FROM HOSPITALITY TO HOSTILITY: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE TOURIST-HOST RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 virus took the world by storm. It required society to stand still and left governments with the difficult task of implementing adequate measures, which also had many implications in the field of tourism. Feelings of uncertainty and fear have prevailed, creating uncomfortable situations between tourists and locals and their relation may even resemble temporary 'alienation'. Hitherto, little is known about the exact effects of the presence of this virus on the tourist experience. Therefore, this thesis dedicates itself to find an answer to "How and in what ways has the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Western tourist experience, the destination image and the tourist-host relationship in destinations in Southeast Asia". In order to answer this question, this thesis performed a qualitative research with an ethnographic approach in the form of in-depth interviews with ten participants who practiced international travel to Southeast Asian countries at the time of the Coronavirus outbreak. The results of this thesis demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak unleashed xenophobic behaviour of the local communities towards the Western tourists, which was caused by several factors, such as media portrayal, information scarcity and (often ungrounded) assumptions. In turn, the local communities acted out of fear, panic, and self-protection, leading to uncomfortable tourism encounters in which the Western tourist had been Othered, and temporarily took the position of the Reversed Other. Strikingly, the results of this thesis show that the Western tourists interviewed were able to put it all into perspective, by realising and expecting it was a momentary experience driven by steering emotions as panic, anxiety, and protection during a time of crisis. Therefore, interestingly enough, neither the tourist–host relationship nor the destination image seemed to be negatively affected in the long-term.

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1. Introduction

Without a doubt, one of the most impactful events the world has faced in the twenty-first century, which will undoubtedly be written about in future history books, is the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of 2020, this virus took the world by storm and required society to stand still and left governments with a difficult task to implement adequate measures. These measures impacted social life in a way that deviated from the 'normal' standard. Furthermore, businesses and organisations too struggled due to the measures that were implemented which brought economic growth to a standstill in many sectors, like the tourism industry (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Answers to questions regarding the origin of the Coronavirus, as well as its development, composition, mutation, treatment and eradication, has not been uncovered yet, and to this day a lot of questions are still unanswered (Davidson, 2021). This ignorance has resulted in the rise of questions revolving around the origin and spreading of the virus, such as: How did this virus manage to have a global reach as it has spread across all continents and who is responsible for this? A common answer is found in the link between globalisation and tourism. International tourism and tourists are associated with the spreading of the Coronavirus outside of China, especially Western tourists, as they are stereotypically assumed to actively participate in international travel (Winter, 2007). Especially host countries and the communities who receive Western tourists consider this answer to be accurate (Purohit and Mukherjee, 2020). The blaming of Western tourists is rooted in the thought that through the presence of Western tourists, the Coronavirus has been given the opportunity to manifest itself in the host country, affecting and infecting the host communities as well (Purohit and Mukherjee, 2020). Moreover, the fact that especially Western tourists are considered to carry the Coronavirus is because of the rapid spread of the disease to the Western world, i.e. North America and European countries, which have rapidly become the second epicentre as the number of reported cases and deaths exceeded China's (Linka et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Countries all over the world developed different strategies to control the virus. It should be noted that African and especially Asian countries had developed seemingly more effective strategies in comparison to Western countries, as African and Asian countries have more experience with infectious viruses that occurred in their countries over the last decades (Barnard, 2020; Bolourian & Mojtahedi, 2021). The experience provided these countries with an enhanced understanding of infectious viruses and this knowledge was translated into protocols (Nuki et al., 2020; Barnard, 2020).

This thesis does not consider it relevant to answer the question of who is responsible for the spreading of COVID-19 (Yeh, 2020). Nevertheless, the search for the responsibility for the spreading of the virus has caused certain tourism-related situations that are worth exploring and examining, for example, the uncomfortable encounters driven by xenophobic sentiments between the tourists still travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic and the locals. In particular, the strain it has had on their relationship known in tourist studies as the tourist-host relationship (Sharpley, 2018). This thesis will focus on the tourist-host relationship between Western tourists and host communities in Southeast Asian countries, as these are often chosen as travel destinations by Western tourists and therefore rely considerably on the international tourism sector (Dolezal et al., 2020; Mandal & Vong, 2016). In this thesis, I examine how Western tourist experiences have been affected in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, how the local community has contributed to an affected tourist experience, what kind of implications this may have on the tourist-host relationship and how this reflects on the destination image for tourists. In this light, this thesis poses the following research question: How and in what ways has the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Western tourist experience, the destination image and the tourist-host relationship in destinations in Southeast Asia?

In terms of social relevance, this research is based on an epidemic that is still ongoing and that continues to disrupt the daily routines of people all over the globe. Due to the ongoing development of the COVID-19 pandemic, grounded and reliable research is lacking. Gaining insights into COVID-19 and its consequences in the tourism field would not only be relevant on a social level, but also on an academic level. The world and the field of tourism are no strangers to disasters or crises. War, terrorism, natural disasters, economic crises, but also pandemics, have proven to be serious threats to the tourism industry and previous academic research can provide a theoretical foundation for a better understanding of the consequences in people's mobility during and after the Coronavirus pandemic. Unfortunately, COVID-19 appears to be different from other disasters as it has caused a certain paradigm shift in the field of tourism which existing theory and research may not be able to fully explain (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The paradigm shift Zenker and Kock (2020) refer to entails a transfer from the obvious, crisis-induced research paradigm to a paradigm that is focussed on amended theoretical explanations of certain tourism concepts that have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Change in the destination image, change in the tourist behaviour, change in the resident behaviour, change in the tourism industry in general and possible long-term effects, are areas in tourist studies that require revision in their theoretical explanation as

the COVID-19 crises have impacted them. As a consequence, research gaps are left to be filled along the lines of impact on and change in tourist behaviour in times of crises, as well as the local/resident behaviour. Possible changes in the behaviour of both, or any of the groups would also mean that there exists a possibility that the nature of their relationship, the tourist-host relationship, may have changed as well. In case the tourist-host relationship is altered negatively, there is a high likelihood of a chain effect whereby the tourist experience and the destination image of the country visited also suffer. This, in turn, may have consequences for future tourist consumption and the overall tourism industry of the particular destination. This thesis will serve as a response to the call for tourism research on the COVID-19 pandemic that not only investigates the self-evident in a merely descriptive way, but also dedicate itself to investigate "deeper underlying relationships" (Zenker & Kock, 2020, p. 1). In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic is a very relevant, still underexplored and original topic to research. The combination with the tourist-experience, the destination image, and the tourist-host relationship is also considered.

In order to answer the aforementioned research question, this thesis first developed a theoretical framework in which relevant research is addressed on tourism and crises, tourism and the digital age, the tourist-host relationship, the tourism encounter, the relation of the 'Other' to xenophobia and similar empirical research. The theoretical framework led me to determine that qualitative research, in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews, is the most adequate method for investigating and uncovering the tourist experience related to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the relationship to local residents. The specifics of the qualitative research conducted are discussed in the methodology section. Furthermore, the methodology section is followed by a section that outlines the findings, which is elaborated upon in the discussion and conclusion section in which the data is processed and analysed against the theoretical framework, providing insights into the COVID-19 impact on the tourist experience, the tourist-host relationship and the destination image from the perspective of Western tourists on Southeast Asian countries. This final section also provides a conclusion in which the research question is answered.

2. Theoretical review

To answer the research question, *How and in what ways has the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Western tourist experience, the destination image and the tourist-host relationship in destinations in Southeast Asia?*, several concepts have been borrowed from tourism literature to construct a theoretical framework. First, as the COVID-19 pandemic is considered a crisis, this theoretical review will discuss the extensive relation between tourism and crises in order to understand how a crisis, or more specifically a pandemic, can influence the tourism sector. Second, a somewhat newer relation to tourism will be explored, which entails postmodernism and particularly the use of digital means in tourism. As will be explained, the influence of misinformation provided by the digital network has played a significant role in the formation of certain prejudices against Western tourists by Southeast Asian locals with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, previous research on the tourist-host relationship will be examined in order to understand whether and how tourists and locals interact. In relation to this, research on the tourism encounter will be discussed in the fourth section which builds further on the tourist-host relationship and creates an even deeper understanding of the social aspect of tourism. In addition, this concept also functions as a bridge that links the tourist-host relationship to the Other. Furthermore, this theoretical framework will review academic research on the Other and its development towards releasing the locals' feeling of xenophobia towards Western tourists in Southeast Asia. Finally, a similar empirical research will be discussed and explored in terms of similarities and differences.

2.1 Tourism in critical times: disasters and crises

We live in a world that is increasingly prone to disasters and crises (Faulkner, 2001). This proneness has consequences in many sectors and fields, emphasising the vulnerability of our world to external disturbances, whether natural or man-made. These external disturbances can take many forms, such as economic crises, environmental crises, natural disasters, health crises (i.e. epidemics and pandemics), and so on. Many academics recognise that, in times of crises, one of the most impacted industries is the tourism one and, as a result, vulnerability increases for all stakeholders involved (Aliperti et al., 2019; Faulkner, 2001; Yeh, 2020). After a disaster or crisis takes place, a chain reaction might follow in nearby tourist locations, such as lower tourism demand, which in turn implies lower tourism generated income and the

possibility of economic decline (Yeh, 2020). The economies of many Southeast Asian countries thrive on tourism-generated income and are therefore highly dependent on the tourism industry. Furthermore, a crisis or disaster can also negatively impact the destination image of a tourist destination, which may lead to a reduced number of (international) tourist visits (Avraham, 2015; Li et al., 2018). Not only the destination may suffer negatively from the consequences of crises, but tourists themselves can also develop tourophobia whereby the tourist behaviour is affected in terms of fear and anxiety (Çakar, 2020). The tourist behaviour is being steered by fear for the occurrence of a disaster or crisis, which results in reluctance of visiting specific destinations and in extreme cases, reluctance of travelling in general. Disasters and crises are thus mostly seen as undesirable in the field of tourism.

Health related crises, such as epidemics and pandemics, are particularly important events that greatly affect the tourism industry (Yeh, 2020). Not only does the tourism industry suffer from epidemics and pandemics, but it is also often marked as the vector for disease dissemination due to globalisation (Mason et al., 2005; Ornell et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2001). The ever-increasing number of international travellers crossing borders has been a facilitator to disease spreading (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2001). Many pandemics the tourism industry has faced in the past have been subject of research, like Ebola (Novelli et al., 2018), Influenza (Page et al., 2006), and SARS (Mason et al., 2005; McKercher & Chon, 2004; Zeng et al., 2005). While all diseases had a major impact on the tourism industry at the time of the outbreak, the long-term pattern of growth of the tourism industry has returned quite rapidly after each case (Zeng et al., 2005).

The general assumption is that disasters and crises are undesired as these often cause the tourism industry to (temporarily) collapse. However, it should be noted that this assumption can be criticised. In certain cases, the tourism industry creates niche types of tourism, which flourishes from the occurrence of a tragedy or disaster. These cases are often subject to being destinations of *dark tourism*, which is can be understood as "the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites." (Foley & Lennon, 1996, p. 198). Tourists that partake in this type of tourism are often thought to be attracted to sites that can induce anxiety and fear due to a certain fascination that they experience with them. There exist variations in the terminology of dark tourism which in the academic debate has similar labels such as Seaton's (1996) *thanatourism* or Rojek's (1993) *black spots*. In all theoretical concepts, tourists are interested in destinations associated with disasters, crises or tragedies because of a fascination or a desire to know more in regards to death and the devastating effects it has caused at the time. It

can be argued that the COVID-19 pandemic belongs to the category of disasters, crises and tragedies as many of those infected have suffered in health from the effects of the virus and for some the virus has even resulted in death. The research of Ariawan and Ahmat (2020) has already hypothesised that the proclaimed location of origin of the Coronavirus, the wet market of Wuhan in China, will turn into a tourist attraction for dark tourism in the post-pandemic period.

In sum, crises and disasters and their relation with tourism can be considered to be two-fold. On the one hand, a crisis can harm tourism at different levels (i.e. economically or socially). On the other hand, such tragic event may also develop into a tourist attraction or site which can be labelled as dark tourism and is therefore appealing to tourists interested in this niche.

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis that has occurred in a disaster and crisis-prone world as Faulkner (2001) argued. Moreover, the world and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic can also be interpreted from another perspective: a world that thrives on information sharing through digitisation. The existing network of information channels that have been established by technological means has an immense outreach that has a role in the dissemination of information and misinformation with regard to COVID-19, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

2.2 Tourism in digital times: social media and the sharing of (mis-)information

Today's world and tourism industry patterns have developed and evolved over time. Technological advancement in digitisation has reached a point where it is omnipresent in our everyday lives, and therefore also heavily present in our tourism practices. The expansion of the Internet and the development of information-sharing platforms as social media have become indispensable sources for travel information (Jansson, 2018). Smartphones and mobile applications allow tourists (typically Western consumers) to easily access online information that supports them before, during and after their travels in terms of navigation, booking process, advice from other tourists, creation of visual content, etc. The opportunities of the digital landscape are seemingly endless and its exploration continues to this day.

Undoubtedly, the digitisation of tourism practices has become a normalised social condition for many tourists. Nevertheless, some scholars also acknowledge the downside of these contemporary tourism practices (Feifer, 1985; Jansson, 2018). Critics have argued that we have entered a stage where tourism has transformed into 'post-tourism' (Feifer, 1985), in

which tourists are aware that mass tourism is to an extent staged, and therefore tourists "deliberately performed tourism according to media imageries rather than searching for authentic places" (Jansson, 2018, p. 101). In post-tourism, the boundaries of tourism are being challenged and re-negotiated with the help of digital advancements. The preference of media imageries over authentic places actively demonstrates how influential digitisation is on tourist practices, but also within the academic debate, as it contradicts one of tourist studies' more prominent concepts: authenticity. In the past decades, the search for authenticity was argued to be one of the main motivators for tourists to travel, as it was believed that all tourists embody a quest for authenticity (MacCannell, 1973). However, more recently the concept was criticised by scholars such as Urry (2003) who contradicted this idea, as he considered authenticity to be too simplistic a concept to explain contemporary tourism. This thought is justified, as contemporary tourism turned out to be more complex due to the rise of technological developments, and the effects of globalisation, which include increased mobility.

Tourists do not only adhere to the media imageries in terms of travelling, but contribute to the digital platforms as well, becoming to an increasing extent (co-)creators of content such as online texts, reviews, blogs, recommendations, visuals, and so on. In contemporary times, tourists can therefore contribute to the cultural (re)coding of destinations, and tourism in general (Jansson, 2018). Online content is often accessible and open for all, as it is distributed across digital platforms. Jenkins et al. (2013) coined the term 'spreadable media', a form of media content whereby tourists are invited to partake in the process of circulation. Within this process, content can be re-moulded or re-contextualised as the content is accessible to online participants (Jansson, 2020).

The outreach of 'spreadable media', and especially the process of re-moulding or re-contextualising content, has in some cases resulted in undesired consequences, such as sensation writings, misinformation, false news, and information pollution (Banerjee & Rao, 2020; Ornell et al., 2020). Crises and the media have a symbiotic relationship, which allows a crisis situation like a pandemic, to be perceived as more intense or fearful in media coverage than it is in reality. In other words, the combination of a pandemic and media has the potential to generate negative media coverage (Yu et al., 2020) as it can "intensify racism, fear, and stigma and produce unconstructive and threatening behaviour" (Barua et al., 2020, p. 2). To illustrate this, for example, it is sufficient to look at media reports on the 2003 SARS virus, which often took a sensationalist and alarmist tone, influencing and steering the public opinion in a certain direction (Mason et al., 2005). This is in line with the argument of

McKercher and Chon (2004) about over-reaction to the SARS disease and the fuelling of fear to the people's minds.

Many of the interviewees in the research of this thesis have mentioned the influence of misinformation and sensationalist writing in the media on the behaviour of the local residents at the time of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This argument is also supported by academics and professionals as many declare that contemporary society faces an epidemic within a pandemic: an 'infodemic' or 'misinfodemic' (Barua et al., 2020; Banerjee & Rao, 2020; Park et al., 2020; Siddiqui et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). To be more precise, it is referred to as the epidemic of (mis-)information. It appears there is a tendency of fake and exaggerating news about the Coronavirus circling around in social media. Moreover, they acknowledge that "communication on social media might cause misleading information, and more accurate information should be acquired from official sources." (Yu et al., 2020, p. 4). The presence of misinformation has altered the behaviour of the locals towards certain tourists. Moreover, racial discrimination had been expressed on the digital forums which victimised 'Asian looking' tourists as they were associated with the virus (Yu et al., 2020). However, their research covered a limited period of data collection that does not include data at the time of the global COVID-19 outbreak. At exactly that time, another group of tourists became victimised in the online social media realm of certain Southeast Asian countries which was also reflected in the local's behaviour (McPherson & Birsel, 2020). As COVID-19 marked Europe as the next epicentre in 2020, Western tourists who were visiting Southeast Asia at the time also became subject to racial discrimination.

This development of instances of victimisation of Western tourists in Southeast Asian destinations shows that the interaction and relationship between these tourists and the local community possibly also have undergone alteration. The theoretical insights on the tourist-host relationship will be discussed in the next subsection.

2.3 The tourist-host relationship

Tourism can be considered a process of cultural brokerage that introduces two or more different cultural groups that have the opportunity to interact and engage with each other (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016). This interaction establishes a link between the internal community, which are the locals, and the external community or communities, represented by tourists. The difference between the two is strongly highlighted by Valene Smith, who has marked the beginnings of the anthropology of tourism with her work *Hosts and Guests* (1978). The

dichotomy of 'hosts' and 'guests' already indicates that the two parties are different, and their social relations can also vary depending on various determinants. The social relation is defined in tourist studies as the tourist-host relationship (but academics also keep using the periphrasis 'guest-host relationship'). The relationship is involuntarily made, as the interaction of the two groups is almost inevitable, whether contact is intended or not (Sharpley, 2018). The nature of this relationship can vary in degree of desirability as Smith (1978) states that "the effects of tourism can be assessed along the continuum from a highly positive relationship that benefits all, to a highly disruptive, negative interaction fraught with conflict." (p. 4). In line with this statement, the tourist-host relationship has been regarded by some scholars as being characterised by negative, post-colonial connotations, such as social inequality, reciprocal stereotyping, misunderstanding, and one-sided exploitation (MacCannell, 1992; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Pearce, 2013; Said, 1978; Sutton, 1967). Other scholars are convinced the tourist-host relationship typifies mutual understanding and empowerment (Dolezal, 2015; Scheyvens, 2002).

This critical perception has led to the promotion of other, more considerate types of tourism such as sustainable tourism and volunteer tourism (Hammersley, 2014; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007), which have been popularised next to conventional mass tourism. These types of tourism are believed to be more human-oriented as these demonstrate consideration for the host communities. Critics, however, question whether these types of tourism benefit the host community and argue that tourists often partake in these types of tourism for self-centred reasons (intentionally or subconsciously) while the power structure that benefits the tourists at the expense of the hosts remains intact (Conran, 2011). In order to overcome this power imbalance between guests and hosts, scholars have opted for more equality in their relationship. An example of this is the integration of deference in tourism practices in which appreciation and acknowledgement of both actors towards each other is the objective that would naturally lead to more harmony (Goffman, 1956; McKenna; 2016). A harmonious tourist-host relationship is considered to be desirable in tourist studies as both parties can gain economically and socially from having a positive bond with the 'Other' (Sharpley, 2018). Furthermore, harmonious tourist-host relationships are beneficial for the overall tourism development of the destination and industry (Fan et al., 2020; Sharpley, 2018; Zhang et al., 2006). Especially a positive attitude from the local community towards tourists that visit their land is considered essential to tourism development. 'Happy hosts' (Snaith & Haley, 1999) can create an amicable environment for tourists and tourist organisations as this relies on the goodwill of the local community. As a consequence, tourism is practised in a successful and

sustainable manner (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). In practice, this desired outcome may be interrupted by numerous variables which can change the nature of the relationship.

In order to understand the complex nature of the tourist-host relationship, social exchange theory has been proposed by Ap (1992) as a useful framework. The essence of the theory regards the transactions that take place in social occurrences (Sharpley, 2018). In tourist studies, hosts are considered to be important players who can determine and influence the development of tourism in their surroundings (Ap, 1992). When the theory is applied to tourism, it suggests that residents will partake in social exchange with tourists if they perceive that the benefits from this exchange are valuable and will outweigh its costs. Theoretically speaking, in such circumstances, the residents can be labelled as 'happy hosts' who perceive tourism as (potentially) valuable and, as a consequence, will be supportive of development efforts in the tourism sector (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). The social exchange theory assumes that the greater the perceived benefits, the more positive and receptive hosts will be towards tourists and tourism. Conversely, when the costs are outweighing the benefits, the exact opposite will occur in which the hosts will adopt an increasingly negative attitude towards tourists, which, as noted above, is highly undesirable for tourism development (Sharpley, 2018). Ap (1992) acknowledges that hosts can also show hostile behaviour towards tourists and the tourism industry. The theory is also applicable to the perspectives of the tourists, as a preponderate ratio of the benefits can contribute to a positive tourist experience. In turn, when costs are outweighing the benefits, a negative impact on the tourist experience will occur such as occasions in which the tourist will be taken advantage of by the hosts (Ap, 1992).

The social exchange theory assumes that rational behaviour will lead to one of the outcomes mentioned above. However, Sharpley (2018) is of the opinion that this is a rather simplistic approach as individuals do not always act rationally. Besides, sociological, cultural, economic and environmental factors can be of influence to the social exchange and the tourist-host relationship which can cause the relationship to turn drastically (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). For example, cultural distance is considered to be a highly influential variable on the nature of the tourist-host relationship (Sharpley, 2018). Cultural distance within tourist studies can be understood as the extent to which the culture of the tourists' region of origin differs from the culture of the host region (Crotts, 2004). Cultural distance is particularly apparent between individuals from developed countries and individuals from developing countries (Samovar & Porter, 2000). In other words, it can be considered that North-European tourists visiting developing countries in Southeast Asia and meeting their hosts will likely shift towards the direction of an unequal tourist-host relationship due to cultural, social and

economic distance. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that the tourist-host relationship is perceived negatively by the hosts or the tourists (Reisinger & Turner, 1998). Besides cultural distance, a variety of other elements such as type of tourism, maturity as a tourism destination, state of the local economy, local cultural values and more, can also direct and influence the tourist-host relationship negatively or positively (Sharpley, 2018; Smith, 1978; Sutton, 1967).

The tourist-host relationship is constructed from the tourism encounter, as the interaction between the local residents and the tourists forms the base of the relationship. In this light, the next section will discuss the tourism encounter with a special focus on the encounter between Western tourists and the Southeast Asian hosts.

2.4 Tourism encounter

One of tourist studies' core concepts is that of *the tourist gaze* of John Urry (1990). The tourist gaze emphasises the visual nature of tourism, or, in other words, how tourists see and consume views that are presented by the tourism industry. As the presence of the host is also part of the tourist experience, it is naturally assumed that tourists therefore also gaze upon the residents. The gaze initiates the tourism encounter as "gazes organise the encounters of visitors with the 'other', providing some sense of competence, pleasure and structure to those experiences" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 14). However, a social encounter requires at least two actors. Neglecting the agency of the hosts within the tourist gaze has led to criticism within tourism research for not explaining the phenomenon accurately (see Maoz, 2006). As a response, the concept of 'mutual gaze' had been developed which refutes the idea that tourists are the only actors who gaze (Maoz, 2006). Instead, the mutual gaze acknowledges that the gaze can also be reciprocated and transmitted back by the hosts.

Similar to the mutual gaze, the tourism encounter is a two-way street in which both the tourists and the locals participate. It is the phenomenon in which the two parties meet and interact. Still, it should be noted that whereas tourists are on holiday immersing themselves temporarily in another environment, hosts remain in their habitat and continuing their 'normal' existence. The encounter, therefore, takes place within distinct circumstances for both parties (Turner, 2003). This difference enabled Sutton (1967) to create a fivefold list of characteristics of the tourism encounter: (1) the awareness of both parties that the encounter is most likely temporary; (2) the encounter revolves around the orientation to immediate gratification; (3) the tourism encounter tends to be unbalanced; (4) the encounter allows for

new experiences, and (5) the nature of the encounter rests on cultural values. While these characteristics had been developed as an attempt to analyse the structure of the tourism encounter, it should be recognised that innumerable configurations of tourism encounters exist and that therefore these characteristics can only cover a partial fragment of this (Sharpley, 2018). However, this list does provide some useful general observations on the nature of the tourism encounters.

Within the academic debate of tourist studies, it is often argued that the tourism industry, and thus also the tourism encounter and tourist-host relationship, can be seen as a new form of imperialism (Hollinshead, 2004; Nash, 1989; Sharpley, 2018). As stated previously, cultural distance between individuals from a developed country and a developing country will most likely lead to an unbalanced relationship and encounter (Crotts, 2004; Sharpley, 2018). Tourists from the Western world have dominated the tourism industry for a long time, especially in terms of the number of tourist arrivals in Southeast Asia (Sharpley, 2018). More recently, other big economies like China and India have emerged, resulting in the rise of Asian tourism as the development of stronger economies allowed for more outbound tourism (Winter, 2007). Despite this development, Southeast Asian countries are still predominantly designed to serve the desires and needs of Western tourists given their long-standing domination in the tourism industry as "The locals tend to mirror what the tourists want, and the 'culture' they play out is that of the Western imaginary." (Maoz, 2006, p. 225). An example of this argument can be found in the Indian concept of *Atithi Devo Bhava* which is translated as 'Guest is God' in Sanskrit (Kour, Jasrotia & Gupta, 2020). The comparison of the tourist as a God indicates that Indian locals consider the tourists as superior, and themselves to some extent as inferior. The concept is marketed in the tourism industry to reassure tourists that they will be treated hospitably (Bhatt, 2019). This is a good example of an unequal tourist-host relationship and tourism encounter. Other scholars such as Dolezal (2015) contradict this power imbalance and argue that the former theory does not apply to contemporary times as the tourism encounter "is a space that the tourist and the community co-construct, resulting in mutually fruitful relationships" (p. 182). Regardless of what the power structure of the tourism encounter is, fact is that the recent COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the tourism encounter drastically between Western tourists and Southeast Asian hosts.

Hitherto, the tourism encounter has so far been discussed in relatively stable circumstances and under the assumption that these would not significantly change. However, in times of crises such as during this still on-going pandemic, the social conditions have not

been 'stable'. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration that the tourism encounters took place under aggravating and extra-ordinary conditions. In specific cases, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had unleashed uncomfortable encounters between the tourists and hosts (Lehto et al., 2020). Such encounters occurred in many parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. The combination of the rise of Asian tourism in Southeast Asia, consisting largely of Chinese tourists, and China identified as the first epicentre and place of origin of the Coronavirus, resulted in a series of xenophobic encounters between the Asian hosts and the Chinese tourists (Roberto et al., 2020). In addition, Western tourists too became subject to prejudiced violations as Europe became the next epicentre of the virus. At the time of the virus' outbreak, the Health Minister of Thailand expressed concern about the presence of Western tourists in Thailand by making discriminatory remarks, such as calling Western tourists 'dirty' and describing them as the 'carriers' and more importantly, 'spreaders' of the Coronavirus (Khaosod, 2020). Furthermore, the Health Minister stated that interaction with Western tourists should be done with more caution than with Asian tourists (Khaosod, 2020). Not only did the tourism encounter started to deviate from the pre-COVID-19 standard in Thailand, but part of the local communities of countries of the same continent also reacted in a similar way to Western tourists. For example, the attitude of some Indian hosts towards Western tourists was described as hostile, as Indians treated them with rudeness and discrimination (Purohit & Mukherjee, 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the negation of the aforementioned *Atithi Devo Bhava* as many encounters between the Indian locals and the Western tourists became quite uncomfortable. To an extent, the hospitality of the local community turned into hostility.

Within the tourist-host relationship and tourism encounters, there is always the 'Other'. The presence of the other party marks a distinction that has been especially visible during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to tourists and hosts. As a consequence, part of the local population of Southeast Asian destinations had developed xenophobic sentiments towards Western tourists, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

2.5 Xenophobic sentiments towards the reversed Other

The tourism encounter has long been studied from a binary perspective in which inequality between the two parties has been the main focus (Dolezal, 2015). Said's *Orientalism* (1978) indicates a significant disparity in colonial and post-colonial power structures that the West holds over Oriental populations. It is therefore not surprising that the former is positioned as

superior and the latter as inferior, supporting the previously mentioned argument of Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) about the way Indian locals perceive Western tourists, which mimics the historical relationship between colonisers and colonised. According to Said (1978), not only the Oriental populations enforced this hegemony by perceiving it this way, Europeans have allowed it to be established by identifying themselves as 'us' Europeans against 'those' non-Europeans. This idea has perniciously been maintained within tourist studies into what is formally known as the 'Self' versus the 'Other' (Seaton, 2009). At its core, the Other is a recognition of diversity (Said, 1978), and it is understood as 'people not like us' from the perspective of the Self (Seaton, 2009, p. 76). Moreover, it is assumed that the Self dominates the Other (Said, 1978), and that the West has to assist the 'inferior' Orient (Rahman, 2014). Within tourist studies, the Self is stereotypically considered to refer to the tourists who see communities, societies and groups other than their own as the Other (Munt, 1994). It is argued that for Western tourists, the Other are those originating from the Orient, which is an area stereotyped as mysterious, exotic, authentic and pristine (Caton & Santos, 2009), but also whose people are seen as passive, underdeveloped and immature (Gillespie, 2007).

As stated above, the tourism encounter is argued to be initiated by the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990). When applied to Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Western tourists are assumed to gaze upon the Southeast Asian locals (i.e. the Other). However, the mutual gaze (Maoz, 2006) already refuted the idea of locals being passive in this regard. The locals too can return their gaze on tourists. Similarly, the Coronavirus pandemic outbreak in Southeast Asian destinations showed that the role of the Other could also be reversed: when undertaking international tourism goes from being a desired practice to a potentially lethal endeavour, Western tourists become the Other, while the Self is portrayed by the Southeast Asian hosts. This can be understood looking at the process of othering, which makes social division visible as the Self depicts the Other what the Self is not, and what the Self does not want to be (Gillespie, 2007). Paradoxically, a position that was heretofore considered to be that of the 'inferior' had now been filled by the former 'superior'. The reversal of roles maintained an unbalanced tourist-host relationship and unequal tourism encounter, yet with the traditional roles swapped. Western tourists became the Other in the perspective of the hosts as Western tourists were assumed to be the 'carriers' and 'spreaders' of the COVID-19 virus, which resulted in alien-like treatment from the local residents (Kour, Jasrotia & Gupta, 2020). In specific cases in Southeast Asia, the alien-like treatment at times even mutated into xenophobia (Banerjee et al., 2020).

The term xenophobia can be dissected into two parts: *xeno,* which is the definition is 'foreign' or 'stranger' and *phobia*, a well-known medical term often used in psychology that is meant 'fear' (Parrinello, 2016). The two words together indicate that xenophobia is associated with the fear of something or someone foreign. In academic terms, xenophobia is defined in similar lines as "the denigration of individuals or groups based on perceived differences" (Hjerm, 1998, p. 335). To be more specific, xenophobia is based on clear differences between the actors involved. In addition, these obvious differences trigger negative sentiments for (at least) one of the actors. Obvious differences are often reflected in visual representation, like ethnic differences as skin colour (Kock et al., 2019; Parrinello, 2016). Through the ethnic differences, the Other or the non-national is easily recognised. Hence, xenophobia can be understood as the anxiety of foreigners (Olukole et al., 2008), which is the definition used in this thesis.

Within the field of tourism, the interaction between the internal and external groups is almost unavoidable and therefore an intrinsic part of tourism, as mentioned above (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Sharpley, 2018). Tourism encounters that generate negative sentiments may allow xenophobia to manifest itself in the relation between the tourist and the local. It goes without saying that this is a highly undesirable result as xenophobia may lead to prejudice, social exclusion, discrimination and even verbal or physical violation of a particular individual or cultural group, which can have huge implications in the field of tourism when this occurs (Kock et al., 2019). Negative impact on the destinations' economy, its destination image, its tourism development, are all examples of consequences that may occur when xenophobia towards tourists is present. Therefore, xenophobia is regarded as an impediment to international tourism (Olukole et al., 2008).

Although xenophobia can take many forms depending on the circumstances of the encounter, in the case of pandemic outbreaks such as Ebola (Kim et al., 2016; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2016) and COVID-19 (Kock et al., 2020), xenophobia served the function of virus avoidance. It was assumed that non-nationals could carry the virus and bring it into contact with nationals who had no build-up immunity against this virus (Faulkner et al., 2004). The perceived vulnerability and risk perception of the local inhabitants enabled the development of negative attitudes towards foreigners, and thus, towards Western tourists (Kock et al., 2020). Xenophobia is in this regard a response to an accumulation of fear: fear of a virus that has heretofore not been encountered in the destination, fear that the travelling Western tourist carries the virus into the local region, and fear that the Western tourist infects the local community.

2.6 Results from previous empirical research

One research I want to give special attention to in this thesis is the research of Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) that provides an empirical investigation on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourist-host relationship in India specifically, based on a sample of 26 tourists. Their research shares similarities with this thesis in terms of examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist-host relationship and destination image in India, which is one of the Southeast Asian countries that this thesis focuses on. Their findings suggest that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to tourists' negative perceptions of the destination image of India and its local community due to undesired treatment towards tourists driven by panic, mistrust and irresponsible behaviour. As a consequence, their results indicate that the tourist-host relationship between the Indian locals and the international tourists have been negatively affected in the long run as well.

Whereas Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) focus on India and its local community, this thesis has a wider spatial scope and focuses on Southeast Asian destinations. Moreover, they have not defined the ethnic nature of their data sample, while this thesis investigates the tourist-host relationship in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of the Western tourist.

In the analysis section, I will go into more detail on how this thesis and the research of Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) differs, based on own conducted findings of empirical research of which the methodology will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research approach

In order to accurately answer the research question, this thesis proposes an ethnographic approach in the form of interviews. The aim of this thesis is inherently qualitative, as it has the objective to contribute to academic literature in a way that is not purely descriptive, but that investigates, as previously mentioned, deeper underlying relations (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The interviews are in-depth and semi-structured, which allows flexible engagement with the interviewees. The motivation for the chosen method of qualitative research in the form of interviews is because this method would best uncover the participants' underlying experiences, motivations, thoughts, sentiments and understandings (Bryman, 2012) with regard to their visit to Southeast Asian destinations during the period of the Coronavirus outbreak in 2020. As the thesis is primarily focused on tourist perceptions, interview research would work best as "the qualitative research attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations." (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). Interviews allow the respondents to narrate freely their thoughts and experiences, and with that, their interpretations on the matter (Bryman, 2012). As the topic of this research can be considered as a heavy subject of discourse, it was important that the research adhered to ethical considerations so that the participants felt comfortable enough to speak freely during the interview without fear of judgement (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2018).

More specifically, semi-structured interviews had been selected as the approach for conducting interviews due to its flexible nature and possibility for thorough exploration. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher was at liberty to deviate from the interview guide for the benefit of the research (Bryman, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide is based on the theoretical framework of this thesis. Concepts and theories such as the tourist experience, the destination image and the tourist-host relationship had been discussed during the interviews. Furthermore, topics such as discrimination and xenophobia were also incorporated in several interview questions. To illustrate, a question could have been asked whether the participant felt discriminated by the locals at the time, and in what way. The purpose of the interview guide was to structure the interviews as a storyline: the participants had been asked questions in chronological order of their visit to the destination. In this way, the interviews were interactive and reminiscing for the participant as

they could narrate their travel experience and activate the process of phenomenology that creates meaning-making (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.2 Data collection

In the course of five months between December 2020 and April 2021, interviews have been conducted with a total of ten participants who formally constitute the unit of analysis. All interviewees are Western nationals with either a Dutch or Belgian nationality, who have practised international travel to a Southeast Asian destination during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and who have experienced uncomfortable encounters with the hosts at that time. Thus, the criteria are very specific and only a selective group of tourists could be interviewed. The selection of interview participants is therefore based on purposeful sampling, as the tourists are to be selected in line with the research on the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). One of the strategies of purposeful sampling is to purposively select a homogeneous subgroup and investigate them in depth (Patton, 2002). The objective is to limit variation (Palinkas et al., 2015). This thesis focuses only on Western tourists who have had uncomfortable tourist experiences and encounters with the local community in Southeast Asian destinations, giving the research a focussed scope. The reason why I chose to investigate those with uncomfortable experiences and encounters only is because it is relevant to research how the tourist-host relationship phenomenon can be affected in a specific, negative situation; the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Homogeneous sampling offers information-rich cases as it concentrates on people with particular characteristics. It is believed that these people will be better able to assist with the concerning research (Etikan et al., 2016). Although the scope of this research is one-sided, it offers great insights into the understanding of how theoretical phenomena such as the tourist experience, tourist-host relationship and destination image could be impacted and influenced from a unique tourist perspective.

To avoid possible gender bias, I aimed at finding an equal number of male and female respondents. The total of 10 interviewees consists of 3 men and 7 women of all ages. While this balance in gender is not too far off, the majority of the interviewees are women. It should be noted that the sample is not balanced or big enough to represent all Western tourists (Bryman, 2012). The participants were found as I posted a message in the private Facebook group 'WeAreTravellers.nl – Backpackers Groep (NL&BE)' with the call for tourists that have experienced uncomfortable encounters with locals during their visit to Southeast Asia

amid the Coronavirus outbreak in March, 2020. This same strategy was used in other Dutch and Belgian travel Facebook groups as well, such as 'Filipijnen NL', 'Thailand, Laos, Cambodja, Myanmar en Vietnam Reisgroep', 'Reizen in India | Wereldwijzer Reisforums', 'Backpackers NL' and my own personal Facebook page. All Facebook groups are private groups, therefore I had to become an online member to gain access. The number of members in the Facebook groups varied, ranging from around 500 to 13.000 online members. As a consequence, the outreach of the Facebook groups is quite large and therefore enough respondents answered the call posted by me. The interviewees have travelled to one of the following Southeast Asian destinations: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Vietnam. Two interviewees had been staying in the particular destination for a long period, from November 2019 and February 2020 to March 2020 respectively. All other respondents arrived and departed in the timeframe of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which happened largely over the course of March.

All interviews have been conducted in Dutch via online video calls (Zoom) at a time and date agreed with the participant. Due to the Coronavirus lockdown in the Netherlands at the time of research and writing, there was no opportunity or possibility to meet participants face to face. The use of online video calls is, however, quite in line with the topic of research. At the beginning of the interview, the participants have been asked for permission to record the interview for research purposes, so that it could be transcribed and analysed afterwards. The interviewees felt comfortable enough to speak freely and little incentive on my part was needed. All interviewees were offered anonymity of which one preferred to be represented under a pseudonym. The other 9 interviewees are represented by their authentic identity. The duration of the interviews varied from 40 to 55 minutes per interview. Furthermore, an interview guide with open-ended questions formed the basis of the interview process. However, since the interviews were semi-structured, deviating questions had also been posed as this could yield interesting insights that were not predicted beforehand (Bryman, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview topics were structurally based on the chronological order of the respondents' visit to their destination. To be more specific, the first topic entailed the *pre-Coronavirus outbreak (travel) experience* in which the respondents' motivation for travelling to the destination had been explored, the description of how the start of their visit to the destination in question was like, and what their expectations of the destination, its culture and its inhabitants were beforehand. The second topic covered, was the *amidst-Coronavirus outbreak (travel) experience.* In this topic, the essence of their tourist experience of that

particular visit had been discussed. Examples were given by the interviewees of uncomfortable situations with the local community and the overall COVID-19 situation. The final topic, *post-Coronavirus outbreak (travel) experience,* concerned their reflections on the matter and how they felt after the uncomfortable encounters. The reflections also encompassed possible changes in their view of and opinion about the country (destination image), the local community and how they valued their visit in general.

3.3 Method of Analysis

For the purpose of analysing the data, the recorded interviews have been converted from oral to written dialogues through manual transcription. The motivation to transcribe all interviews manually is because manual transcription can be considered the first step in the analysis as it creates a sense of familiarity with the data by listening to the recordings and writing it down (Bolden, 2015; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, the disadvantage is that it is a rather time-consuming process (Bryman, 2021; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews have all been conducted in the tourists' native language Dutch, which allowed them to express their thoughts and sentiments as authentic as possible without obstruction in the form of a language barrier. The quotations of the interviewees in the analysis section have been translated to English as accurate as possible.

After transcription, a thematic analysis was conducted with the aim of providing answers to the research question. According to Bryman (2012), coding is an important step that initiates the generation of theory. Therefore, the raw data underwent a process of coding that has broken down the data into smaller parts with specific labels attached to them (Bryman, 2012). Thematic analysis is a technique that reveals themes and patterns in the data with the use of collecting the codes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The objective of thematic analysis is "not simply to summarise the data content, but to identify, and interpret key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question" (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297) and is therefore considered to be appropriate for any exploratory research (Alhojailan, 2012). The themes that have been formed in the process, supported by their corresponding subthemes, are used to reflect on and interpret the data. Through themes, I can examine how the Western tourists interpret their social reality (Vaismoradi et al., 2016), or in other words, how they interpret their tourist experiences during their travel to Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak concerning the destination and the encounters with the local population.

Similar to the method of transcribing, the analysis was executed manually. The analysis followed the systematic process of the six phases outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006): familiarising yourself with the data (as mentioned above, through transcribing), generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and producing the report. The process of initial coding adhered to a hybrid approach of both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding elucidated theories and concepts derived from the theoretical review and was complemented with inductive coding, in which themes emerged from the content of the interviewees which were not included in my analytic preconceptions. Codes considered relevant had been labelled and categorised per topic. Soon, patterns emerged that needed refinement by eliminating codes that were considered not relevant for the research. Furthermore, the themes and subthemes found have been reviewed, defined, and documented. The analysis provided a range of themes and subthemes in this thesis, some of which were expected, but others unexpected.

In the following section, the rich data of the analysis will be presented in the form of overarching themes and subthemes, which forms the basis in answering how and in what ways the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has affected the Western tourist experience, the destination image and the tourist-host relationship in destinations in Southeast Asia.

4. Findings

As this research is about the Western tourist experience and their perception on the matter, it should be noted that the tourist experience is not a univocal one. All participants have visited different countries in Southeast Asia, have had different tourist experiences and encounters and narrate according to their own perspective. Despite the uniqueness of the tourist experience (Pudliner, 2007), the rich data collection recognises a lot of similar patterns. The first finding, discussed in section 4.1, comprises the positive expectations the interviewees had before their trip with regard to the destination image and the local population of the destination. Moreover, finding 4.2 describes the tourists' experiences with regard to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly how and in what ways the locals reacted to that. This finding suggests that the Western tourists interviewed perceived there had been implications which significantly diminished the possibility to practise tourism, that certain Southeast Asian destinations had admirable experience in pandemics, but that the spreading of (mis-)information, mostly about Western tourists in relation to COVID-19, laid the foundation for xenophobia in the attitude of the hosts. In section 4.3, the third finding profoundly discusses the xenophobic acts and the reason why these acts occurred from the perspective of the Western tourists interviewed. Lastly, finding 4.4 elaborates on the unexpected ability of the Western tourists interviewed to put the xenophobic sentiments of the locals into perspective.

4.1 Pre-COVID-19: positive expectations

This theme encapsulates the respondents' initial thoughts and assumptions before their departure. It reflects how the pre-COVID-19 period had been defined and expected in the eyes of the Western tourists.

4.1.1 Tourists' destination image

> "I don't know, Vietnam fascinated me quite a bit due to their history, and of all countries, I was most excited about Vietnam. Sometimes you have something determined in your head so to say, and that makes you to want to go. Also, it appeared to be very cheap, with a very diverse landscape and the big cities were described as crazy. A little less discovered than

Thailand and Cambodia, so yeah, that's why this country was on top of my list."[1] (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

This quote from Jan, a 24-year-old Dutch Leisure Management student who visited Vietnam, captures the excitement of travelling to a destination that has long fascinated him because of its history, culture and landscape scenery. This excitement is also expressed in the opinions of other interviewees who visited the destinations for leisure purposes. It is noteworthy that all ten interviewees seem to have a strong affection for Southeast Asian destinations, as the particular travel had often been inspired by a previous visit to another Southeast Asian destination in the past. This experience often left a valuable impression and encouraged the tourists to visit similar countries that might even surpass the previous destination, as explained by Isabelle, a 54-year-old Belgian bank employee who went to Vietnam:

> "The year before we went to Thailand, and there we encountered many people who went to Vietnam in previous travels. They were of opinion that Vietnam was even better than Thailand. Since we liked Thailand a lot, we said to each other; 'alright, our next travel will be to Vietnam'. That is how we decided to visit Vietnam."[2] (Isabelle, 54-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam)

Southeast Asia is considered an ideal area for tourism by Western tourists. Frank, a 63-year-old Dutch former realtor who travelled to India, expressed his fondness by stating how much he loved all of Asia and that he went to several destinations, often multiple times. Additional factors that have contributed to the anticipation of a positive destination image of the particular Southeast Asian countries, according to my interviewees, were that specific destinations are digital-nomad friendly, that specific destinations are appealing because of their scenic beauty, their rich culture, and that some were very interested in the sharp contrast with the interviewee's country of origin. For Céline, a 24-year-old Belgian media student who also went to India, it was the curiosity of experiencing a country and its culture that were the

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[1] "Ik weet niet, Vietnam fascineerde mijn best wel door hun geschiedenis, en van alle landen had ik wel de meeste zin in Vietnam. Soms heb je dat in je hoofd zitten zeg maar dus dan wil je er dan ook gewoon graag heen. En verder scheen het heel goedkoop te zijn, en een heel divers landschap en de steden schenen een grote gekkenhuis te zijn. Iets minder ontdekt dan een Thailand en een Cambodja en zo, dus ja het stond daarom best wel hoog op mijn lijstje." (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)
[2] "Het jaar voordien zijn wij naar Thailand geweest, en daar zijn wij veel mensen tegengekomen die naar Vietnam geweest waren. Die vonden dat Vietnam beter was dan Thailand. En Thailand was ons enorm goed bevallen, en daarom zeiden we ook van oké, onze volgende reis wordt naar Vietnam. En daardoor hadden we eigenlijk beslist om naar Vietnam te gaan." (Isabelle, 54-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam)

complete opposite of what she knew that made her interested in the destination: "I really wanted to experience something totally different, something so different that I was used to (..) I wanted to see and experience that culture''[3]

In total, 6 interviewees were inspired and motivated to go to the destination by external factors, such as hearing positive stories of acquaintances, seeing appealing visual material and reading convincing information about the destination and its locals online. Such factors helped in the process of developing an expectation of the country.

4.1.2 Locals

The destination image is interlinked and impacted by the tourists' perception of the locals. Its community is part of the destination and can be an influential factor on how tourists perceive a destination. As stated above, the pre-departure destination image of the Southeast Asian destinations has been considered as positive by most interviewees. Similarly, the general image of the local people has also perceived as good by the Western tourists before the travel to their destination in 2020. From the interviews, it is clear that the interviewees all expected that the hosts were 'helpful', but most of all 'kind' and 'friendly'. Some interviewees based the assumption of these characteristics on their previous travels to Southeast Asia. Two of the ten respondents had visited their respective destination already in the past, such as Marijn, a 38-year-old online marketeer with a Dutch nationality who went to Vietnam a second time in 2020. Her memories of the locals, deeply rooted in her mind, were one of the reasons that made her visit Vietnam again. She recalled the pleasant interactions she had had with the local community during her visit in 2009. Similarly, Willem, a 23-year-old Dutch back-office employee who visited Indonesia, stereotypically considered the average Asian local to be friendly and hospitable and reflected this perception on his expectation of the Indonesian locals as well.

In addition, characteristics as 'open', 'curious', 'interested', 'tolerant', 'social' and 'polite' have been mentioned by the interviewees. An interesting expected characteristic of the hosts was mentioned by a couple of respondents, like Susanne, a 30-year-old Dutch childcare employee who thought the locals of Sri Lanka were "tourism oriented"[4]. Celeste, a 33-year-old Dutch dental hygienist who travelled to the Philippines agrees with Susanne as

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[3] "Ik wou sowieso gewoon echt iets ervaren wat totaal anders was, totaal anders dan ik gewend was (..) ik wil dat zelf zien en gewoon zelf ervaren hoe die cultuur is." (Céline, 24-years-old, Belgian, India)
[4] "Ingespeeld op toerisme" (Susanne, 30-year-old, Dutch, Sri Lanka)

she states that she was aware that the destination's economy relies heavily on the tourism industry and that therefore local inhabitants are accustomed to the presence of the tourists.

Overall, the expectations of the destinations in terms of destination image and the anticipation of the character traits of the locals were given a positive connotation. From the interviews, it appears that the tourist gaze had been constructed already before visiting the destination, as many interviewees had created an image in their minds of what they expected the reality to be.

4.2 Reactions to the emergence of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia

After the Western tourists arrived at their destination in Southeast Asia, soon many noticed the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the response of the destination. In some cases, the presence of the COVID-19 became apparent gradually, in others, the emergence of the Coronavirus caused a rapid change in the social situation of the destination. This subsection discusses how the Western tourists perceived their experiences with regard to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak during their stay in Southeast Asia.

4.2.1 COVID-19 implications on tourism practices

As the COVID-19 virus spread rapidly around the world, the Western tourists interviewed stated that at the moment of departure, a pandemic was not expected. Therefore, they experienced the process of the implementation of measures at the destination, and that influenced their tourist experience. As the respondents resided in different destinations across Southeast Asia, and every government had the authority to decide when and how to impose measures to prevent dissemination of the Coronavirus in their country, the interviewees experienced similar or different measures. Some stated that the measures were implemented gradually, others stated that they felt that the measures were sudden and took them by surprise.

Many participants acknowledged that tourism arrivals began to drop in the destinations over time. One respondent, Susanne, a 30-years-old childcare employee from the Netherlands visiting Sri Lanka, considered this as a pleasant side-effect as it offered a unique opportunity to see the country in its glory without crowds of tourists and thus experience it in an authentic way: "We we're lucky with that actually. There is this famous train route, and

now we could experience it seated at the best spot. So that was very nice".[5] In contrast, for others the decline of tourists in the destination was rather disappointing. For Jan a 24-year-old Dutch Leisure Management student who visited Vietnam, the tourist motivation consisted partly of the interaction with other tourists as well. He states:

> "The moment I really wanted to leave was when I stayed in a hostel of which we knew beforehand that there were a lot of spots, because they had room for housing 260 guests, it was a pretty big hostel along the coast. One week before, we had heard that there were only 180 people there. At the time when we went to the hostel, one week later, we called [the hostel] and they told us that the previous night only 70 people were there. And when we went to the hostel the next day, only 26 people were left. So, you noticed that it [the tourist number residing in the hostel] drastically diminished."[6] (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

While Susanne enjoyed the tranquillity of an otherwise tourism-crowded Sri Lanka, Jan hoped for more tourists in Vietnam. This difference can be understood from the tourists' motivation to travel. Susanne was accompanied by her partner who mainly looked for culturally rich experiences, i.e. visiting the famous train route, while Jan's motivation to travel to Vietnam had been fuelled by the desire of social interaction with like-minded people, i.e. residing in a party hostel.

Besides the change in the number of tourist arrivals, destinations too contributed to the changed atmosphere and tourist experience by implementing measures. From the interviews it is clear that many participants were not very surprised when they saw Southeast Asian locals wearing facemasks upon arrival. According to their knowledge, it is not uncommon for them to wear facemasks due to the smog and air pollution in many Southeast Asian countries. Nevertheless, with the development of the COVID-19 virus, facemasks became the unofficial standard and tourists too were expected to wear them, as well as adhere to other hygienic rules. Isabelle, a 54-year-old Belgian bank employee who travelled to Vietnam noticed that this was expected from her and her partner from the moment they arrived:

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[5] "En daar hadden we wel mazzel mee. Je hebt die beroemde trein route, en die konden we nu zittend op de beste plek doen, dus dat was hartstikke mooi." (Susanne, 30-year-old, Dutch, Sri Lanka)

[6] "Het punt echt dat ik naar huis wilde gaan was toen ik in een hostel zat en we wisten dat daar veel plek was, want ze hadden plek voor 260 mensen, best wel een groot party hostel aan de kust. En we hadden een week eerder gehoord dat er nog maar 180 man was. Toen wij naar dat hostel gingen, een week later dan, toen hadden we gebeld en toen zeiden ze van ja afgelopen nacht waren er nog 70. En toen gingen wij de volgende dag naar het hostel en toen waren er nog 26. Dus je merkte echt dat dat toen stukken naar beneden ging. " (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

> "Since day one there was actually already a confrontation with COVID-19: a facemask, hand gels … you could notice that they were already very careful, and especially with the tourists … very much."[7] (Isabelle, 54-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam)

Such hygienic measures were not compulsory in most of the destinations at the time of the tourists' travels, therefore tourists were free to choose whether or not to comply with them. In contrast, there were other restrictions that the tourists had no choice other than to comply with. The interviewees cited as examples the closure of tourism facilities such as accommodations and activities, and after a while also the closure of international and regional borders. This left the tourists with nothing to do, to the frustration of Celeste, for example, a 30-year-old Dutch dental hygienist who went to the Philippines and stated that:

> "… everything closed. Restaurants, beaches, hotels. We were also not allowed … there were these checkpoints established of which you had to go through, so we didn't really leave the accommodation anymore. There was literally nothing to do, very sad but yeah …"[8](Celeste, 30-years-old, Dutch, the Philippines)

The measures implemented by the destination's government restricted the practice of tourism, which in turn, influenced the tourists' experience.

4.2.2 Southeast Asia and experience in pandemics

In the interviews reviewed, it emerged that Southeast Asian destinations, particularly Vietnam, have previous experience in managing contagious viruses. Isabelle (54-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam) expressed a sense of surprise when she found out that the destination had only one known infected person at the time she was there, and yet took very extensive measures to prevent a potential outbreak. In addition, Marijn (38-years-old, Dutch, online marketeer, Vietnam) expressed admiration for Vietnam's approach to the virus and its history with other pandemics:

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[7] "Vanaf de eerste dag aan was er eigenlijk al een confrontatie met COVID-19: een mondmaskertje, de handgels … Je merkte wel dat ze al heel voorzichtig waren, en vooral met de toeristen … enorm." (Isabelle, 54-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam)

[8] "… alles ging dicht. Restaurantjes, stranden, hotels. We mochten ook niet … er stonden ook allemaal van die posten waar je doorheen zou moeten, dus eigenlijk zijn wij niet meer van de accommodatie af geweest. Er was echt niks te doen, heel jammer maar ja..." (Celeste, 30-years-old, Dutch, the Philippines)

"They have a lot of experience in Asia with these kinds of viruses, like SARS and MERS. So, they know exactly how they have to target and handle this, so in an early stage they were already busy with closing important facilities, like schools"[9] (Marijn, 38-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

By stating this, it can be interpreted that Marijn acknowledges or perceives that Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian destinations, are capable and knowledgeable of how to handle a crisis in the form of a pandemic. In the interview, Marijn stated that she had the impression that Vietnam's experience had caused the country to be very wary of the emerging COVID-19 virus as they knew what implications an outbreak could entail. At the end of the interview, Marijn was of the opinion that "Vietnam did everything to suppress the virus, and they did a very good job in doing so".[10]

The other 8 interviewees did not specifically mention Southeast Asia's experience in pandemics during the interviews.

4.2.3 COVID-19 and the influence of media and (mis)information

"the 'whatsapp-culture' is very present there, so yeah, they [Indian locals] can forward a message and everyone will think that it is reality"[11] (Céline, 24-years-old, Belgian, India)

The quote of Céline, a 24-year-old Belgian student who studies Media and Journalism and who visited India in 2020, reflects on an interesting phenomenon that occurred in India. Céline implied that she expected that the 'whatsapp-culture', as she nicely called it, to be a vector of misinformation. Frank, a 63-years-old, Dutch, retired realtor and also a tourist in India in 2020, agrees with Céline as he is also of the opinion that the media in general plays a significant role in the lives of Southeast Asians, and Indians in particular. Frank believed that the media had enforced certain thoughts, sentiments or assumptions:

"Indians are very preoccupied with social media, they share everything with each other. I cannot control this, but my guts say that it has enforced certain things. Because on

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[9] "Ze hebben heel veel ervaring in Azië met dat soort virussen, met SARS en met MERS, dus zij weten ook precies hoe zij zich daarop moeten richtten en hoe ze moeten handelen, dus ze waren al wel snel bezig met belangrijke dingen dichtdoen zoals scholen" (Marijn, 38-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)
[10] "Vietnam heeft er alles aan gedaan om het virus gewoon de kop in te drukken, en dat hebben ze ook gewoon heel goed gedaan" (Marijn, 38-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)
[11] "de 'whatsapp'-cultuur heerst daar super hard dus ja, ze kunnen een ding doorsturen en die denken dan dat dat allemaal realiteit is." (Céline, 24-years-old, Belgian, India)

television… in every hotel the television was on with ongoing news about Corona. Really, everywhere, in every dining area was a television turned on with numbers [infections], all day the topic of discussion was Corona"[12] (Frank, 63-years-old, Dutch, India)

The local population of India was bombarded with news about a disease of which little was known. In neighbouring country Bangladesh, where Kris, a 24-year-old Dutch Earth and Environment student went, the pieces of information the locals received were blown out of proportion and misrepresented, according to her:

"… and there we noticed that they [locals] were very badly informed. At that moment, they thought that Corona already … well how long did Corona exist by then? Around 2 weeks or so. They thought that already 20 million people died of it then [laughs]. Well, that is a rate which we have not surpassed even now."[13] (Kris, 24-years-old, Dutch, Bangladesh)

From the interviews, it appears that in all countries the media has passed on sensational stories or misinformation to their local inhabitants. An overwhelming majority of the interviewees felt that this had fuelled fear and panic of the virus among the hosts. Moreover, some interviewees had the impression the media tried to blame the Western tourists for bringing the virus into the country. Marijn (38-years-old, Dutch, online marketeer, Vietnam) expressed her astonishment when she read a new story in a newspaper that had twisted the information in a way that the Western tourists were portrayed as the disseminators of the virus, while she knew that was not the truth:

"I read [in Dutch Facebook group] that there was this Vietnamese girl, around the age of 25 who went to Europe, to England, to Italy and to the Netherlands, and she came back to Vietnam while contaminated. She had infected a couple of passengers in that plane. These were two tourists, men I believe, who were infected. But what they do in Vietnam, is blaming the tourists. So, there was this huge newspaper headline accompanied with a photo of tourists: 'the virus is back in the country', while it was not the tourists who brought the virus into the

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[12] "Indiërs zijn enorm van social media, ze delen werkelijk alles met elkaar. (…) Ik kan dat niet controleren, maar ik heb wel het gevoel dat daar heel veel door versterkt is. Want op de TV … in elk hotel stond de TV aan met doorlopend nieuws over Corona. Echt overal, in elke eetzaal stond een TV met de cijfers, en de hele dag ging het over Corona." (Frank, 63-years-old, Dutch, India)

[13] "… en daar merkten we dat ze ook heel slecht geïnformeerd waren. Op dat moment dachten ze al dat Corona al … nou hoelang was Corona er toen? Dat speelde echt 2 weken een beetje. Zij dachten dat er al 20 miljoen mensen eraan waren overleden. (lacht) Ja, daar zitten we volgens mij nu nog lang niet op." (Kris, 24-years-old, Dutch, Bangladesh)

country. However, how they see it as us white people, we travel across the country, so if the virus were to spread, it would be us who did it."[14] (Marijn, 38-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

As a consequence of blaming tourists and portraying them as the Coronavirus carriers, the respondents had the impression that the locals adopted this image they were presented with. It is believed that the media portrayals of especially the Western tourists enhanced and magnified the fear of the local population towards the Western tourist. This marked a disruption in the tourism encounter, as at least one party began to perceive the other party in a drastic different way. Moreover, the influence of the media also meant that the locals changed the way they regarded and approached Western tourists. It seems that Western tourists suddenly became aware of the gaze pointed towards them (i.e. the mutual gaze), as the situation became more alarming and urgent for the hosts and misinformation became increasingly widespread. Western tourists used to embody the tourist gaze that was considered a one-direction of tourists gazing upon hosts as an exotic other. The clear visibility and awareness of the mutual gaze changed this paradigm and allowed the locals to gaze back in an intensified manner on the estranged tourists who were now depicted as the ones accountable for allowing the virus to manifest itself at the destination.

4.3. Hosts versus guests

In response to the changed perception about Western tourists, and the awareness of the among Western tourists, the nature of the encounters and relations between Western tourists and locals were also changed. The former hospitable treatment by the local community appeared to have given way to a treatment that could be considered more hostile. Strikingly, my findings show that Western tourists underwent a process of being 'Othered', whereby it felt to the interviewees as if it was 'the locals versus the Western tourists'. In this section, this changed treatment will be discussed through the eyes of the interviewees.

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[14] "en daar las ik dat er een Vietnamees meisje van een jaar of 25, die was in Europa geweest, in Engeland, in Italië en in Nederland en die kwam terug naar Vietnam en zij was besmet. En zij heeft een paar passagiers in dat vliegtuig besmet. En er waren toeristen die daarin zaten en er waren 2 toeristen, mannen geloof, die besmet waren. Maar wat ze dan in Vietnam doen is de toeristen een beetje de schuld geven. Dus er was een hele grote krantenkop met een foto van toeristen: 'het virus is terug in het land' terwijl eigenlijk het niet de toeristen waren die het virus het land in brachten. Maar hoe zij het gewoon zien is wij, als blanke, witte mensen, wij reizen veel door een land, dus als het virus verspreid wordt, komt dat door ons." (Marijn, 38-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

4.3.1 Xenophobic treatment

The link that the Southeast Asian media has made between the COVID-19 pandemic and the presence of Western tourist set in motion an interesting process in which the Western tourist reversed roles with the locals and became the Other. As previously stated, Western tourists are usually, in most Southeast Asian regions, treated with a high degree of hospitality, as they were considered not just guests, but more importantly, special. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the hosts' attitude towards the Western tourist as at that moment, they were no longer considered as 'special', but rather 'contagious', and therefore 'dangerous' to be around.

The ways in which Western tourists were being Othered fully sum up the xenophobic treatments of locals that characterises this process. All interviewees, none excluded, were convinced that their white skin-colour had been the foundation of being Othered. Due to this obvious visual distinction, locals could easily recognise the Western tourist. Denise, a 26-year-old Dutch career and reintegration consultant who travelled to Laos, was well aware of the treatment she received based on her skin-colour: "It is purely because of your skin-colour that you were treated differently. Yeah, and that is … something you normally never encounter with a white skin-colour"[15] A very striking observation can be drawn from her second sentence in which she expresses a moment of awareness about ethnical differences. This impression is corroborated by her non-verbal language during our interview: her facial expressions showed signs of being surprised and a little confused by the observation that she herself made. Being Othered by the locals is not something pleasant to experience nor is it something that she expected or was used to. Like Denise, the other interviewees too recognised the association the hosts made between their skin-colour and the COVID-19 virus. The different treatment Denise refer to is for example the desperate desire of the local population to physically distance themselves from the Western tourists, like Kris (24-years-old, Dutch, earth and environment student, Bangladesh) who felt that "they [locals] had the mindset of, 'alright, that is a white person, someone you should now stay away from'. There was this real association with white; 'white is Corona'"[16] Other examples given by the respondents of xenophobic treatment that put the Western tourists in the role of the Other were negative staring, whispering, calling names, not wanting to be seen or associated with Western tourists, exclusion, the desire of locals for Western tourists to leave the destination as

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[15] "Het is puur op huidskleur dat je anders behandeld wordt. Ja, en dat is … wat je anders met een blanke huidskleur nooit meemaakt" (Denise, 26-years-old, Dutch, Laos)

[16] "maar wel vanuit hun dat ze zoiets hadden van, oké dat is een blanke, daar moet je van wegblijven nu. Wel echt de associatie met blank; 'blank is Corona'" (Kris, 24-years-old, Dutch, Bangladesh)

soon as possible, and an overall experience of the tourism encounter that went from friendly to tolerant, as well as the general idea of having received an unfair treatment. The denial of access to tourism facilities and services caused the Western tourists to interrupt their travel and to cease their tourism practices. Céline (24-years-old, Dutch, media and journalism student, India) recalled being quite frustrated when she learned the accommodation she and her friends were supposed to go refused to let them stay there:

"So, I called our accommodation and the person [on the phone] was extremely rude, he said 'no, if you're not Indian… if you are a tourist, a foreign or international tourist, then you cannot stay with us' and then he hung up the phone. And how I told this to you now was in a friendly way, but it definitely was not in a friendly way at that moment."[17] (Céline, 24-years-old, Dutch, India)

Besides Western tourists being Othered by the hosts, another interesting finding in the quote of Céline is the mentality of the local man working at the particular accommodation in India who made a clear distinction by only allowing nationals in the accommodation and not allowing foreigners to enter. Several interviewees experienced this treatment, like Jan in Vietnam (24-years-old, Dutch, student leisure management):

"In some restaurants there was also a sign… I made a picture of a restaurant which had a sign in which was written 'We're so sorry, this shop is temporary for local customers only', so not for tourists so to say. And also, at some restaurant there was literally … you could see people sitting inside, and then you wanted to enter to eat or drink a little, and then you received the response [of local employees] 'no, no, no, we're not open'. And then I said 'but I see people sitting inside' and then again, the reaction 'no, no, no'"[18] (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

Respondent Jan even took a picture of this sign as he thought it was quite a weird message and worth photographing (see figure 1). The locals versus the Western tourist dichotomy is

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[17] "ik heb dus gebeld naar onze accommodatie en de persoon was echt super grof en die zei van ''nee, als je niet Indisch bent … als je een toerist bent, een buitenlandse toerist of internationale toerist, dan kunnen jullie niet bij ons terecht'' en toen gooide hij de telefoon neer. En ik zeg dit nog op een vriendelijke manier, maar het was echt niet op een vriendelijke manier." (Céline, 24-years-old, Dutch, India)
[18] "En op sommige restaurants stond dan ook … ik heb een foto gemaakt van een restaurant waar stond van 'Sorry, we zijn tijdelijk alleen open voor lokale bewoners', dus niet voor toeristen zeg maar. En ook bij sommige restaurants daar stond letterlijk … dan zag je mensen binnen zitten, en dan wilde je daar naar binnen gaan om wat te eten of te drinken, en dan was het van 'no, no, no, we're not open'. En ik zei van 'maar er zitten mensen binnen', en dan was het 'no, no, no'" (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

strongly represented in both experiences. The Reversed Other (in the case of this thesis, the Western tourist), usually an experienced traveller in the area and used to be the one in power in the tourist-host relationship, received this sudden xenophobic treatment, which they had not experienced before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Naturally, this sudden change had triggered the Western tourist's emotional reactions, changes in perception of their overall environment, and novel thoughts. From the interviews, it is clear that every respondent considered these encounters as unexpected. As stated in the findings above, the expectation of the Western tourists concerning the locals of the destination had been fairly positive (i.e. kind, helpful). Tourism encounters with the local community that displayed the opposite is what the interviewees had not expected to happen.

In general, the interviewees experienced the xenophobic treatment as unpleasant and annoying, which led to emotions as sadness, frustration and confusion. The latter has been elaborated upon by Celeste (30-years-old, Dutch, dental hygienist, the Philippines) as she states "Because you think why? It is coming from China, and suddenly it is us tourists who brought it into the country"[19] Not all interviewees experienced the same emotion at that time. For example, Susanne (30-year-old, Dutch, childcare employee, Sri Lanka) expressed she felt anger and sadness with regard to the treatment of the locals "It made me sad and also angry actually. It was them [locals] who I was angry with actually."[20] The reactions of the interviewees can be seen as understandable, considering Western tourists suddenly became the Reversed Other, a position which made them feel inferior and vulnerable. Moreover, when the question was posed to the respondents whether they considered the treatment they received from the local community as discrimination, only three out of ten respondents acknowledged that such treatment felt like discrimination at the time. The majority of the interview sample refuted the idea that it was discrimination and perceived the treatments in another way, which will be discussed and elaborated upon in section 4.4.

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[19] "Ja, want je denkt dan ook wel een beetje van hoezo? Het komt uit China, en nou zijn wij ineens de toeristen die het hebben meegenomen." (Celeste, 30-years-old, Dutch, the Philippines)
[20] "Ik werd er wel verdrietig van en ook wel boos eigenlijk. Op hen werd ik boos eigenlijk." (Susanne, 30-years-old, Dutch, Sri Lanka)

Figure 1: Denied access for tourists. Photo taken by interviewee Jan de Groot.

4.3.2 Perceived reasons for xenophobia

As noted in finding 4.2.3, the role of information distribution by the media and among locals initiated a change in attitude of the local community towards the Western tourists. According to the interviews conducted, the respondents believed that the main culprit for the change in behaviour were the media. The reason why the media blamed Western tourists, or rather, associated the Coronavirus with Western tourists, was perceived as a result of the drastic increase in the number of infections on the continent. As a consequence, Europe became an epicentre of COVID-19 infections. The interviewees compared the thoughts of the hosts with the following equation: Europeans are white, Europeans are infected with the COVID-19 virus, so therefore contact must be avoided. Denise (26-years-old, Dutch, career and reintegration coach, Laos) has given a the following example:

> "The inhabitants received so little information from the news, it is all so basic, so if they only
> hear that [Europe as an epicentre of COVID-19], then I can imagine they would assume that.
> But the image that every white tourist has Corona, that is not true of course. Nevertheless, that
> was what they assumed […]. I think that their source of information was very black and white,

it was basically China is Corona, Europe is Corona, and that's it." [21] (Denise, 26-years-old, Dutch, Laos)

Some of the interviewees expressed indignity about this assumption, and became somewhat defensive when discussing it, indicating that they considered this as an unfair equation. One respondent, Frank (63-years-old, Dutch, retired realtor, India) rhetorically commented "But we were the ones who brought Corona into the country, right? …"[22] It can be inferred from this quote that Frank does not entirely agree with the conviction of the locals about the Western tourists, as he rhetorically, yet indirectly, criticises this assumption.

Another factor that has contributed to the local's xenophobic treatment, is the belief that international tourists, including Western tourists, have a high mobility pattern as they often travel within the destination and in some cases, across other nations, which makes them a vector of disease dissemination. Interviewee Denise (26-years-old, Dutch, career and reintegration coach, Laos) noticed the difference in mobility and linked this to the xenophobic treatment:

"The people who lived there as inhabitants, they really lived there … And these people did not move a lot. Of course, they were aware that Western people moved a lot more, so therefore they could also get easier infected. So, I think it is also a little bit fear, like; 'alright, you have been somewhere else as well, so yeah … I have no idea if you have been infected from the place that you went to'"[23] (Denise, 26-years-old, Dutch, Laos)

In comparison to tourists, the local inhabitants do not exhibit the same pattern of mobility. The assumption is therefore quickly made that the distribution of an infectious virus like COVID-19 is more likely to be carried and spread by tourists than by the hosts themselves. In a way, it gives the locals a well-founded argument to hold tourists accountable.

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[21] "Ja, die mensen krijgen eigenlijk ook zo weinig input uit het nieuws, dus het is allemaal zo basic eigenlijk, dus als zij dat als enige te horen krijgen dan kan ik me ook heel goed voorstellen. Maar het beeld dat elke blanke toerist heeft Corona mee, dat is natuurlijk niet helemaal waar. Maar dat is wel denk ik de gedacht die zij hadden ja […]. Ik denk dat hun informatiebron heel zwart wit is geweest, puur alleen China is Corona, Europa is Corona, en dat was het." (Denise, 26-years-old, Dutch, Laos)
[22] "Maar wij waren degenen die Corona in dat land hadden gebracht hè …" (Frank, 63-years-old, Dutch, India)
[23] "de mensen die daar natuurlijk woonden als bevolking, die woonden daar … En die verplaatsen zich ook niet zoveel. En ze wisten natuurlijk ook wel van de Westerlingen die verplaatsen zich juist veel meer, dus die kunnen het ook makkelijker ergens oplopen. Dus ik denk ook dat dat een stukje angst was van 'oké je bent ergens anders dus ook geweest, dus ja… geen idee of je het daar natuurlijk hebt opgelopen waar je ook geweest bent'." (Denise, 26-years-old, Dutch, Laos)

The quote of Denise indicates that she considers the local community to react to the Western tourists based on fear. All interviewees agree that the emotion of fear is the driving force behind the hosts' uncomfortable behaviour, which mainly consisted of the fear of getting infected and the fear of infecting others. In Vietnam, for example, it has been acknowledged by interviewee Marijn (38-years-old, Dutch, online marketeer, Vietnam) that Vietnamese inhabitants often live in the same house with their families, including their elderly. To Marijn's understanding, the locals were therefore very cautious and careful as they did not want to infect themselves or their family. In line with Marijn's perception is that of Frank, a 63-years-old Dutch retired realtor who went to India. According to him, the Indians Othered the Western tourists out of self-protection which he considers a human reaction. Isabelle (53, Belgian, bank employee) also believed that the Vietnamese nationals acted out of protection for themselves, but also for their country. This realisation sparked in Marijn, Frank and Isabelle a sense of admiration for the local population.

4.4. Rebalancing the tourist-host relationship in pandemic times: the ability to understand

The previous finding 4.3.2 ended with the remark that some of the interviewees had a sense of admiration for the hosts for being cautious, protective, and therefore considerate of themselves and their community. The reasons why these interviewees were able to understand the reaction and behaviour of the hosts towards them in 2020 is also a central finding in this thesis. All of the interviewees acknowledged that, despite the uncomfortable tourism encounters and temporal reversal of the Other during their travel to one of the Southeast Asian destinations, they could very well put into perspective the treatment of the local community due to a number of factors. These will be discussed in this section. Note that the interviews had been conducted between 9 and 14 months later than the particular travel discussed in this thesis. The interviewees have had a significant period of time to reflect on their perceptions at the time, especially in the light of the severe impact of the pandemic in their own countries. This temporal aspect might, more than likely, have influenced the meaning-making process at play in their accounts of the experience. Tourism experiences (the encounter at the time of the trip) and the tourism narratives (the way tourists make sense of the encounter in a second time) are in fact two separate phenomena that should be taken into consideration: their perception of the occurrences can therefore be different now than it was at the time of travel.

4.4.1 Putting encounters into perspective

The ability to relativise an experience is an admirable trait that all interviewees revealed during the interviews. It is a striking finding, as theory expects that uncomfortable tourism encounters would negatively affect the tourist's perception, and thus the ability to put the encounters into perspective can be considered as an unanticipated result. It also contradicts the findings of Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020), which will be further analysed in the discussion.

As indicated above, three out of ten interviewees perceived the behaviour of the locals as discrimination. A majority of seven out of ten interviewees perceived it differently. For many, it was not identified as discrimination, because they could put the situation into perspective. In the eyes of respondent Isabelle (53-years-old, Belgian, bank employee, Vietnam) the uncomfortable encounters she had experienced could not be labelled as discrimination, as she states:

> "Well, no. I don't think that you could say it was discrimination. I think it is rather self-protection … would you then call it discrimination [she wonders] … pff, no, I don't think so. Discrimination is something totally different. If you are protecting your country, then I don't think you are discriminating. At least, that is how I see it […] You have to be able to create nuances and put it into perspective. And perhaps it's [the treatment of the locals] not always correct, but it is what it is."[24] (Isabelle, 53-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam)

Isabelle recognises that the behaviour of the hosts was not necessarily pleasant or 'correct' as she refers to, but she emphasises the importance of the ability to put the situation into perspective. Not only were those interviewees who did not describe the treatment of the locals as discriminatory able to put the situation into perspective, but also those who felt it was a form of discrimination did so. For example, when the question was asked to Jan if he could relativise the tourism encounters despite seeing it as discrimination, he responded:

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[24] "Nou… nee ik vond niet dat dat discriminatie was. Ik denk eerder beschermend voor zichzelf … noem je dat dan discriminatie [vraagt ze zichzelf af] … pff nee dat vind ik niet. Discrimineren vind ik iets heel anders. Als jij je land beschermd vind ik niet dat je dan aan het discrimineren bent, dat vind ik niet. Zo komt het althans op mij over […] Je moet nuances kunnen leggen en een beetje kunnen relativeren. En misschien is het [het gedrag van de lokale bevolking] niet altijd correct maar het is wat het is." (Isabelle, 53-years-old, Belgian, Vietnam)

"Yes, that I could do. It [xenophobic treatment] was based on something you know. That is also why I could understand it, so to say."[25] (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)

From the interviews, various reasons were given by the respondents of why exactly they could understand the local's reactions. One reason that was often cited was their awareness of the ignorance of the local community about the information related to the COVID-19 virus. Jan (24-years-old, Dutch, student leisure management, Vietnam) stated that this ignorance is the reason why he could not hold the local inhabitants accountable for him being Othered: "For those people [locals] it was often because of the ignorance. So, we couldn't really hold them accountable, they just heard what they heard. Therefore, I could understand their fear and their thoughts"[26] This ignorance was not a one-sided occurrence. The interviewees expressed that they did not forecast that the COVID-19 virus would erupt into a global pandemic. In turn, the panic it unleashed was also felt by some of the interviewees. Participant Willem (23-years-old, Dutch, back-office employee, Indonesia) acknowledged that this was the reason why he understood the hosts' treatment towards him, as "It is a unique situation nobody has ever encountered in his or her life. That is why I can't blame these people that they want to be more careful and thus avoid the Western tourist for a while"[27] It appears that the fact that it is a crisis that is considered unique, enables the respondent to have a more understanding attitude towards the local community and to show a deeper level of empathy, that he potentially would not experience in regular situations. The respondent illustrates this feeling of empathy by explaining that chances are he would have reacted the same way if he were in their position. This illuminates some of the interviewees' perception that the hosts displayed rational, human behaviour. In addition, keeping in mind COVID-19 is a crisis, and therefore a temporary disruption of the standard, some interviewees expressed the realisation that the local's behaviour was therefore also momentary and not the 'real' behaviour the local population would exhibit in normal circumstances.

Six respondents expressed understanding as they realised that not all locals behaved in a way that was Othering the Western tourist. For example, interviewee Céline (24-years-old,

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[25] "Ja, zeker dat wel. Het was wel ergens op gebaseerd zeg maar. En daardoor kon je er wel begrip voor opbrengen zeg maar." (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)
[26] "voor die mensen is het vaak ook de onwetendheid. Dus we konden ze het hen ook niet ontzettend kwalijk nemen, zij hoorden ook alleen maar wat ze hoorden. Ik kon hun angst ook wel weer begrijpen en hun gedachten" (Jan, 24-years-old, Dutch, Vietnam)
[27] "Het is een hele uitzonderlijke situatie die niemand echt ooit in zijn leven heeft meegemaakt. Ik kan het die mensen niet kwalijk nemen dat ze voor zichzelf wat extra voorzichtig doen en de Westerse toerist even ontwijken" (Willem, 23-years-old, Dutch, Indonesia)

Belgian, student media and journalism) experienced in India that only part of the Indian population treated her in a xenophobic way, while a significant other part remained hospitable:

> "I have to say that I could really put it into perspective, considering it was not everyone [that behaved unpleasantly]. It was like only 20% or so who whispered and stared and yeah, being a bit rude because you're white so to say and a tourist. However, the other 80% still remained very friendly and for them, nothing was wrong, so that made it a little better."[28] (Céline, 24-years-old, Belgian, India)

Not only did this realisation made the respondent understand the situation better, it also refuted the biased impression that all locals Othered the Western tourists. From the interviews, it became also clear that the uncomfortable behaviour of the Southeast Asian locals was exactly that: uncomfortable, but not necessarily aggressive. None of the interviewees encountered extreme hostility or physical harassment. For most interviewees, violations in the physical form would have affected the tourists experience to an extent that it potentially could have degraded the overall tourist-host relationship.

4.4.2 The aftermath: perceptions on locals and destination

Although the main topic of this research and the interviews had been the discussion of xenophobic treatments of the Southeast Asian locals towards the Western tourists, all interviewees had been able to put this into perspective and understand why these sentiments arose from the side of the locals. It neutralised to some extend (for some more than others) the negative tourist experience they had encountered during their travel to Southeast Asia in 2020. Half of the respondents expressed regret of their particular travel due to financial reasons and unfortunate timing. The other half of the respondents did not regret their visit because they happened to have a longer stay than the other interviewees.

One respondent, Kris (24-years-old, Dutch, earth and environment student, Bangladesh) expressed she would not return to Bangladesh. She explained that her reason for this is that she considered Bangladesh still too primitive for tourism as there was a lack of

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[28] "Ik moet zeggen dat ik dat wel vrij goed in perspectief kon plaatsen, omdat het ook niet iedereen was. Het was echt een deel, iets van 20% dat zo was, en dat ging dan van fluisteren en kijken, ja en een beetje grof zijn omdat je dan blank bent zogezegd en ze denken dat je een toerist bent. Maar de andere 80% was wel nog altijd super vriendelijk, en voor hen was er eigenlijk niks aan de hand, dus dat maakte het wel beter." (Céline, 24-years-old, Belgian, India)

tourism facilities, and specified that her decision did not have much to do with the treatment she received in 2020. Other than Kris, all respondents expressed they were willing to go back to their destination in Southeast Asia. Some expressed more enthusiasm than others, like Frank (63-years-old, Dutch, retired realtor, India) who is still very fond of India and wishes to return. Others, like Denise (26-year-old, Dutch, career and reintegration coach, Laos), would also want to return, but with the motivation to turn a negative tourist experience into a positive one:

> "I would really like to return with the objective to change the experience that I had, because then, I thought: well, forget it; they were not friendly or nice. On the other hand, I think that if I were to return, I would have a totally different experience and see that it is indeed a beautiful country, with friendly people"[29] (Denise, 26-year-old, Dutch, Laos)

Strikingly, all interviewees clarified that, despite the uncomfortable encounters with the local communities in Southeast Asia and the unfair treatment Western tourists received from them, neither the destination image, nor the perception of the hosts have altered. It is due to the ability of understanding and relativising that the Western tourists maintain a positive perception of both the destination image and the locals.

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[29] "[…] zou ik ook heel graag terug willen juist om die ervaring te veranderen omdat ik toen inderdaad dacht: nou, zoek het uit; ze waren niet vriendelijk, niet aardig. Maar aan de andere kant denk ik, als ik er weer terug zou komen, dat je een hele andere ervaring hebben en dat het gewoon wel weer een hele mooie plek kan zijn, want het is echt een prachtig land, met echt wel vriendelijke mensen" (Denise, 26-year-old, Dutch, Laos)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the search of answering the research question of *How and in what ways has the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Western tourist experience, the destination image and the tourist-host relationship in destinations in Southeast Asia?,* this thesis reframed according to this new and unexpected situation the concepts and topics that have long been studied in tourism studies, and shows how new context can bring about new perspectives. The tourism encounter and the tourist-host relationship in particular have a well-developed foundation and are extensively discussed in the academic domain. Nevertheless, in the case of a crisis such as a global pandemic, it is a legitimate reason to review these theories and concepts and examine these in a different light (Zenker & Kock, 2020).

A crisis of the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to place the tourism industry in a vulnerable position (Yeh, 2020). It is exactly this unfortunate vulnerable position in which the interviewees of this research were placed during their stay in Southeast Asian destinations amidst the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The findings suggest that the participants, unaware of the upcoming magnitude of the crisis (even though COVID-19 had already appeared in China), constructed the tourist gaze before their trip (Urry, 1990), following their previous experiences in the area. The expectations of the interviewees concerning the destination image and its locals can be seen as positive. The tourist gaze of the Western tourists continued upon arrival, and considered the local inhabitants as the distinct Other (Said, 1978). However, the unfortunate event of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak had an impact on the assumed one-sided tourist gaze as the local inhabitants' approach towards the Western tourists took a drastic turn. Hospitality turned into hostility as the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed xenophobia on the part of the Southeast Asian hosts. During this unique occurrence, the Western tourists became aware of the returned, mutual gaze of the locals (Maoz, 2006), an essential element which had been neglected in Urry's tourist gaze (1990). It can be argued that the COVID-19 crisis caused the locals to initiate a process in which the Western tourists were Othered. Therefore, this thesis wishes to address this unique and uncommon phenomenon as the 'Reversed Other'. It is important to note that this Othering process had been made visible because of the crisis. At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, there had been a reversal of roles in which the local community's self-protection mechanism took over and refuted the usual power-dynamics in place in tourism in the area, which depicts Western tourists as the superior. This is in contradiction to the hegemony

displayed in Said's *Orientalism* (1978), in which it is argued that the West holds a restraining power over Oriental populations. In this unique occurrence, Western tourists are not perceived as, and do not perceive themselves as superior, but rather are put in a position of powerlessness and vulnerability. When looking back at the overall content and tone of the interviews, it becomes clear that this position is alien to the Western tourists interviewed, as they do not feel in charge of the power structures and power-relations. Historically seen, it is not surprising that the inversion of power is alien to the Western tourists when holding this against the historical backdrop of colonialism and post-colonialism (Wijesinghe et al., 2019). In a time of crisis and fear, the establishment of the Reversed Other had brought to the surface the colonial and post-colonial substratum, which had always been present in Southeast Asian destinations in relation to Western tourists, yet in an invisible, subconscious manner. The process of Othering illuminated the unbalanced power-relations that the Western tourists inherently know from the past, but do not usually think about. It could be this awareness of their white privilege (Bandyopadhyay, 2019) that had been illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic, that might have played a role in the reason of why the Western tourists' perception of the destination image and the destination's locals have not changed in the long-run.

Considering the Western tourist converted into the Reversed Other, it is plausible that the tourism encounter between Western tourists and Southeast Asian hosts also had been shaped differently. Sutton's (1967) description of the characteristics of a standard tourism encounter can be partly applied to this case as well, but in a reversed way: the awareness of both parties remains that the encounter is most likely temporary; the encounter tends to be unbalanced, which in this case is not the standard unbalanced nature of the superior Western tourists in relation to the inferior locals, but rather the unbalanced structure of the hosts versus guests in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic; the encounter allows for new experiences, which in this case, is one that the Western tourists had not anticipated beforehand; and the nature of the encounter still rests on cultural values that were explicitly expressed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As outlined in the theoretical review, the tourism encounter is a social phenomenon and therefore unique in character. Dolezal (2015) argued that the tourism encounter is a producer of mutually fruitful relationship as it is constructed by the tourists and the local community together. Although this may be the case in some tourism encounters, it can be concluded that this perception cannot be applied to the case of this thesis. But, then again, it should be taken into consideration that the COVID-19 pandemic deviates from standard circumstances and that tourism encounters had been formed under extra-ordinary conditions (Lehto et al., 2020). The interviews reveal that the tourism encounter was disrupted

at the moment the pandemic emerged and overwhelmed the destination and its inhabitants. When referring back to social exchange theory, it can be concluded that at that moment, the costs of tourism began to outweigh its benefits, which was reflected in the tourism encounter (Ap, 1992). A disruption often results from the fact that locals and tourists have to share the same physical space (Tung et al., 2020). Especially in times of a global pandemic, the sharing of space is undesired by the local residents due to safety hazards and they may respond to this by performing harmful behaviour towards tourists, which had happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the disruption caused the tourism encounter to be perceived by the Western tourists as unpleasant and overall negative. Nonetheless, a majority of the interviewees recognised the temporal aspect of this encounter.

Even though Western tourists are not accustomed to being the Other, this does not mean that they do not understand this change that has been facilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, xenophobia can be understood as the anxiety of foreigners (Olukole et al., 2008). When applied to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, it also functions as the Southeast Asian locals' response to fear, as it is acknowledged that crises, such as pandemics, increase anxiety, stress levels, and insecurity to individuals who in turn, act from fear-related behaviour (Ornell et al., 2020). In addition to fear of a crisis, fear of the (Reversed) Other has also contributed to the xenophobic behaviour of the locals, as "the 'other' have become the objects of fear, concern, and suspicion." (Bushra, 2014, p. 1). The interviews reveal that several factors, such as media portrayal, information scarcity, and (unproved) assumptions have contributed to the image of the Western tourists as spreaders of the Coronavirus. This supports, among others, the argument that contemporary society is facing not only a physical pandemic, but also a virtual one; a second pandemic concerning information, i.e. the 'infodemic' or 'misinfodemic' (Barua et al., 2020; Banerjee & Rao, 2020; Park et al., 2020; Siddiqui et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). The media have become so pervasive in our globalised society, that the interviewees individuated media portrayal of the pandemic and Westerners as a culprit for poor treatment received. The realisation of the interviewees that the hosts' reaction is based on certain assumptions and is rooted in sentiments that displays human behaviour as self-protection and fear, enables the interviewees to put the xenophobic treatments into perspective during the reflection process.

The understanding of the interviewees is an important result, as it provides interesting insights in the tourist-host relationship. Smith (1978) argued that the tourist-host relationship is an influential, and therefore important phenomenon that indicates the effects of tourism.

Needless to say, a positive tourist-host relationship is desirable as it benefits both parties as well as the destination, whereas a negative tourist-host relationship is characterised with conflict and degrades the tourism development. Ap (1992) had argued that in social exchange theory, hosts can even exhibit hostile behaviour towards tourists and the tourism industry when the costs of tourism outweigh its benefits, which happened in Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020. According to previous academic theory, this would translate in a tourist-host relationship perceived as negative. From the interviews, however, it appears that the respondents themselves do not interpret it this way. Instead, the interviewees are of the opinion that the tourist-host relationship had experienced a temporal rupture, but not an actual break. A break would imply that the Western tourists interviewed would seclude themselves from the Southeast Asian local population with no desire for further interaction and therefore no return to the destination. Even though the tourist-host relationship had been temporarily disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents showed understanding and put into perspective the xenophobic treatment of the locals by realising and expecting that it was a momentary experience driven by guiding emotions as panic, anxiety, and protection during a time of crisis. The interviewees recognised that the tourism industry is one of the most impacted industries when a global crisis occurs, and that particularly the Southeast Asian destinations' economies are put in a vulnerable position, similar to its inhabitants (Aliperti et al., 2019; Faulkner, 2001; Yeh, 2020). This recognition allowed the Western tourists interviewed to understand the reactions and emotions of the local residents. A recognition potentially enforced by the surfaced, subconscious awareness of the heretofore invisible substratum of colonialism and post-colonialism history and their white privilege (Wijesinghe et al., 2019; Bandyopadhyay, 2019). With this in mind, all interviewees stated that their perception of the destination and its locals had not been negatively affected and that most have the desire to return to the destination once the pandemic is less apparent. Therefore, this particular case does not comply with the idea that a crisis means a negative perception of the destination image (Avraham, 2015; Li et al., 2018), nor with idea that the Western tourists interviewed developed a form of tourophobia after their trip (Çakar, 2020). Thus, it can be concluded that neither the tourist-host relationship, nor the destination image will experience long-term consequences.

In this last section of the discussion, I would like to address my findings in comparison to those of an article similar in scope, but whose findings seem to contradict my own. In the theoretical review, a subsection had been dedicated to a similar research of this thesis conducted by Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020). Both our findings observe the

uncomfortable treatment the tourists received. Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) argued that the treatment of the local community was driven by panic, mistrust and irresponsible behaviour. A similar finding had been identified in this thesis, but framed in the specific context of xenophobia and the Othering process. While Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) have not specified the nationality of their interview sample, this thesis specifically examines the perspective of the Western tourist. Therefore, the uncomfortable behaviour of the hosts towards the tourists is defined in this thesis as xenophobia. More strikingly, Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) argue that the tourism encounters have negatively impacted the image of both the community and the destination to such an extent, that the tourist-host relationship will remain affected in the long term. As noted above, the findings of this thesis clearly contradict these latter arguments, as the tourists interviewed in my thesis did not seem to have a lasting negative image of the destination or its local community. There are some differences in the methodology which may explain the difference in findings. Whereas Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) focus on one Southeast Asian destination only, namely India, this thesis has adopted a wider scope by focussing on the whole region of Southeast Asia. More importantly, the interviews of Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) have been conducted in February and March 2020, which is the exact period of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Southeast Asia. Their respondents had been interviewed shortly after their travel, indicating that respondents were likely to enter the interview with vivid memories and emotions regarding their experiences. The possibility exists that these vivid impressions led to responses that were still emotionally driven, especially at a time where the magnitude of the pandemic was just being recognised in Europe. This temporal difference in research is actually opted for as multiple temporal lenses on one phenomenon can illuminate different aspects of that particular phenomenon (Ancona et al., 2001). In contrast, the interviews in this thesis had been conducted 9 to 13 months later, giving the interviewees a longer period of reflection and the opportunity to contextualise and reframe their experience in the light of the 2020 global evolution of the pandemic.

This thesis contributes to the knowledge of theoretical concepts such as the tourist-host relationship, the tourism encounter, and the Other that are well-known in tourism studies. A deeper understanding of how these concepts should not be utilised as fixed, monolithic entities, but can change under certain circumstances such as shifting paradigms like crises. Furthermore, gaining insights of a specific group of tourists allowed the researcher to continue the exploration of the tourist perspective, which is lacking in research in comparison to the host perspective (Kour, Jasrotia & Gupta, 2020). In addition, a research like this also

provides societal relevance, as it allows Western tourists to narrate and reflect on their experiences and perceptions that have occurred in unique, tourism encounters that deviate from the norm. As the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, this thesis provides interesting insights considering the research is written during the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. in the heat of the fire. Nevertheless, this thesis has limitations in terms of highlighting a one-sided perspective (that of the Western tourists) on the tourism encounter and the tourist-host relationship. It should also be considered that the results should not be construed to be representative of all Western tourists, due to the limited nature of the sample of interviewees. Furthermore, the focus of this thesis was to investigate the perspective of Western tourists who have encountered negative tourism encounters in order to investigate the theoretical concepts in a specific light. Research that focuses on positive or neutral tourism encounters could balance the findings of this thesis. In addition, the different research findings of Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) and this thesis, as stated above, are largely due to temporal reasons. Therefore, in answering the research question, a new hypothesis was generated about the temporality about this research which could be answered by future research.

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pre-Corona virus outbreak (travel) experience

1. Waarom heb je (…) als land van bestemming gekozen?

Why did you choose (...) as destination?

2. Waarom ging je op reis? Vakantie, tussenjaar, stage?

Why did travel? Holiday, gap year, internship?

3. Voordat je naar de bestemming ging, hoe verwachtte je de cultuur en de bevolking?

Before you went to the destination, what were your expectations about the culture and locals?

amid-Corona virus outbreak (travel) experience

4. Toen Corona eraan kwam, wat gebeurde er in de situatie met de lokale bevolking?

With the emergence of the Corona virus, what did that situation do with the locals?

5.Wat merkte je dat anders was in de houding van de lokale bevolking?

Did you notice the attitude of the locals had changed?

6. Hoe voelde je je op dat moment? Veilig? Angstig?

How did you feel at that moment? Safe? Anxious?

7. Zou je je ervaring omschrijven als discriminatie?

Would you describe your experience as discrimination?

8. Wilde je na je ervaring(en) meteen weg uit het land?

After the experience(s), did you wanted to leave the country right away?

9. Had je het gevoel dat ook andere toeristen zo werden behandeld?

Did you think that other tourists received the same treatment as you?

post-Corona virus outbreak (travel) experience

10. Kijk je nu anders aan tegen het land of de mensen?

Do you have a changed perception of the destination or its inhabitants?

11. Zou je, als Corona is gaan liggen, weer terug willen naar het land?

Would you go back to the destination in the post-Corona times?

12. Heeft het je kijk op het reizen in het algemeen beïnvloed?

Did it influenced your perception on traveling in general?

13. Kan je je vinden in de reactie van de lokale bevolking?

Can you understand the reaction of the local community?

14. Zou je anderen na deze ervaring(en) aanraden om naar de bestemming te gaan?

Would you recommend others to go to the destination after this experience

15. Als je had kunnen kiezen om niet naar de bestemming te gaan tijdens Corona met de ervaring die je nu hebt, zou je dan zijn gegaan?

In case you could have chosen to not go to the destination during the Covid-19 pandemic, knowing the experiences that you have encountered, would you still have gone?

Name interviewee	Age	Gender	Nationality	Occupancy	Destination	Date of travel	Travel company	Date of interview
Susanne Spies	30	Female	Dutch (Nijland)	Childcare employee	Sri Lanka	11 – 18 March, 2020	Partner	17 December, 2020
Céline Jalil	24	Female	Belgian (Antwerp)	Student Media and Journalism	India	November, 2019 – 20 March, 2020	Fellow students	19 December, 2020
Kris van den Berg	24	Female	Dutch (Nijmegen)	Student Earth and Environment	Bangladesh	9 – 19 March, 2020	Fellow students and partner	20 December, 2020
Isabelle de Meyer	54	Female	Belgian (Brugge)	Bank employee	Vietnam	6 – 18 March, 2020	Partner	18 April, 2021
Denise Roos	26	Female	Dutch (Amersfoort)	Career and reintegration consultant	Laos	11 – 21 March, 2020	Solo	20 April, 2021
Jan de Groot	24	Male	Dutch (Oude Leije)	Student Leisure Management	Vietnam	10 – 21 March, 2020	Solo	20 April, 2021
Frank van Dijk	63	Male	Dutch (Baarn)	Retired (former realtor)	India	8 – 20 March, 2020	Partner	23 April, 2021
Celeste Hoogland	30	Female	Dutch (Apeldoorn)	Dental hygienist	The Philippines	10 – 20 March, 2020	Partner and family	26 April, 2021

Willem Janssen*	23	Male	Dutch (Maassluis)	Backoffice employee	Indonesia	4 – 20 March, 2020	Partner	26 April, 2021
Marijn Driesen	38	Female	Dutch (Oldenzaal)	Online marketeer	Vietnam	1 February – 17 March, 2020	Solo	28 April, 2021

*Pseudonym

Appendix C – Code sheet

Positive expectation locals pre-COVID-19	Positive expectation destination pre-COVID-19	Asia and COVID-19-control	Xenophobia	Influence media
Friendly	Good work location	Experienced	Blaming Western Tourists	Misinformation
Curious		Knowledge of how to control virus	Association White skin with COVID-19	Enhanced fear of Western tourists
Similar to other Asian populations	Attractive destination			
	Chaotic	Fast and effective reaction	Association Western tourist with COVID-19	Enhanced portrayal of Western tourists as spreaders
Open	Different from NL			
Helpful			Convinced locals themselves had no COVID-19	Minimal information
Generous	Fascination			
	Beautiful			Exaggeration
Interested			Locals versus international tourists	
Tolerant	Unpaved – negative			
Modest	Appealing			
Social	Rich culture			
Calm	Similar to other destinations			
Polite				
Straightforward	High expectation			
			*Reasons xenophobia	
			Fear of getting infected and infecting others	
			Media information	
			Europe second epicentre	
			Media misinformation at	

			the expense of Western tourists	
			Assumption all Western tourists had virus	
			Convinced Western tourists brought COVID-19 into destination	
			Western tourists move across the globe higher chance contamination	
			*Acts of xenophobia	
			Keeping distance	
			Avoid contact with Western tourists	
			Negatively staring	
			Murmuring about Western tourists	
			Uncomfortable moments	
			Unfair treatment	
			Locals in physical contact with Western tourists ignored/avoided	
			Aggressive approach	
			Calling names	

			Hiding Western tourists	
			Locals welcome Western tourists unwelcome	
			Desire for Western tourists to leave as soon as possible	
			Denial access tourism facilities	
			Less friendly	
			Exclusion	

Western tourists' feelings towards local's xenophobic treatment	Western tourists' interpretations sentiment locals	Western tourist experience	Western tourists' perception destination image post-COVID-19	Western tourists' perception locals post-COVID-19
Annoying	Panic	Uncomfortable encounter is negative experience	Not wanting to leave	No changed perception locals
Feeling as object of fear	Afraid		Reason departure uncertainty development virus	Ability to understand
Uncomfortable	Angry	Uncomfortable encounters only verbal		Admiration
Unpleasant	Cautious		Reason departure not because of locals' behaviour	Asians too sweet and calm to resort to violence
Identified as discrimination	Self-protection	Uncomfortable encounters in physical form would've meant bigger negative impact		
	Protecting land		No changed destination image	
Confusion why Western tourists were blamed	Health prioritising			
Pity locals	Different perceptions virus with Asia versus West	Weird encounters	Recommend destination to others after COVID-	
Frustration assumption locals		Not all locals behaved that way		
Hostile				

		Part locals interacted normal	Desire to return	64
Irrational Alienated Sad		Locals' behaviour exact opposite from usual/reversed treatment Big city normal behaviour locals smaller villages uncomfortable behaviour locals From friendly to merely tolerating		
*Ability of understanding		***Duration impact**		
Putting into perspective Realisation not all locals behaved that way Not identified as discrimination Ignorance locals Ignorance development virus Would have had same reaction Locals have to be more careful with virus Locals cannot be held accountable Self-protection Different reactions because		Annoying at that moment Sense of understanding after travel		

different cultural group Crisis unexpected Realisation momentary behaviour Global panic Realisation not real behaviour locals Not aggressive Logical reaction Human behaviour				

COVID-19 effect barriers	Reflections post-COVID-19	Pre-COVID-19 treatment locals		
Border closure Lockdown Cancellation flights Closure accommodations Denial access public facilities Facemasks Necessity of health declaration Denial tourism services	No regret of travel to destination Regret of travel because of financial reasons Regret of travel because of wasted time Relieved went home Life lesson Unique experience	Comparison tourists with Gods Hospitable Tourism oriented Respectful Locals used to perceive Western tourists as special		