of white Western women and the implications this has on the way Eastern cultures are represented in discourses of travel and leisure. Moreover, it analyses the importance of representation when considering the travel experiences of Western women of colour, specifically in the realm of travel blogging. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, this study analyzes 10 blog entries from five travel bloggers; three of whom are white (Adventurous Kate, A Dangerous Business, and World of Wanderlust) and two are women of colour (HeyCiara and Along With Ari). The blog entries were selected based on geographical proximity, focusing on Eastern destinations from the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The analysis of the chosen blog entries highlight the emergence of two discursive themes – that of the “touristic gaze” – which was informed by bloggers’ use of Othering/Orientalist language, the division between local and tourist culture, and the commodification of local culture. This notion is more commonly associated with white women due to their tendency to articulate these discourses through their writings, fostering the superficial gaze of a tourist. Alternatively, “the traveller’s gaze” – informed by the adoption of an “authentic voice”, an interest in local (rather than tourist) culture, and less use of Orientalist/Othering language.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Travel writing has served as a tool of exploration, discovery, and storytelling for many decades now as it offers readers the chance to understand distant cultures and experiences. Travel mediums such as guidebooks, travelogues, and online travel blogs serve to inform and inspire other travellers by providing them with valuable insights and tips through narratives of their own experiences. This is particularly true in the case of travel blogs, where travel blog writers will share personal accounts of visiting certain places through details of their encounters, visual observations, and practical advice. Travel blogs have grown in prominence over the last few decades, specifically among Western women. The purpose of this study is to understand the discourses that are produced by Western women's travel blogs when sharing their experiences while visiting foreign destinations, particularly those travel narratives written by white women and women of colour from the West. Additionally, this study analyzes the implications of these discourses on representation in travel writing media, specifically of the Eastern cultures and people encountered in their travels.

This study is guided by three research questions: What discourses appear in Western women travel bloggers' online content about their non-Western travel destinations? How do these discourses construct the non-Western nations for their readership? Does the standpoint of the Western bloggers appear to inform the discourses that construct the non-Western destinations visited?

This research topic first caught my interest because, in Western culture, white women are typically depicted at the forefront of many media representations, specifically in terms of beauty, leisure, and luxury standards. This is evident in women solo-travel films such as *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010) and *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2000), where the main characters are white

American women who go on journeys of self-discovery in romanticized and exoticized destinations. In these Hollywood representations, white women's narratives are centred, which normalized a specific (i.e., white, American, female) viewpoint toward the destination cultures and people. Moreover, my goal for this study is to highlight the importance of representation in the often-overlooked media – travel blogs – as these discourses risk contributing to Othering narratives that marginalized the experiences of women of colour.

To answer the research question for this study, I analyzed 10 travel blogs from five women travel bloggers; three of them are white women, and the remaining two are women of colour. Three of the blogs are created by white American women and include: *Adventurous Kate* (2010), *A Dangerous Business* (2010), and *World of Wanderlust* (2012). The two blogs run by women of colour are *HeyCiara* (2015) and *Along with Ari* (2014). I chose to analyze the travel writings of women of colour bloggers since this study aims to understand the importance of representation in shaping diverse narratives in the travel industry. Moreover, the inclusion of women of colour travel bloggers may provide a comparative basis for understanding whether and how travel discourses differ depending on the travellers' respective standpoints. I chose to analyze two blog entries from each writer, focusing on similar geographical destinations in the Middle East (Morocco and Jordan) and Southeast Asia (Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Thailand).

In the next chapter, I present an overview of the relevant literatures that help situate my study, specifically, scholarship on the history of travel writing, the intersection of race and gender in travel writing, as well as the profile of travel bloggers as “microcelebrities” (Marwick, 2013). In Chapter 3, I outline the theoretical frameworks utilized for this study, leading with discussion of standpoint theory. To facilitate analysis of the blog discourses about Eastern destinations, I draw on Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and bell hooks' (1992) concept of “the Other” and its commodification. That chapter connects these theories

with conceptualizations of the “white spatial imaginary” (Lipsitz, 2011) and “white travel imaginary” (Arthur, 2023). The methodology section describes critical discourse analysis to preface discussion of the method used for data collection. In Chapter 4, I present my critical discourse analysis of the chosen blog entries, while the Conclusion offers a synopsis of the entire study and highlights its significance.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

Over the years, social media has grown in its influence on the dissemination and shaping of certain discourses, particularly those about notions of Whiteness and Othering. This includes tourist blogging mediums, specifically among white women bloggers who share and document their travel and leisure experiences online with their readers through blog articles and photos. The objective of this study is to examine the extent to which tourist bloggers, specifically white women, produce and perpetuate narratives that may be rooted within contexts of Orientalism and Othering. Scholar Crystal Abidin (2017) provides a nuanced framework that breaks down and operationalizes the different roles of online users creating content; these terms include “internet celebrities”, “micro-celebrities”, and “influencers”. Firstly, this review starts by discussing the existing literature on race, gender, and travel writing to provide a historical context for these overlapping issues within the discourse of exploration and representation in travel media. Secondly, it will distinctly define the juxtaposition between the role of the “tourist” and “traveller”, a framework that will be used extensively and applied to outline the distinctions between white women’s and women of colour’s travel writings (Azariah, 2016). Additionally, it will discuss concepts of “transmediality” and “remediation” to outline the transition of travel writings to travel blogs and the implications this has on how travel narratives are constructed (Calzati, 2015). Lastly, the review will shift to explain the role of a microcelebrity compared to an influencer, establishing a nuanced interpretation of how these distinct types of online presence shape perceptions and social dynamics in contemporary media.

Travel, Tourism, and Blogging

When considering extant discourses on travel and tourism, there is an evident distinction between the two terms. Academic scholar, Deepti Ruth Azariah (2016), conducted a discursive analysis of online travel narratives, specifically in terms of online travel blogging and the implications it has on the way contemporary travel culture is created and consumed. Moreover, Azariah considers “travel” to be “associated with authenticity, adventure, and spontaneity”, where the individual is more focused on the journey and adventure that ensues while they visit a particular location (Azariah, 2016, p. 1). On the other hand, tourism is associated with less desirable connotations, as it is considered to be “superficial” and “passive” (Azariah, 2016, p. 1). In other words, a traveller is someone who is involved in making their own experience, whereas a tourist is someone who engages in activities that have been commodified for the tourist experience. If a tourist and a traveller were to go on a trip to Italy, for example, the tourist will focus on visiting cultural monuments and staying at a fancy hotel, whereas the traveller is seeking a more authentic experience. This would entail participating in activities they have never done before, as the role of the traveller is to distance themselves from the familiar to gain a deep feeling (Dann, 1999).

Travel writing has existed for many decades before social media blogging, ranging from fictional and promotional texts such as travel books, diaries, photographs, brochures, guidebooks, etc. (Azariah, 2016, p. 2). The history of travel writing can be traced back to Homer’s *Odyssey* from 8 BC in which Odysseus’ journey home after the fall of Troy can be seen as “a very early form of written travel account that had an influencing factor in inspiring others to take such journeys (Bolan, 2020, p. 227). Early accounts of travel literature provided detailed accounts of geographical information, cultural aspects, and historical significance of the places they visited. Additionally, early travel literature “tended towards a greater scientificity”, aiming to provide information on a cultural destination based on

scientific and factual observations (Bassnett, 2006, p. 227). However, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were when travel writing gained more prominence since travel and transportation became increasingly available for those who could access it. This also meant that the influence of travel writing would shift. Known as the Grand Tour, this travel expedition involved touring around key cities of cultural and historical significance in Europe, such as France, Germany, and Switzerland. This tour is often “seen as a pivotal time in the development of tourism as we know it today” since it drew on the influence of previous literary works such as paintings, music, and other forms of artistic expression (Bolan, 2020, p. 228).

This influx of travel and tourism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought about technological advancements in the way travel literature is disseminated, such as the publication of guidebooks. In the early 1800s, Karl Baedeker was the one who constructed the idea of the “guidebook” - which many travellers found to be practical during this time. These guides were essentially designed for convenience as it’s meant to fit in one’s pocket and they included information on tourist sites and state-of-the-art maps; all of which provide “accuracy, reliability, lucidity, portability, and above all facilitating the traveller with an independence to travel armed with knowledge and advice” (Bolan, 2020, p. 230). In the context of modern travel writing, these guidebooks provide a starting point for the tourist, while also being directed toward the best cultural monuments, information on those monuments, restaurants, hotels, etc. allowing the traveller to make informed decisions without getting lost or confused in a new destination. However, the guidebook is not necessarily the most engaging genre of travel literature. Travel writing from the first-person perspective captures readers’ interest in a different way than guidebooks, as they foreground personal experiences of travel and tourism.

Travel diaries, for instance, were an early form of first-person travel writing that documented individuals' journeys to new destinations. Travel blogging remediates early travel diaries through the use of digital platforms. Originally coined by media scholars David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), the term "remediation" refers to the ways in which "a given message is affected when passing from one medium to another" (Calzati, 2015, p. 154). Travel blogs remediate travel diaries' chronological structure and use of first-person narrative to document journey experiences, the destinations, and the experience of being a traveller. Additionally, travel blogging remediates travel diaries' use of visuals to describe new cultures and experiences. As Bolan (2020), highlights, tourists and travellers can "use informal online environments to publish details of [. . .] their experiences, both textually and visually" (p. 233). In contrast, travel blogs are generally written with the intention that they will be read; the online platform creates the possibility for sharing with a small or larger reading audience. In a similar vein, scholar Stefano Calzati (2015) presents a comparative analysis that works to understand how the transition from travel books to blogs "affects the rhetorical and epistemological status of these texts" (Calzati, 2015, p. 153).

Calzati's study analyzed two Italian travel books and two Italian travel blogs about China, classifying both travel mediums as "intermedial transpositions [. . .] that foster the idea of different occurrences in different media that refer to a common matrix"; in this case, travel writing (Calzati, 2015, p. 154). Scholars Yoon Jung Lee and Ulrike Gretzel (2014) define blogs, similarly, pointing out that "they can be defined as online diaries or personal journals, which are frequently updated web pages listed in reverse chronological order" (Lee and Gretzel, 2014, p. 37). Blogs are a form of social media platform that has allowed those who travel to publicly share the personal narratives of their travel experiences, and as a result, it has expanded the already extensive body of travel-related content by introducing a wide range of discursive forms. It's important to note that these texts are not mere factual accounts

of a travel destination, but rather subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors.

Using multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), Calzati aimed to uncover hidden power dynamics manifested in language by looking at the linguistic elements and semiotic details across various travel mediums. The key aspects examined by Calzati were the extent to which travel writing contributes to our understanding of cultural destinations, and how this knowledge is impacted by the remediation of those texts.

Another aspect of Calzati's analysis concerns the "transmediality" of travel writing, referring to the "redistribution of texts in various media" (Calzati, 2015, p. 154). Travel blogs expand the already extensive body of on- and offline travel-related content. This is highlighted in Calzati's comparative analysis of two travel books and two travel blogs. The two books he analyzed were: *La Cina in Vespa (Around China on a Vespa)*, by Giorgio Bettinelli (2008), and *La birra di Shoashan, (A Beer in Shaoshan)*, by Sergio Ramazzotti (2002). The travel blogs he chose to analyze were: *Cina: terr di grandi contrasting, (China: Land of Big Contrasts)*, by Millycat (2012), and *Conoscere Pechina tra dinastie e imperatori (Getting to Know Beijing between Dynasties and Emperors)*, by blogger Flavia (Calzati, 2015, p. 153).

Calzati's analysis revealed that with travel books, the narratives are heavily reliant on the subjective perspectives of the travel writer, emphasizing the "I" of the author (Calzati, 2015). In this sense, the author's personal experience plays a central role in shaping how a story is perceived by the reader, establishing a direct relationship between the reader and writer that invokes a sense of authenticity and intimacy. For example, Bettinelli's book took the form of a life diary, encompassing the series of life events "whose function is to create the preconditions for the journey" (Calzati, 2015, p. 158). This narrative establishes a more direct

and personal connection between the writer and reader as it offers insight into the author's unique perceptions and interpretations of the places they travel to.

In contrast, travel blogs are revealed to be characterized by “objective notations and/or by tourist advice which bring these texts close to the travel guide” (Calzati, 2015, p. 164). Travel blogs adopt a more objective stance where the travel writer only mentions information about what they see and experience, often resulting in the erasure of subjectivity and personal reflection. This is particularly evident in the travel writings of travel blogger Millycat (2012), when mentioning the Winter Palace, describing it as “the Forbidden City, or Imperial Palace [. . .] is one of the most important buildings of the whole country as it represents a symbol of traditional China and one of the best preserved buildings of the classical age” (Calzati, 2015, p. 162). This kind of writing takes on a documentary style of reporting that refers to the practicality of the journey that often results in a lack of recognition and representation of the locals and their local culture. Moreover, this narrative of travel blogs is more concerned with “the fact of knowing, with having, with knowledge as a possession”, perpetuated through the visuals and language used to portray the traveller's experience (Calzati, 2015, p. 162).

By outlining the transmediality of travel books to travel blogs, this analysis highlights how travel narratives are constructed differently across various mediums. Moreover, the choice of a travel medium can shape storytelling techniques, narrative styles, and the overall presentation of travel experiences, specifically in terms of self-representation and subjectivity. The comparative analysis of both mediums underscores the narratives adopted by travel writers to suit the affordances of different mediums; in the case of travel blogs, this is impacted by the infrastructure of the blogs interface “whose policies of use constrain what bloggers and readers can do much more radically than publishers do in books” (Calzati, 2015, p. 165).

Race, Gender, and Travel Writing

When considering the relationship between race, gender, and travel writing, early accounts were predominantly written by white Western men due to their increased freedom in the public sphere. Existing literature on this matter specifically emphasizes the difference in writing styles between men and women, highlighting the implications their writings have on shaping colonialist narratives on how a cultural destination is perceived. This is particularly evident in the writings of Susan Bassnett (2006) and Daniel Kato (2018), where they both examine the travel writings of women from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such as Emily Georgiana Kemp and Lady Wortley Montagu to reveal the evolving role of women in travel writing and the complexities of gender and representation in this genre (Bassnett, 2006). Bassnett's work specifically looks at the social and cultural aspects that contributed to the construction of travel spaces and publications for male dominance. According to Bassnett, "The adventure quest [. . .] was explicitly gendered, since the idea of man as heroic risk-taking traveler underpinned not only the great travel narratives of the next centuries, but much of the travel writing of the twentieth century also" (Bassnett, 2006, p. 225). For the most part, these early travel accounts created "myths of the heroic explorer", seeking to explore a location that no man has ever gone before (Bassnett, 2006, p. 225).

Women's travel writings often emphasized personal relationships, everyday experiences, and the journey to self-awareness and self-discovery. Specifically, their travel writings focused on "the relationship between the individual and the societies through which she travels" (Bassnett, 2006, p. 237). Women's awareness of their role in society, both in the public and private sphere, allows them to foster deeper understandings of the world around them, especially as marginalized individuals, understanding intricate power dynamics within their travel narratives. This allows them to be more immersed in their cultural exchanges, specifically with other women, as they have access to the customs and practices all women

face regardless of where they are. This is particularly evident in the travel writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, referred to as *Letters* when she travelled to Constantinople in 1716 with her husband. Montagu's travel writings are multifaceted in the topics she focuses on as she navigates from describing herself as a traveler to describing how she experimented with the smallpox vaccinations in Turkey by allowing her children to be immunized while there (Bassnett, 2006, p. 229). Montagu also writes about Turkish women working in the bathhouses but does so in a way that criticizes the eroticization of women's domesticated realities that she also happens to be a part of. This account was made in contrast to George Sandy's and Monsieur de Thevenot's travel writings on Oriental women, classifying them as lazy and sexualizing them to normalize their 'provocative' nature. This is especially highlighted in Sandy's accounts regarding the use of the public baths, mentioning "much unnatural and filthy lust is said to be committed daily in the remote closets of these darksome Bannias" (Sandys, 1652, p. 54). The travel writings of men tend to be rooted in unrealistic accounts of "veiled women, repressed sexuality, and deviance" as they work to describe women in the Orient. Similar to the accounts of Montagu, Lucie Duff Gordon (1865) challenged the romanticized and idealized views held by men of that time about Egyptian women by writing about their everyday lives in her book *Letters from Egypt*. These types of texts worked to deconstruct the narratives men's travel writings had established about non-European women working domestic jobs such as bathhouses, specifically labelling them as "places of highly charged sexuality" (Bassnett, 2006, p. 229).

Following the revival of women's travel writings such as *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and Their World* by Mary Russell (1986), women travel writers were depicted as eccentric through the use of a "comic note that can easily be interpreted as mocking" based on the title of their travel writings (Bassnett, 2006, p. 226). These stories focused on the unconventional aspects of women travellers and their refusal to

accept gendered narratives about their role in society, further categorizing them as ‘doubly different’: women travel writers differ from women who conform to gendered social norms, and they differ from male travellers “who use the journey as a means of discovering more about their own masculinity” (Bassnett, 2006, p. 226). However, this notion places an expectation on women travellers to be ‘exceptional’ where they must perform extraordinarily and stand out from other women to warrant any recognition for their travel narratives in a male-dominated field.

This notion is inherent in the travel writings of Emily Georgiana Kemp, who was an English scholar, visual artist, and traveller who wrote about her experience visiting Northeast China in 1911. In her book, *A Face to the World*, Kemp features a painted self-portrait of her titled “Chinese ‘female travelling scholar’”, pictured in a high-collared brocade robe, long jacket lined with fur, a wide-brimmed hat (Kato, 2018, p. 142). Kemp’s choice in featuring her self-portrait stemmed from the fact that, despite her academic standing as a student at Oxford, Somerville College, and Slade School of Art, as a female student she was not considered a full member of the university and did not have access to academic literature. This meant that despite her privilege of being a white European woman, her privilege did not extend far enough to grant her equal representation in academic and political spaces. Moreover, this resulted in the inclusion of her self-portrait, “presenting herself as a credible traveling artist-scholar and an astute commentator of the social and political scene in the Far East” (Kato, 2018, p. 149). This type of self-representation in the early travel writings of women in the nineteenth century worked to challenge what was perceived at the time to be a masculine-driven discipline, manifesting in subtle negotiations that asserted their experiences in the domain of travel literature.

However, much of women’s travel writing is dominated by the perspectives of white American/European women who often overlook the representation of women of colour

within these travel narratives. Feminist scholar Susan Kollin (1997) asserts that the travel writing of white women claimed a larger cultural role for themselves “by reproducing the same discursive tactics used against them” (Kollins, 1997, p. 106). Referring to it as the woman-nature connection, this notion underscores white women travellers' self-representation in foreign environments by “consigning the racial other to the realm of nature” while claiming the “privilege” of not being equal to them (Kollins, 1997, p. 106). Following the Civil War in the United States, this prompted what is referred to as the “New Empire” which was an initiative characterized by global and cultural expansion (Kollins, 1997, p. 108). This period of imperialist ambition brought about discourses of the “New Woman”, a transnational female subject who broke free from the biological determinism that limited women’s roles in culture and restricted their spatial mobility” (Kollins, 1997, p. 108).

The emergence of the New Woman was adopted by the dominant social order linking nationalist and imperialist ideals with traditional ideals of middle-class femininity. This allowed middle-class women to assert themselves in positions of authority, therefore resulting in the “first white woman” trope (Kollins, 1997, p. 108). White American women are then depicted as pioneering figures who venture into uncharted territory and furthered the goals of Western expansion. Furthermore, this discursive formation secured the authority of white women in colonized spaces as it aided them in asserting their contributions to nation-building initiatives and standing out from the natives in that region.

This notion is echoed in Carl Thompson’s (2011) framework regarding women travellers and colonialism, where assumptions regarding women’s roles as travellers “accordingly constitute a form of counter-discourse which contests colonial discourse of their day” (Thompson, 2011, p. 191). This is fuelled by the idea that white women are familiar with notions of oppression since they have also been affected by it, and therefore created “an affinity [. . .] that generated a greater openness towards other cultures, and a greater sympathy

with the plight of indigenous populations” (Thompson, 2011, p. 191). In this sense, travel narratives produced by white women travellers leaned more toward interacting and describing the members of a nation from an individualized perspective rather than collective representations of the race.

More recent scholarship, however, reveals that the writings of white women travellers did not always follow in this pursuit as accounts of ‘othering’ seem to be prominent in the writings of Janet Schaw (1770). Specifically, Schaw’s writings contribute heavily to racist and ethnographic assumptions about the “Other,” “referring to slaves in Antigua as ‘brutes’ and their children as ‘monkeys’” (Thompson, 2011, p. 192). Her writings go on to justify the physical abuse many of the slaves endured, emphasizing that they are made to feel this pain and it doesn’t hurt them since their punishments last for a short time. Discourses of ‘othering’ are also produced through the depiction of picturesque scenery in visual art and writing, as it “served an ideological function [. . .] as it worked to render an alien landscape and its potentially unruly inhabitants more familiar and unwelcoming” (Thompson, 2011, p. 192). Moreover, this strategy was used as a way of making the unfamiliar appear less strange and intimidating to the colonial readers, as it focused solely on the visually pleasing landscapes while hiding any signs of native dissatisfaction.

Attention to these imperialist practices works to deconstruct assumptions about white women travellers being more sympathetic than their male counterparts when interacting with the natives of a foreign land. Stemming from patriarchal standards of what is deemed “appropriately feminine”, there is the idea of women having an overwhelming capacity for feeling and great concern with moral standards (Thompson, 2011, p. 193). Serving in humanitarian causes while travelling gave white women travellers the authority and agency to speak on behalf of the colonial subjects as the suffering of others led to their self-empowerment. Noted as the “dominant ideology of imperialism - this term refers to the idea

that it is only through contact with the Western civilization that the “natives” had any chance of being delivered from their own tyrannical customs” (Thompson, 2011, p. 192). With this in mind, Thompson notes that no assumptions should be made about the intentions of white women travellers to be more sympathetic and open about other cultures during the “New Empire” age.

When considering the available literature on travel writings by women of colour, the findings revealed that this is an under-researched area, as there were no substantive publications on this aspect of travel writing history. The closest in relevancy would be the work of Tori Omega Arthur (2023), as she highlights the exclusion of Black traveller’s experiences within the tourist blogging industry. Omega Arthur’s work emphasizes notions of the white travel imaginary that looks at the absence of representation of Black travellers and the dominance of white-able bodied individuals in travel content (Omega Arthur, 2023). She highlights that often when travellers of colour are “represented within media and its symbolic power logics, they are typically couched in hegemonic and presentist terms hiding the long history of people of colour travelling globally (Omega Arthur, 2023, p. 2). Travel writings from individuals of colour include the “sojourns and writings of Ibn Battuta in medieval times, the 1955 establishment of the first fully appointed black owned travel agency in the United States Henderson Travel Service, and the *Grannies on Safari*” (Omega Arthur, 2023, p. 2). Omega Arthur underscores the influence of still and moving travel images as these modes of representation continue to place white travellers at the forefront of travel and leisure discourses.

While Omega Arthur’s work provides a background for the way Black travel writers have been excluded from discourses on travel and leisure, her work focuses primarily on the contemporary travel writings by travellers of colour, and not a historical analysis. Therefore,

her study is limited in this aspect as it does not consider the deeper systemic virtues that contributed to the exclusion of Black writers from mainstream travel narratives historically.

Travel Bloggers as Microcelebrities

Current scholarship on “internet celebrity”, “microcelebrity”, and “influencer” culture has been on the rise over the last decade or so, reflecting the social and environmental factors that shaped how it is perceived by individuals on social media over time. With this in mind, it is hard to define what an “influencer” is in broad terms, since much of this figure is shaped by cultural trends and consumer behaviour that are constantly evolving. Digital media scholar Crystal Abidin (2017) defines these terms in relation to one another, emphasizing the difference in values and practices that are associated with each of these roles.

The construction of the celebrity is rooted in the commodification of a celebrity’s talents and qualities; i.e., how an individual is positioned as “worthy” of attention - both public and media. With this in mind, a “microcelebrity” differs from a traditional celebrity in that these individuals are considered “non-actors as performers” who appear to be “more ‘real’ than television personalities with perfect hair, perfect friends, and perfect lives” (Abidin, 2017, p. 159). Microcelebrity comes to be defined as “a burgeoning online trend, wherein people attempt to gain popularity by employing digital media technologies, such as videos, blogs, and social media” (Abidin, 2017, p. 159). This premise is highlighted through Abidin’s reference to Alice E. Marwick’s (2013) framework of microcelebrities, distinguishing between two different types of microcelebrity: an “ascribed microcelebrity” and an “achieved microcelebrity”. An ascribed microcelebrity constructs a celebrity’s online personality through the production of media content such as photographs and/or user-produced online memes that align with their overall public image. Alternatively, an achieved microcelebrity is one that “engages in “self-representation strategies” [that foster] the illusion of intimacy with fans, maintaining a persona, and selective disclosure about oneself” (Abidin,

2017, p. 159). For this study, the focus will be on achieved microcelebrities as one of the key objectives is to understand how travel blog authors engage in their self-representation and self-branding online.

An article that relates to this framework is that of Andrew Duffy and Hillary Yu Ping Kang (2020) titled *Follow me, I'm famous: Travel bloggers' self-mediated performances of everyday exoticism*. Duffy and Kang discuss tourist microcelebrities' online use of self-mediation and dual performances to gain the attention of their audiences as well as commercial entities (Duffy & Kang, 2020). Their study analyzes the *About Me* sections of 50 popular travel blogs to identify themes including the combination of the ordinary with the exotic, self-commodification, and the role of social media in their self-construction. Furthermore, the findings of this study go on to suggest that many travel bloggers advertise themselves as relatable and authentic, monetizing their blogs through collaborations and endorsements they receive from other businesses. The study emphasizes how increasingly influential social media has become especially in terms of blurring the lines between who constitutes a mainstream celebrity and a microcelebrity. In this sense, this article further reifies Abidin's framework of how an influencer gains prominence on social media, and the ways in which an audience becomes influenced by the content they see online. Outline the different types of online celebrity, notably microcelebrity, helps clarify understanding of who and what is being analyzed for this study.

Conclusion

The literature review situates this study within relevant scholarship, focusing on travel writing history, the remediation and transmediality of first-person travel writing forms, and race and gender in travel writing. The chapter finishes with an examination of the type of "celebrity" manifested by the travel bloggers included in the study, concluding that they are best considered to be "achieved microcelebrities" (Marwick, 2013). The purpose of this

literature review has been to provide a contextual framework for the analysis section of this study, which examines the traveller or tourist personas by a select group of Western women travel bloggers. Moreover, this review supports the analysis' focus on how these travel blogs reproduce or challenge racialized discourses that continue to be reinforced in Western travel writing history. In the following chapter, I will present the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter 3 - Theory and Method

Introduction

In utilizing the frameworks of Orientalism and the commodification of Otherness in relation to the tourist blogging genre, this research considers the historical legacy of white/colonial racism, examining whether or not those discourses continue to inform contemporary travel writing, such as these blogs. This study also utilizes standpoint theory as a framework that underscores the power dynamics inherent in the travel writings of white women travellers and women of colour travellers. The inclusion of women of colour travel experiences and writings is essential for challenging dominant narratives rooted in colonial discourses of privilege and superiority.

This section considers the “white spatial imaginary” articulated by George Lipsitz (2011), which outlines the role of racialized perceptions and representations in shaping spatial experiences. Building on this framework, Tori Omega Arthur (2023) developed the concept of the “white travel imaginary”, revealing how spaces dominated by Western ideals of travel and leisure reinforce the exclusion of travel bloggers of colour from contributing to these discourses. Furthermore, this section will transition to discuss the methodology employed in this study, underscoring the rationale behind the selection process. Incorporating a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, this study will analyze a total of 10 blog entries from five travel bloggers; three of whom are white women travel bloggers, and two of whom are women of colour.

Theory

Standpoint Theory

When considering the role of standpoint theory in research, the inclusion of marginalized perspectives is imperative for highlighting hidden power dynamics, revealing the ignored experiences that reinforce dominant narratives of privilege. Standpoint theory works to challenge “epistemic standards for more accurate, comprehensive, objective, and rational production for knowledge” (Harding, 2009, p. 195). Rooted in Nancy Hartsock’s (1983) foundational framework, this methodology serves to “define the nature of the truth claims that feminists advance and to provide a methodological grounding that will validate these claims” (Hekman, 1997, p. 341). It asserts the idea that women’s unique position in society allows them to make claims about truth and reality, offering valuable perspectives from those who are oppressed or marginalized. Feminist scholar, Sandra Harding (2009), explains that within hierarchically organized societies, “the daily activities and experiences of oppressed groups enable insights about how the society functions that are not available. . .from the perspective of dominant-group activity” (Harding, 2009, p. 194). Dating back to the 1980s, this theory was initially utilized as a methodology that measured the effectiveness of feminist research across varying disciplinary fields such as political philosophy and sociology, focusing specifically on issues of race, class, sexuality, and studies in postcolonial research (Harding, 2009, 193).

Inspired by Marxist ideology, this framework shares a critical perspective on power, social relations, and the distribution of resources, focusing on the material conditions of society that influence the formation of consciousness. Specifically, it is shaped by the idea that knowledge is something that is situated and perspectival, and that knowledge can be produced from multiple standpoints. Feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins (1989), builds on this framework by focusing specifically on “the intersections of gender, sexuality, and class

in the lives of Black women and men”, positing that systems of oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type as they work together to produce injustice (Harnois, 2010, p. 70).

This framework essentially critiques earlier arguments made by some feminist scholars claiming women’s experiences foster a “women’s perspective” that sets them apart from dominant patriarchal structures (Harnois, 2010, p. 71). The issue with this argument is that it does not consider the material conditions that influence the way women perceive their role within society, resulting in the perpetuation of systemic inequalities. Moreover, the experiences of Black women work to “foster the development of a group standpoint,” where inequality and diversity stem from “their shared history of oppression and historical and present-day segregation” (Harnois, 2010, p. 70).

The arguments made by Hills Collins are relevant to this study in that it justifies the importance of analyzing the travel experiences of women of colour in relation to white women. Specifically, it challenges the “women’s perspective” that informs dominant narratives regarding travel and leisure that places the experiences of white women at the forefront of this discourse. Hills Collins’ argument emphasized that shared disadvantages and interests are not sufficient enough to maintain group consciousness, rather, it is about understanding how separate modes of life distinguish one group from another. The women who were chosen for this study are brought together by the fact that they travel and share their experiences online through blogging. However, they differ based on their lived experiences and the material circumstances that shaped their perspectives. Since this study aims to understand the implications of white women’s travel writings on Orientalist and Othering discourses, including women of colour’s travel writings critically analyzes how diverse experiences intersect and challenge dominant narratives. Incorporating this theoretical framework is justifiable since it approaches travel and leisure discourse from an anti-disciplinary perspective, challenging conventional paradigms that align with notions of white

privilege. Moreover, analyzing the travel writings of women of colour unravels the intersection between white privilege and gender, and how these factors reinforce hierarchies of power in the travel narrative.

Orientalism, Whiteness, and Othering

“Orientalism” is an important framework for understanding how racial discourses about the East are constructed and disseminated within Western society. Coined by Edward Said (1978), “Orientalism” refers to Western discourses that construct Eastern cultures and peoples in ways that affirm the West’s superiority over the East. Orientalist ideology subjugates the “Orient” by empowering homogenizing and stereotypical narratives about how its diverse cultures and peoples should be perceived based on the idea of Western supremacy. Although Said did not identify a particular continent or country in the East that experienced this, it is understood that “the Orient” refers to nations in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia (Said, 1978). The way in which Eastern cultures and people are represented through an Orientalist lens involves the process of categorizing through stereotypes and generalizations, depicting them as exotic, mysterious, and uncivilized. Said highlights that this process of representation is evident within ancient Western literature and art, imposing a specific perspective of the East for the Western audience. Said’s Orientalism identifies the inherent geopolitical and cultural power dynamics that are portrayed within those representations. This project is interested in identifying whether and how travel blogs by Western women manifests Orientalist discourse in their written and textual representation of Eastern destinations.

In hooks’ (1992) framework on Whiteness and Othering, what’s deemed as “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”, places individuals that exist on the margins of that ideological power structure under the category of the Other (hooks, 1992, p. 22). Moreover, non-white individuals continue to be marginalized, stereotyped, and objectified, therefore

perpetuating norms of systemic racism and white supremacy within society. Hooks' develops this idea further with the notion of the "commodification of Otherness" (hooks, 1992, p. 21). This refers to dominant cultural practices that continue to objectify and commodify the identities and experiences of the "Other" in the form of cultural appropriation and the perpetuation of racial stereotypes. White supremacist ideologies continue to uphold power over how to define, consume, and appropriate the cultural practices of marginalized racial groups. Furthermore, this practice of the objectification and commodification of the Other is rooted in the fetishization of Otherness, where the Other is considered *desirable*, welcome to be used as "seasoning that can liven up a dull dish that is mainstream with white culture" (hooks, 1992, p. 21).

In a similar fashion, this perspective is echoed in Karl Spracklen's (2013) book, *Whiteness and Leisure*, where he explains that whiteness as a dominant social position relates to leisure. Highlighted in his chapter, *Whiteness and Tourism*, Spracklen elaborates on how the white individual "will use their economic and cultural power to create local spaces that allow them to have a taste of the exotic in the comforting surroundings of other Westerners" (Spracklen, 2013, p. 171). Spracklen's framework confirms that of hooks', where a white individual's perception of cultural destinations reflects dominant Western ideologies where they are not immersing themselves in the culture of the destination they're visiting. Rather, they indulge in cultural traditions as if they were a hobby or a commodity to be acquired. Both of these frameworks examine the way white cultural norms and values can shape how tourist destinations are perceived, specifically highlighting the unequal power dynamics between local communities and Western tourists. Many tourist bloggers will use their platform to share their experiences when visiting a particular dream location, working to influence and shape narratives about how to perceive the Other, continuing to perpetuate the objectification of the culture they encounter. As these experiences are described from the

perspectives of white women, it runs the possibility that they may unintentionally describe it from a Eurocentric or Orientalist worldview, perpetuating a limited understanding of cultural nuances.

Moreover, these practices work to shape and accommodate white norms and values at the expense of culturally appropriating traditions and practices from a particular dream destination. Known as the “white spatial imaginary,” George Lipsitz (2011) describes this term in his book, *How Racism Takes Place*. He describes it as “an abject racist formulation inscribed in the physical contours of the places where white people live, work, and play” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 28). An example of this involves the segregation of Black individuals from residing in white neighbourhoods, promoting the “coordinated racial exclusion of Blacks as a mechanism for inflating the value of properties owned by whites” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 26). In this case, Black individuals are not allowed to be seen on the same social hierarchy as white individuals as this would serve as a threat to white privilege and allow for the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Lipsitz explains in his chapter that the correlation between crime and a Black individual owning a home in a white neighbourhood was first introduced in an instruction manual for white professionals (Lipsitz, 2011). It aligned with the racial and political climate of that time and conformed to the commitment’s local realtors, planners, and developers had to ensure the segregation of Black individuals from these neighbourhoods. Moreover, the violation of these policies to enter a white-dominated space constituted an actual crime punishable by law, but this would not apply to a white individual had they done the same as the law is designed to protect them. All of these societal mechanisms work to reinforce whiteness in systems of social control that maintain the status quo of racial hierarchy.

Expanding on Lipsitz, Tori Omega Arthur (2023) writes about tourist blogging through the lens of the “white spatial imaginary”. She highlights the lack of representation of

Black travelers within the tourist blogging industry. Moreover, Omega Arthur heavily emphasizes how whiteness continues to be “reified. . .in a range of travel media, including social networking sites” (Omega Arthur, 2023, p. 2). Omega Arthur’s work draws attention to the Western-centric perspective that exists within tourist blogging discourses that leave out the experiences of travel bloggers of colour. This informs what Omega Arthur deems as the “white travel imaginary;” a concept used to describe the way travel media commonly portrays the experiences of white travelers as the standard, perpetuating narratives of whiteness as the default perspective in travel writing (Omega Aruther, 2023, p. 2).

This framework also incorporates Elvi Whittaker’s (2009) theory of travel photography as the enactment of racial stereotypes, clarifying how assumptions rooted in whiteness highlight a distinctive perspective within a broader context of travel and leisure activities. Whittaker discusses the evolving purpose of photography, arguing that still and moving pictures portraying middle-aged, white women sharing their experience in a dream destination are “blocks of space and time that have effects beyond the people or place [. . .] to which they refer” (Omega Arthur, 2023, p. 5). Even though the photos are shared with the intention of simply capturing these tourists, the images work to shape mainstream narratives of travel and leisure. The implication is that when examining these travel blogs through a critical race lens, it runs the risk of perpetuating Othering discourses, both textually and visually, therefore supporting the idea of the white travel imaginary as described by Omega Arthur.

When considering how the white spatial imaginary is created, it’s helpful to also consider how tourism itself is considered a form of performance. This notion is emphasized by scholar Tim Edensor (2001) who suggests that, metaphorically, tourism is staged and performed, working to minimize improvisation, questioning, and mockery (Edensor, 2001, p. 59). Essentially, Edensor argues that the role of the tourist in this performance “evolves

around class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality”, resulting in what is considered the status quo of what tourism is and who gets to perform it. Moreover, this perceived notion reinforces Lipsitz’s and Arthur’s framework regarding the white travel imaginary, in which tourism is seen to be a constructed performance that is shaped and influenced by a set of cultural and societal norms. Moreover, Edensor conducts his analysis of tourism as a performance by also examining examples of tourist activities such as the staging of theme parties at hotels, the performance of barter, and the performance of gazing at tourist attractions (Edensor, 2001, p. 66). The example that was most prominent throughout his article was what he deemed as “themed spaces,” which he describes as the establishment of particular spaces as “tourist enclaves” that involve things like festival marketplaces, heritage sites, waterfront attractions, and shopping centers (Edensor, 2001, p. 66). These “themed spaces” are considered staged shows that work to advertise the landscaped lawns and white-sand beaches of the tourist destination as a commodity to be enjoyed by those who resemble the performer. When tying this back to the white spatial imaginary, “themed spaces” essentially define how it is constructed since they involve the shaping and representation of travel experiences. Additionally, concerns regarding the possible commodification and objectification of cultural practices within the white imaginary are prevalent in Edensor’s argument about tourism as a performance.

Also expanding on this framework are Pierre L. van den Berghe and Charles F. Keyes (1984) in their article, *Tourism and Re-Created Ethnicity*. Berghe and Keyes discuss the significant impacts of “ethnic tourism” on the maintenance and re-creation of ethnic boundaries (Berghe and Keyes, 1984, p. 343). “Ethnic tourism” refers to a mode of travel where “the prime attraction is the cultural exoticism of the local population and its artifacts” (Berghe and Keyes, 1984, p. 344). Moreover, they focus mainly on covering the role of the state in this development, as well as how ethnic characteristics and consciousness are altered

through this. Berghe and Keyes argue that ethnic tourism impacts and even alters the indigenous culture and practices of the destination as this can shape the way locals behave, including how art is portrayed, how locals dress, etc. This form of tourism essentially caters to the tourists' desire for authenticity within that culture, which can result in the loss of genuine cultural practices, where the natives themselves become performers. This argument resembles that of Edensor, where the tourist is considered a performer themselves in the way they 'set the stage' for how a destination is perceived. However, Berghe and Keyes' insights prove that the locals/natives of a said culture also serve as performers in shaping particular Orientalist narratives. In this way, the framework also resonates with Said's notion of Orientalism, as the locals themselves perceive their culture through the eyes of the dominant West.

Methodology

For this study, I have chosen to conduct my analysis using a qualitative research method known as critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the "social and political context of discourse, based on the view that language is not only conditioned by these contexts but itself helps to constitute them" (Tonkiss, 2018, p. 480). In general, discourse analysis in and of itself works to find existing patterns or themes within texts as a way to understand how meanings are constructed and contested. This framework works to understand how ideologies are perpetuated through language and texts as well as how they function in relation to historical events and contexts. It considers the social and political settings in which that language took place, how it's being used, and its impacts on society. Moreover, language in this context is understood to be a crucial tool in understanding how systems of power are reproduced, perpetuated, and exercised within social relations and institutions (Tonkiss, 2018, p. 480). I chose this approach as I find that it has a nuanced process that examines the way texts are structured to produce discourses within our society

while focusing on identifying patterns of variation and association that “disrupts the appearance of a coherent or ‘watertight’ piece of discourse” (Tonkiss, 2018, p. 487). This methodology allows the researcher to identify and question the inconsistencies of a text and account for the exclusion of alternative accounts or perspectives. This research method also helps researchers analyze the ways social actors are being positioned in particular texts, working to uncover the values, beliefs, and/or problems that have come to be associated with certain groups. In this case, racial minorities. Moreover, this qualitative method aims to provide a rigorous process that explores the author/speaker’s standpoints and perspectives on a particular political or social issue, showcasing the nuanced ways in which language can be used to perpetuate and/or contest existing power dynamics. Therefore, in understanding the capacity of how this qualitative research method operates, it is important to lay out how it will be used in my overall study.

Method

The main objective of my study is to identify how Western bloggers discursively construct Eastern destinations in their travel writing. To do so, I analyze the texts and visual media that tourist bloggers use to share their journeys. I used purposive selection to identify relevant blogs for this study. Purposive selection, or purposive sampling, is “a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment” (Alchemer, 2021). This process involved the selection of blog entries from five popular, Western (based in the U.S.) women travel bloggers. Since this study aims to discover whether Western women bloggers' standpoints inform the discursive construction of Eastern destinations, I wanted to study travel blogs created by white women and women of colour. This brings a comparative element to the study, which affords me an opportunity to interpret whether there are variations in the discourses, narratives, and visual imagery presented by the different bloggers and, potentially, shedding light on issues of power dynamics, cultural hegemony, and

representation within blogging genres of travel. Three of these travel blogs are run by white women, while two are created by women of colour. I chose to focus on women travel bloggers instead of men travel bloggers because there seems to be a wider range of available content online by women.

To identify the blogs, I did an initial review of the bloggers' "About Me" pages to confirm their location (i.e., based in the West). I also reviewed the blog structure (use of text and visuals) and bloggers; travel destinations to ensure that they traveled to Eastern destinations *and* that they all travelled to similar destinations - which would aid in the analysis. Based on this review, I ultimately selected five travel blogs for analysis - three were written by white women and two by women of colour. The travel blogs that are run by white women are *Adventurous Kate* (2010), *A Dangerous Business* (2010), and *World of Wanderlust* (2012). The two blogs run by women of colour are *HeyCiara* (2015) and *Along With Ari* (2014). I have chosen these travel bloggers based on the idea that they are all Western women who have travelled to Eastern destinations. This is a common factor across all travel bloggers and therefore helps to ensure a consistent analysis across a diverse range of perspectives and experiences presented in their writings.

Kate McCulley from *Adventurous Kate* is a 39-year-old white woman originally from Boston, Massachusetts who claims she's been "pursuing a career in online marketing and a lifetime dreaming of traveling the world" (McCulley, 2010). At some point in her life, travelling the world became her "true calling" and she felt as though she had to share her experience of traveling solo as a woman with other women who plan to do the same (McCulley, 2019). Similarly, Amanda Williams from *A Dangerous Business* and travel writers from the *World of Wanderlust* have the same objective for their followers as they also hope to share insights on traveling as women as well as their own experiences.

The two travel blogs created by women of colour include HeyCiara (2015), also known as Ciara Johnson, written by a Black woman who quit her job to travel and “immerse herself in other cultures.” Johnson’s site explains that she's interested in sharing her experience traveling with other women, hoping to motivate them to do the same (Johnson, 2015). In a similar vein, tourist blogger Ari (2014) from *Along With Ari* is an Asian-American woman who moved to Shanghai in 2014. She explains that her passion for traveling stemmed from making this big decision to live in Shanghai and that her blog aims to share her experiences in order to inspire others to do the same (Along With Ari, 2014).

Specific entries from these five travel blogs will be analyzed to better understand whether and how these travel narratives produce or perpetuate racialized, classed, patriarchal, and/or Orientalist discourses. I initially aimed to select a total of 25 blog entries, consisting of five blog entries from each tourist blogger where they each talk about the same five destinations. I chose to do this in order to provide a consistent analysis across different perspectives and experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding of each destination from various viewpoints. However, after reviewing each tourist blogger’s page, I identified a gap in the number of destinations each blogger had visited, i.e., not all of them had visited the same countries. As a result, I chose blog entries based on relative geographical proximity of the bloggers' destinations. I also reduced the number of blog entries chosen for analysis to 10, rather than 25, to ensure the scope of the project remained manageable. The blog entries describe travelling to destinations in Southeast Asia (such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Hong Kong) as well as the Middle East (such as Morocco, Dubai, and Jordan). The sample size as well as the selection process for my study is curated to provide a nuanced understanding of how text and visual imagery on Western women’s travel blogs stand to produce understandings of who gets to travel, how non-Western locations are perceived, and who gets to share their experiences online.

Conclusion

In this section, frameworks on the standpoint theory were interpreted based on the works of Nancy Hartsock (1983), Patricia Hill Collins (1989), and Sandra Harding (2009). These frameworks highlight the importance of centering marginalized perspectives and understanding social, cultural, and historical contexts' influence on shaping knowledge and subjective experiences. This framework aligns with notions of George Lipsitz's (2011) white spatial imaginary, emphasizing the intersectionality of dominant narratives, power dynamics, and the formation of spatial experiences, specifically regarding discourses on travel and leisure. Moreover, it highlights this aspect in the realm of contemporary travel writings and the exclusion of travellers of colour's experiences from discourses of travel and leisure in the works of Tori Omega Arthur's (2023) white travel imaginary. This framework establishes the theoretical lens through which the analysis of this study will be carried out.

Moreover, it provides a rationale for the selection process of the travel bloggers, their blog entries, and their geographical destinations. By focusing on the travel writings of white women and women of colour, this study aims to provide a complex analysis of the power dynamics and intersections of privilege, race, and gender within the realm of travel narratives. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, this study offers insight into the way different social identities construct subjective experiences and representations in this context.

Chapter 4 - Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the blog entries selected for this study. Overall, there are prominent discourses that outline the different roles of a tourist and traveller, outlined in the literature review. All five bloggers were analyzed based on factors such as writing style, the language they use to describe their experiences, and the relevance of the photos they share to complement their content. To organize my analysis, I grouped blogs created by white women travellers (Adventurous Kate, A Dangerous Business, and World of Wanderlust) and those written by women of colour (HeyCiara and Along with Ari). The selection of blog entries for this analysis was based on geographical proximity that allowed for a consistent analysis across all travel bloggers. These geographical locations included the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The chapter will start with the findings from all five bloggers and their blog entries, providing context for the discussion of the discourses that were identified across their travel writings. This overview will be followed up by a detailed discussion of the discourses that emerged through women of colour's blogging. To conclude, the chapter addresses how these respective sets of discourses coalesce around a "touristic gaze" and a "traveller's gaze" in these blogging practices.

Analysis of Blog Entry Statements

In my initial review of all the blogs, I focused on understanding how travel bloggers described their non-Western destinations. This meant that I paid close attention to the language they used to describe local cultures and peoples, including comparisons made to Western culture and people. The following chart captures selected quotations from all five bloggers, which speak to these aspects of the blogs.

Middle Eastern Destinations: Morocco, Jordan, Dubai

All five bloggers travelled to Middle Eastern destinations, with three visiting Morocco (A Dangerous Business, HeyCiara, Along with Ari), one visiting Jordan (Adventurous Kate), and one visiting Dubai (World of Wanderlust).

Travel Blogger	Selected Quotations from blog entries
Adventurous Kate	Blog entry, "Jordan: The Perfect Introduction to The Middle East"
Jordan (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "While the Middle East may conjure up images of war, Jordan is a very safe country." - "Most consider it the safest country in the region by far." - "You certainly can't say that about Syria or Lebanon" - "While Syria is a mess right now, this does not affect Jordan's safety whatsoever." - "Has Jordan had isolated violence and terrorism in the past? Very, very little." - "Whatever negative images you may have about Middle Easterners will fly out the window as Jordanians welcome you with warm hospitality." - "Floating in the dead sea is a lot of fun, and a sensation unlike anything you've felt before [. . .] but it's also the key opportunity to get pictures of yourself to show off to your friends."
A Dangerous Business	Blog entry, "8 things that surprised me about traveling in Morocco"
Morocco (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Maybe a combination of gorgeous Instagram shots and the fact that I enjoyed my 2017 trip to Egypt so much [. . .] I suddenly found myself with a fierce desire to visit Morocco." - "I'd had some preconceived notions about what traveling in Morocco would be like, and, as it turned out, many of them were just wrong!" - "It's safer than you probably think" - "I get similar comments walking down the street in Cleveland, Ohio" - "I erroneously assumed that Morocco would be similar to Egypt. But how wrong I was!" - "Fes with its labyrinthine medina is completely different from Marrakech's and its rose-coloured buildings and palm trees, which is different from the blue-washed Chefchaouen, which is completely different from the Berber towns in the High Atlas Mountains." - "The country is far more developed and "Westernized" than most people realize"
World of Wanderlust	Blog entry, "10 of the best photo locations in Dubai"
Dubai (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "The Palace in Downtown Dubai [. . .] This beautiful hotel sets a magnificent backdrop in the centre of town." - "Atlantis the Palm [. . .] The impressive resort has so much to offer by way of photo opportunities but for the best view, make your way down to the private beach." - "This is one of Dubai's busiest hotels so for a serene photo without the crowds, you'll need to visit at sunrise while the rest of the hotel is sleeping." - "You can't visit Dubai without visiting the Dubai desert. These expansive sand dunes have become everyone's favourite photographic location in Dubai." - "For the best photos, book a sunrise hot air balloon and glide over the landscapes with ease." - "Jumeirah Beach [. . .] It is here where you'll find many travellers and expats sipping away on a cocktail in one of the many beach clubs." - "Each room features its own private swimming pool, butler service and inclusive activities in the dunes."
HeyCiara	Blog entry, "An unforgettable experience in the Sahara Desert - Morocco"
Morocco (2015)	- "Every aspect of the landscapes, people, and culture left me in awe, wanting more."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “We arrived to remote Merzouga midday after driving through massive gorges and lush green valleys.” - “Before jumping on our camels, we prepped ourselves for the elements by wrapping scarves around our heads in traditional Berber style and fueling up with some Moroccan mint tea.” - “Up and then down, was the continuous motion as we set off into bright orange dunes are far as the eye could see.” - “Other than the squeals we’d occasionally release as the galloping camels jolted our bodies, you couldn’t hear a sound. <p>“I began to tear up as we rode into sunset and our shadows silently dance along the seas of sand.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “After only several days, it was like we forgot that we [tour group] started this trip as strangers.” - “I sunk my hands into the powder-like sand and thanked the universe for gifting me these new friends to share this experience with.”
Along with Ari	Blog entry, “21 photos to inspire you to visit Morocco”
Morocco (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Morocco is on the bucket list of almost every traveler I’ve met.” - “Morocco is filled with gorgeous contrasts of colour.” - “I spent 10 days in this stunning country and definitely did not get enough.” - “There was nothing more magical than watching the sun rise and fall over the sandy horizon and laying in that same sand staring up at the stars.” - “If this destination wasn’t on your bucket list before, I hope some of these photos encourage you to go sometime in the future!”

Southeast Asian Destinations: Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong

All five bloggers travelled to destinations in Southeast Asia, with three visiting Thailand, (A Dangerous Business, HeyCiara, and Along with Ari). Additionally, HeyCiara visited Cambodia and Vietnam. One travel blogger visits Malaysia (Adventurous Kate) and one visits Hong Kong (World of Wanderlust).

Travel Blogger	Selected Quotations from blog entries
Adventurous Kate	Blog entry, “The ‘real’ Asia”
Malaysia (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The teenager, a Malaysian, goes on to ask me where I’m from and tells me how much he wants to visit the United States. People have said that would happen all the time, but it never really happened in Thailand.” - “Aside from posing for a few photos of my blue eyes, I’m not that exotic there. Farang rule. But Malaysia is something different.” - “I know stares. I love stares. In Italy and Argentina, you feel like the hottest person in the country when walking down the street [. . .] Not here. I walk by and the Indian men go silent. They watch each step I take as if to memorize the gait of my walk, no trace of humour in their eyes.” - “Did I really call Bangkok chaotic? It’s got nothing on KL. The street vendors are more persistent; the yells are louder. The streets are potholed and every sewer makes me want to retch.” - “I walk into the hostel and introduced myself to the first person I saw: a Finnish firefighter who just finished a diving trip in Sumatra. And right away, my spirits improved.” - “We’re eating pizza and drinking margaritas at a Jamaican bar in Malaysia [. . .]

	<p>Joining us are an Australian guy and American girl.”</p> <p>- “Sometimes, a little human contact is all you need.”</p>
A Dangerous Business	Blog entry, “The Phi Phi Islands: So much more than Leo and ‘The Beach’”
Thailand (2014)	<p>- “I swear to God! You really do say it ‘Pee Pee’! I was talking about the Phi Phi Islands”</p> <p>- “I only knew these islands as being the place where the Leonardo DiCaprio movie ‘The Beach’ was filmed.”</p> <p>- “An easy 10-minute walk along the beach brought me to silence and some of the most amazingly-coloured water I’ve seen with my own two eyes.”</p> <p>- “I heard much of the coral and fish life here was still suffering after having been mostly destroyed in the tsunami 10 years ago, we were lucky to see quite a good number of colourful fish.”</p> <p>- “We went to Koh Phi Phi Don [. . .] Even though this island is one of the most touristy, I was still awed by the colour of the water out in the bay.”</p> <p>- “Next up [. . .] Maya Bay [. . .] This small bay can be teeming with tourists.”</p>
World of Wanderlust	Blog entry, “Hong Kong in 48 hours”
Hong Kong (2017)	<p>- “Hong Kong Island has the benefit of centrality, being within walking distance of many of the cities’ main attractions.”</p> <p>- “On the other hand, you have Kowloon, offering a more authentic stay just minutes to the local markets and right “in the thick of it”.”</p> <p>- “I checked into the Kerry Hotel, a new hotel located away from the hustle and bustle, with a view of the entire harbour.”</p> <p>- “Cat Street [. . .] which has nonetheless retained its authenticity offering local handicrafts, souvenirs, and plenty of great food to sink in to.”</p> <p>- “The food is not quite as local as the neighbourhood has maintained itself, largely due to the expat population and a logical sense to offer more Western foods in the area.”</p> <p>- “Make Lantau Island your first stop [. . .] it is here where you will see the famous Bronze Buddha up close and experience more of Hong Kong’s ancient cultures and traditions.”</p> <p>- “Lamma Island is another great half day for a more relaxed escape from the city and beautiful beaches that will make you forget the hustle and bustle in no time at all.”</p>
HeyCiara	Blog entry, “Traveling Southeast Asia with Teva – The perfect travel sandal?” [Sponsored Post]
Southeast Asia (2018) (Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam)	<p>- “I’ve visited Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam so far. It’s been a whirlwind of an experience.”</p> <p>“Thanks to delicious food, budget accommodation, rich culture, and developed tourism infrastructure, Southeast Asia is known as the ultimate backpacker’s destination.”</p> <p>- “Ya girl was on a budget, so the cheap prices in this region were definitely appealing.”</p> <p>- “For the most part, everyone was right about Southeast Asia.”</p> <p>- “I’ve stepped foot on what might be the most perfect beach in the world.”</p> <p>- “I’ve slept in beds that cost less than a cup of coffee.”</p> <p>- “I’ve explored ancient temples that blew my mind.”</p> <p>- “I swam in a bioluminescent beach. It was magical.”</p> <p>- “I’ve discovered a new love for cozy cafes hidden in busy alleys.”</p> <p>- “Travelling with Tevas [. . .] I’ve worn them while walking on rocky beaches, exploring busy markets, and bathing beautiful elephants.”</p>
Along with Ari	Blog entry, “Your guide to visiting Khao Sok National Park”

Thailand (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “When you Goggle Khao Sok National Park, you’ll immediately be inundated with photos of longtail boats, giant limestone cliffs, and the brightest of bright blue water.” - “As pretty as those photos are, they still don’t compare to the magic of seeing the national park in person.” - “The easiest way to get to Khao Sok National Park is by minibus.” - “When I was there, I stayed at Coco Hostel and really enjoyed myself. It was fairly cheap and I only paid 200 baht a night!!” - “I met some other people who were staying at the Khao Sok Jasmine Garden Resort and Khao Sok Riverside Resort and also had a good time.” - “This one of the only parks in Thailand where wild elephants and still known to roam around. Spend a few extra days in the park and get your adventure on!” - “Take yourself to the park during the day and walk along some of the trails.” - “Trek to find the Rafflesia flower [. . .] This is one of the more popular activities in Khao Sok National Park.”
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From these statements, I identified specific discourses that emerged in the bloggers writing about these destinations: Othering/Orientalist discourses, local culture as “primitive”, and the commodification of local culture. In the following analysis, I expand on these discursive themes to highlight the standpoints of travel bloggers inform the use of these discourses in their travel writing. I will then conclude by highlighting how these discourses situate bloggers as entailing either a “traveller’s gaze” or a “touristic gaze.”

Othering and Orientalist Perspectives

When considering themes of Othering and Orientalist perspectives, they are particularly evident in the writings of white woman travel bloggers. Specifically in the travel writings of Adventurous Kate (2010), and A Dangerous Business (2014), highlighted in their blog entries about Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Consistent with Edward Said's framework of Orientalism, this perspective highlights the representation of the Orient that often continues to reinforce Western beliefs and stereotypes about the East (Said, 1978). When microcelebrities have a platform where they can shape their followers' perspectives on certain narratives, in this case, travel and leisure, it's important to consider the language that is being used as this can unintentionally reinforce Orientalist narratives. When considering the standpoints of white women travel bloggers, their perspectives can be rooted in Eurocentric worldviews that can be reflected unintentionally through their portrayal of

cultural practices. Examples of Othering and Orientalist perspectives range from the exoticization of Thailand's small islands to the scepticism of Jordan's safety. This section reviews the blog entries by white women travel bloggers, highlighting the importance of language in shaping Othering and Orientalist narratives in travel.

There also appears to be the common narrative of comparing Asian cultures to one another. This oversimplification of Asian culture can be witnessed in McCulley's entry, mentioning her "chaotic" journey from the airport to the hostel (McCulley, 2010). She measures the busy nature of KL to that of Bangkok, Thailand, setting a Westernized standard to which Asian cities must conform. Similarly, travel blogger World of Wanderlust shares their experience while visiting Hong Kong, strongly emphasizing the difference in how busy HK Island is compared to Kowloon. Both of these comparisons rest on Western standards of leisure that entail a bias towards efficiency and orderliness that overlooks the authenticity associated with each cultural destination. Moreover, these examples highlight the possibility of Western travellers imposing their expectations onto diverse cultures, reinforcing a cycle of cultural homogenization and marginalization of local perspectives.

These comparisons also position Western perspectives at the centre of discourse, suggesting that the experience of white women travellers is the standard for measuring certain cultures' authenticity. The comparison of one culture to another is also persistent in Western tourists' experiences in the Middle East, where preconceived stereotypes about war and danger continue to be associated with the region as a whole. Examples are prevalent in McCulley's (2012) blog entry about Jordan, where she provides a travel "guide" for travellers who are visiting Jordan for the first time. McCulley's guide aimed to portray a positive image that strayed away from Orientalist perspectives that labelled it as "unsafe." In doing so, McCulley assessed the safety of Jordan to that of Syria and Egypt, as she considers both countries as the least safe in the Middle East. This comparison blurs the lines between all

Middle Eastern cultures and overgeneralizing the region's complex historical background. Additionally, McCulley's attention to the political climate of the Middle East suggests her initial acceptance of those very stereotypes.

Similarly, Amanda Williams (2019) from *A Dangerous Business* shares a blog entry about her trip to Morocco, where she also reassures her readers about the region's safety by comparing it to the safety of another Middle Eastern country. Williams differs slightly in her writing style, however, as she admits to her readers how wrong she was about having preconceived notions about Morocco's safety, claiming it's a lot safer than they think (Williams, 2019).

When referring back to Said's framework on Orientalism, he explicitly mentions how Eastern cultures and people are represented through an Orientalist lens that involves the process of categorizing through stereotypes and generalizations as uncivilized and threatening compared to Western cultures (Said, 1978). The language that is conveyed by both McCulley and Williams evokes these tropes, even as they attempt to debunk these generalizations. By mentioning the negative misconceptions about the safety of the Middle East, travel bloggers are amplifying their generalizations to their readers who may internalize this information and ultimately shape how it continues to be perceived.

Division Between Local and Tourist Culture

A theme that persisted across the travel writings of white women travel bloggers was the division between local and tourist culture, where a distinction is constructed through language of "authentic"/ "real" experiences (i.e., local culture) versus tourist culture (i.e., experiences created to support tourist economy that presents a particular experience of the city/country to foreigners), as well as discourse of local cultures as "chaotic" and "busy". This is particularly evident in travel blog entries from *Adventurous Kate*, *A Dangerous Business*, and *World of Wanderlust*, specifically about Southeast Asia. This division in local

and tourist culture is captured in writing and photographs included in the blog entries. Referring back to Karl Spracklen's (2013) framework on whiteness and leisure, this portrayal of local culture allows white individuals to "have a taste of the exotic in the comforting surroundings of other Westerners" (Spracklen, 2013, p. 171). This can be seen in McCulley's (2010) blog entry on her trip to Malaysia, where she describes her experience of riding a shuttle bus in busy traffic. In describing her experience, McCulley's blog entry captures her disappointment upon arrival at the Malaysian hostel until she connects with another tourist – a "Finnish firefighter [...] right away, my spirits improved." Adventurous Kate have dinner with the "Finnish firefighter at a Jamaican bar, where they meet an Australian guy and an American girl" (McCulley, 2010). McCulley remarks that sometimes "human contact is all you need" to feel better when traveling in a foreign country. This observation is ironic since McCulley had described an interaction she had with a Malaysian teen earlier in the same blog entry. As a result, McCulley's framing of these interactions suggests – inadvertently or not – that the Malaysian teen (and other locals she must have conversed with on her trip) were either not suitable human contact or that the locals were Other, that is, they did not register as "human contact." In this sense, the locals are relegated to the backdrop of "Adventurous Kate's" travel. In doing so, this characterization centres the familiar from a Western perspective, foreclosing possibilities of authentic cultural exchanges.

This aspect can be emphasized in McCulley's blog entry about her trip to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It mentions her experience with a Malaysian teenager who asked her where she was from. When she mentioned she was from America, the teenager expressed how much he wanted to visit the United States. In this interaction alone, the teenager's desire to visit the U.S. is rooted in this fascination with Western culture that also reflects underlying Orientalist perspectives where Western culture is idealized. This teenager's fascination with McCulley's cultural background is underscored when she explains how she's often deemed as

exotic in Asian cultures as her Westernized features, blue eyes and a white complexion, make her stand out due to the "Farang Rule" (McCulley, 2010). The term "farang" is a Thai term that is "commonly used for light-skinned foreigners" (Husa, 2019, p. 290). While the term itself is not inherently offensive, the history behind how it was coined and used by Thai locals historically suggests it might be used to label Westerners as the Other amongst locals. The term's usage as a marker of difference, however, can carry undertones of exoticism and Othering as the word stems from colonial encounters throughout history.

The distinction between local and tourist culture is also constructed in written statements and imagery that focus on the experience of "luxury" and "privacy," typically catering to tourist travellers. In the blogs studied, several focused on tourist practices that separated them from the local "hustle and bustle" of the cities they visited (World of Wanderlust, 2017). The creation of tourist spaces comes from dominant ideals of whiteness and leisure that place the value of luxury in the commodified disparities between public and private modes of life. Rooted in colonialist ideals of luxury, this division exacerbates notions of exclusivity and privilege, where privacy is promoted as a commodity accessible only to certain social groups. Key examples of this appear in the travel writings of World of Wanderlust.

In a blog entry about their visit to Hong Kong, for instance, World of Wanderlust (2017) describes the difference between staying on Hong Kong Island versus Kowloon. The author notes Hong Kong's business and financial "vibe," compared to Kowloon's more "authentic" experience of local culture (World of Wanderlust, 2017). The language used in this blog entry to describe the difference in local culture between both cities perpetuates this divide since it's based on Western ideals of what's considered "authentic".

Referring back to notions of standpoint theory, knowledge is something that is situated and perspectival. This is relevant to Western ideals of what is considered authentic,

as authenticity is viewed solely from the knowledge and experience of a white individual. This is a point that is also heavily emphasized by bell hooks (1992), describing how white supremacist ideologies continue to uphold power over how to define, consume, and appropriate cultural practices of marginalized racial groups. In contrast, local understandings of authenticity are shaped by the lived experiences of the locals and their complex cultural heritage. A tourist economy, therefore, can be built on the commercialization of certain cultural practices, objects, and traditions (such as Hawaiian resorts that provide tourist experiences of luau, leis, and hula performances). This can lead to the re-signification of local customs and practices as part of the “tourist spaces” (that help shore-up local economies) more than the indigenous culture. As mentioned earlier, many Asian cities are portrayed as chaotic and busy which appears to bother many Western travel bloggers since it does not align with Western ideals of order and familiarity. It’s often viewed as an inconvenience when visiting countries in Asia, where tourists will often ignore the livelihoods of the locals and create a division between local and tourist culture. Moreover, tourists will often endure unplanned encounters and unfamiliar situations, interpreting them through the lens of inconvenience and disruption rather than an opportunity for cultural exchange and personal development. To compensate for this fact, many Western tourists will indulge in luxurious cultural experiences that reaffirm their sense of comfort and privilege in unfamiliar environments. World of Wanderlusts blog entry about their trip to Hong Kong highlight the notion that experiencing the city in an authentic sense involves seeking moments of escape from the busy environments as well as to explore its urban landscapes. They mention the hotel they're staying at and pointing out the benefits of being away from the hustle and bustle, while enjoying a view of the harbour (World of Wanderlust, 2017).

This division between tourist and local culture can also be seen in the travel writings of Amanda Williams (2014), where she shares her travel experience in Thailand and provides

a guide for her readers encouraging them to visit. The language used in this entry labels Amanda's visit to the Phi Phi Islands as "the most touristy", further distancing local culture from the tourist experience and framing it as something to be avoided rather than embraced. Amanda's blog entries about Morocco further perpetuate notions of privacy at the centre of travel and leisure, encouraging her readers to "book an entire private riad" while visiting the Royal Mansour in Morocco (Williams, 2019).

The division between local and tourist culture is further emphasized when comparing the way white women bloggers capture and share photos of their travel experiences to the way women of colour travel bloggers do it. In her blog entry about Morocco, *Along With Ari* (2019) features a series of photos that aim to inspire readers to visit Morocco one day. In these photos, Ari worked to capture the cultural encounters with Moroccan locals. Moreover, her experience captured the markets, houses, and streets filled with people (both local and tourist). One photo documents a busy, narrow street lined with vendors selling fruits, traditional scarves, and tapestries, with a mix of locals and tourists shopping the stalls. Compared to selfies or other posed photos that centre the tourist as the focal point, this image captures interactions between Moroccans and foreigners, but does so to document the local tourist economy.

In comparison, photos included in *World of Wanderlust's* blog entry about Dubai, centred the tourist in the images of "the most picturesque locations in Dubai" (World of Wanderlust, 2020). One of these locations was The Palace in Downtown Dubai, where they include a photo of themselves at the centre with their back turned to the camera, while facing the front of a visually pleasing cultural landscape. Moreover, this division between local and tourist culture is reinforced through the visual representations of women travel bloggers online, therefore shaping narratives around what luxury and privacy entails from the perspective of white privilege.

Commodification of Local Culture

In a related theme, some of the travel bloggers' writing manifests the "commodification of local culture" – which may be considered as an extension of bell hooks' (1992) framework of the commodification of Otherness. In the examples, this discourse highlights the ways local, non-Western cultures are framed as a "spice that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992, p. 21). Travel writings that evidence this discourse include *Adventurous Kate*, *A Dangerous Business*, and *World of Wanderlust*, specifically when writing about Southeast Asia and, on occasion, the Middle East. Particularly, their blog entries about their trips to Southeast Asia, however it appears subtly in blog entries about the Middle East. In the blog entries analyzed, these white women travel bloggers utilize language and imagery that reduces non-Western cultures to commodities that serve the purpose of entertainment and consumption by other Western tourists. This can be seen in the exoticization of Asian islands, where travel bloggers utilize cultural practices and mannerisms of a location to gain authenticity from the experience of the Other.

The commodification of local culture in the travel writings of white women is evident, for instance, in the blog entries posted by *Adventurous Kate*, specifically her entries on Jordan. There, McCulley's language minimized the cultural significance of the sites and landscapes she discusses. This is witnessed in how she encouraged her readers to visit Petra, mentioning "Love Indiana Jones? Get Adventurous at Petra!" (McCulley, 2012). Referencing a movie such as *Indiana Jones* to describe a cultural landmark reduces the significance of Petra to a mere backdrop in Western ideals of adventure and leisure. It minimizes the cultural significance of Petra, failing to acknowledge the complex history and significance of this landscape. Additionally, McCulley focuses on self-fulfilment over cultural understanding and appreciation of that site, therefore promoting a consumerist approach to travel. In a similar fashion, *A Dangerous Business* references the Leonardo DiCaprio (2000) movie, *The Beach*,

in her blog entry about her trip to Thailand when discussing the Phi Phi Islands as this was the location the movie was filmed in. This is especially highlighted when she mentions that she “only knew these islands as being the place where the Leonardo DiCaprio movie “The Beach” was filmed” (Williams, 2014). The near-exclusive focus on the architectural details of these sites in travel writing fosters an erasure of their cultural, religious, and historical significance as well as how these spaces exist as part of local culture. Instead, they are primarily promoted as sites to be enjoyed by visitors.

These descriptions reinforce a standard of leisure that is rooted in Whiteness, shaping the way many of these cultural destinations are perceived by other tourists. These discursive practices echo George Lipsitz’s (2011) critical framework of the white spatial imaginary, which critiques the way certain spaces are perceived to be constructed for the enjoyment and comfort of white individuals only.

Touristic versus Traveller’s Gaze

This analysis highlights the emergence of two discursive themes - that of the “touristic gaze” - which was informed by bloggers’ use of Othering/Orientalist language, the division between local and tourist culture, and the commodification of local culture. The analysis reveals a tendency among white women travel bloggers to articulate these discourses through their writings, and therefore fostering the superficial gaze of a tourist. Alternatively, when analyzing travel blogs written by women of colour, a different discursive theme emerged - that of the “traveller’s gaze” - informed by the adoption of an “authentic voice,” an interest in local (rather than tourist) culture, and less use of Orientalist/Othering language. The distinction between the touristic gaze and the traveller’s gaze is important for this study as it informs the foundation of how each role shapes narratives and representations found in travel literature. This section lays out the foundation of what entails the touristic gaze and the traveller’s gaze, touching on the works of Deepti Ruth Azariah (2016) and Graham Dann

(1999) where they highlight the motivations, behaviours, and perceptions that distinguish the two roles apart.

When considering the role of the tourist in travel writing, their experiences are usually characterized as a “passive tautology – the riskless, hedonistic pursuit of seeing what has been prefigured” (Dann, 1999, p. 165). Tourists, then, are seen as outsiders who bring “home” with them on their journeys, and so they do not fully immerse themselves in the destination culture. Tourists will visit popular attractions cultivated to appeal to foreign visitors, but they typically do not explore the cultural significance of these sites within historical or local contexts. In a blog entry about Jordan, for instance, McCulley (2012) constructs “The Perfect Introduction” to the Middle East, a guide filled with recreational tourist activities and cultural landmarks to visit. Specifically, she suggests her followers go swimming in the Dead Sea, describing it as “a sensation unlike anything you’ve felt before - but it’s the key opportunity to show off to your friends!” (McCulley, 2012). In travel blogging, therefore, the “touristic gaze” manifests a heavy focus on self-representation and performative cultural experiences that address (and, in this case, impress) other Westerners – those “back home.” This is especially evident when suggesting others should capture the moment with a photograph, not to have a memory for themselves, but rather as a symbol of status or exclusivity, where the tourist is distinguishing themselves from those who haven’t had the same experience.

The “touristic gaze” is a viewpoint toward travel that is disconnected from the local culture. This kind of travel writing essentially reinforces a narrative where the sole purpose of travel is for consumption and leisure rather than an exchange of cultural experiences. Further, the touristic gaze tends to construct travel as an event that adds to one’s personality, making the traveller more interesting by “adding spice” (hooks, 1992) to their lived experiences.

Arguably, this is evidence in *A Dangerous Place*'s excited confirmation that, "I swear to God! You really do say it 'Pee Pee'! I was talking about the Phi Phi Islands."

In contrast, the "traveller's gaze" emphasizes "imaginative freedom [. . .] it encourages the fashioning of special identities good for the journey and afterwards" (Dann, 1999, p. 166). According to Dann, this trope is "anti-tourism" as it works to avoid the practices and activities associated with being a tourist – that is, disconnecting from curated experiences that are a part of the local tourist economy. This perspective manifests in actions that distance the traveller completely from other tourists, as this helps them to gain a "deep feeling of being set apart" and helps them to distinguish their traveller identity from that of a tourist (Dann, 1999, p. 167). Abandoning what they see as familiar and modern, the traveller treats everywhere they go as an exciting journey, "offering real difference, self-actualization and, above all, freedom" (Dann, 1999, p. 166). Examples of the traveller's gaze are most apparent in the travel writings of *Along With Ari* (2020) and *HeyCiara* (2018), specifically their blog entries about visiting Southeast Asia.

In her travel writings about Thailand, Ari's writing style does not commodify the cultural monuments she is describing. She specifically recommends her readers to go visit Khao Sok National Park, describing it as "Thailand's not so hidden treasures" (Ari, 2020). Even though the language used to describe the park focuses on its physical attributes, Ari reminds her readers that instead of Googling it and looking at pictures of it, "it still doesn't compare to the magic of seeing the national park in person" (Ari, 2009). Ari's writings differ from the other travel bloggers, as she provides a more rigid travel guide that is not as opinionated or personal as a tourist blogger, while focusing on places and activities to partake in while visiting that do not feel so commodified. This is evident in her transportation and accommodation options, suggesting that taking a minibus everywhere is the best and cheapest way to get around (Ari, 2020). Additionally, she provides recommendations for affordable

hostels she stayed at while she was there, describing “I stayed at the Coco Hostel and really enjoyed myself. It was fairly cheap and I only paid 200 baht a night!!” (Ari, 2020) This is also evident in her blog entry where she provides a comprehensive list of “things to do” that are inexpensive and not constructed by the touristic gaze. These things included jungle trekking in any of the parks on the island and watching the sunset from a coffee house in Khao Sok (Ari, 2020).

In a similar fashion, Johnson’s blog entry about her trip to Southeast Asia focuses on her personal enjoyment that is not reliant on touristic tropes or activities to have a good trip. She emphasizes all the things she enjoyed on the trip by giving thanks to all the good experiences she encountered while she was visiting. She expresses her gratitude in an opening paragraph, saying “Thanks to delicious food, budget accommodation, rich culture, and developed tourism infrastructure, Southeast Asia is known as the ultimate backpacker’s destination” (Johnson, 2018). However, throughout Johnson’s writings, there are a few instances where the language she uses aligns with the touristic gaze trope, in which her description of a particular cultural monument or practice commodifies her experience, similar to that of white women. This involves her paid partnership with shoe brand Teva, in which she promotes a pair of sandals through her travel writings and experiences.

When referring back to Dann’s framework, the distinction between the “tourist” and the “traveller” lies in the traveller’s desire to make everything a journey without participating in tourist cultures and economies. In contrast, tourists rely heavily on recreational activities and external factors to make their experience worthwhile, also emphasizing a strong reliance on luxury and convenience rather than genuine cultural immersion. With this in mind, it feels necessary to contrast the travel experiences of Amanda Williams (2014) in Thailand with that of Ari’s as a way of illustrating the stark differences between each gaze.

When considering Williams' (2014) blog entry about her trip to Thailand, her touristic gaze can be pointed out in her description of her trip to Koh Phi Phi Don, highlighting that "even though this island is one of the most touristy, I was still awed by the colour of the water out in the bay" (Williams, 2014). By using the word, "touristy", Williams reveals her perceived standards that determine what a 'tourist' space entails, while also revealing her motives behind engaging with cultural monuments. When looking at the guide of places and things to do, Williams also suggests visiting one of the islands, specifically the Phi Phi Islands. However, Williams' accounts of the places and activities to partake in while visiting, the language she uses to describe these places are centred around the visual aesthetic, explaining how a leisurely 10-minute walk on the beach brought her a sense of tranquillity having witnessed the mesmerizing colours of the water (Williams, 2014). While the activity of walking on the beach sounds unproblematic, the language that was used insinuates that her overall satisfaction is dependent on the beauty of her surroundings.

Considering the accounts made by Ari, her travel writings seem to resemble that of early travel writings, such as guidebooks, where the main purpose is to provide information for travellers without the use of personal opinions in the tone of the text. To contrast this once again with Williams' blog entry about Thailand, Williams' experience was rooted in personal beliefs and values regarding how local/national landscapes and tourist activities should be engaged with. Whereas, for Ari, the guide she presented was motivated by her desire to immerse herself in the cultural landscapes of the places she's visiting.

When considering the standpoint of women of colour travel bloggers in this context, defining their roles as travellers helps to create a space where their experiences are supplemental to the authenticity of their travel narratives. Referring back to Hills Collins' (1989) and Harding's' (2009) framework on standpoint theory, this notion challenged dominant narratives that places the experiences of white women at the forefront of travel and

leisure discourses. Moreover, it reinforces the idea that women's unique positions of oppression and marginalization allow them to make claims about truth and reality. The travel narratives of women of colour bloggers entail a sense of authenticity and belonging among locals due to the complexities of their intersecting personalities. Therefore, the standpoints of women of colour travel bloggers create spaces that deconstruct notions of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that informs common perceptions about women's role in travel writing. Their experiences allow for an inclusive documentation of the cultural encounters they come across, allowing for deeper connections and meaningful cultural exchanges that are not fuelled by superficial stereotypes or preconceived notions.

Conclusion

This analysis highlights the discourses that inform the characteristics of the "touristic gaze" through the use of Othering/Orientalist language, the division between local and tourist culture, and the commodification of local culture. Alternatively, the "traveller's gaze" emerged in contrast, highlighting notions of "anti-tourism" that strive for authenticity rather than superficiality in cultural exchanges. Moreover, the interpretations of this analysis break down the existing power dynamics between white women travel bloggers and women of colour travel bloggers that reinforce their positions within travel narratives. Additionally, highlighting these discursive formations between white women travel bloggers and women of colour travel bloggers creates the necessary spaces for marginalized perspectives to be acknowledged, while deconstructing the notions of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that continue to marginalize them.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This thesis sought to understand the discourses produced by Western women travel bloggers and to consider whether and how their respective standpoints inform the discourses used to construct their travel destinations in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. To this end, this study aimed to understand the ramifications of these discourses type of “gaze” directed on Eastern destinations by white women and women of colour travel bloggers. The study identified distinction between the standpoints of white women travel bloggers and women of colour travel bloggers, presenting through the concepts of the “touristic gaze” and the “traveller’s gaze”. In this analysis, key differences in these positions are demarcated by the use of Othering and Orientalist language, the commodification of local culture, and the distancing of local and tourist culture. Whereas the blog entries written by the white women bloggers studied here manifested these discourses, the blog entries by women of colour generally did not. Instead, those blog entries constructed travel as an opportunity to engage in authentic cultural exchange.

Throughout the travel writings of white women bloggers, there are themes of Othering and Orientalist perspectives that are used to describe their travel experiences in non-Western countries. This type of language includes the use of words such as “chaotic” to describe the densely populated local area of Kuala Lumpur, or questioning if visiting the Middle East is “safe” since it’s perceived to be corrupted by war and terror (McCulley, 2010). These perspectives are rooted in colonial discourses that construct narratives of the East as inherently inferior, working to rationalize Western hegemonic power ideals. Additionally, this language also resulted in the division of local culture and tourist culture, highlighting the cultural dynamics of non-Western destinations as constructed through Western ideals of travel and leisure.

The division of local culture and tourist culture stems from Western understandings of adventure and leisure, as local culture is commonly portrayed primitively in comparison to the perceived luxury of tourist culture. This idea traces back to notions of the “touristic gaze” which outlines that tourists often stand out from the locals since they bring “home” with them everywhere they go (Dann, 1999). They will visit popular tourist attractions that are specifically labelled for the enjoyment of a tourist, but these perceptions touristic engagements are rooted in Western understandings of travel.

In a similar note, the commodification of local culture is also a prominent theme across the travel writings of white women, where the focus of their cultural experience is not on gaining an authentic experience but rather on the consumption of exoticized attractions. This is evident in the travel writings of Kate McCulley (2010), or *Adventurous Kate*, where most of her travel writing is centred around the visual landscapes and luxury accommodations. Travel writers will perpetuate discourses of the commodification of Otherness, a notion highlighted at the beginning of this study that informs the foundation of the analysis.

The biggest distinction, however, is that of the “touristic gaze” and the “traveller’s gaze”, in which the power dynamics between white women travel bloggers and women of colour travel bloggers are highlighted. The findings of this study align with what scholars Graham Dann (1999) and Deepti Ruth Azariah (2016) describe as the “tourist” (Dann, p. 165). Often white women travel bloggers will share their experience from a passive perspective that results in a surface-level understanding of the cultural exchanges they encounter while travelling. The tourist will promote picturesque local destinations that overlook the cultural significance of the country they are visiting, suggesting the lives of locals as backdrops in their experience. Resonating with hooks’ idea of consuming the Other, like a “spice”, this narrative is heavily emphasizing in the role of the tourist, where the cultural exchanges they encounter are for their personal fulfilment and not authenticity.

Alternatively, the “traveller’s gaze” is more apparent in the travel writings of women of colour bloggers who share their travel experiences based on how immersed they were in the local culture. For tourists, their idea of travel and leisure is based on activities that are specifically created for the enjoyment of the tourist; their idea of fun is already created for them. For the traveller, they are responsible for creating their personal idea of leisure that is not centred in colonial beliefs of privilege and luxury. Travel writings by Along With Ari (2020) felt cathartic to read through as she describes her personal struggles with mental health in her writings, serving to create a personal and authentic connection with her readers. Similarly, travel writings by Ciara Johnson (2018) mention her experience with travelling on a budget and emphasizing an authentic cultural exchange that is not fixed on luxury resorts or the most picturesque cultural landmarks.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of standpoint perspectives to the extent that it breaks down intersections of race and gender in the genre of travel blogging. Moreover, narratives of Othering and Orientalist perspectives are reinforced through the travel writings of white women as they shape the perceptions of their readers about the non-Western destinations. Attention to these online spaces works to challenge these narratives and reveal the underlying power dynamics that continue to overlook not only the cultural experiences of the locals, but the experiences of women of colour travel bloggers.

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