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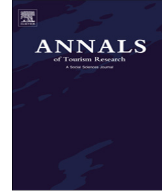

Responsibility in tourism: A discursive analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper illuminates how norms associated with certain discourses of responsibility in tourism operate and to what effect. Drawing on discursive and postcolonial perspectives, we analyze meanings and practices of responsibility represented in qualitative and visual texts derived from 28 tourists of the Thelon River in Arctic Canada. Findings reveal that responsibility is primarily constructed around an ethic of leaving no trace, which is contingent upon nature as peripheral and anachronistic space, deference to scientific and experiential knowledge, and cycles of representation. This limits tourists' potential to more fully identify with the Thelon as Aboriginal homeland. The paper exemplifies the power of responsibility to normalize particular versions of truth, dismiss the presence of others, and reinforce social privilege and disenfranchisement.

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Introduction

The power of tourism to produce ecological, cultural, economic, and political effects has given rise to several modes of practice and thought designed to ensure tourism's positive potentialities outweigh anything hurtful. 'Responsible tourism' has received much recent attention as one of these promising and/or alternative possibilities. While studies have approached responsible tourism as a product consumed by an ethically oriented market segment (Goodwin & Francis, 2003; Weeden, 2013), the term tends to denote a process of planning, policy, and development that prioritizes community-level involvement, sustainable resource management, equitable distribution of benefits, and minimal

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negative impacts to local contexts (Goodwin, 2011; Husbands & Harrison, 1996; Reid, 2003). According to Leslie (2012), such processes aim to generate tourism experiences underpinned by a holistic moral concern for individual, community, and broader social and environmental well-being. This is reflected in the mantra of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism: "making better places for people to live in, and better places to visit" (ICRT, 2014); and inscribed in the 2002 Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations (Frey & George, 2010). Indeed, the currency of responsible tourism extends globally. It is applicable to a range of tourism-related actors—tourists, managers, guides, industry associations, politicians, governments, NGOs, host communities (Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale, & Scarles, 2008)—involved in contexts as diverse as park tourism in Finland (Puhakka, 2011), slum tourism in Egypt (Mekawy, 2012), and pack animal supported mountain tourism in Morocco (Cousquer & Allison, 2012). It is likewise relevant in contexts of Arctic tourism where research and development priorities have included understanding visitor and Indigenous community perspectives (Notzke, 1999; Stewart, Dawson, & Draper, 2011), developing codes of conduct for operators and visitors (Mason, 1994, 1996), and assessing the implications of rapid environmental change (Dawson et al., 2011).

Visions and practices of responsible tourism are not without their critics. Wheeller (1991), one of the earliest, noted that responsible tourism is adopted more often as a marketing ploy than an ethical planning mechanism. Others have politicized responsibility in tourism by associating it with the expansion of neoliberalism (Duffy, 2008) or power differentials reminiscent of colonialist regimes (Sin, 2010). From Fennell's (2008) perspective, responsible tourism has largely failed to achieve the outcomes desired by its proponents due to a lack of philosophical engagement with the meaning of responsibility. He argues that responsible tourism has become a ubiquitous term, but with ambivalent outcomes attributable to "a lack of sufficient ontology in structuring a way forward" (p. 4). Calling upon Derrida, Fennell contends "in the case of RT [responsible tourism], a failure to have knowledge of what responsibility means is itself a lack of responsibility" (p. 4). In effect, enhanced philosophical grounding and reflection is deemed necessary for tourism to *be* or *become* responsible.

This paper seeks to augment such critical and meditative appraisals by turning attention to what 'responsibility' in tourism *does* or *can do*. This approach treats language—in this case the rhetoric of responsibility—not as a reflection of reality, but as constitutive of it (Hollinshead, 2007). In other words, how we talk about and communicate responsibility in tourism has real-world effects, some that can be extraordinarily positive or productive, and others that can perpetuate socially dominant or ecologically destructive ideologies. Influential to this analytical position is the critical perspective of discourse, which, for the purposes herein, is understood as the "specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible" (Campbell, 2009, p. 166). This perspective, which we elaborate upon below, is adopted not to undermine the relevance of responsible tourism to issues of social justice and sustainability that span global and local scales, but to draw attention to how power relations permeate, and are constituted through, the meanings and practices of responsibility in a particular tourism setting. It helps to illustrate how even good intentions discipline us to ignore certain truths, are never without their silences or modes of othering, and are always ripe for critical dialogue and debate.

Drawing upon these insights, the purpose of this paper is to report on research that illuminates how touristic norms associated with certain discourses of responsibility operate and to what effect. More specifically, this study adopts a postcolonial lens and engages qualitative and visual texts derived from canoe tourists of the Thelon River in Arctic Canada to address a series of interrelated research questions. First, in an effort to explore various discourses at work, we ask: What construction(s) of truth in relation to responsibility are privileged in the meanings and practices of Thelon canoe tourists? To what extent are there inconsistencies within these? Second, to unpack how certain visions of responsibility are legitimized among canoe tourists, we ask: How are the meanings and practices of responsibility produced, favoured, and accepted as knowledge? And finally, recognizing that alternative discourses overlap with, interrupt, or contest dominant discourses, we ask: What voices are silenced by touristic discourses of responsibility within the context of the Thelon? What are the mechanisms that enable these exclusions?

Discourse and (post)colonialism

Discourse has been defined and applied in various ways within tourism (Hannam & Knox, 2005). The epistemological positioning of this paper takes direction from Foucault's (1972) theorization of discourse as a form of *sense-making* (Picken, 2006). Discourse describes a sequence of shared assumptions and rules that circulate through various texts—e.g., media, policy, travel blogs, souvenirs, academic literature, bodies, and so forth—to govern knowledge claims and discipline social and spatial relationships. Through discourse, particular ways of communicating, understanding, and behaving become 'normalized' and 'naturalized'; they privilege and accept only certain versions of truth, knowledge, or subjectivity (Rose, 2007). While several discourses operate around us at any one time, our social realities manifest in relation to particularly dominant discourses associated with institutions of power and persuasion (from nation-states to patriarchy to visitor codes of conduct developed by international organizations). Alternative discourses that attend to other ways of knowing get subverted, silenced, or constructed as peripheral to the powerful discursive status quo. Indeed, it is through discourse that power is imposed and circulated (Foucault, 1980).

Yet as Foucault (1980) instructs, power is relational and productive, meaning that it operates through discourse to not only impose or coerce, but also to actively resist or negotiate dominant meanings and practices. In other words, contending discourses may become empowered to compete with and contradict privileged discourses and their effects of truth (Waitt, 2005). This applies within terrains of tourism just as much as it does within realms of academia—tourism can be *done* and *researched* to enable resistance (Hall & Tucker, 2004a). Attending to power relations thus engenders awareness of how discourses dominate and subjugate, while at the same time bringing to the forefront possibilities for thinking and doing things differently (Cheong & Miller, 2000).

Postcolonialism is one of many intellectual movements in the social sciences and humanities that work with these analytics to destabilize norms with inherent biases based upon various modes of difference. Since Said's (1978) stage-setting extension of Foucault, scholars have cautioned against any singular or definitive definition, expression, or experience of postcolonialism (McLeod, 2000; Quayson, 2000; Young, 2001). After all, the effects of colonialism are contextually specific and felt by individuals in multiple ways (Braun, 2002). In this paper, we engage postcolonial theory as an approach that critically analyzes how colonial discourses and power relations give shape to contemporary social interactions involving those who are "Other-ed" and in relation to the environs (Braun, 2002; Cruikshank, 2005; Said, 1978; Young, 2001). A premise here is that colonialism is not simply a relic of the political or economic past, nor is it confined to a group's experience of invasion and territory loss at the hands of a European empire. Rather, we view colonialism as an enduring cultural process of subjugation and dispossession, whereby the losses associated with a people's control and ownership of local systems, livelihoods, norms, and resources at the hands of colonizers are continuously envisioned and revived through signs, metaphors, and narratives (Gregory, 2004). 'Postcolonial', in this case, does not denote an historical or chronological moment—that which comes after being a colony, or part of one. Rather, our particular application of postcolonialism seeks to identify and disrupt structures and ramifications of colonialism communicated in and through touristic understandings, practices, and representations of responsibility, situated within a particular Canadian Arctic riverscape. Following McLeod (2000), this is about questioning assumptions that we bring to our understanding of the world through tourism, why those assumptions are in place, and the role colonialism and its aftermaths play in underpinning and normalizing those assumptions.

This paper builds on the work of several tourism scholars mindful of the discursive links between colonialism and tourism, and their use of postcolonialism as a critically reflexive approach for reconsidering and interrogating structures of power that establish the Western binary of colonizer and colonized (e.g., d'Hauteserre, 2004; Hall & Tucker, 2004b). Palmer's (1994) account from the Caribbean is exemplary as it demonstrated how the tourism industry's reliance on certain colonial images perpetuates ideologies that prevent host communities from creating their own self-determined identity. Similarly, Hollinshead (1992) highlighted how tourism parallels colonial discourses when conscious and unconscious practices essentialize and fragment notions of indigenous identity, resulting in "sedimented historical explanations of indigenous culture" (p. 43). The pinnacle of such violence may be

the quest for "authentic" encounters with indigenity through tourism, which Nesper (2003) argued is underpinned by desires to experience a "Paleolithic" (i.e., traditional, kinship-based) way of life. Such constructions of "authentic" romanticize the past to such an extent that Indigenous cultures, which have certainly evolved, diversified, and adapted over time, have little in common with tourists' expectations (Amoamo, 2011). For instance, in a study of wilderness tourism in Yukon Territory, Canada, de la Barre (2012) observed that the social and economic realities of First Nations, including those rooted in colonialism, often conflict with tourists' pre-constructed conceptions of native people. As such, when it comes to Indigenous peoples existing within tourist space, Amoamo (2011) has argued that tourists are often "directed towards overly simplified and destructive interpretations" (p. 1254) of local culture founded in unequal relationships of power, cultural commodification, and essentialization.

Similar tensions have been attributed to postcolonial academic research and writing. Following Spivak (1988), much of this scholarship is implicated as reinforcements of colonial ways of knowing and "Othering", especially in terms of who is (or is not) authorized to speak. According to Cruikshank (2005), the penchant for theoretical concerns in postcolonial literature, which dates back to Said's (1978) treatise of a monolithic colonial discourse, serves to distance it from the specificity of knowledges, practices, and power relations on the ground. Likewise, for Maori scholar Linda Smith (1999), "the field of 'post-colonial' discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns" (p. 24). Thus, with its emphasis on the onset and effects of colonialism, studies of postcolonialism have been accused of maintaining an underlying universalism and intellectual imperialism that recentres Europe as the only agent of history (Braun, 2002; Cruikshank, 2005). The agency, priorities, voices, and narratives of other cultures over time are "relegated to prehistory or understood primarily in terms of [their] response to European colonialism" (Braun, 2002, p. 21). Also hidden from view are the mediations, internal contradictions, and relations through which colonialism was made possible (Barnett, 2006). In effect, postcolonial studies often ignore the actual societies they claim to serve and re-write the Western binary of colonizer/colonized (Hall & Tucker, 2004b).

Partly in response to such contradictions, postcolonial scholarship has incorporated two interrelated adjustments, both of which have been applied in tourism research. The first is to decentre the Western subject in processes of knowledge production (Smith, 1999). Teo and Leong (2006), for example, achieved this by focusing on how Asian backpackers, largely underrepresented in backpacking research, contest racialized and gendered stereotypes. The second is to attend to 'hybrid' subjects and spaces that offer possibilities for resisting a totalizing discourse of colonialism (cf. Bhabha, 1994). A tourism case in point is Amoamo (2011), who illuminated performances of Maori operators as hybridized counter-narratives that trouble, if not subvert, conventional colonial binaries and bounded indigenous identities represented in promotional imagery. At play in these accounts is a concerted shift away from emphasis on colonizer/colonized, towards circumstances and concepts focused upon processes of cross-cultural and intra-cultural communication (Barnett, 2006).

A point for emphasis here is that multiple postcolonialisms exist, each with different utility in terms of understanding, revealing, or resisting multiple axes of identity. Our engagement with postcolonialism herein is necessarily restricted to the scope and intentions of this paper laid out in our Introduction. Consequently, we use postcolonialism cautiously and reflexively; we recognize that it supports us in telling a situated and partial story about responsibility in tourism, one that will inevitably exclude some voices and privilege others, including our own as analysts. As non-Aboriginal scholars, we have been consistently troubled and curious about these politics while preparing this paper. Our apprehensions about presenting this analysis are tempered by our other research and professional commitments involving work with marginalized others.

Methodology

The empirical substance of this paper represents a subset of data derived from an extended case study of the Thelon River watershed in Arctic Canada. Drawing on community-based, participatory, and visual approaches, this broader project involves diverse Thelon River stakeholders, primarily Aboriginal inhabitants and river tourists, in documenting and dialoguing knowledges in order to foster

enhanced understanding of, and responsible relationships to, a special place within contexts of social-ecological change. Focus in this paper is placed strictly upon discursively analyzing data relating to the meanings and practices of river canoeists; specifically, those meanings and practices canoeists associated with responsibility, conveyed as qualitative and visual texts, and not yet sufficiently scrutinized from a critical perspective. If taken on its own, this deconstructive effort may seem to convey little in the way of critical counter-narratives to dominant tourism discourses. For that reason, our paper is best viewed in relation to other reports from the broader Thelon case study that deal more directly with decolonizing efforts via community-based participatory methodology, Aboriginal relationships to the Thelon, and practices and performances of hybridity (e.g., Grimwood & Doubleday, 2013a, 2013b; Grimwood, 2014).

Thelon River, Canada

From headwaters in Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT), the Thelon River flows out of the boreal biome and east across the tundra and into Nunavut (Fig. 1). The river stretches 900 kilometres, traversing road-less terrain that is ideal habitat for migratory herds of caribou and other large mammals. The watershed is homeland to distinct pre-historical and historical Aboriginal societies, including the traditionally nomadic Denesoline (Chipewyan Dene) and semi-nomadic Caribou Inuit. Archaeological records dating back 8000 years reveal livelihoods associated with caribou as the main source of food, clothing, shelter, and tools (Gordon, 1975). Considerable activity occurred at caribou water crossings where hunters and families would drive and/or wait for herds to cluster and become vulnerable while swimming. These places are marked by stone tent rings, inuksuit, kayak stands, or lithic scatters and

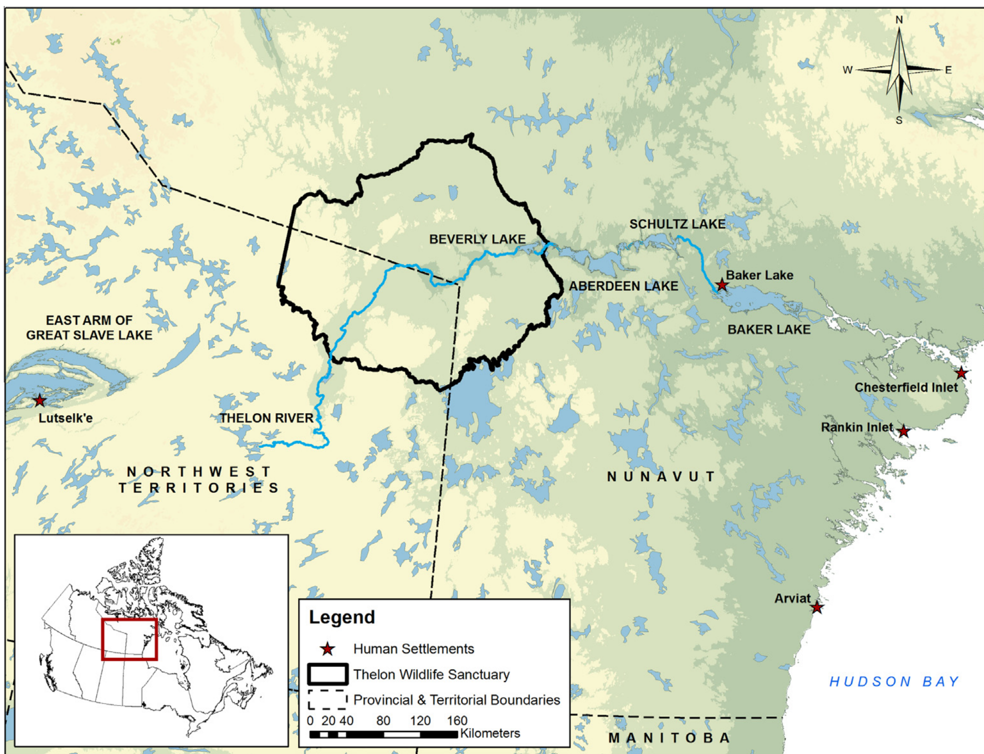

Fig. 1. Thelon River Watershed. Source: W. Van Hemessen, using shapefiles provided by GeoGratis and DMTI Data Consortium, June 2012.

continue to be used and deemed sacred by the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, NWT and the Inuit residents of Baker Lake, Nunavut. While recent and rapid transitions from land-based to settlement lifestyles has marshaled cultural change, the Thelon remains integral to the knowledge, memory, subsistence, and social relations of these communities.

Despite longstanding human occupation, many perceive the Thelon as emblematic of "wilderness" due to its relative remoteness and naturalness. This perception is perhaps most pronounced amongst recreational canoe travellers, a heterogeneous subset of an Arctic tourism market that is attracted to the general underlying theme of nature (Johnston, 2011). Indeed, since the first recreational canoe trip occurred along the Thelon in 1962, wilderness has been a common motif in texts constructing the river as a destination for multi-day expeditions (see e.g., Pelly, 1997). A key attraction is the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the first and largest conservation areas in Canada, and renowned habitat for charismatic animals like caribou, muskoxen, wolf, and grizzly bear. Arguably, like other nature-based tourists, the 100 or so canoeists who travel the Thelon each summer desire encounters with the sublime landscape and wildlife and to (re)construct identities through an experience of difference (Kane & Tucker, 2004). Fulfilling these desires, canoeists gain entry into Euro-Canadian exploration narratives, which in the context of the Thelon include epic journeys near the turn of the twentieth century.

Data collection

The qualitative and visual texts analyzed in this paper were collected from canoeists by the lead author in 2010. The majority of participants were clients of a single commercial guiding company catering to an affluent North American market since 1974. The company specializes with three Thelon canoe expeditions per summer; each 11-days long and involving ten participants, upwards of 270 km in length along the river's upper or middle sections, and renowned for the guide's extensive experience. Expeditions are fully outfitted and require charter floatplanes for access and egress.

Participants were contacted via the operator's owner, who, after having discussed research objectives and methods with the lead author over telephone, emailed research invitation letters to former and current clients. Those that were interested in participating in the research were asked to contact the lead author and were subsequently enrolled in the study. This purposive sampling strategy resulted in a total of 28 tourist participants. This group included men and women, most of whom were non-Arctic residents of North America and above the age of 50. Attempts to include independent travellers, other canoe guiding companies, and other forms of nature-based tourism were met with limited success. Thus, participants represent a cross-section of clients served by a consistent tourism presence within the Thelon basin.

Qualitative and visual texts were collected in partnership with the tourist participants using modes of "participant generated photography" (Rose, 2007), or what others describe as "photo-elicitation" (Harper, 2002) and "volunteer-employed photography" (Garrod, 2007). First, through email correspondence, participants were invited to select and share up to 12 Thelon photographs from their personal collection that reflected to them themes relating to responsibility and meaningful experience (see Table 1). Of the 345 photographs contributed, some were taken during summer months of 2010, while the others were captured within the last decade. Next, participants used these photographs to express knowledge, stories, meanings, and experiences associated with the Thelon in a one-on-one interview (n = 14) or a qualitative questionnaire distributed via email (n = 14). Interviews occurred in participant homes in Ontario, Canada or via telephone, ranged from 60–120 minutes in length, and were loosely scripted. They were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. Questionnaires modified the interview script and were used for tourists when geographic or temporal factors constrained arranging a one-on-one meeting. Responses included descriptive accounts of the experiences and meanings represented in photographs contributed. As Table 1 highlights, both interviews and questionnaires included prompts that focused on meanings and practices of responsibility. With participants' assent, all contributions were copied and organized for analysis using N'Vivo 8 software.

Discourse analysis

Informed by postcolonialism, we discursively analyzed the qualitative and visual texts contributed by tourist participants. Discourse analysis "examines how discourses are constituted and circulated within

Table 1
Features of the Data Collection Process.

Themes participants considered when selecting photographs from personal collections	• A positive and/or negative event on the river • Something that was good and/or bad about your river experience • Something that seemed fair or unfair during your river experience • Something that belongs or doesn't belong on the river • A change caused by humans • A change that just happens • Something significant about the river • Something that tells you how you should behave
Selected prompts used in interviews and questionnaires	• Please rank three photographs that are most important to you. What is it that makes these the most important? • From your perspective, explain which three photographs best reflect the meaning of responsibility and why? • Explain what emotions, thoughts, or memories you experience while looking at your Thelon photographs. • Is there anything missing from your photographs that you think is important to this research? If so, what, and why?

texts and representations, which in turn function to produce a particular understanding or knowledge about the world that is accepted as 'truth'" (Waitt, 2005, p. 168). Consistent with social constructionist epistemologies, this approach identifies with the provisional and socially situated character of all knowledge (Schwandt, 2000). So rather than produce final or unequivocal interpretation, our analysis strived to unpack constructions of truth along with the structures that maintain their validity and worth in a particular social context (Waitt, 2005). Our discursive analysis was also attentive to alternative discourses—those that "fail to exert the same power over particular realms of practice" (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 28)—and their potential effects. This was accomplished by taking notice of inconsistencies within analyzed texts and by actively looking for exclusions or silences (Waitt, 2005). Because "invisibility can have just as powerful effects as visibility" (Rose, 2007, p. 165), it was important for us to look beyond what was contained within the texts and to consider what was also left out or not obvious, as well as the mechanisms that enable these exclusions (Hannam & Knox, 2005).

We began the analysis process by familiarizing ourselves with the qualitative and visual data. Independently, we each immersed ourselves in reading and scrutinizing canoeists' photographs, transcripts, and questionnaires. In doing so, each author began to identify emergent themes and noted where in the texts they were made present (or absent in the case of exclusions). Following Waitt (2005), we attempted to approach this coding process with fresh eyes, balancing our pre-existing assumptions while remaining alert to insights into the particular knowledges of responsibility (re)produced within the texts. After our individual interpretations of text, we worked together to synthesize and clarify emergent themes relating to our principle aim of discursively investigating responsibility in tourism. We structured this process using three broad categories: constructions of responsibility; contingent structures of responsibility; and limits of responsibility (Waitt, 2005). These categories are reflected in the research questions noted in our Introduction and fleshed out in the following sections.

Constructions of responsibility

Our analysis exposed two prevailing constructions of responsibility circulating amongst the meanings and practices represented by canoeists. First, responsibility signified accountability for the well-being of one's self and one's travel partners. This was shaped by canoeists' use of several safety strategies to ensure individual and group health during their expedition. For Jesika, responsibility while touring the Thelon involved

> Paddling within our ability (portaging when necessary, having a safety line at the bottom of questionable rapids, etc.) and bringing appropriate equipment (food, gear, emergency satellite phone,

> first aid kit, etc.). Making sure that necessary rescue measures did not need to be taken in otherwise preventable situations due to irresponsible decisions.

Other participants identified accountability to supporting companions through onerous tasks. Peter, for example, who shared a photograph that depicted him portaging heavy equipment around a waterfall, expressed "I felt it was my responsibility to help out".

Curiously, responsibility as safety and support had implicit boundaries; it seemed to extend only to the members of one's travel group. Encounters with other canoe tours along the Thelon were generally regarded with disaffection. Diane's depiction of encountering another group at the head of a portage is a case in point:

> We were unloading our canoes, they shored alongside us and proceeded to unload their canoes as well…I would have thought there was an unwritten rule on the river that you let the first group finish their portage before starting yours…I was hoping to not see any other canoeists while we were there and when we did, I found them quite rude.

The second, overriding construction of responsibility circulated around an ethics of 'leaving no trace' or low impact travel. Participants described responsibility as "tread[ing] lightly" (Bob) and "leaving no traces but footprints" (Hans). For Joan,

> responsibility means taking care to preserve the pristine nature of the river and its surrounds. It means passing through an area without threatening the animals who live there and respecting the nature of the plants and minimizing any impact the need to camp might cause.

Travelling by canoe was viewed as conducive to this ethic. As Bill noted, "canoeing leaves no trace," and for Hans, responsibility meant, "travelling by canoe and not a motorized vehicle". Participants minimized their trace by following a number of other practices. Among these, limiting cooking fires and packing out garbage emerged with overwhelming conviction and were widely considered common sense behaviours on the Thelon. For instance, Judy noted that packing up garbage was "almost not worth saying, [it] should be so obvious." On the same subject, Taras commented "it is trivial to mention it as some kind of responsibility because it is really natural for people who do that kind of travelling." Bart identified that "cameras and binoculars" belong in the Thelon environment, while "machinery, lots of people, guns and traps" were out of place. By and large, canoeists' notions of responsibility enforced enjoyment through observation, not involvement or interference.

Such expressions of responsibility were coupled with both intrinsic and instrumental valuations of the Thelon. Participants conveyed a deep sense of appreciation for the river and its non-human animal and plant inhabitants, which fostered a sense of respect. For Judy, responsibility involved "appreciating and caring for this amazing land, this special place in the world that is beautiful, fragile, and potentially dangerous". Responsibility also served to sustain the river for future use. Hans explained: "responsibility means to me to respect nature and to leave it as we found it, so that future generations—our children and grandchildren—will also be able to enjoy unspoilt nature as it was created." Although such comments align with widely referenced Indigenous Peoples' practice of considering resource use in the context of seven generations (Battiste, 2000), canoeists' texts were vacant of direct mention of, or attribution to, such parallels. Instead, responsibility was repeatedly inscribed in such a way that the Thelon would be sustained primarily as a leisure landscape.

Typically, encounters with any signs of modernity were met with disapproval and characterized as a scar of irresponsibility upon the Thelon. Interestingly, however, canoeists looked favourably upon 'discovering' certain kinds of human traces. The presence of the 'presumed premodern' (stone arrowheads, tent rings), for example, was universally considered to belong within the landscape (see Fig. 2). To canoeists, these traces represented histories of human activity along the Thelon, and their emplacement as part of a traditional Aboriginal past complemented their desire for perceiving pristine space.

Despite canoeists' uniform adoption of 'leaving no trace', there were some inconsistencies in this construction of responsibility. This was especially apparent when canoeists recalled their interactions with wildlife or their remains. It was an enchanting opportunity, for example, to inspect active wolf dens located on shore. Gail used a photograph of herself holding a wolf pup to represent her "respect[ing] the wildlife", and noted that "we all took pictures then released this little beauty back at his den".

Fig. 2. Stone Tools and Arrowheads. Credit: H. Weidemar.

Jon described a moment upon which he encountered a caribou skull and antlers. Wanting to share the experience with his companions, he hauled them back to the group's campsite. Reflecting later, Jon acknowledged that these actions were inconsistent with the low impact ethic informing his sense of responsibility. Indeed, the discourse of "leaving no trace" was punctured by participants' desire for close and intimate encounters with riverscape wildlife.

Moreover, as participants contemplated their own traces, a dissonance began to emerge. For instance, many photographed the floatplane used to access the Thelon, identifying it as something that did not belong because of its ecological footprint. Canoeists thus recognized their presence within the riverscape as transient, even intrusive; and yet they were still compelled to the experience. For some canoeists, this dissonance sparked critical reflection on their sense of responsibility. Barry commented, "it took me a heck of a lot in terms of a carbon footprint to get there in the first place and I am not sure I am going to go there again, I mean I'd love to, but maybe it's irresponsible." In this and other instances, the research design enabled some canoeists to identify incoherence within their meanings and practices of responsibility.

Contingent structures of responsibility

Constructions of responsibility represented in canoeists' texts were legitimized by their deference to popular conceptualizations of nature as "wilderness". While nature is recognized within academic circles as a complex and dynamic social concept (Reis & Shelton, 2011), canoeists marked the Thelon's nature as "pristine", "remote", "uncivilized", and "threatened". For instance, Barry commented: "I think the Canadian wilderness—the areas like the Thelon River and all the rest of it—represent the last place where we have relatively undisturbed natural order of things and it is rapidly being encroached on". Similarly, Carolyn indicated that the "area is a place that will only stay as it is if you only have a few people going up there. It can't take a lot of people or it will just change".

As discursive structures, such conceptualizations of nature are tethered to certain spatial and temporal perceptions. Spatially, canoeists hold up the Thelon as remote destination, far from influences and (in)conveniences of modern society 'back home'. Hence the importance of being responsible for the well-being of one's self and one's group. Remoteness is, of course, relative to where one is situated

(de la Barre, 2012). However, institutions of socio-political persuasion have disciplined canoeists, among others, to invest in the kinds of spatial imaginaries that, in their mind, the Thelon represents. The U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964 is one example. Its definition of wilderness (below), reverberated within the comments of Barry and Carolyn (above), has been a pillar of protected area policy in North America for half a century:

> a relatively large wildland area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by people and where people who are visitors do not remain. It is basically an area of undeveloped land which retains its primeval character and natural influence without permanent improvements or human habitation (Henning, 1987, p. 284).

A similar spatial ideology was at play in 1927 when borders for the Thelon Game (now Wildlife) Sanctuary were carved into the central barrenlands of the Canadian Subarctic. This federal government initiative was driven by reports from colonial adventurers concerned with depleting stocks of muskoxen and caribou, and, for the purposes of conservation, required the expulsion of all hunting and trapping, including Aboriginal subsistence activities, which had been sustained in the area for generations (Sandlos, 2007). The notion that an original state of nature can and does exist beyond human influence was enacted into a spatial reality. This dualistic vision of nature and society is reverberated in canoeists' voices and photographs, and in the obviousness of 'leaving no trace' for ensuring the Thelon will be "pristine…and stay the same" (Chris).

The temporal attributes associated with the discursive structure of nature are varied. On one hand, canoeists encounter the Thelon as a provisional site of leisure and adventure. They pass through over a matter of days. On the other hand, canoeists perceive the Thelon as a place literally running out of time, threatened by consistent resource extraction pressures, the inevitable onslaughts of modernity, and global forces like climate change. Nevertheless, it seems the current state of the Thelon is afforded status as an authentic nature, mostly aloof—at least thus far—to the evolution of society at large. To maintain this status, canoeists shun or cover up signs of human use and become nostalgic for a time in which simpler, more organic lives (often, but not exclusively, Indigenous) were lived and in deep connection with what once was the purist of natures. With the advent of modern conveniences, which canoeists relied upon but struggled to accept within their constructions of responsibility, such lifestyles were acknowledged as a thing of the past. These romanticized and essentialized lives could, however, be sensed by performing the Thelon as an unmarred and unchanging nature space. Leaving no trace expressed this anti-modern nostalgia and served to transform the Thelon into an anachronistic space, one perceived to be left undisturbed by the workings of time (McClintock, 1995). Inhabitants of these spaces become likewise fixated in time and state. As Braun (2002) illustrated, evidence of modern/contemporary life within an anachronistic space disrupts tourists' expectations and desires. Accordingly, in the context the Thelon, canoeists often felt conflicted by their own presence and purposely minimized signs of their passing, coding this as responsible. Other evidence of contemporary presence, including Aboriginal livelihoods, was obscured or dutifully ignored.

Power/knowledge represents another discursive structure that legitimizes and normalizes responsibility amongst Thelon canoeists. As Foucault (1980) instructed, dominant discourses embedded within and maintained by socially powerful institutions are also embodied in "the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (p. 131). In the case of Thelon canoeists, the guide authorized safety and 'leaving no trace' as principle constructions of responsibility. Amongst canoeists, the guide's status as river steward and expert was attributed to his scientific training in wildlife biology and his accumulation of direct experience within the riverscape. This was an unsurprising reflection of the kinds of knowledge valued by Western societies. When asked what drew her to the Thelon, Carolyn explained:

> I was reading a book [that] mentions the guide as somebody who really knew the north really well and who was a wildlife biologist…it was obvious that he really knew the area well and loved it and I think that was really important in picking an outfitter.

Canoeists were equally captivated by the guide's knowledge while en route. Deference to his authority allowed participants to make sense of what they observed on the Thelon, and situate themselves within this context. Chris' interpretation of wolf population dynamics was a case in point:

> It just seems from talking to [the guide] how there used to be a lot more wolves along there and there is some reason they are starting to disappear…Now, one thing [the guide] said is that…sometimes they [wolves] happen to move around because they are sick and tired of the same den. So it could have just been a natural all around thing. But it just seemed to me, but mostly just listening to [the guide], that there are fewer wolves than there used to be.

The guide's status was further legitimized when canoeists relayed how they followed his firm directives about leaving the Thelon unmarked. The power of his narratives to inform the words and behaviours of canoeists did not waver even when they interrupted the dominant constructions of responsibility. Gail's enthusiasm for holding a wolf pup (discussed above) reflects this authority. While a seemingly stark contrast to 'leaving no trace', the guide's encouragement allowed Gail to justify this behavior and weave it into her notion of responsibility.

Interwoven with the foregoing discursive structures was a cycle of meaning making that mirrors what has been described elsewhere as the "circle of representation" or "hermeneutic circle" (Caton & Santos, 2009; Jenkins, 2003). Canoeists' accounts and performances of responsibility appeared to reiterate understandings and relationships represented in texts produced by previous Euro-Canadian travellers to the Thelon, both historic and contemporary. Most canoeists indicated having been lured to the Thelon, in part, by tales of adventure and exploration (e.g., Samuel Hearne, David Hanbury, or John Hornby), stories infused with hardship and taming unknown wilderness. Months prior to their expedition, canoeists received from the guide an information circular containing route description, ecological and historical information, recommended pre-trip reading, and picture brochure. Canoeists often referred to this circular as an instructive resource, helpful in terms of preparing what to bring and what to see during the expedition. Far from benign, such texts served to regulate touring expectations, perceptions, behaviours, and satisfaction levels. For example, Diane indicated: "I was hoping to see more wildlife. I have read about the herds that used to roam in the Thelon area. We did not see any of this". Jim described how the guide "wants to take us where no other people are around, and if somebody else shows up it sort of spoils things", while Peter recalled having his expedition group "invaded by an intrusive, talkative, annoying person who camped across the river from us—in itself a breach of good manners". Indeed, canoeists' experience of the Thelon was in many ways tied to re-capturing what they had already been exposed to prior to the start of their trip. Prized were those photographs that included sublime and unpeopled panoramic views (see Fig. 3), as well as wildlife, or traces of wildlife in the form of tracks or remains. Several canoeists noted that, upon returning home from their expedition, photographs and descriptive accounts were transferred to social media, websites, and personal photo albums; thus becoming entwined in networks of representation that re-circulate meanings and desires.

Limits of responsibility

When rehearsed by canoeists as remote and pristine nature, and ordered by the guide's expertise and through cycles of representation, the Thelon is performed as a place that has withstood the tests of time; a romanticized spatial and temporal vision that conceals much of the human history, livelihoods, and meanings present within the riverscape. Given the postcolonial lens informing this analysis, we are particularly troubled by how these touristic nature narratives—which structure meanings and practices of responsibility—mask legacies of colonial encounter within the Thelon and the resilience continuously demonstrated by Inuit and Dene societies to many faces of change. Our contention here is that discourse regulates canoeists' locus of responsibility, such that it is bound to a particular notion of nature encountered by a particular group (travel companions) for a finite period of time (expedition). This affords little opportunity for canoeists to identify with the Thelon as the historical and contemporary homeland of Aboriginal Peoples.

> In our view, there are three perilous exclusions facilitated by this dominant discourse of responsibility. First, canoeists demonstrated consistent slips by referencing themselves and their guide as the true stewards and advocates of the Thelon. One participant said that,

Fig. 3. "Leave the land as I found it". Credit: P. Albrecht.

> If you don't have people going to the Thelon, you don't have anybody to sort of put their hand up when a mining company asks for a license and say 'no, you shouldn't, that place is just too special, mine your gold somewhere else'. (Andrew)

According to William, after having experienced the Thelon directly, canoeists' responsibility extends to "whatever we can do in 'civilian' life (e.g., activism) to ensure that the tundra stays wild and unpoisoned". Unacknowledged here are the multiple strategies that Inuit and Dene have employed over the years to resist the presence of resource extraction within the Thelon basin and to self-determine the management of the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary. In August 1995, for example, Dene from Lutsel K'e and Inuit from Baker Lake met in the heart of the Sanctuary to initiate the development of a cooperative management framework (NWT, 2010). This led to an agreement in principle on joint management in 2001. Moreover, in 2012, the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation re-affirmed their complete opposition to mineral and uranium development within the Thelon watershed (Enzoe, 2012). It appears that observations made by Braun (2002) fit the situated circumstances of Thelon canoeists: that so long as Aboriginal people are seen to be existing outside modernity, then nature may be "both a place that deserves preservation and requires a modern representation to speak in its name" (p. 94). In other words, touristic imaginations of anachronistic space may reinforce the understanding that it is tourists' sole duty to speak out on landscape protection because Aboriginal inhabitants are construed as unable to do so themselves in a modern world.

Second, the dominant discourse of responsibility diminishes the value that the Thelon maintains in Aboriginal livelihoods. This was most pronounced when canoeists discussed and represented wildlife. Canoeists all agreed to the significance of wildlife to their Thelon experience and many were disheartened when expectations of seeing individual animals or large migrating herds were not met. When asked what was missing from her photographs, Judy responded:

> Caribou are missing! We only saw one on each of the two trips I have taken in the area, yet there have been thousands in the past as can be seen by the old caribou trails over the tundra. Where are they? What has happened to the huge herds?

Participants often worried about the implications of such changes on the fragile northern ecosystem, and for sustaining the region as an ecological preserve or majestic destination for future generations of

outdoor enthusiasts. In effect, the Thelon, and the Canadian North more generally, are maintained as a place to be crossed, a place where human presence is always temporary (Saul, 2008). Seldom was concern focused on the impact such wildlife dynamics have on Aboriginal livelihoods, food security, or culture. With few exceptions, canoeists spoke of Aboriginal hunting and reliance on the caribou in a historical context.

Finally, the dominant discourse of responsibility excludes the possibility of canoeists realizing, let alone assuming any accountability for, their association with the abuses and dislocations of the colonial past and present. At best, colonial narratives of expansion and dispossession were ancillary to canoeists' desires to experience and preserve pristine nature. At worst, historical and ongoing effects of colonialism were neglected completely. For instance, when Tom expressed his appreciation for the foresight of creating the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary, stating "I think, gosh am I ever glad that somebody in 1927 said, you know, if we are going to keep any musk ox around, we better set aside a place that you can't hunt them", the Canadian government's economic intentions of cultivating stock were overlooked (Sandlos, 2007). Likewise ignored was the fact that Inuit and Dene subsistence practices were deemed illegal within the protected area boundaries. As representatives of a so-called settler society, what responsibility do these canoeists (and we as non-Aboriginal authors) bear in relation to the systematic denial of Aboriginal rights and livelihoods in the Thelon riverscape? What might responsibility look like when we paddle or write toward reconciliation, partnership, and solidarity with the Thelon's Aboriginal inhabitants?

In response to these questions, a discourse structured by imaginations of remote and pristine nature seems entirely unhelpful as it serves to separate us from past and present realities and overlooks the need to acknowledge privilege embodied by beneficiaries of colonialism. More productive possibilities can be found within recent discursive resources surfacing within the broader field of tourism—'reconciliation' and 'hopeful' tourism as two examples (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011). That these emphasize participatory, emancipatory, and context-sensitive processes *with* marginalized groups is especially encouraging. Specific to the Thelon, Grimwood (2014) expounded relational, value-based metaphors as counter-narratives to Arctic tourism 'nature'. Drawn from mobile ethnographies of tourist and Inuit travel practices, and a backdrop of geographical and anthropological literatures, these metaphors craft cooperative and provisional linguistic spaces within Arctic tourism's moral terrains. 'Author's' argument is that just and sustainable tourism may only proceed when our vocabulary becomes adaptable to, and inclusive of, the plurality of voices layering a landscape.

Conclusion

This paper reports on research involving canoe tourists of the Thelon River in Arctic Canada to show how touristic norms associated with responsibility operate and to what effect. Informed by postcolonial theory and conceptualizations of discourse attributable to Foucault, we analyzed the meanings and practices of responsibility represented in qualitative and visual texts derived from 28 canoeists. Our discursive analysis revealed that, even in its apparently benign forms, tourism is interwoven with difficult narratives and power differentials. In the context of canoeing the Thelon River, responsibility is constructed around the principal ethic of leaving no trace, which is structured by a reification of nature as peripheral and anachronistic space, deference to science and direct experience as modes of knowing embodied by the guide, and cycles of representation. Here, responsibility in tourism has the effect of normalizing beliefs and behaviours that inscribe the Thelon as, first and foremost, a pristine leisure landscape. As we have argued, this limits the potential of canoeists to more fully identify with the Thelon's historical and contemporary reality as Aboriginal homeland. Canoeists are instead prompted to celebrate particular and romantic visions of an Aboriginal past and to obscure, if not ignore, Aboriginal livelihoods existing within the riverscape.

It is important that these analyses not be construed as a condemnation of Thelon canoeists or their constructions of responsibility. After all, leaving no trace and accountability to personal and group well-being have unmistakable worth; they create a sense of belonging and group cohesion, facilitate travel with minimal environmental footprint and reduced risk, and express care and respect for people

and place (Marion & Reid, 2007; Simon & Alagona, 2009). Additionally, and on a more general level, our analyses are not meant as a denunciation of responsibility in tourism. There is, for instance, far too much potential and virtue in responsible tourism endeavours to jettison the ideas altogether. Rather, our analyses are indicative of how constructions of responsibility in tourism are contextually specific—that meanings and practices of responsibility are socially produced and surface in relation to a particular time and space. These constructions are not without limits. As we have highlighted in the case of the Thelon, power circulates within discourses of responsibility to normalize particular versions of 'truth', dismiss the presence of others, and reinforce certain kinds of social privilege and disenfranchisement. When we talk and write about responsibility in tourism, we invariably represent specific interests, values, and power relations.

With respect to representations included within this postcolonial critique, some may argue that they simply present another instance in which research premised on a basic binary of tourist/non-tourist confirms the colonial nature of tourism and erasure of Indigenous Peoples (Braun, 2002). Critics would be right to point to the inability of our discourse analysis to reveal counter-narratives that resist dominant discourses of responsibility, expose symmetries in thinking and practice between Thelon canoe tourists and Aboriginal inhabitants, or illustrate the multiple and negotiated identities within and between groups that oppose any inclination toward essentialism. Indeed, a crucial limitation to our analysis is the way it collapses diversity among Thelon canoe tourists to make certain arguments, in turn failing to showcase how the riverscape, as a historically and contemporaneously contested moral terrain, is constituted in relation to multiple and often contradictory discourses (colonialist among others).

Some of these limitations, as implied earlier, are offset by other publications stemming from the broader and ongoing case study research. Fundamentally speaking, we concur with Smith's (1999) vision of deconstruction as part of a larger intent. Nonetheless, the critical diagnosis of responsibility presented above is valuable to projects of progressive change and emancipation in tourism (Bramwell & Lane, 2014). In particular, our discourse analysis helps lay bare the character of recurrent social inequities and struggles, which demand consistent attention within our field and beyond. By unpacking and revealing such baggage, our postcolonial reading creates space for the kind of critical questioning, dialogue, and understanding that may lead to creative responses and new practices (d'Hauteserre, 2004, p. 238). To these ends, we have been encouraged by what Hall and Tucker (2004b) describe as a crucial thread in postcolonialism: "to make visible the relative and partial nature of all 'truths'; and to expose the ideological biases underwriting any ethical and epistemological system which would otherwise regard itself as definitive and axiomatic" (p. 15–16).

Accordingly, this paper serves as timely reminder for researchers and practitioners involved in responsible tourism. With the growing international interest in responsible tourism, various centres of knowledge have been established that construct and disseminate powerful, morally laden ideas about what it means to be responsible in tourism. The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) is one example. Founded in 2002, the ICRT emphasizes postgraduate teaching and research designed to encourage all stakeholders—planners, operators, tourists, local communities—"to take responsibility for making the changes necessary to make tourism more sustainable" (ICRT, 2014). Its network consists of several organizational branches worldwide, allies with global authorities such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council, and operates an annual international conference and peer-reviewed journal. A discursive perspective sheds important light on how such an influential body regulates what is true and/or known about responsible tourism, what qualifies as being 'appropriate' or 'normal' for consideration, and what (and whose!) interests and values are being mobilized across the globe and experienced locally. Such critical inquiry is integral given responsible tourism's dedication to equitable and ethical relations.

Consequently, this paper encourages research that takes better stock of the multiple spatial and temporal flow of responsibilities that circulate within our complex, troubled, and dynamic tourism worlds. Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy, and McGehee (2013) observed that

> most discussions in the tourism literature either ignore the responsibilities of tourists or present them as a variation of responsible consumers with a broad global responsibility to be more sustainable. To date, very little tourism research has considered the specific responsibilities and

> obligations that tourists…have to the communities they visit…and there has been no explicit discussion in the tourism literature of the responsibilities that destination communities have towards tourists. (p. 553)

Indeed, there are few examples of studies that deviate from industry-driven perspectives in which responsibility is prescribed as a countermeasure to negative tourism impacts or as a mechanism for ethical development. Sin (2010) provides one exception by drawing on discussions within the geographies of care and responsibility literature to examine perspectives of host-communities involved in volunteer tourism. Similar studies are necessary to flesh out the multidirectional relationships of responsibilities in tourism settings, how these relationships change over time, and how power operates in and through them. A critical discourse analysis of responsibilities flowing within Indigenous narratives of tourism would be especially interesting as a complement or challenge to findings conveyed in this paper. Unless we resign responsible tourism to the next neocolonial enterprise, future research must also continue to articulate new ways of *doing* and *speaking about* responsibility that engage, respect, and contribute to the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and other historically marginalized groups.

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