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Pain, politics and volunteering in tourism studies

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Keywords

studies, tourism, volunteering, pain, politics

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PAIN, POLITICS AND VOLUNTEERING IN TOURISM STUDIES

FRAZER, RYAN & WAITT, GORDON

ABSTRACT

This paper is an ethnography of how six Australian volunteers experience a house-build project in the Philippines. Contingencies of empathic pain arising from the living conditions of those they aimed to help were felt through their bodies. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's ideas on pain enabled us to explore the politics of volunteer tourism. We suggest the intensification of volunteers' empathic pain constitute ambivalent spaces. In some volunteering contingencies, pain led to a blurring of conventional boundaries of 'them' and 'us', giving priority to difference over dominance. In others, volunteers reproduced dominant understandings of volunteering that mobilised neoliberal and colonial discourses. We conclude by encouraging other tourism scholars to think politically about pain.

Keywords

Affects
Emotions
Sensations
Qualitative
Volunteer Tourism
Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Research on international volunteer tourism emphasises volunteering as an emotionally charged practice (Zahra & McIntosh 2007). Volunteering often involves moral tasks that extend to one's personal belief system of how things 'ought to be'. But the embodied experiences of volunteer tourists—including compassion and happiness—are often argued to be complicit with structural power relationships of neoliberalism and a hegemonic culture of devolved self-governance (Crossley 2012a, 2012b; Mostafanezhad 2013a, 2013b). In these neoliberal critiques of volunteer tourism, the centre of political life is argued to shift to the personal sphere, in which voluntarism, (re)produced by personal acts and values, is conceived as a mode of global citizenship (see McGehee and Santos 2005; though for critique see Lyons, Hanley & Wearing 2011 and Simpson 2004).

While acknowledging the extensive influence of this discourse of privatised politics, in this paper we draw on poststructuralist feminist geographical thinking to articulate a more progressive spatial and social theoretical framework for emotional and affective politics. We respond to the call of Buda, d'Hautesserre, and Johnston (2014, p.102) who argue that "tourism studies should pay closer attention to the politics of feelings". This paper asks how tourism scholars within the sub-field of volunteer tourism might benefit from paying attention to the conjunction of sensations, emotions and affect of empathic pain in exerting agency in the production of bodies, subjectivities and space. We argue that close attention to the intensification of specific sensations, emotions and affect of empathic pain triggered by everyday encounters in particular tourism contexts can tell us much about the shifting connections that define how an individual dwells within the world and helps assign meaning to place, self and others.

To this end, this paper presents an emotional and affective feminist geography of a group of six older Australian volunteer tourists. In 2013, one of the authors joined this group to engage in an ongoing volunteer housing project in the Philippines organised through Rotary International networks and therefore outside of the capitalist imperative of commercial tour operators. The project is an example of what Wearing and McGehee (2013, p.125) categorise as a 'decommodified' expression of volunteer tourism. The objectives of our research were to examine what motivates older people to participate in a decommodified expression of international volunteer tourism and investigate the challenges of volunteering. Older volunteers' voices are largely marginalised within tourism studies. The participants' ageing bodies challenge the dominant tourist studies trope of an able body within an accessible geography. These volunteers also trouble the dominant discourse of volunteer tourism being exclusively a young person's activity.

We noted that in navigating the role of volunteer, participants in this project often voiced contradictory emotions, including pleasure and pain, pride and shame, love and hate. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the scholarship of the politics and ethics of volunteer tourism by exploring the specific sensations, emotion and affect communicated from witnessing hardships and suffering of others. As the participants stepped into and out of different roles and contexts in the course of their daily lives as volunteers in the Philippines, the empathic pain in encountering others emerged as a recurring theme in observant participations, diaries and semi-structured interviews. We found Sara Ahmed's (2015) theorisation of pain particularly helpful for the purpose of this research. Like Ahmed, we are interested in the question of what pain *does*, rather than what pain *is*. Experiencing one's own pain is a firm reminder of both bodily dwelling and dwelling in place. Pain demands attention to bodily existence, rendering present to consciousness that which is normally absent. Witnessing the pain of others draws attention to social difference and the ways some bodies remain privileged.

Brought to the fore in broader tourism literatures that draw on psychological approaches is the potential for 'vicarious trauma' in volunteering across a range of contexts, including in hospices (Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield 2008; Dein & Abbas 2005), in emergencies (Lewig et al 2007) and with refugees (Duncan et al 2010). The painful excesses of volunteering may result in 'volunteer burnout' or alienation from family and friends, sometimes leading for the need of professional intervention in the form of counselling (see Pittaway et al. 2013.). Yet pain is often overlooked in volunteer tourism scholarship. We argue it is important to recognise the empathic pain that accompanies volunteer work and encounters with inequality, particularly for an activity that is alternately positioned as morally worthy and influenced by historical romanticism and colonialism (Cousins, Evans & Sadler 2009a; Waitt, Lane & Head 2003).

The article is divided into four main sections. The first outlines some benchmark tourism scholars' work on international volunteering. Theorisation of the politics of international volunteer tourism is a diverse and contested terrain. We then move beyond this literature and discuss Ahmed's (2015) thinking on the emotional politics of pain as our theoretical framework, particularly in relationship to sensation, emotion, affect, sociality, bodies and space. Paying attention to the sensual-emotional-affectual dimensions of international volunteer tourism enables us to chart our contribution to the literature. Next we outline our case study and the methodological approach used to conduct the research that combined observant participation, solicited diaries, and pre- and post-trip semi-structured interviews. The third section draws on a form of narrative analysis to highlight how an interpretation of

the affective and emotional politics of pain may contribute to debates about international volunteer tourism. We highlight the ambivalent role of empathic pain for the politics of volunteering. We argue that the contingencies that trigger the intensification of sensations, emotions and affect of empathic pain that constitute particular volunteering spaces may operate in ways that can either maintain or trouble dominant understandings of volunteering and privilege. We conclude by encouraging others to examine an ambivalent politics of pain in tourism that is understood as both relational and spatial.

PROGRESS TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER TOURISM

Scholars are increasingly interested in how international volunteering facilitates tourism (McGehee 2012; Wearing 2001; Wearing and McGehee 2013). The vast majority of this work is conducted with small groups of international volunteers from the 'developed' North working in the 'developing' South. This strand of literature primarily focuses on pre-trip motivations and post-trip personal transformations in the context of a neoliberal program that trades on a rhetorical space that merges 'doing good' with short-term pleasure. These accounts, drawing on a range of postcolonial and feminist theories, demonstrate how social inequalities are reproduced through neo-colonial geographical imaginaries, identities and 'paternalistic' social relations (Brown 2005; Callanan & Thomas 2005; Devereux 2008; Diprose 2012; Palacios, 2010; Perold et al 2013; Raymond & Hall 2008; Simpson 2004; Sin 2009; Wearing & McDonald 2002). Orientalist imaginaries and simplistic binaries of 'us' and 'them' are shown to resonate with young 'gap year' volunteers from the global North and mirror common moral geographies of care, need and responsibility. Sin, for instance, concluded that 'relationships of care', underpinned by ideas of 'First world' responsibilities for the wellbeing of the 'Third world' or poor subject, do "little to bring about equal relationships" (2010, p.988). Likewise, Lyons and Wearing (2012) raised important questions about the 'beneficiaries' of the relationship between tourism and gap year volunteering. Together this research points to how, for the young and privileged Northern traveller, volunteer tourism can reproduce established imaginaries of rich and poor by drawing on Western hierarchical dualisms such as Self/Other, civilised/wild and history/prehistory.

Another strand of volunteer tourism literature raises questions about the commodification of development, nature and environmental citizenship, while alerting us to forms of knowledge legitimised by colonial and Western masculinist knowledge (Cousins, Evans & Sadler 2009a). This work draws attention to how volunteer tourism projects often reproduce powerful sets of ideas for economic gain. Eco-volunteer tourism projects, for instance, may nourish popular understandings of charismatic focal species, particularly mammals (Krüger

2005). Volunteer tourism projects are here critiqued not only for their narrow mammal-centric approach but also how volunteer tourism organisations trade on Western binary understandings of nature as 'wild' (Cousins, Evans & Sadler 2009a). Not only are some organisms more valued than others, but the European fantasy of the 'wild' erases Indigenous peoples or at best categorises them as part of nature, "creat[ing] a vast emptiness in which tourists can become explorers and experience apparently pristine nature"(Waitt, Lane & Head 2003, p.529). As McGehee and Andereck explain, "cultural and geographic distance and difference create an atmosphere ripe for the 'othering' of the voluntoured by the volunteer tourists" (2008, p.18).

Significantly, for these cultural critiques of volunteer tourism, the blurring of boundaries between global citizen and consumer is illustrative of a process that dovetails neatly with either corporate concerns of neoliberal political culture or colonial geographies and identities of the South as the 'exotic' (Baillie Smith & Laurie 2011). Central to these concerns about the tainted qualities of volunteer tourism is an understanding of consumers as purely self-interested individuals and the industry's complicity with neoliberal ideology. The act of volunteering is here less about addressing inequality, justice and development than nourishing both the participant's *curriculum vitae* and tourism operator's market success (see Vodopivec & Jaffe 2011).

Likewise, a more embodied approach to volunteer tourism that takes into account expressive and material forces has opened up possibilities for thinking about how emotions, including pain, are an integral part of volunteer tourism (Lorimer 2010; Smith et al. 2010). A critical mass posits that when attending to embodiment, the emotional and affective life of international volunteers is also complicit with neoliberalism through the marketing of the volunteer tourism industry (Conran 2011; Crossley 2012a, 2012b; Mostafanezhad, 2013a, 2013b). This work points to emotions that ominously threaten volunteer tourism's humanitarian promise, and exemplify Thrift's (2004; 2007) argument that corporations 'engineer' or 'ramp up affects' (2007, p.241) to resonate with, in this case, volunteers' desires, anticipations and imagined geographies. For example, drawing on cultural-economy theories, the notion of affective economies and her extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Mostafanezhad foregrounds the way that "volunteer tourism provides an aesthetic structure that depoliticises and dehistoricises the framing of global inequality" (2013a, p.165) and "perpetuates structural inequality and chronic poverty in the Global South" (2013a, p.166). In another paper drawing on this fieldwork in Chiang Mai, Mostafanezhad's (2013b) account of the geographies of compassion of volunteer tourism argued that the realm of volunteer tourism is antithetical to that of a politics and ethics of

care. Reflecting the wider abiding sense in the volunteer tourism literature that individuals and social relations are sullied by the intersection of commodification and neoliberalism, Mostafanezhad concludes that volunteer tourism “works to map out a geography of compassion that extends imperial legacies of colonialism and uneven development” (2013b, p.332). According to Mostafanezhad, to address the cultural politics of compassion, the answers are “not sentimental—they are political” (2013b, p.333). Effective activism, then, tends to be regarded as occurring within critical autonomous spaces outside of the commodified affective relations of volunteer tourism and the logic of capitalism.

While this work remains invaluable, we agree with Griffith (2014) who argues convincingly for a broadening of conceptions of the politics of volunteer tourism, framing encounters as productive of social rather than just market relationships. Instead of understanding volunteer tourism as inevitably tied to the logic of neoliberal capitalism and colonialism, Griffith’s post-structuralist feminist inflected account of volunteer tourism foregrounds the ways that bodies, affect and emotions can meaningfully rework understandings of the people and places volunteers encounter through volunteering. Griffith shifts the grounds of conventional accounts of civic agency and citizenship in volunteer tourism through embracing the work of Gibson-Graham (2008), which highlights the emotional, affective and relational possibilities of social life. Following the lead of Gibson-Graham (2008), affect exerts its own agency. As Griffith argues, work on emotions and affect has much potential for building new ways of thinking about how bodies and places are co-constructed within volunteer tourism through attending to “difference over domination, hope over oppression and resistance over compliance” (2014, p.14). Emotional and affective accounts offer opportunities to explore how people—although not functioning wholly outside discursive and material structural relations of neoliberalism within volunteering—exert their own agency through the capacity of their bodies to affect and be affected while navigating the encounters of everyday volunteering.

For example, Cousins, Evans and Sadler (2009b) ‘enliven’ accounts of volunteer tourism by drawing on discussions of more-than-representational theory in geography and their ethnographic fieldwork conducted with 22 young people on four wildlife conservation volunteer projects in South Africa. They document how “strong emotional highs and lows were produced as the actualities of game conservation and game ranching in South Africa came into conflict with the culturally-constructed vision of African wilderness” (2009b, p.1077). Cousins et al. (2009b) bring to fore the affective dimension of volunteering to demonstrate how volunteers may reproduce but also rework dominant understandings of conservation, Africa and African animals in meaningful ways. They note that “emotions

played a major role in prompting the research subjects to reflect upon and question their expectations concerning not only nature and their interactions with it, but the practice of conservation itself” (2009b, p.1071). While acknowledging that volunteer conservation is thoroughly embedded in consumer capitalism and colonial discourse, they illustrate how the embodied experiences of volunteers offer the “possibility and impossibility of change” (2009b, p.1078) by both opening up and closing down moral gateways.

Such findings present valuable perspectives on the emotional and affective politics of volunteer tourism. However, taking our lead from feminist scholars, more-than-representational theory discussed in geography ignores bodily differences. The material, social and assembled body is also aged, classed and gendered through place. As Johnston and other feminist scholars emphasise, overlooking bodily differences runs the risk of “reasserting the so-called unified, knowing, masculine, rational subject” (2012, p.3). Furthermore, we argue that overlooking specific emotional and affective relations tends towards ignoring the politics of what different emotions do. Hence, we turn to the work of Sara Ahmed (2015) for furthering critical insights into the spatial, relational and political dimensions of pain in volunteer tourism.

What does pain do?

Within the social sciences, scholars convey the difficulty of representing pain in speech and writing. For example, Scarry (1985) argues in *The Body in Pain* that pain ‘shatters’ language and communication. In this sense, language is lacking in Western cultures through its emphasis on visual metaphors rather than bodily sensations. Similarly, Ahmed (2015) points to the inadequacies of medical language that codifies pain. She alerts us to arguments within medical textbooks that the intensity of pain is not reducible to the severity of bodily damage alone, but rather our immediate bodily experience of pain combines with our comprehension of the consequences of an injury, embodied histories and memories. Pain is irreducible simply to the biological body (in medical discourse, receptors that respond to pain are termed nociceptors), because it is entangled in returns gathered over a life-course. Hence, rather than attempting to define pain, we follow Ahmed’s (2015) lead and think about the implications of what embodied experiences of pain do for those involved in international volunteering. In particular, we follow the question: how does pain form bodies, boundaries and spaces?

Contrary to popular belief, and following Ahmed (2015), we do not think of pain as something that is given, private or buried within us. Rather, Ahmed (2015, pp.24-28) draws

on Butler's (1993, p.9) notion of 'materialisation' to conceptualise pain as a form of emotional, affective and sensual knowing that circulates between bodies and through which bodily surfaces are made meaningful. Pain, says Ahmed, is a powerful resource for thinking about the how we become orientated in the world through the making, remaking and unmaking of skins, surfaces and borders. Introducing her concept of 'intensification', her aim is "to show how pain creates the very impression of a bodily surface" (Ahmed 2015, p.15). As an ontology, it is important to think about pain as a spatial process because bodies in pain cannot be separated from the spaces in which they are constituted. It is through the body that we orient ourselves and are orientated in space. In Ahmed's words: "[T]he recognition of a sensation as being painful (from 'it hurts' to 'it is bad' to 'move away') also involves the reconstitution of bodily space" (Ahmed 2015, p.24). Pain is understood here as a distancing response that not only creates social and spatial borders between 'selves' and 'others', but also assigns meaning through the act. Different affective and emotional intensities of pain—entangled in ideas, things, bodies and memories—operate to differentiate our (dis)attachment from this or that place. Pain is understood as productive in this differential process of connection as we find ourselves making, remaking or unmaking borders as we move towards or away from particular places, objects, bodies and things.

Finally, Ahmed (2015) argues for the sociality of pain. She explains that "while the experience of pain may be solitary, it is never private" (2015, p.29). This is significant, because, as Ahmed argues, the politics of pain may then be thought about in terms of the role of empathy; that is, the response to the pain of others. Ahmed (2015) wants us to embrace the way that pain that is not our own makes us reflect on who we are and who want to be, both individually and collectively. Drawing on the example of the marginalisation of Australian Indigenous peoples in white settler society, Ahmed (2015) stresses the impossibility of ever knowing the pain of the other. She rejects a politics of pain based on trying to 'capture' the other's unknowable pain and assimilate it within a reconciled nation. Instead, the key to the politics of empathic pain lies in rethinking the future through moments of encounter between bodies that provide opportunities for sharing painful narratives while acknowledging the impossibility of ever sharing the felt experience itself.

Volunteer Program, Location and Methods

This research emerged through learning of a volunteer tourism 'home build' project organised through a 'sistership' pairing between the Illawarra Sunrise Rotary Club, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia and Bacolod Rotary Club, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, the Philippines. Since 2005, members of the Illawarra Sunrise Rotary Club have

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organised and funded an annual volunteer project centred on a 'home build' constructed primarily by hired Filipino builders and whatever skills Australian volunteers have to offer. The home is built in Nayonbago, a socio-economically disadvantaged village on the outskirts of Bacolod City. The project is registered with the non-government organisation Habitat for Humanity, an international operation that facilitates affordable housing through the support of volunteers, donors, partner organisations and homeowner families.

Both Rotary clubs are 'chartered' by Rotary International. Rotary was originally conceived as "a place where professionals with diverse backgrounds could exchange ideas and form meaningful, lifelong friendships" (Rotary International 2013). Today, Rotary is a vast international organisation. According to Rotary International (2013), Rotary's 1.2 million members in 34,000 clubs across 200 countries are "working together from around the globe both digitally and in-person to solve some of our world's most challenging problems" (Rotary International 2013). The rhetorical space opened by Rotary International of an ethic of 'service above self' mirrors the development aid language of 'giving back' and 'helping'. At the same time, the 2013 home build became a site of mutual exchange and play through sightseeing, a cultural exchange evening, a formal dedication ceremony and other moments of spontaneous intercultural dialogue.

The volunteer project lasts for one month. The volunteers all stay in a four-star hotel near Bacolod City Centre, some ten kilometres from the home build. The 2013 home team build was comprised of six Australian volunteers, who gave their consent to participate in this research. All shared a British or European ancestry. All except one were married. All were aged over 60 years of age; one was over eighty years of age, and two were over 70 years of age. In terms of employment, five were retired and one was employed as an engineer. Four had participated on six or more previous home build projects; two participated in all eight. Only one participant was new to the home build project. Three were registered members of Rotary. Only one participant was female. Pseudonyms are given to maintain anonymity of participants and the villagers.

Following Callanan and Thomas's (2005) classification of 'deep' and 'shallow' volunteer tourists, then, our participants may be categorised as a group of 'deep' volunteer tourists, given the length of the project, their professional qualifications, the focus on 'active' participation, a priority of altruistic over self-interested motives, and that the management of the project was spearheaded through collaboration with the host community. Yet, important differences between participants were also present in terms of involvement in project fundraising and personal familiarity with members of Bacolod Rotary Club and villagers.

Study Methods

Methodological challenges accompany calls in emotional and affective theories that foreground the 'unspeakable push' of affective forces and unquantifiable dimensions of how bodies negotiate the encounters that volunteer tourism facilitates. In response to these challenges, the project design adopted a multi-method qualitative approach that aimed to build a portfolio of ethnographic testimonies. The project design combined pre- and post-trip semi-structured interviews, solicited travel diaries and observant participant over a six month period between December 2012 and May 2013.

The pre-trip interview was structured in three themes to provide a comprehensive travel autobiography: first, travel over a life-course; second, volunteering and travel; and third, anticipations of the trip. Following the advice of Harvey and Riley (2005), to help investigate emotion and affect the post-trip conversation began by asking participants to talk about a material object of personal significance from the trip that they had been asked to bring to the interview. Next, following Latham (2003) a form of photo-elicitation was used to discuss, reflect upon and re-enact the activities they engaged in. The photographs revealed the routine actions and movements of volunteering as bundled into sets of activities that structured their encounters. These included: relaxing at the hotel, travelling to the volunteer site, volunteer labour, mutual exchanges at ceremonies, official dinners and visiting designated tourist destinations. The follow-up conversation was structured around four themes: 1) challenges, rewards and surprises; 2) volunteering as emotional labour; 3) emotions as a source of reflection on self, Australia, the Philippines, travel, and poverty; and, 4) the project organisation. All semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews may at first seem incongruent for a project involved with embodied knowledge. However, Dewsbury mounts a defence of conventional talk-based methods, suggesting that "a well conceived set of interview questions might well be [...] effective in capturing the tension of the performing body" (2010, p.325). His vindication of talk-based methods was evident in this project. Semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation allowed participants to narrate stories that conveyed sensations, affects and emotions implicated by their volunteering experiences through verbal descriptions, bodily gestures and embodied responses (such as laughter and tears).

Feminist calls to employ the body as an 'instrument of research' informed the decision for one of us to become a project volunteer (Longhurst, Ho & Johnston 2008). By taking part in the same activities as the volunteers, the researcher was given insight into the bodily sensations, emotions and affects of the home build. Through volunteering they were forced to recognise how their own subject position as a relatively affluent, educated, able bodied,

single, white and younger Australian informed their encounters of what they perceived as inequalities. Taking part was equally important to obstruct the too private, too painful, too 'inappropriate' or too messy process of being written out of the project. As both volunteer and researcher, a diary was kept to capture the emotional and affective intensities of sensing and witnessing the various forms of embodied knowledge and practice. The research diary also offered a reflexive space, facilitating critical reflection on volunteering.

Five participants accepted our invitation to also keep a 'travel diary' to reflect on their experiences, reflections, observations and emotions. The diaries were given with specific instructions for participants to pay attention to their felt, embodied, emotional encounters of volunteering. The diaries encouraged reflection on the everyday and banal aspects of their volunteering experience. We considered solicited diaries particularly appropriate for this project because alongside all participants being pre-equipped with appropriate writing skills, a written diary was already understood by this age-cohort as integral to travel cultures. Furthermore, as Meth (2003) argued, solicited diaries can empower participants in the co-production of knowledge by offering participants opportunities to reflect on and check researcher interpretations.

This paper emerged from a desire to know more about what embodied sensations, affects and emotions do in the context of international volunteering. Our narrative analysis followed the advice of Fraser (2004) and attends to the manifold sensory experiences and ways of knowing through the collaboration between the researcher and participants. Attention is given to what is said, but also registering emotions conveyed through body language used or stimulated through description or depiction. All ethnographic materials were coded under the participants' sensory expressions, such as joy, fear, pride, shame, anger, love, frustration, hope and pain. We chose to analyse pain as an example of what we can learn about volunteering when our attention turns to the contingencies of sensations, emotions and affect. Our intention of focusing on pain should not be interpreted as erasing the importance of other bodily sensations, emotions and affect. Instead, we aim to address an emotion and affect in specific terms—rather than the tendency in the literature to speak generally about emotions. We now turn to our findings that explore the relationship between international volunteering in Nayonbago and the sensations-emotions-affect of pain.

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING AND THE AFFECTIVE AND EMOTIONAL POLITICS OF PAIN

This section investigates what we interpret as the ambivalent political affects and effects of pain. We demonstrate how, for some volunteers, an economy of empathic pain circulating between bodies can operate to both conceal and repeat asymmetric colonial power relations. However, we also illustrate encounters of empathic pain that may fuel the passion of some volunteer tourists and evoke an ethics of a responsible hope. Such moments illustrate examples where volunteers' emotional, embodied and affective sense of being and engagement with marginalised groups is based not on a politics of assimilation into the global neoliberal capitalist economy, but on an affective politics that bears witness to the Other's unknowable pain.

An affective and emotional politics of pain that conceals and repeats asymmetrical power relations

The smell of open sewers, the prickly heat, the crowded housing and disorderly streets of suburban Bacolod provoked outbursts of distress and tears amongst participants. They spoke about the 'pain' of sensing and witnessing the suffering of others. The resulting embodied knowledges of the affective intensities of unfamiliar smells, textures, tastes and sights accumulated and pressed on their bodies as discomfort. These impressions were expressed in personal narratives of hurt from encountering the suffering of others. According to Ahmed, "it is through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and world materialise and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, surface and fixity is produced" (2015, p.24). In encountering the pain of others, the surfaces of volunteering bodies, Others and worlds materialised.

For example, Dawn articulated the intensity of empathic pain of witnessing inequalities and suffering in terms of 'need':

You think, I can't do this, I can't do it again. But, if you remember what we've got in Australia compared to what the need is, I'm motivated to forget about your comfort zone and go and do it again. You're torn between helping, and you're out of your comfort zone that far, I am. I had to push back to remind myself, over and over, that, you know, at least you can do something. Don't let the first initial shock stop you. [Interviewer: Yep.] Because it can. I'm out of my comfort zone by about 500%. But it's the need that brings me back. (Dawn, female, mid-70s, post-trip interview)

In volunteering, Dawn must confront the empathic pain that manifests in encountering other people's everyday lives. She conveys how poverty and the suffering it brings becomes a threatening and unsettling space. In another interview, she likewise recalled her first

experience of the Philippines, where she “could see the real Philippines, the poor, and the poverty, and I was so shocked. I wanted to come back home, I just couldn't cope with it” (Dawn, female, mid-70s, pre-trip interview). In Dawn’s words, how the people of Nayonbago live their lives takes her outside of the materialities and sets of relationships that constitute her ‘comfort zone’—which celebrates order, cleanliness, convenience, consumption and affluence—and confronts her with embodied expressions of empathic pain in the form of ‘shock’.

Dawn illustrates how empathic pain produces intimate knowledge of particular places. Pain gives particular meaning to the production of the volunteer, the Philippines and the ‘comfortable’ home of Australia. As Crossley (2012b) argues, for those like Dawn who are embedded in the global Northern culture of material consumption, the spatial politics of volunteer tourism is often bound up with colonial narratives of poverty through which volunteer tourists define those they encounter as lacking. The intensity of empathic pain caused by the poverty that materialises the social and spatial borders of Dawn’s ‘comfort zone’ connects volunteers like Dawn to Nayonbago—it moves her, it simultaneously pushes her away and ‘brings her back’.

However, the response of some participants to contingencies of empathic pain remains troubling. There were expressions of a newfound appreciation of privilege and romanticised narratives of poverty, which worked to both depoliticise and neutralise the transformative potential of volunteering. For example Martin, James and Alan discussed the painful emotions and affects of encounters with the living conditions of the socio-economically marginalised residents of Nayonbago. The conditions they encountered pressed on their bodies as discomfort. Moral gateways were opened: the empathic pain invited these volunteers to reflect upon materialism and the accumulation of wealth in their everyday lives.

Yeah, I think it [suffering] helps us to see that. Because we've got everything and we still want more. (Martin, male, 80, post-trip interview)

So, you know, all of these things [poverty, pain and suffering] really challenge your belief. And you think, we've got everything here, even the poorest of us is a millionaire in lifestyle in comparison to someone who's over there in the middle range. (James, male, 60, pre-trip interview)

Um, I think we're spoilt in our country, very much spoilt. And we have, we're not asking for needs in our country, we're asking for wants upon wants. Right? We're talking about need, here. And that's a big difference. And, um, it makes you wonder, are we becoming a very selfish nation? (Alan, male, mid-70s, post-trip interview)

Existing literatures both critique and substantiate the 'transformative potential' of volunteer tourism (Grabowski & Wearing 2010; McGehee & Norman 2001). For participants in McGehee and Norman's (2001) study on ecotourists, for instance, a newfound social awareness translated into increased thoughtfulness in habits of consumption. Mirroring findings from Zahra and McIntosh (2007), Crossley (2012a; 2012b) and Smith et al. (2013), for the above participants, the hurt of encountering unequal economic relations mobilised narratives of increased awareness of the privileged material wealth of nations in the global North relative to the South. Martin, James and Alan convey the guilt of the privileged entitlement of the 'Western' self. Alan expressed how being 'hurt' by the needs of others made him reflect on whether Australia was a 'selfish nation'.

However, here we follow Probyn's more cynical approach, who argues that any fleeting emotions of guilt over their relative fortune or selfishness may be easily "smoothed away by an act of reparation" (2005, p.30). In some cases, the compensation for their relative fortune and affluence is a better appreciation of their privileged position. Such accounts echo Crossley's (2012a; 2012b) discussions of volunteer tourism as trading upon 'poverty as redemptive'. Poverty is no longer experienced as discomforting, but rather as offering moral redemption through a newfound appreciation of the material wealth in the volunteers' everyday lives.

For instance, Dawn discursively resolves the tension of her newfound knowledge of relative wealth through a troubling form of cultural relativism. When asked if her volunteering experiences changed her understandings of 'home', she responds:

Dawn: I really appreciate [home]. You go to spend some money, and you think, Oh... And then you have to stop and say: This is Australia, it's a different country, and you can help over there, but you can't be really controlled your whole life with that experience. Otherwise, I don't think you'd function back here properly. People would think you were crazy. (Dawn, female, mid-70s, post-trip interview)

While her volunteering experiences open her eyes to the reality of poverty, Dawn precludes any critical interrogation of the causes of systemic inequality through containing questions of wealth and consumption within a depoliticised framework of personal responsibility. While she can, and does, "help over there" in the Philippines, "This is Australia", she concludes, where material consumption is a cultural norm and imperative.

Alternatively, the empathic pain of some participants is eased through a discursive romanticisation of poverty. For example Martin, Rod and Dawn attend to the discomfort of

the need of people they encounter in Nayonbago by challenging the Northern cultural preconception that often aligns material wealth with happiness:

Well most people will observe going to a country where there's poverty and poor people, poverty doesn't automatically go in with misery. They're often very happy people. (Martin, male, 80, pre-trip interview)

Those people are either happy, or else they're putting on a very, very, very good act, I thought. (Rod, male, mid-50s, post-trip interview)

They're happy, but we know they haven't got very much. But, fortunately they, you know, they're happy. (Dawn, female, mid-70s, post-trip interview)

Simpson (2004) and Crossley (2012b) also reported evidence of narratives of development bound up in discourses of the 'poor but happy' Other, which fit the global South into the white community's romanticisation of inequalities. The 'poor but happy' discourse helps erase the historical weight of uneven socio-economic relationships that enable the volunteering in the first place. In doing so, volunteer tourists help minimise the surfacing of the bodily pain evoked by encountering living conditions devoid of material abundance. This transformation helps to erase the 'bodily life' of colonial histories (Ahmed 2015, p.34). One challenge to volunteer tourists is not to ignore or erase their own pain triggered from the inequalities they encounter by either romanticising poverty or transforming it into a sense of moral redemption from a heightened appreciation of their own wealth.

An affective and emotional politics of pain that evokes an ethics of hope

As the above section demonstrates, contingencies of pain may work to reproduce and depoliticise asymmetrical power relations—largely supporting the work of Crossley (2012a; 2012b) and Mostafanezhad (2013a; 2013b). However, in this section, we argue that, for some volunteers, empathically painful encounters with the suffering of others in Nayonbago also evoked an affective ethics of hope. This is not to suggest that these hopes were unequivocally unproblematic. Volunteers instead articulated hopes that both challenged and reasserted inequalities—what Pedwell, following Ahmed (2015), refers to as the “ambivalent grammar” (2012, p.281) of emotion.

For instance, the notion of volunteers as bringing hope to help address conditions of pain arising from material inequalities resonated strongly with participants. Mark and Dawn said:

[The biggest reward of volunteering is] giving people hope [...] that they realise there are people out of their country, out of their area, that are prepared to go there and, ah, that are concerned about them. (Mark, male, 60, post-trip interview)

It's the need that motivates you and [...] to give them [in Nayonbago] a little bit of hope, to build a new life. (Dawn, female, mid-70s, post-trip interview)

One story in particular, shared by group leader Alan, became embedded in the project's narrative. This story was evidently significant for Alan and was retold multiple times—once while he gave a speech during the dedication ceremony held in Bacolod at the successful completion of the home build and again in his post-trip interview:

Remember that story, once when we were building a house in the village, and just resting, and a woman came up and was giving us a cool drink, and she sat down and said, 'Alan, even if you didn't build, your being here, just being in the village, recognising us, has given us hope'. Okay? So that's what I think is happening, you're giving other people hope that other people outside of their own village are watching and looking and seeing things. (Alan, male, mid-80s, post-trip interview)

The presence of overseas volunteers is here understood to evoke possibilities of imagining 'something better' for Nayonbago residents.

Some scholars are sceptical about the ethics of hope and its efficacy in addressing injustice. Spinoza (2014), for instance, suggests hope relies upon both pain in the present and ignorance about the future. If the outcome were certain, the affect of hope would be missing and, indeed, redundant. Rather, hope always relies upon an illusion, a future not-yet or yet-to-be, or is the result of inadequate knowledge. Nietzsche is likewise pessimistic of hope, putting it unequivocally: "Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man" (1996, p.45). The soothing presence of hope delays the ethical imperative to build a future that is more just than the present.

For these reasons, the politics of hope is regarded by some scholars as deceitful—aligned with powerful neoliberal or neocolonial agendas rather than driving social transformation. In this vein, Anderson suggests that there are times "when the enactment of hope catalyzes relations of injustice" (2006, p.749). And as the above accounts suggest, volunteers may appeal to hope in their narratives to justify and soothe their presence in Nayonbago, rather than actively addressing socio-economic disadvantage. By doing so, they potentially suture over and dehistoricise problematic relations based on race, neocolonialism and neoliberalism.

Yet far from simply hoping for change—or imagining themselves as embodying hope—these volunteers were acting upon their hopes. Here we argue that the pessimistic view of hope is too narrow. Following Ahmed (2015), we suggest empathic pain is integral to understanding the politics of hope. And that while it is impossible to experience another person's pain, empathy opens up the possibilities to explore difference by creatively imagining how another person feels. Hence, as Pedwell cautiously suggests, the affective experience of empathy is “potentially generative of both personal and social change” (2012, p.166). Volunteering may create moments of embodied empathy of pain that generate hopes which operate outside of neoliberal imaginaries of development.

Alan illustrates powerfully the affective potential of empathic pain. He described a chance encounter with a grandfather with a malformed leg on the streets of Nayonbago:

What am I going to do about that guy? You see, it's [the problem is] still there. And so that's a challenge that I've got. It's an emotional challenge. But he won't leave me. And I had to keep it in check there [in Nayonbago]. Even though it dwells up in me here [touches chest], it's part of the.... stiff upper lip [begins silently weeping]. Because you will get swamped over there, with that need. I get the joy of seeing something fixed or something healed in a person's life, but I have that emotional down when it's not. And I suffer with that. (Alan, male, 80, post-trip interview)

This painful encounter clearly lives on within Alan. As Ahmed argues, pain involves sociality and “‘surfaces’ in relationship to others, who bear witness to, and authenticate its existence” (2015, p.31). What the affective pain of this encounter does for Alan is generate a sense of how he inhabits the world and how he lives in relation to other bodies. Alan is touched by the difference he encounters—following Ahmed, the disadvantage Alan encounters *impresses* upon him. He illustrates how the experience of empathic pain is felt as the transgression or violation of the borders of his own body. Alan uses the metaphor of feeling ‘swamped’ to convey how pain rearranges and attaches to his body within Nayonbago.

Chouliaraki (2013) is suspicious of the role of empathic responses to the suffering of others in contemporary modes of humanitarianism, like volunteer tourism. In her work *The Ironic Spectator* (2013) she argues against a new form of empty solidarity that has filled the void of the former grand narratives based on race, class or politics. She criticises what she identifies as the current dominance of a narcissistic emotionality in politics. The central target of her analysis, the eponymous ‘ironic spectator’, is “an impure or ambivalent figure that stands, at once, as sceptical towards any moral appeal to solidary action and, yet, open to doing something about those who suffer” (2013, p.2). The ironic spectator subscribes to a form of solidarity that “avoids politics and rewards the self” (2013, p.15). In this sense, she argues, it

is a form of superficial solidarity that precludes the possibility of real solidarity, instead opting to foreground the way others' suffering affects the self empathically.

The participants' accounts could be read in this way. Their narratives are indeed largely depoliticised and their discourse privileges their own personal empathic pains and joys of volunteering.

Instead we argue that their accounts of pain ultimately align much more closely to Chouliaraki's own vision of solidary humanitarianism. "Empathy"—the ability to register the pain of others—"is a constitutive dimension of public life that enables, rather than corrupts, civic sensibilities," Chouliaraki argues (2013, p.23). She notes a caveat, however, in that this empathy must be "combined with judgement so as not to collapse into narcissistic emotion" (2013, p.23). Ultimately, she argues, for solidarity to fulfil its own promise it must be "less about branding and more about our systematic and explicit engagement with the voices of vulnerability and the values that may inform our action upon it" (Chouliaraki 2013, p.24).

While Alan's is a largely depoliticised account of volunteering, lacking in any grand or revolutionary narrative, it does not devolve into the empty humanitarianism of the ironic spectator. Indeed his accounts of volunteering are far from ironic. While Alan, and the other participants, expressed personal feelings of pain, it was not limited to the handheld mirror of Chouliaraki's narcissistic society. Rather, Alan points to how intensities of bodily pain may result in the body turning in or moving away. In Alan's words, "It's an emotional challenge"—one he could simply ignore or move away from.

But he does not. Here we suggest that what works to prevent this turning away, what instead keeps Alan 'going back', is an ethics of pragmatic hope informed by an affective politics of pain. This parallels Chouliaraki's (2013, p.23) vision of a humanitarianism that is "based, on the one hand, on our imaginative capacity to feel for vulnerable strangers [...] and, on the other, on our imaginative capacity to observe ourselves as actors upon their suffering".

Alan's empathic pain presents a concrete and urgent challenge: "What am I going to do about that guy?" This is not a passive Nietzschean hope, one which delays or negates joy in the present for imagined reward in the future. Rather it is a hope which energises attainable action. For eight consecutive years, Alan has returned to Nayonbago to build homes for some of the Philippines' most disadvantaged people, distributed donations from Australia, and maintained relations with networks of dozens of Filipino partners who work together to realise the Rotary project. Back in Australia, Alan has performed handyman and maintenance work to raise money for the project; he has run fundraising events; hosted regular meetings to debrief and strategise the project, aiming to maximise the impact it can

effect. And it is, we argue, the empathically painful encounters of Nayonbago, such as the one he describes above, that evoke an affective, hopeful ethics, which energises and animates Alan to continue addressing socioeconomic disadvantage.

We argue, then, in this case, it is the emotion and affect of pain that connects Alan to the people of Nayonbago, rather than neoliberal discourses. Following Ahmed, embracing the impossibility of knowing another person's pain, the ethics of hope demands: "I must act about that which I cannot know" (2015, p.31). In doing so, Ahmed restores some gravity to hope by encouraging us to embrace the impossibility of communicating or experiencing another person's pain. And in this way, an affective politics of pain opens possibilities to experience difference over dominance and hope over oppression, which are not necessarily subservient to processes of neoliberalism.

CONCLUSION

Our experiences of pain reveal something about the way we inhabit the world. Yet the bodily sensation of pain is something that is rarely granted epistemic privilege in tourism studies. Pain is perhaps thought of as too private, too personal, or too embodied. Here, we have illustrated the value of Sara Ahmed's (2015) work, which conceives of pain as emplaced, relational, social, emotional, affective and political. A feminist framework of the politics of emotions offers an entry point in exploring what bodies in empathic pain can do. We engaged with six Australians volunteering in a small village in the Philippines. The empathic painful encounters that arose from conditions of uneven material wealth presented an opportunity to engage with the ambivalent affective and emotional politics of volunteer tourism.

For these volunteers, empathic pain prompted paradoxical political effects and affects as they juggled the demands of volunteering. On the one hand, individual and collective feelings of empathic pain functioned to reproduce dominant norms surrounding material inequalities. Their painful encounters with the inequalities manifest in Nayonbago opened moral gateways for volunteers to reflect on and challenge their material privilege. However, participants' narratives often worked to reduce, depoliticise or neutralise the transformative potential of these painful experiences. Through recourse to romantic notions of the 'poor but happy' or the realisation of their own moral redemption, volunteers erased the 'bodily life' of colonial histories and reinforced neoliberal ideals of social sensitivity.

We also found instances of empathic pain that appeared to operate outside these dominant power structures. Chance encounters with marginalised people surfaced feelings of

empathic pain, evoking an affective and emotional politics of hope for things to be otherwise. For one participant in particular, group leader Alan, the subsequent embodied sense of hope impelled him to act. This empathic response to another's unknowable pain presented an urgent ethical challenge he was determined to solve. For Alan, the politically transformative potential of empathy was realised; pain was not mobilised within neoliberal discourses of self-improvement. Thus while the political efficacy of pain in addressing structural inequalities remains ambivalent, it is clearly crucial to the experience of volunteer tourism.

Our research points to the importance of paying attention to particular bodies as they navigate particular spaces of volunteering. We suggest that engaging with the affective and emotional politics of pain may be useful to further think about the relationship between tourism, power, emotion, affect, bodies and space. We encourage other tourism scholars to consider what empathic pain does and the issues surrounding an affective and emotional politics of pain in other tourist spaces for other sorts of bodies. Through understanding pain as social, spatial, relational and political, tourism scholars can provide insights into how individuals dwell in the world.

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