A critical analysis of to what extent financial aid, volunteer tourism and English language teaching is based in neo-colonial ideology and what effect this has on developing countries

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Abstract

This paper critically explores the effect of volunteer tourism, financial aid and English language teaching on developing countries. In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of tourists taking on volunteer placements in developing countries and these are often linked with the teaching of English as an additional language. This paper provides an overview of how these practices are an extension of neo-colonial ideology and evaluates how successful they are at assisting developing countries out of poverty.

Paper

Countries are often divided into two categories, the first being the global north (also developed world, first world) which is defined as being developed economically and socially (amongst other factors), and the second being the global south (also undeveloped world, third world) which are classed as the opposite (Chant & McIlwaine 2008). Although there are many criticisms attached to these terms, for the purpose of distinguishing between who is giving aid and who is receiving it, this paper will use the terms 'global north and south'. The concept of the global north sending financial aid and volunteer tourists to the global south, as well as the importance placed on English language learning is often viewed positively and as a necessity (Oxfam, 2016). This paper however, will explore the criticisms and negative effects financial aid, volunteer tourism and English language teaching can and do have on the countries, economy and people living in the global south.

Phillipson (1992, p23) states that the English language is no longer just the concern of native English speakers, as through 'British colonialism, international interdependence, revolutions in technology, transport, communications and commerce, and because English is the language of the USA' proficiency in English is often seen as the path to opportunity and achievement. As more and more countries start using English as the language of education and government, it is more important than ever that people know the language, if not for the purpose of travel then for their own education and survival in the labour market (Phillipson 1992). Pennycook (1998) notes that the spread of English stems from the British Empire and their focus on educating the colonised people who were not proficient in English. Phillipson (1992) states that the imposition of English language was often at the expense of vernacular languages, educational methods and content. This is widely seen as the British Empire gaining strength and power over the colonised people, not only with physical force but also by indoctrinating them with the belief that they were inferior and were there to serve their colonisers (Mart 2011). Mart (2011) also states that in parts of Africa, the colonisers undermined the native people by depriving them of an education which would benefit their lives, and instead using education to serve their own needs and keep the colonised in their place. Colonialism is often described as one of the largest factors in creating inequality and subsequently causing the global north and south divide, Storm (2011) adds that through colonialism and British imperialism the global south were assigned to a cycle of poverty and unable to catch up with the other half of the world. In opposition to this view,

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Williams (2011) argues that the global south cannot blame all inequalities on colonialism and its repercussions. This is due to the fact that many countries that were previously colonised (such as Japan) now have thriving economies and many countries that were not colonised, or only colonised for a very short period (such as Nepal) are amongst the poorest in the world.

The concept that colonialism was 'transformative rather than transitory' and that countries in the global south are still living with colonialism is the basis on which postcolonial theory works (Chiriyankandath, 2011, p30). Martin and Griffiths (2012) state that through independence countries were able to decolonise, however the mindset of the colonised people was not so easily reversed and that people still view themselves and their culture as being inferior and invaluable. Chiriyankandath (2011) purports that the expectations of the freed countries leaders and their people were frequently not met due to the political, economic, social, and language legacies left from the colonial process. Gandhi (1998) however, criticises post-colonial theory for being too generalised, stating that the experiences of countries that were colonised were vastly different to one another and the theory seeks to group them as the colonised, rather than countries in their own right. Another criticism of postcolonial theory is that it is almost impossible to trace where legacies have come from. This argument is furthered by Chiriyankandath (2011) who notes that pre-colonial societal structures hugely influenced how countries dealt with post-colonialism. This was evident in the case of Africa, because it had such inconsistent state traditions before colonialism it had a much harder time dealing with the repercussions of post-colonialism and setting up a new way of living. Pennycook (2013, p147) also notes that the wider use of English language across Europe could have stemmed from the British Council with their aim to educate people on British culture and language in order to 'counter the spread of European fascism'. Although these aims were no less imperialistic than many processes of colonization, it does offer a different view on the spread of English across the world and supports the statement that supposed post-colonial legacies are actually very difficult to trace.

Ryan (2008) states that post-colonialism has fostered neo-colonial attitudes towards the global south. Altbach (1982) defines neo-colonialism as inequalities between nations, and the concept that the global north uses their influence and power over the global south with complete disregard to the views and culture of the 'invaded' country. Neo-colonial ideology can be as harmful as the physical effects of colonialism, an example of this is shown in a speech by Winston Churchill, stating that the English language would enable the unfortunate people who were not natives to engage in our society (Ogden, 1986). This suggests not only that English speakers are superior to others but that the British version of society is better too and should be replicated worldwide. Financial aid, volunteer tourism and English language teaching can all be seen as being rooted in neo-colonial thinking, and will be explored further throughout this paper.

A number of critics such as Frank and Amin (Klees, 2010) oppose the concept of aid in its entirety, branding it as a neo-colonial operation. On the one hand there is a call for financial aid to be continued and increased, Oxfam (2016) justify this through success stories such as '1.4 million people benefiting from improved sanitation facilities'. Where financial aid is not successful, the solution offered by many is often proposed as increasing the amount of aid sent to the global south (Oxfam, 2016). This perspective is, however, strongly contested by Easterly (2006) who claims that over fifty years and 2.3 trillion dollars later, even low cost commodities such as mosquito nets are still in short supply and high demand. Moyo (2009) adds that developing countries are worse off than ever, stating that financial aid has made them poorer, stifled innovation and created issues such as corruption, conflict and dependency on the global north. Ryan (2008) also criticises unethical interest rates on loans from the global north to the south. This often results in the global south having to pay back much more than they borrowed and consequently creates a cycle of poverty and dependency. Ryan (2008) specifically targets organisations such as The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund for forcing

development plans on small developing countries with negative repercussions. Papa New Guinea is used as an example in Ryan's (2008) argument, as their development plan appeared to be in the interest of the IMF and their view of what a successful country looks like without taking into account the needs of the country itself. This can be viewed as neo-colonialism because the global north often views development in terms of economics and if other definitions differ, they are more often than not, disregarded.

Although there are many criticisms of financial aid, many of the critics do not offer much in the way of specific alternatives to reducing inequality, Novogratz (2009) however, offers a third way of looking at aid. The underlying issue of neo-colonialism is addressed by identifying that giving developing countries money for free and telling them how they should use it is incredibly damaging in both the short and long term. Instead, Novogratz (2009) suggests that the developed world invest in entrepreneurs from countries such as Pakistan, who know what they and the rest of their community/country need, whether it is irrigation tools or women's employment projects. This method of aid enables the recipients to live and work sustainably and take pride in their communities without neo-colonial ideas and external input.

Volunteer tourism as a form of aid is also criticised, it often involves citizens from the global north undergoing short-term visits in the global south, combining charity work with tourism (Jakubiak 2012). Volunteer tourism has become something of a modern trend, which is increasingly seen as a way of travelling more ethically. Despite the recent rise in volunteer tourism, the charity Tourism Concern (2015) have found that it can have detrimental effects on both the volunteer and the receiving country or community. Butcher and Smith (2010) support this statement as they report that the organisations selling volunteering packages are often the only ones benefitting from the high fees charged. TRAM (2008) note that as volunteer tourism grows, more travel and tour companies have added volunteering packages to their previously holiday based brochures, this indicates the benefits for businesses in this increasingly lucrative market. Butcher and Smith (2010) found that the average volunteer tourism package price of 3000 dollars would be much more valuable if it was given straight to the developing community projects, rather than on a self-serving tourist who is only helpful for a fixed and short amount of time. A criticism of this statement is that if money is received or intercepted by the wrong people, such as corrupt organisations in Yemen (Transparency International, 2016), the money may never reach the people who need it most, at least with volunteer tourism, the aid is generally focused in the right areas. Heath (2007, p437) however adds that the high cost of volunteer tourism packages often only attracts young people from wealthy backgrounds, this allows certain groups in society to reaffirm their power, pass on their perspective and beliefs to the receiving communities all whilst coming across as 'altruistic and worldly'.

Another criticism of volunteer tourism comes from Palacios (2010) who reports that the appeal for many people who choose to volunteer is that they often do not need any specific qualifications or experience, and although it is a good opportunity for people to gain experience, he questions whether they will be of any help to the receiving community. Palacios' (2010) study found that the volunteers felt hugely under qualified for the roles they had been given, they were hired based on their ability to speak English, however the volunteers felt that they needed much more experience and struggled with cultural differences and language barriers. On top of this, the volunteers felt uncomfortable with to what extent their opinions and skills were valued by the receiving company and its staff, all solely based on their ability to speak English and their western roots (Palacios 2010). This could be seen as an aspect of postcolonial theory manifesting in people's lives as the qualified staff viewed inexperienced western graduates as being more knowledgeable and superior to themselves.

Jakabiak (2012) explains that the aims of voluntary teaching in developing countries are often unclear, Pennycook (1998) furthers this by stating that 'English as development' and 'English for development' are two distinctly different concepts that are often mixed up and frequently add to the confusion of the English language volunteering justification. These arguments, paired with the short term placements of volunteers often result in students learning little-to-no English, and therefore making the whole operation useless and a waste of valuable money (Coleman, 2011).

Overall, the negative effects of volunteer tourism can often be traced back to the organisations that advertise the volunteer packages. On top of the unethical way in which they make a profit, Raymond and Hall (2008) add that the lack of training or guidance given to the volunteers is damaging. The organisations often do not have an elimination process and will let anyone volunteer as long as they pay for it, regardless of the background or skills (Raymond and Hall, 2008). Also when volunteering packages are not monitored or managed well, they can lead to unemployment in the receiving communities as paid workers are undercut by tourists from the global north who wrongly think they are making a positive contribution to the lives of others (Raymond and Hall, 2008).

Due to a number of different factors, English is widely regarded as the language of modernity, power, political influence and technology (Phillipson, 1992). English language teaching makes up a large proportion of charity work in developing countries, but Jordao (2009), criticises the profession in its own right. He argues that seeing the English language as a commodity can be very harmful and a way for the 'global north to impose its own ways of knowing' on the global south, whilst the private sector benefits from the desperation of non-native English speakers (Jordao 2009, p98). This adds to the perspective that English language teaching reinforces neo-colonialism. Jakubiak (2012) found that the discourse associated with proficiency in English (in developing countries) was that the English language is the sole tool to any and all possibilities, and if people are not financially stable, it is because they do not speak English. These statements, once again, can be seen as a symptom of post-colonialism through the 'west is best' ideological slant and ignore other structural factors such as 'volatile labour markets, insufficient employment opportunities, and minimal public safety nets' (Jakubiak 2012, p444). The idea that charity, funding or expansion of opportunities can reduce poverty without the acknowledgement of the roots of inequality is one that is destined to fail (Royce, 2009, Jakubiak, 2012).

Another issue associated with English language teaching in the global south (and even countries in the global north, such as Italy and Spain) is the assumption that native English speakers are able to teach the language without any formal teaching qualifications. Jordao (2009) explains that this concept is damaging to the local teachers and reinforces neo-colonialism through education. This is because local teachers are left undermined and often without jobs based solely on the fact that they are not native English speakers, regardless of their teaching experience or qualifications.

Not only can English language teaching be damaging to teachers, but it can also be a negative experience for students. Pinnock (2010) found that in some countries in the global south, the addition of the English language has caused student drop out rates to increase. This could be due to students not being previously exposed to the language (in opposition to many countries in the global north that have access to English language via films, books, internet and the media), their parents having no knowledge of the language and them seeing no benefit of learning English. With many countries choosing to change to English-medium curricula formats, a number of students will be automatically disadvantaged and often unable to continue their education beyond primary school (Coleman, 2011).

As well as English language teaching, neo-colonialism can be seen as invading all other aspects of education in the global south. Ryan (2008) states that neo-colonial influences in education often lead

to the cultures and beliefs of students being undermined and belittled. An example of this is portrayed through AusAID's influence on the curriculum reform of Papa New Guinea, Ryan (2008) notes that their 'western' ways of working were forced onto the pre-existing curriculum team and that little room for input outside of their own views was permitted. As a result, indigenous practice and cultures were removed from the curriculum, in favour of western views of knowledge and the world which can have a detrimental effect on the students whose cultures are not recognised or celebrated through education.

Aside from the view that English language teaching is neo-colonial, Smith (2005) argues that English is an inappropriate lingua franca based on a criterion of what a good common language should be. The reasons for this are that English is unpronounceable to many other language speakers (such as Japanese, German and the romance languages), the most popular verbs are irregular (making even basic English learning difficult), sentence structures are far more complex than other languages and it is very ambiguous and subsequently hard to understand. Smith (2005) does not contest the fact that the English language is suitable for native speakers but that the benefits become weaknesses when it is used as a second or additional language. In the 20th Century 'Basic English' was created as a way to tackle the complexity of the English as an additional language and used only eight hundred words to ensure it was easy to learn (Dabbagh, 2005). Although Winston Churchill championed this idea, Basic English was a failure from the outset, with critics branding it as another method of neo-colonialism and British imperialism as well as undermining the learning capacities of foreign speakers (Dabbagh, 2005).

Nonetheless, a criticism of all the previous arguments mentioned (including Palacios' study, 2010) is that the views of the people receiving financial aid, volunteer tourists and English teachers are often unexplored. Palacios (2010) justified his lack of this perspective on the language barrier, however, the opinions of people living in developing countries are very frequently different to the criticisms of volunteer tourism presented above. In the radio broadcast The Goddess of English, Masani (2012) found that many people in India view the English language as a way to tackle the inequality rooted in the caste system. The English language offers a range of vocabulary that does not exist in many of the languages spoken in India, this gives people a completely different perspective of the world and was even described as being a 'passport out of poverty'. Masani (2012) notes that many people still oppose the spread of English language as it only reaches the parts of the population which have money, and consequently increases the gap in opportunities between the rich and the poor. Despite this, the Indian government have recently introduced English language into schools as part of the country's economic development plan (it was previously abolished from schools after being described as a 'colonial hangover') and Roy (2015, p529) adds that for some, English is the only way out of 'oppressive familial and social structures'.

Although the spread of English language (and its subsequent status as the global language) is often traced back to colonialism and the British Empire, Smith (2005) questions the future of English language use worldwide. Smith (2005) notes that the prevalence of English language can also be attributed to the success of the United States of America in the global economy and that the recent rise of the Chinese economy could have an effect on this. With indications that China will overtake America as 'the world's biggest economic power', Ross (2005, p62) identifies that mandarin could become the global language within the current century and consequently end many forms of neo-colonialism, as it is currently known.

In conclusion, the perspectives presented from critics such as Phillipson (1992), Ryan (2008), Palacios (2010) and Jordao (2009) show that although financial aid, volunteer tourism and English language teaching are often seen as positive contributions to the global south, in fact they are based on neo-

colonial ideology and can be very damaging to the receiving country. Although colonialism is often viewed as the cause of poverty in the global south (Storm, 2011), it is strongly contested with arguments from Williams (2011), who claims that there are many other factors involved due to the fact that many countries have come out of colonialism with thriving economies. Moyo (2009) argues that aid entraps the global south in dangerous cycles of poverty and dependency that could be avoided if the effects of aid were explored critically by the global north. On top of this, the rise of volunteer tourism has had mixed outcomes. On the one hand receiving communities are often happy to host volunteers and learn from them, but on the other, volunteers often reinforce negative stereotypes, strengthen neo-colonialism and can cause higher unemployment rates because they work for free. Overall, regardless of the way in which English came to be the language of modernity, its suitability and whether it is here to stay, it is currently seen by many as a way out of poverty, and a step in the direction of economic development. Denying the global south access to the English language would mirror the practice of many colonisers and would be more harmful than beneficial.

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