# VOLUNTEER TOURISM, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE PSYCHOSOCIAL

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# ABSTRACT

Volunteer tourism is an increasingly popular practice that provides tourists with the opportunity to contribute to community development or environmental projects, usually in Third World countries. This research explores the potential of volunteer tourism to develop cross-cultural understanding, transform tourists into more charitable, ethical subjects and foster more reciprocal relations between tourists and visited communities. The research uses a longitudinal methodology to follow ten young people from the UK through time and space as they embark on a journey to Kenya with a commercial volunteer tourism provider. Using a combination of repeated in-depth interviews and participant observation, I show how volunteer tourists produce understandings, or 'imaginaries', of poverty, authenticity and care that simultaneously enable and constrain their ability to act ethically. I argue that the complexities of the volunteer tourism encounter can only be understood through a psychosocial account of subjectivity that articulates the point of suture between the social and the psychological. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to interpret the volunteer tourists' narratives, I show that it is possible to approach the psychological in tourism studies in a non-reductive and culturally engaged way. This psychoanalytic reading provides insight into how volunteer tourists' perceptions are refracted through cultural fantasies of the non-Western Other, how they are confronted by the demands of contradictory ideological injunctions and how their investment in consumer identities presents a barrier to ethical transformation. The thesis concludes that in order to harness volunteer tourism's potential as a means of achieving social transformation, greater attention must be paid to subjectivity and the psychosocial as a way of understanding the social demands, desire and investments experienced by volunteer tourists.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ABBREVIATIONS

E       Lacan, J. (1977). *Écrits: a selection* [trans. Alan Sheridan]. London: Tavistock.

I       Lacan, J. (1991a). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's papers on technique, 1953–1954* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. John Forrester]. New York: Norton.

II      Lacan, J. (1991b). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis, 1954–1955* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Sylvana Tomaselli]. New York: Norton.

VII     Lacan, J. (1992). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The ethics of psychoanalysis, 1959–1960* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Dennis Porter]. New York: Norton.

XI      Lacan, J. (1981). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, 1963–1964* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan]. New York: Norton.

XVI     Lacan, J. (2002). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVI: From an Other to the Other, 1968–1969* [trans. Cormac Gallagher]. London: Karnac.

XX      Lacan, J. (1998). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Bruce Fink]. New York: Norton.

# Introduction: tourism, ethics and subjectivity

*Much is known about demographics, spending patterns, destination decisions, amenity satisfaction, and the like; almost nothing about the depths and intimate contours of tourist curiosity, subjectivity, and motivation.*

*–MacCannell 2011, p. 4*

The tide of ethical discourse that has swept over the Western world in recent decades, be it in terms of environmental sustainability, responsible consumerism or high profile charity appeals, has left no area of public life untouched. Tourism, with its negative track record of bringing environmental degradation, cultural erosion and exploitative employment practices upon destination localities, has been no exception and now offers the Western consumer a dazzling array of 'responsible', 'ethical' and 'eco' alternatives. While the environmental and cultural impacts of such products have been documented, far less attention has been given to how what might be called the ethical turn in tourism has affected what it means to be a tourist, how tourists' expectations of the toured Other[1] have changed and what these new ethical tourism practices mean for contemporary Western subjectivity. Significance has long been placed on the figure of the tourist as an emblem of modernity – an expression of Western society's increased alienation, mobility and desire to consume Otherness that has resulted in a flow of people and

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[1]  I use 'Other' to refer to a generalised, conceptual other embedded in postcolonial relations of power, where the capital letter accentuates a perceived separateness from the Western subject. In its uncapitalised form, I use 'other' to refer to more concrete actors within this postcolonial terrain – other people. This terminology is complicated further by the crucial Lacanian distinction between the 'big Other' and 'little other', as I will explain in due course.

hybridization of cultures (MacCannell 1976; Rojek and Urry 1997; Dann 2002). If we conceptualise tourists as embodiments of particular cultures and ideologies then their experiences have the potential to provide a commentary on the functioning of society beyond the tourism site. Therefore, in this thesis I want to explore not only interactions between volunteer tourists and visited communities but also a broader cultural discourse that permeates and frames tourist practice, marking the distinction between what is ethical and what is not, and in the process carving out a space to hold tourists' desires.

The encounter between tourists and local actors in tourism destinations contains at once the prospect of mutual understanding, compassion, and symbolic or physical violence. This is particularly the case in the context of 'Third World' tourism, which may present the Western visitor with the most stark economic and cultural contrasts to their home society and problematic postcolonial resonances. Pratt (1992, p. 4) calls these spaces 'contact zones': 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination'. The proximate engagement with usually distant others, in a geographical or emotional sense, afforded by community based or volunteer tourism (the focus of this study) links directly into discussions of cosmopolitanism and global citizenship by way of the heavy emphasis placed on reciprocal relations, cultural learning and philanthropy in poor communities. These tourism practices are deemed ethical in an environmental sustainability sense and due to the altruistic or, one could say, reparative stance towards poverty and suffering. They can also be conceptualised as ethical because they promote interactions and cooperation between people from different parts of the world with the potential to form new affective relationalities, a broader scope of emotional identification between normally disparate peoples, and new kinds of progressive transnational social spaces (Mitchell 2007; Linklater 2007). However, the picture of ethical tourism is complicated by the tourist's dual interpellation as a moral actor and a pursuer of desire and hedonism. This appears to be especially the case in popular commercial volunteer tourism packages, which offer the consumer a worthwhile and life-changing experience through aiding poor communities but which are also packed full of enjoyable leisure activities such as wildlife viewing and the conventional sun, sea and sand.

In attempting to unravel the consequences of this complex positioning of tourists within the ethical tourism matrix, a qualitative focus on subjectivity and identity has been essential. The methodology developed in this thesis approaches subjectivity as a performative, embodied and affectively charged space of lived experience. I use the term 'subjectivity' rather than 'identity' because for me it conveys greater nuance in articulating the performativity and experience of the social positioning that creates identity (cf. Hollway in Wetherell et al. 2005; Wetherell 2008). The emerging discipline of psychosocial studies, building on work in critical social psychology and certain strands of social theory, provides the theoretical resources to approach subjectivity non-dualistically as an emergent property of interrelated social and psychic fields, often drawing on psychoanalytic theory to enhance interpretations of personal narratives and subject positioning (Henriques et al. 1998; Frosh 2003; Frosh and Baraitser 2008).

Within this general methodological ethos, I draw on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to explore the dialectics of enjoyment and ethics, desire and defence, as presented in volunteer tourists' accounts of their activities. This allows me to articulate how the ethical trend in contemporary tourism reflects deep-seated fantasies about exotic places and poverty contained in the Western imaginary, ideological injunctions that direct consumers towards certain ways of adhering to ethical codes, and how these socially constructed and affectively charged discourses are culturally disseminated, reproduced and invested with meaning through lived subjectivities.

The appetite for such critical approaches within tourism studies has grown progressively in recent years in light of lamentations that the field has suffered from the dominance of market research, economic approaches and descriptivism to the exclusion of more qualitative or politicised voices within the academy (Allon et al. 2008; Ateljevic et al. 2007; Franklin and Crang 2001; Tribe 2005). Among these dissenting voices, Vrasti (2013, p. 6) complains that 'the discipline's behavioural orientation precludes any serious engagement with the political implications and subjective complexities of volunteer tourism'. However, with critical tourism studies thriving, we can now begin to address the intricacies of what MacCannell (2011, p. 4) refers to as the under-investigated 'depths and intimate contours of tourist curiosity, subjectivity, and motivation'. Such an inquiry will have to provide an account of the dilemmatic ways in which tourists are positioned in terms of their identities, the troubling and emotionally charged encounters that problematise tourism as an escapist practice, and the intersections between unique, lived subjectivities and collective discourses. In short, I am proposing that critical tourism studies should take on board a psychological account of tourists, that biography, desires, fears and fantasies are important components of their constitution, and that the psychosocial can be approached from a non-reductive and critical empirical perspective.

Despite this potential, very few psychoanalytically informed discussions of tourism have been undertaken (for exceptions, see Bruner 1991; Buda 2012; Buda and McIntosh 2013; Cömert-Agouridas and Agouridas 2009; Crossley 2012a, 2012b; Kingsbury 2011, 2005; Kingsbury and Brunn 2004; MacCannell 2011, 2001; Moufakkir 2013; Picard 2011; Uriely et al. 2011; Vye 2004) with a heavier emphasis having been placed on embodiment and the role of the senses in configuring toured spaces (Crouch 2005, 2002, 2000a, 2000b; Crouch and Desforges 2003; Perkins and Thorns 2001; Pritchard et al. 2007). This thesis attempts to prove the merit of pursuing the elusive psychosocial for exploring the intersections between volunteer tourism, ethics and subjectivity. My work defends psychosocial methods against a backdrop of ongoing attempts to discredit psychoanalysis within tourism studies. For example, in a recent review of mainstream psychological studies of tourism, Pearce and Packer (2013, p. 387) rather disparagingly dismiss psychoanalysis as an example of a 'fading tradition from earlier eras of inquiry', further remarking that psychoanalytic concepts are 'loose, hard to pin down and difficult to apply in consensually agreed on ways'. By characterizing psychoanalysis as 'fading' and from a bygone era, Pearce and Packer show their ignorance of the rich canons that have been written since Freud and continue to evolve through intersections with diverse

bodies of theory including critical theory, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism, linguistics, neuroscience and environmental science. Similarly, their apparent call for a static, consensual psychological language shies away from the complexity and fluidity of contemporary tourist subjectivities while failing to recognise the productive potential of academic disagreement and contestation.

This research follows the journeys and stories of ten young people from the UK who travelled to Kenya with a commercial volunteer tourism company in the summer of 2010. Having travelled a great deal myself, but never as a supposedly 'ethical' tourist, I was intrigued by what would motivate people to pay such large sums of money to undertake often backbreaking manual labour as a holiday. Volunteer tourism is a popular option for young Britons, especially for those taking a pre-university gap year. However, the expense and exclusivity of the activity has made it into a politically contentious issue, with opponents arguing that it is used as cultural capital to give middle-class youths an advantage in accessing higher education and jobs (Heath 2007). The British government has actively promoted overseas youth volunteering through increasing state spending from 2008 and the launch of its flagship International Citizenship Service (ICS) scheme (Lough and Allum 2013, 2011). In light of criticisms regarding the classed nature of gap year volunteer tourism, ICS has been introduced as a way of allowing young people from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds to participate in development projects abroad, with the state funding 90% of the scheme and volunteers being asked to raise the remaining 10% themselves (VSO 2013).

However, the controversy surrounding volunteer tourism in the UK extends beyond the issue of limited, inequitable participation. The practice has found itself in the firing line of the British popular press at regular intervals in the past decade in relation to the perceived damage caused by some gap year volunteers. Commentators have warned of the potential harm naïve travellers can inflict on visited communities through poorly planned projects that do not adequately consult local stakeholders and have posed the question of whether the ethos of overseas volunteering renders it neo-colonial (Alleyne 2006; Barkham 2006; Boffey 2011; Brodie 2006; Brown 2003; Ross 2011). This latter claim was sparked in 2006 by high profile comments from Judith Brodie, then Director of VSO UK,[2] stating that the gap year suffered from 'a colonial attitude whereby it is assumed that just because a young person is from the UK they will benefit their host community' (Alleyne 2006). In this context, a politicised analysis of volunteer tourism as a site of moral regulation for young people and as a contact zone precipitating potentially nefarious power dynamics is both timely and in great need.

In keeping with a theoretical interest in personal change through travel, I wanted to follow my participants through time as well as space in order to gauge their expectations, experiences of volunteering, and readjustment to British society following their trip. Interviews were conducted before, during and after the volunteer tourism placement, over the course of a year, in order to provide a longitudinal perspective. The

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2    Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) is an international development charity based in the UK
     that sends volunteers abroad to work with and train local people in poor communities.

small number of volunteer tourists chosen for the research reflects its qualitative, psychosocial methodology and the need to analyse the tourists' narratives in great depth. My decision not to interview members of the toured communities in Kenya reflects two equally important considerations. First, I wanted to devote enough attention to the experiences of the volunteer tourists to enable comment on the ideological, affective construction of their subjectivities which, given the scope of the research, necessitated focusing on this single group of participants. Second, following Hutnyk (1996, p. 23), I chose 'for "political" reasons, to study my own (position)' in order not to run the risk of producing a narrative that would misrepresent the Kenyans and in order to maximise the opportunity for my reflexive input into the research. While including the voices of local Kenyans would have provided an interesting additional angle to the analysis, this would have necessitated a longer period of immersion in Kenya, which, ultimately would have compromised the longitudinal generation of data with the volunteer tourists.

However, this decision did not resolve the issue of how to represent Kenya and its inhabitants. The volunteer tourism literature is replete with problematic dichotomies between the 'First' and 'Third' world or 'developed' and 'developing' countries. Critics argue that such terminology homogenises and derogates vast regions of the world for the sake of elevating the status of Western powers (cf. Biccum 2002; Escobar 1995, 1992; Latouche 1993). Similarly, Garland (2013) suggests that the tourism literature euphemistically uses the terms 'hosts' and 'guests', implying a degree of reciprocity in the relationship between tourists and visited people that she argues is ludicrous in a place such as Africa. I support Garland's contention and would add that such language also functions to depoliticise the volunteer tourism encounter and downplay its (often) commercial dimension. Thus, I use the more neutral term 'visited communities' rather than 'hosts' to refer to the people visited by the volunteer tourists, except for where I discuss other authors' conceptualisations of 'host-guest' dynamics. As for the former set of geo-political terms, however, I do refer to the 'West', 'Third World' and 'Africa' based on how my participants defined the places that they imagined and visited. As will become clear throughout my discussion, these terms correspond less to tangible geographical spaces than to political-cultural agglomerations that permit volunteer tourists to differentiate between self and Other, and to articulate their desires. Thus, my use of these terms reflects a wish to investigate the volunteer tourism 'imaginary' rather than to perpetuate discursive distortions.

This enquiry into the desirous, defensive and ethical aspects of volunteer tourism is a project that has instilled in me a new awareness of the cultural and biographical baggage that we all take with us on holiday. The account of the volunteer tourists' experiences presented in this thesis is a deeply reflexive one in which I attempt to reflect on my own subjectivity, both as a researcher and a tourist. While at times the analysis may seem judgemental—criticising participants' investments in a wasteful lifestyle or their romanticisation of the poverty that they encountered in Kenya—I want to stress that this critique is aimed at collective modes of conduct rather than at any particular person.

**Thesis outline**

The thesis is divided into three parts: *Volunteer tourism and subjectivity* outlines the theoretical and methodological frames of the research; *The imaginary and desire* groups three analysis chapters that focus on the volunteer tourists' interactions in Kenya through the lens of the Lacanian concepts of imaginary identifications and desire; *Ideology and transformations* presents the volunteer tourists' transformational pathways as they strove to become more ethical and explores how ideological investments affected their ability to reintegrate into British society after returning from Kenya. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 begins by setting out the thesis's rationale in terms of what I perceive as a lack of serious consideration given to tourist subjectivity and psychology in tourism studies. I show that by drawing on critical theoretical resources emerging from the field of psychosocial studies—in particular on Lacanian psychoanalysis—a politicised, non-reductive conceptualisation of tourist subjectivity can be developed that allows us to adequately address the fantasies, desires and fears that underpin the dynamics of volunteer tourism.

Chapter 3 presents an exploration of the cultural and ideological context of volunteer tourism. It examines how subjects in Western societies are invited to participate in collective ethical expressions of charity through travel consumption and how transformative models for self-improvement are advocated by reality television travel programmes, often portraying emotional journeys taken in developing countries. I argue that these form part of broader 'tourism imaginaries' that also incorporate vestiges of colonial discourse that continue to construct 'Africa' as an expression of, and container for, Western collective fantasies. Chapter 4 then outlines the research's psychosocial methodology and methods employed in the data generation and analysis. I discuss how a methodology capable of capturing the richness and complexity of subjectivity and lived experience was developed through a theoretical focus on discourse, psychodynamics and longitudinality. This was translated into the data generation tools of repeated in-depth interviewing, participant observation and a reflexive field journal, together with a psychosocial mode of analysis.

Chapter 5 opens Part II by focusing on how volunteer tourism sits within debates about sustainable and pro-poor tourism initiatives, and how the poverty dimension of the practice affects how tourists perceive and respond to the toured landscape. My central argument here is that volunteer tourists desire markers of poverty for their symbolic properties of authenticity, leading to an elevation of concerns for preserving the authentic landscape over the local people's needs for infrastructural and economic development. Desire is again analysed in Chapter 6 in relation to the volunteer tourists' interactions with host community members and their photographic practices. It explores how the relationship between representing, desiring and encountering visited people results in some being idealised while others are avoided. I use this finding to critique the assumption that volunteer tourism can easily foster greater cross-cultural understanding. Chapter 7 looks specifically at the voluntary work carried out by the tourists in order to establish how helping or caring roles were envisaged and invested with meaning. I focus on two case studies in order to explore in greater depth how a popular house building

project carried resonances for the volunteer tourists in terms of their investments in home, family and the maternal. These affective dynamics help us to understand what volunteer tourists get out of volunteering as well as the appeal of projects centred on individual beneficiaries.

The final two analysis chapters in Part III deal with the longitudinal elements of the interview data and processes of ethical change in the self. Chapter 8 begins by outlining the pedagogical accent placed upon travel experiences such as gap years and international service learning, particularly in a youth context, and how these invoke the construction of self-change narratives. I argue that these narratives take on a distinctly moral character when young people participate in volunteer tourism, creating the impetus for such tourists to frame their travel as transformative and constituting an important component of what I refer to as 'ethical subjectivity'. As an extension of this analysis, Chapter 9 presents the case of Lisa, one of the volunteer tourists who found the process of trying to make changes to her materialistic values and lifestyle particularly difficult and whose reintegration into British society was emotionally turbulent. Again, tracing her narrative through time, I use Lisa to reveal some of the complexities of affective responses to poverty and the defensive barriers to achieving self-change that run counter to the ideological orientation of one's home society. The chapter also attempts to demonstrate the utility of using in-depth case studies to access the more detailed, processual and temporal aspects of subjectivity that are sometimes elided in more thematic analyses.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 10 by reviewing salient themes explored throughout the work and proposing their potential consequences for volunteer tourism as a facet of the tourism industry and as a field of socio-cultural activity. My concluding argument is a methodological one – that in order to grasp the dynamics of desire, Othering, helping and ethical transformation in volunteer tourism it is necessary to appeal to psychosocial accounts of subjectivity capable of articulating the juncture between collective practices and lived subjective experience.

**PART I**

VOLUNTEER TOURISM AND SUBJECTIVITY

**Chapter 2**

# Subjectivity and the psychosocial in tourism

*[T]he individual is at the core of understanding the volunteer tourism experience.*

*–Pearce and Coghlan 2008, p. 142*

Tourism studies has been accused of limiting its enquiry to descriptive, theoretically unengaged research that does little to elucidate the emotional, embodied and affective dimensions of tourist subjectivity (Franklin and Crang 2001; MacCannell 2011; Ateljevic et al. 2007; Tribe 1997). Building on a steadily growing body of critical work within the discipline, this chapter develops a psychosocial approach to volunteer tourist subjectivity. This approach expands our understanding of how touristic activities are integrated into broader meaning frames and lifestyles that exist beyond a person's travels and how ideology plays a significant role in regulating the affective dynamics of tourism. It also helps to explain how affect can be theorised as reflecting the complex interplay of interconnected collective discourses, social practices and the subjective, biographically modulated enactment and experience of them. I argue that the reluctance of critical tourism studies to engage with the psychological in tourism is founded on unjustified fears of producing reductionist, individualistic theorisations, which while being the case for many psychological approaches to tourist subjectivity, is not a given. Instead, I argue that by drawing on critical conceptualisations of subjectivity that have been developed in the field of psychosocial studies it is possible to approach tourist psychology from an angle that embraces the complexity of subjectivity and explores the point of suture between the psychic and the social rather than collapsing social reality

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into one or the other category.

The chapter begins by evaluating the current methodological state of tourism studies and exploring a number of salient themes that are currently guiding critical inquiries into tourism. I discuss how tourist psychology has conventionally been studied and set out my argument for (re)considering the psychological in critical tourism studies in order to develop an understanding of tourist subjectivity that can explain the desires, fears and investments that tourists have. In Graburn's terms, this project is one aimed at articulating a 'social and constructed tourist psychology' with the purpose of enhancing socio-cultural theorisations of the tourist (2002, p. 58). I next outline my suggested approach – a psychoanalytically informed branch of a diverse field of study known as psychosocial studies that resists the dualistic tendencies of other branches of psychological study. The chapter concludes with a more detailed explanation of Lacanian theory as my chosen theoretical framework for analysis, linking it to the psychosocial in terms of its ontology of the subject and elaborating on certain key concepts, such as the imaginary, identification and desire, which will be drawn upon in the chapters that follow. These critical, theoretical ideas are brought into dialogue with tourism studies in the hope that they will open up the complexities of tourist subjectivity in a more nuanced and politicised way.

### Researching tourists: reclaiming the psychological

There has been a dramatic shift in tourism researchers' assessment of the state of their field within the last ten years. In the late 1990s, scholars of a more socio-cultural proclivity lamented what they saw as the dominance of an economic and business model of tourism research that threatened to marginalise more critical voices in the academy concerned instead with explaining tourism's impact on culture and identity (Rojek and Urry 1997; Tribe 1997). As Franklin and Crang (2001, p. 6) put it, 'tourism has become fetishized as a thing, a product, a behaviour – but in particular an economic thing'. Desmond, reminding us of the complexity of our object of study, states that 'tourism is not just an aggregate of commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs' (1999, p. xiv; see also Higgins-Desbiolles 2006). However, more recently tourism studies has been characterised by an ethos of optimism ushered in by a revitalised and increasingly institutionalised critical approach, which has resulted in strong advocacy for qualitative research together with critical enquiry into the field's epistemological assumptions (Ateljevic et al. 2007; Ateljevic et al. 2012; Phillimore and Goodson 2004; Ren et al. 2010; Riley and Love 2000; Tribe 2005). There is a growing awareness that, as with any other area of study, research into tourism requires both methodological sophistication and theoretical input (Dann et al. 1988) and the ways in which this can be achieved seem to be increasingly plural and exciting. With these developments in mind, I want to look at two areas of on-going theoretical debate and methodological innovation that suggest to me that a crucial part of tourism studies' reinvigoration should be a focus on tourist psychology: tourists' everyday lives and the role of embodiment and affect in their experiences.

Tourism is embedded in a series of dichotomies between home and away, ordinary and extraordinary, work and leisure, rules and liminality (Urry 1990; Larsen 2008). The assumption that tourism is a separate sphere from tourists' mundane realities has begun to be questioned by researchers interested in areas of spatial, technological and experiential overlap between touristic and mundane activities (Franklin and Crang 2001; McCabe 2002; Hui 2008; White and White 2007). One argument has been that the conditions of postmodernity—the disembedding of traditional social ties and identities, time-space compression, the growth of signs and simulacra—have led to a de-differentiation between what have conventionally been conceptualised as discrete spheres of ordinary life and extraordinary touristic experiences (McCabe 2005; Lash and Urry 1994; Rojek 1995; Rojek and Urry 1997; Uriely 2005). For example, symbols of the exotic that might previously have only been available through travelling to a distant location are now readily available in consumers' home countries: I can switch on my television set to view images of waves lapping at the shore of a tropical island or purchase a fresh, imported coconut from the supermarket, all at minimal effort and expense.

This blurring of boundaries is an important reminder that tourists are ordinary people who inevitably bring personal and cultural baggage with them on holiday:

> Tourists never just travel to places: their mind-sets, routines and social relations travel with them. The imaginative geographies of tourism are as much about 'home' as faraway places.
>
> (Larsen 2008, p. 27)

This statement is thought-provoking. What is the nature of these mind-sets and imaginative processes? How are meanings and identities imported from 'home' negotiated and reconfigured through experiences in the tourism destination? Adequately theorising and investigating the imbricate nature of 'home' and 'away' thus seems to call for an account of tourist psychology capable of grasping these imaginative and identificational dynamics. Equally important is the need to extend research spatially and longitudinally, beyond the tourism site, in order to capture enough of a sense of where the tourist has come from and to where they are returning to understand the relationship between their touristic and non-touristic existence. As Graburn rightly puts it, 'Ideally, no ethnographer would study persons taking part in a ritual or other short-term event and expect to be able to interpret them *meaningfully without putting them into the whole context of their continuing lives*' (2002, p. 20, original emphasis); why, then, should tourism be any different?

A second theoretical development in the field has been the recognition of how tourism studies have 'colluded in writing the body out of tourism' (Franklin and Crang 2001, p. 14). A growing body of work now seeks to articulate embodied, sensorial and kinaesthetic registers of experience, moving away from the traditional emphasis on visuality (Abramovici 2007; Crouch 2005, 2002; Crouch and Desforges 2003; Crouch et al. 2001; Jordan and Aitchison 2008; Pritchard et al. 2007; Small and Darcy 2012; Veijola and Jokinen 1994; Wilson and Ateljevic 2008). Coleman and Crang (2002)

suggest that this new emphasis allows us to conceptualise tourist subjectivity as incomplete, caught up in a continual dynamic process of spatial and intersubjective performativity that simultaneously 'makes' tourists and the spaces that they inhabit. Crouch (2002, p. 207) expresses a similar idea when he says that tourism is 'mediated by our bodies in an animation of space that combines feeling, imagination and sensuous and expressive qualities'. However, accounts of embodied practices often use terms related to the psychological in ways that remain untheorised, such as Crouch's (2000a) reference to memory, imagination, hope, frustration and self in the story that he sketches of the touristic experience. If the focus on embodiment in tourism aims to generate more holistic accounts of how tourists experience their surroundings then they must be careful not to simply substitute undynamic portrayals of the gazing tourist with equally flat depictions of the embodied tourist, caught in a rich sensory present but cut off from memories from the past and desires or fears for the future. Instead, these elements of tourists' mental lives need to be adequately theorised in a way that embraces rather than elides the psychological.

Researching psychological phenomena has conventionally been a deeply divisive topic in tourism studies. Those working in market research have heralded psychology as providing urgently needed answers regarding tourist satisfaction and loyalty, while qualitatively inclined researchers providing more theoretically engaged socio-cultural commentaries have been wary of what they perceive as psychology's essentialising and reductionist tendencies. Commenting on this dichotomy, Moore describes the former, more sizeable body of work as:

> cataloguing, modelling and describing a range of characteristics of tourism and, in particular, the individual dimensions and processes of tourists. These psychological emphases include an often fetishistic pursuit of lists of 'motivations' (i.e. motives), the production of models of decision making, the repeated measurement of tourist 'satisfaction' and 'perception', and a general concern with the subjective experiences undergone by tourists.
>
> (2002, pp. 41-42)

This appraisal correlates with Franklin and Crang's (2001, p. 5) concerns that tourism studies has suffered from a theoretical deficit and instead produced a vast catalogue of disconnected 'instances, case studies and variations'. Moore seems to portray the use of psychology in such work as perpetuating a superficial, commercially oriented research agenda driven by the feelings and attitudes internal to the individual tourist rather than paying attention to the social connections *between* tourists and other actors, or investigating antagonisms as meaningful to tourism encounters rather than simply glitches to be ironed out of tourism products. In the volunteer tourism context, Guttentag (2009, p. 540) similarly complains that 'the repeated focus on profiling volunteer tourists and their motivations frequently seems to derive from a marketing-type goal of better understanding volunteer tourists so that their desires can be better met.'

The process of knowledge acquisition in this tradition of work typically adheres to a positivist, quantitative methodology whereby tourists' psychological attributes are

demarcated, measured, subjected to statistical analysis and then used to build predictive models or typologies of consumer types, expectations, attitudes, affects or satisfaction (cf. Chon 1989; Crompton 1979; Dann 1981; Dann 1978; del Bosque and Martin 2008; Fodness 1994; Gnoth 1997; Hawes 1977; Larsen 2007; Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987; Pearce 1982, 1981; Pearce and Stringer 1991; Pearce 2011a, 2011b; Plog 1987, 1972; Ross 1994; Dunn Ross and Iso-Ahola 1991; Ryan 2002; Schewe and Calatone 1978; Todd 2001; Woodside et al. 2000). These psychometric methods rely largely on self-report questionnaires or personality scales that use closed questions, effectively setting the research agenda for participants and precluding the possibility of any meaningful self-expression. The problematic assumptions underpinning such methods have been extensively critiqued within critical psychology. Discursive psychology, in particular, stresses the variability of meanings associated with different terms included in questionnaires given their social construction, contextual influences on supposedly static mental traits, and the performativity and action-orientation of speech, together with more obvious concerns such as the social desirability bias associated with self-report (Austin 1962; Davies and Harré 1990; Edwards 1997; Edwards and Potter 1993; Gergen 1985; Harré 2004; Potter 2000; Potter and Wetherell 1987). Aside from the reliability of methods, I also want to question the model of the subject that is implicitly constructed through quantitative psychological research in tourism. The dominant model is one of a unitary, rational, self-conscious subject that strategically seeks out travel to meet its psychological needs. I believe that this conceptualisation of tourists is flawed as it simplifies or omits the social, depoliticises enquiries into tourism through a focus on the individual, and overlooks interactional, performative properties of tourists' statements.

Potter (2000) explains that cognitivism, as the dominant paradigm of contemporary mainstream psychology, produces a separation between cognition as computational mental processes internal to the individual and activity (behaviour) as the output of these processes. Attending to this Cartesian dualism, he argues that activity has been treated as a by-product of cognition—something of secondary importance—and that psychologists have 'failed to attend to the way practices are oriented to *action*, are situated and co-constructed in stretches of *interaction*, and are given sense through the *categories* and *formulations* of participants' (Potter 2000, p. 34, original emphasis). This echoes Harré's (1995, p. 369) earlier contention that psychology 'must be rooted in an ontology of activities, skills and powers, not in an ontology of substances. There is thinking, but, in a deep sense, there are no thoughts.' Potter and Harré imply that psychology produces knowledge about subjects that disembeds them from their meaningful social contexts and artificially partitions enlaced elements of the psyche. Writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Kingsbury (2005, p. 114) expresses similar concerns about the pervasive characterisation of tourists as 'rational, wholly conscious, and psychically-integrated individuals endowed with unimpeded agency'. Kingsbury sees this trend as abetted by the enlistment of supposedly apolitical psychological categories and argues that psychological approaches in tourism research perform a reduction whereby 'tourists' psyches are equated with the immaterial mental activities or inner workings of individuals' minds' (2005, p. 118). By reducing tourist psychology

to an insular, deeply individualised mental world, Kingsbury contends that socio-linguistic, or 'symbolic', dimensions are excluded from analysis, resulting in a dualistic, depoliticised account of subjectivity.

Moore's (2002) proposed solution is to adopt discursive psychology as a way of investigating tourists' practices, identities and interactions 'without appeal to an individualistic and privatised account of human psychology' (p. 53). McCabe (2005) also supports an approach that would pay greater attention to the culturally embedded, ideological and rhetorical nature of tourist discourse rather than continuing, as he sees it, to treat language as a transparent medium that allows researchers to peer into tourists' selves. While a focus on discourse certainly provides an antidote to dichotomising, decontextualised, quantified accounts of tourist psychology, I contend that in many crucial respects it continues to elide the psychological. Discursive psychology performs a similar reduction to the mainstream cognitive approach it attacks by positing that we can only engage with subjectivity at the discursive level. It is therefore hard to see how this approach can contribute to tourism studies' recent theoretical advances in terms of exploring extra-discursive dimensions of subjectivity such as the body and affect. Franklin and Crang (2001, p. 14) express a need to 'articulate the libidinal economy of desires around more general tourism' in a way that theorises how tourists are led to desire and landscapes or visited people are made to seduce (Terkenli 2002). Hence, in the remainder of this chapter I build on an emerging body of work looking into the affective and psychodynamic dimensions of tourism in an attempt to articulate such a theorisation of subjectivity, the psychological and desire (Crossley 2012a, 2012b; Kingsbury 2011, 2005; MacCannell 2011; Moufakkir 2013; Picard and Robinson 2012; Tucker 2009).

### Subjectivity and psychosocial studies

The recent emergence of what has come to be known as 'psychosocial studies' (Frosh 2003) reflects a growing insistence within the social sciences upon theorising subjectivity in ways that privilege neither its social nor psychological dimensions. Psychosocial studies can be conceptualised as a theoretically and methodologically plural field, which includes critical psychology but also encompasses work emanating from other backgrounds such as sociology and cultural studies.[3] Stephen Frosh (2003) lists among some of the theoretical elements contributing to psychosocial studies as psychoanalysis, systems theory, feminist theory, and phenomenology, to which we could add the theoretical work relating to affect (not exclusively psychoanalytic in nature) that has gained increasing prominence in recent years (Brennan 2004; Clough and Halley 2007; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Use of the term 'psychosocial' leads to an unfortunate overlap with its more orthodox use in the health studies literature. As Hollway remarks, 'In the largely positivist tradition of health sciences, for example, it is often found hyphenated, along with biology ('bio-psycho-social'), to refer to the

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[3]  However, it should be noted that to a certain extent the terms 'psychosocial studies' and 'critical psychology' are used interchangeably in denoting the study of psychosocial phenomena, for example in Walkerdine (2000).

additive treatment of different levels of analysis in the same research framework' (2006a, p. 467). Therefore, in this tradition the term refers to the psychic and the social as disparate factors to be integrated into an analytic framework, rather than attempting to theorise them in ways that disrupt their boundaries and challenge their separateness. It is this latter theoretical approach that will frame and inform this thesis, helping to build up an understanding of the psychosocial through 'a critical approach interested in articulating a place of "suture" between elements whose contribution to the production of the human subject is normally theorized separately' (Frosh and Baraitser 2008, p. 348).

The imperative to generate psychosocial theory and to transcend the pervasive dualisms that form implicit assumptions in much social and psychological research, such as psyche/social, structure/agency, body/mind, stems from a critical tradition within psychology dating back to the early 1980s. Two distinctive approaches developed critiques aimed at unsettling the theoretical foundations of the 'unitary, rational subject' (Henriques et al. 1998); a subject forged through the Cogito that is transparent, rational, self-knowing and essentially autonomous despite its insertion into the social order. It was argued that this psychological model disavowed forms of intersubjectivity and relationality that bind subjects socially and reduced the complexity of subjectivity through a reliance on crude dualisms (Blackman et al. 2008; Henriques et al. 1998). Some commentators noted how this conceptualisation was complicit in perpetuating neoliberal governance by accentuating people as rational individuals, unconstrained by social ties, who would ultimately look out for their own interests (Parker and Shotter 1992; Parker 2007). The subject was thus constructed as both an object of study and a site for social regulation. Critical psychology and psychosocial research therefore emanates not only from concerns regarding methodological accuracy but also from a commitment to an emancipatory politics (Hayes 2001; Hepburn 2003; Hook 2005a; Parker 2002; Walkerdine 2000). As Gough and McFadden (2001, p. 2) advocate, we should strive towards a critical psychology that 'challenges social institutions and practices—including the discipline of psychology—that contribute to forms of inequality and oppression'.

The discursive psychology of Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987), together with the social constructionist psychologies championed by theorists such as Kenneth and Mary Gergen (1997, 1985; Gergen and Gergen 1988, 1984), Rom Harré (1986, 1984a, 1984b, 1979) and John Shotter (1997, 1993a, 1993b, 1984; Shotter and Gergen 1989), led one influential strand of thought in critiquing this model of the subject. Discursive psychologists take issue with mainstream psychology's dichotomising of thought/behaviour, the positing of (often unobservable) interior motivations, and the consequent reinforcement of the separation between the private, internal psyche and the shared, external social. Instead, their approach destabilises the thought/behaviour binary through an application of speech-act theory and by investigating the psychological as located in discourse, covering diverse research areas including the unconscious (Billig 1999, 1997) and emotions (Edwards 1999). Theorists demonstrated the inseparability of the psycho-social by showing how subjective

expression always involves drawing on collective discursive resources and being positioned through culturally available subject positions, thus producing a poststructural account of subjectivity as 'restless, incomplete and distributed' (Wetherell and Edley 1999, p. 342).

The second approach to arise through this wave of critique was found in the work of Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine (1998), which utilised poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, drawing in particular on the theories of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. These authors suggest that the notion of the unitary, rational subject is undermined through at least three broad theoretical standpoints:

> critical theory and poststructuralist interrogations of the foundations of the discourses of modernity, feminist challenges to the phallocentric and masculinist model of subjectivity privileged in Western theory, and the 'postcolonial' questioning of the affiliations of the logocentric notion of the subject with the ideologies of racism and imperialism
>
> (Henriques et al. 1998, p. ix)

Contemporary psychosocial researchers working within the same ethos of theoretical and methodological pluralism that inspired the seminal work of Henriques et al. critique discursive psychology for its exclusive focus on subjectivity as presented in talk and text and its consequent refusal to engage with the psychological 'other than through its locatedness within language' (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001, p. 115). Similarly, Frosh has warned against '*reducing* meaning to that which can be narrated' (2001, p. 134, original emphasis), pointing to the potential exclusion of unconscious, affective and embodied meanings from purely discursive approaches. Therefore, this tradition of psychosocial work takes the view that while discourse is an important facet of subjectivity, it is only one of multiple sites of subjectification that need to be taken into consideration.

Psychoanalytic theory arguably provides a theoretical lexicon which is unparalleled in its sophistication in dealing with unconscious, affective and conflicting elements of subjectivity. While much of this complexity finds discursive expression, Frosh (2001, p. 29) reminds us that 'there is a point at which discourse fails', in that there may be meaning that can only be retrospectively put into words and even then this expression may only be partial or faltering against the spectre of something that remains forever outside of symbolisation. It is this capability of psychoanalysis to deal with extra-discursive aspects of subjectivity and the complexity of personal, emotional worlds that has led to it finding favour among psychosocial researchers who see purely discursive accounts of subjectivity as lacking explanatory power. Psychosocial studies have had a strong empirical emphasis upon lived experience and personal narratives and have been typified by the use of in-depth qualitative interviews to generate data (Walkerdine 2008). Within this context, psychoanalysis has been utilised as a strategy for 'enriching' and 'thickening' discursive interpretations of such narratives, allowing researchers to

look for conscious and unconscious 'reasons' behind subjects' investments[4] in particular subject positions (Frosh and Saville Young 2008). This has allowed psychoanalytic psychosocial researchers to propose that theirs is a 'why' rather than merely a 'how' approach to the discursive construction of subjectivity, providing insights into why subjects appropriate particular discursive resources out of an array of possibilities (Frosh et al. 2003). It is claimed that by paying attention to biographically derived unconscious dynamics we can better understand this 'stickiness' of identities (Edley 2006) and why one becomes positioned in ways that may induce internal conflicts or contradictions; ways do not seem rational but may nonetheless make sense on some unconscious or emotional level.

Reflecting the field's ontological and epistemological concerns, there has been considerable debate concerning whether the psychosocial should remain unhyphenated or should leave open the gap that has conventionally separated approaches studying the 'psychic' and the 'social'. Hoggett (2008) argues in favour of the hyphenated version on the basis that the psychic and the social, though overlapping and interpermeating, rely on different 'rules of formation' and thus cannot be collapsed into a homogenous singularity. Similarly, Burman (2008, p. 376) makes an epistemological case for the separation of the psychic and social by stressing that the relationship between psychoanalytic approaches and social research should be one of 'a tactical engagement of mutual methodological critique. As soon as the antagonism between these frames disappears, their generative analytic power stagnates'. In a persuasive and influential account, Hollway elaborates a theorisation of the psycho-social based on Kleinian theory in the following way:

> We are *psycho*-social because we are products of a unique biography of anxiety- and desire-provoking life events and the manner in which their meanings have been unconsciously transformed in internal reality. We are psycho-*social* because such defensive activities affect and are affected by discourses and also because the unconscious defenses that we describe are intersubjective processes … We are psycho-social because the real events in the external, social world are desirously and defensively, as well as discursively, appropriated.
>
> (Hollway 2004, p. 7, original emphasis)

It is clear that this conceptualisation is not reductively dualistic in that it posits the psychic and the social as interpermeating and co-constitutive fields of subjectivity. However, Hollway's dichotomising of the 'internal' and 'external', where the former is the locus of the psyche and the latter the domain of the social, can be thought of as problematic from a Lacanian perspective and leaves her vulnerable to criticisms from theorists opposed to the use of psychoanalysis. For example, the discursive psychologist Margaret Wetherell has accused psychoanalysis of splitting the 'public social outside' from the 'private psychological inside' (2003, p. 100). The relationship between these

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4    The term 'investment' was first used in this sense by Hollway (1984) to denote the reasons behind a subject's adoption of particular subject positions, replacing 'choice' because this implies a 'rational, decision-making subject' (Hollway and Jefferson 2005, p. 149).

two realms is expressed, according to Wetherell, in terms of a 'form/content' distinction in which internal unconscious processes provide idiosyncratic form to the content provided by the external social world; this is, of course, exactly how the hyphenated psycho-social is portrayed by Hollway.

Frosh and Baraitser (2008, p. 354) challenge Hollway's account of the relationship between the two components of the psycho-social by suggesting that the term 'psychic reality' may be more appropriate than 'internal reality'. Whereas the latter reinstates a dualism of internal/external, the former term allows the psychic to comprise elements of both internality *and* externality as an always already hybrid entity. This stance sits well within a Lacanian framework in which the concept of *extimité*, or 'extimacy', efficiently captures the radically psychosocial nature of the Lacanian subject (XVI). The term attaches the prefix *ex* (as in *exterieur*, 'exterior') to the French *intimité* ('intimacy'), thus problematising the boundaries between the inside and outside of the subject. *Extimité* suggests that the truth and centre of the subject may lie outside itself—an ex-centric subject—which resonates with the conceptualisation of the unconscious residing in a social web of signification rather than in any internal psychic structures. Such a conceptualisation of the subject not only undermines Wetherell's (2003) argument against the use of psychoanalysis in psychosocial studies on the basis of it being reductively dualistic but also, I believe, opens up the unhyphenated psychosocial to a more fluid and creative reading of its constitution.

As one of several topological structures, Lacan deployed the Möbius strip as the structure of the subject, not merely metaphorically, but literally (Charraud 2001). The Möbius strip is a non-Euclidean topological structure that has the curious property of having only one surface and one edge, in which 'underside and topside, inside and outside flow together as one' (Frosh and Baraitser 2008, p. 349). At its most simple level, we can read the psychoanalytic Möbius strip as showing the continuity between seemingly disparate elements of subjectivity, such as internal and external or psychic and social. However, this should not be taken to imply that an unhyphenated psychosocial represents a unified, uncomplicated totality. One way of articulating this unhyphenated psychosocial can be found in Frosh et al.'s (2003) idea of a biographically and experientially distinct 'arena of personal subjectivity', which they characterise as comprising a unique configuration of social and relational elements. Subjective differences in the experience of thought and feeling can therefore be thought of not as private in the sense of being cut off from the social but as personal enfoldments of the social. The subject therefore speaks at once from a broadly social base and from a more specific, unique position within this.

Despite its potential for enhancing discursive readings of subjectivity, psychosocial researchers have tried to foster an awareness of the problematic nature of integrating psychoanalysis into a research context. For example, Frosh and Emerson (2005, p. 310) ask whether the expert-based system, institutionalised hierarchies and discourses of pathology in psychoanalysis create problems for its use in critical research. Similarly, Frosh and Baraitser (2008, p. 363) warn of psychoanalysis being 'mined for its technology' and drawn upon as an ungrounded expert system of knowledge, with

potentially pathologising effects. Although it could be argued that any form of analysis involves an element of expertise and the researcher's possession of knowledge above that of their research participants, it is the participant's inability to challenge interpretations of their narratives that makes the psychoanalytic mode of analysis potentially dangerous. The researcher can be elevated to a privileged position allowing them to uncover unconscious dynamics that are by definition impossible for participants to be consciously aware of and thereby closed off from any procedures of participant validation or, indeed, refutation. Accordingly, a common accusation from discursive psychologists is that psychoanalysis puts words in participants' mouths by imposing an expert system of knowledge 'top-down' onto data rather than staying within their 'patterns of accounting' (Wetherell 2005, 2003; see also Parker 2010). In practice, this means that while a discursive reading would focus on prominent features of a narrative, a psychodynamic reading would attempt to piece together subtle hints about identity or meaning expressed by the avoidance of certain topics of conversation or excessive enthusiasm over others. Therefore, while still grounded in the text, psychosocial analysis often involves piecing together evidence from across a dataset rather than relying purely on how interviewees present themselves in any given instance.

Lacanian theory has appealed to psychosocial researchers wishing to forge a synthesis between discursive psychology and psychoanalysis. Through its constitution in language and Otherness, the Lacanian subject is effectively decentred, challenging the existence of 'stable, causal mental structures that can be known through interpretative practices' and instead introducing instability, uncertainty, and scepticism regarding any 'true meaning' lying at the heart of psychic reality (Frosh and Emerson 2005, p. 308). This leads Frosh and Emerson to classify Lacanian theory as an example of 'postmodern' psychoanalysis, in contrast to the more 'humanistic' strands associated with Melanie Klein and object relations theories, which they suggest is more compatible with discursive psychology in forging a psychosocial methodology. In the same vein, Frosh et al. (2003, p. 40) draw attention to Lacan's 'relentless onslaught on the integrity of the ego' through his account of the mirror stage and the process of misidentification that conceals the lack at the centre of the subject, which sits well within a discursive framework that challenges essentialism and the autonomy of the self. Furthermore, they emphasise the similarities between discourse theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis in their accounts of the social or cultural system as both 'regulatory and productive' of subjectivity where collective discursive resources, or the symbolic order for Lacanians, both enable expression and limit what can be said (Frosh et al. 2003, p. 40).

Taken as a way of enhancing discursive readings of subjectivity or as a theoretical approach in its own right, I believe that Lacanian theory has the power to articulate the psychological in a cultural and affective way that ties in with current concerns in tourism studies. Derek Hook (2008a) draws attention to a theorisation of the unconscious as a 'trans-individual' phenomenon that can be 'collapsed neither into intrasubjectivity (the unconscious as "Other within me") nor into intersubjectivity (the unconscious as the Other subject)'. This reveals Lacanian theory's potential for articulating a truly radical account of the psychosocial (see also Žižek 1994; Chiesa

2007). According to the Lacanian thesis, the subject is founded through its traumatic separation from the mother and entry into the world of signs and language, leaving it forever desiring a lost sense of wholeness. The pivotal role that language, mediation and identification play in this account of subjectivity is to position the essence of the subject beyond its boundaries, as something located in the social matrix beyond the subject rather than a truth buried deep within it. The subject, conceptualised essentially as a void, is thus an extimate one, with that which is experienced as the most personal and intimate being constructed and situated outside itself. This account of the psychological as intersubjective and culturally embedded complicates and resists dualisms of self/other, individual/collective and psychic/social that psychosocial studies have attempted to destabilise, contributing to poststructural thought's move towards more decentred, fragmented accounts of the subject (Wearing and Wearing 2001). It also provides a way of thinking about extra-discursive dimensions of subjectivity, such as psychic conflicts, desires and other affects in a way that does not reduce the psychological to the individual or cognitive – a concern that has caused some tourism researchers to be hesitant about adopting psychological methods (Moore 2002; McCabe 2005).

As a way of theorising the relationship of the subject to society, early in his work Lacan developed three conceptual orders within which the subject and psyche are situated: the imaginary, symbolic, and real. He later added a fourth element (though not another order) of the *sinthome*, an old French spelling for 'symptom', which had the role of holding the other registers together. Lacan used the figure of the Borromean knot to conceptualise how the three orders of subjectivity were held together; the knot is formed from three interlinked rings in which each ring is linked with the other two such that the removal of any one ring would result in the collapse of the nexus. The Borromean knot demonstrates how the three orders operate together, making it impossible to talk about any one in isolation. These orders were not intended to be a replacement for Freud's topographies of the preconscious, unconscious and conscious, or ego, id and superego, but rather as theoretical structures that would allow a fuller interpretation of these elements of the psyche, while at the same time exceeding them both ontologically and in terms of their explanatory capacity. While Freud's schema suggests a biological, intrapsychic locus of the psyche, Lacan's ontology provides a way of situating the subject in a socio-cultural matrix from which its interiority comes to be shaped.

I will return to the three orders in greater depth later in the chapter but at this stage I just want to sketch them out for the purpose of understanding their impact on our understanding of subjectivity. The imaginary is the order of the fantasmatic, of illusions and identifications, where the infant first comes to recognise its own specular image during the Mirror Stage – a developmental point at which its experience of a fragmented body is (mis)recognised first in the gaze of the mother and later in the mirror itself as unified and whole. It is in the imaginary that the ego is formed through the narcissistic identification with the mirror image – the *petit autre* or small other. The symbolic is the order of language, that which the subject must traumatically enter at the expense of its proximity to the real. Lacan locates the unconscious in the symbolic, hence his famous

dictum that 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (XX, p. 48). Social structures, or as Bailly puts it, the 'set of hypotheses within which the Subject is constituted' (2009, p. 94), are also located within the symbolic; this is what Lacan calls the big Other (*l'Autre*). The big Other is a virtual network that predates the subject, ensuring that 'the subject never fully dominates the effects of his acts' (Žižek 2000, p. 253). Drawing analogously on structural linguistics, if the imaginary can be thought of as the register of the signified then the symbolic is the register of the signifier.

This brings us to the final order, the real. For Lacan (I, p. 66) the real is 'that which resists symbolization absolutely'; it is the part of reality that gets left out in the process of signification, marking the limit of what the signifier can capture and integrate into the symbolic. Unlike the imaginary, which affords certain dualistic 'proto-concepts' such as subject/object and presence/absence, and the symbolic's division into a field of different signifiers, the real is conceptualised as 'smooth' and 'undifferentiated': 'There are no cracks, no interior or exterior – these distinctions are meaningless in the real. Only the Symbolic can introduce some cuts in the Real' (II, cited in Bailly 2009, p. 98). Although the real is by definition inarticulable, this does not prevent us from being able to experience it in some form. Sometimes the real presents itself as an unwelcome and traumatic intrusion into our reality that must be dealt with in therapy, however indirectly, by finding signifiers that refer obliquely to it, allowing in some way a partial symbolisation (Bailly 2009, p. 101). Another route towards the real is the search for and partial attainment of *jouissance* – a French term usually translated as 'enjoyment' but which carries the additional connotation of sexual pleasure. The attainment of *jouissance* provides the subject with a 'kick' but one that is as painful, through its excess, as it is pleasurable and which never fully satisfies desire (Dean 2006).

Through these three orders, therefore, we can understand the subject as arising through complex patterns of identification, emotional investments, the play of signs and images, the demands of one's society, and irrational impulses arising from the extimate unconscious. I see this theorisation as complementing recent conceptual and methodological advances in tourism studies. The ontology of imbrication across conventional psycho-social boundaries allows us to think about how a focus on tourist psychology might simultaneously entail an analysis of the subject's home society and its ideologies. This complements the move towards greater contextualisation of tourists in terms of their everyday lives, cultural context and the relation between touristic and mundane activities. According to a Lacanian lens, to investigate the psychology of a tourist on vacation is simultaneously to study his or her society – the ideologies, injunctions, norms, discourses and affects that permeate the tourist. It is in this way that a Lacanian approach has the potential to foster links between the push for greater contextualisation and the focus on affect and embodiment, because the boundary between self and Other, psychic and social, is theorised as affectively charged, fraught with conflict and lived experientially.

### Lacanian tourists

Lacanian theory has rarely been used in tourism studies, but those authors who have engaged with it have produced a diverse and thought provoking body of work. Topics explored by these researchers include dark tourism (Buda 2012; Buda and McIntosh 2013), volunteer tourism (Crossley 2012a, 2012b), the politics of enjoyment in the pleasure periphery (Kingsbury 2011, 2005), the tourist or host gaze (MacCannell 2011, 2001; Moufakkir 2013; Vye 2004) and theoretical approaches to the unconscious in tourism (Cömert-Agouridas and Agouridas 2009). The studies that interest me most are those that seek to articulate a comprehensive psychoanalytic account of tourist subjectivity, the facets of which might be presumed to include desire, fantasy and identification. The recent work of Dean MacCannell and Paul Kingsbury present two sustained efforts to produce such an account and I examine each in turn to highlight their potential and limitations for contributing to a psychosocial study of tourists.

MacCannell opens *The Ethics of Sightseeing* by stating that he 'treat[s] the symbolic terrain traversed by tourists, in their imagination and in reality, as an analogue of the unconscious' (2011, p. ix, original emphasis). This statement is telling of MacCannell's conceptualisation of the unconscious and what I perceive as being a problematic distinction that he draws between imagination and 'reality'. The book essentially tries to add depth and explanatory power to a semiotic reading of sightseeing by fleshing out the tourist with imaginative capacities and psychodynamics, presenting itself as a seminal text in a novel alliance between tourism studies and psychoanalysis. MacCannell uses this enriched model of tourist subjectivity to question the potential of sightseers to act ethically. While showing potential for expressing a cultural account of the unconscious as manifested in tourism's 'symbolic terrain', I argue that MacCannell's reading of Lacan is flawed and that as a result his text is limited in its ability to advance our understanding of tourist subjectivity and the unconscious. My contention is that MacCannell reverts to a dualistic mode of thinking that ontologically frames tourist subjectivity in terms of oppositions between the individual/social and fantasy/reality, thus failing to apprehend the radical potential of Lacanian theory to dissolve or invert these binaries.

The first instance of MacCannell's dichotomising between the individual and the social is his suggestion that tourists possess ineluctably human 'subjective kernels insulated from the influences of demographics' (2011, p. 5). He suggests that the world's greatest attractions provoke a response from tourists that is largely undifferentiated along social divisions such as age, gender, ethnicity and social class – that tourism stages a democratization of desire. While MacCannell does not substantiate his claim empirically, my contention lies more with his reasoning and its implications for how we conceptualise tourists. Imagine that MacCannell is right; that it is not possible to distinguish between sightseeing experiences according to demographic categories. Does this mean that tourists' responses are 'insulated' from the social and driven by some pre-social essence? According to a Lacanian theorisation, subjects only emerge through their locatedness in a field of Otherness—symbols, language, the law, other people—making it impossible to posit such an essence or 'kernel' that is not

connected in some way to the social. Similarly, later in the text one finds a series of diagrams representing dynamics between the tourist's ego, the attraction and the 'other'. Clearly an emulation of Lacan's graphs of desire, these diagrams again enforce a dualistic account of the individual and the social that fails to grasp the complex entwining of the psychosocial as articulated in Lacanian theory.

Figure 1, below, reproduced from the book, presents an example of the attraction as a means of reinforcing the tourist's ego. Its caption reads, 'The subject (S) sees its own ideal self mirrored in the attraction (a), to the exclusion of the other (O).' MacCannell explains that this mode of sightseeing entails being captivated by facets of the self in the image of the attraction; thus, a 'temptation of every subjectivity in its dealings with others, with otherness, is to see in the other only its own qualities' (2011, p. 110). This scene is presented as a touristic parallel of the mirror stage, or an 'imaginary identification', but is framed very differently to Lacan's account of ego formation. By characterising the other as 'excluded' by the imaginary identification with the tourist attraction, MacCannell again sets up an opposition between self and other that disavows the role of the *Other* in constituting the self. According to Lacan, Otherness infuses the imaginary order in multiple senses. The very process of ego formation involves misrecognising an external image as the self, hence Lacan's designation of the ego as the '*petit autre*' or 'little other' (uncapitalised). Equally, Lacan stresses that the imaginary order rests on symbolic supports. The ego is 'a repository for the projected desires and fantasies of larger others; the child's image is a receptacle for his/her parents' dreams and wishes, with his/her body image being always-already overwritten by signifiers flowing from the libidinal economies of other speaking beings' (Johnston 2013). Thus, far from being the coherent, unitary self that MacCannell portrays as being projected onto the tourist attraction to the exclusion of the 'other', the ego, according to a Lacanian reading, is essentially an Otherness misappropriated as something familiar and intimate. It is something 'extimate' that can only be located outside of ourselves and which arises partly in response to the symbolic desire of the Other.
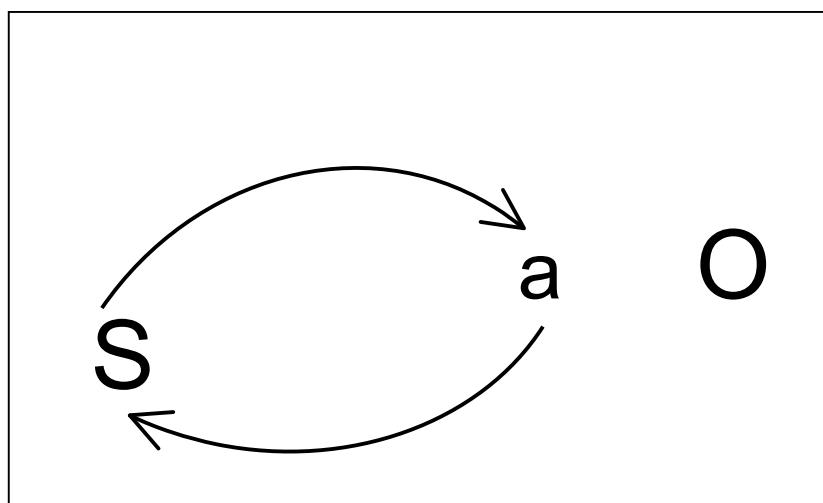


**Figure 1.** Attraction as ego reinforcement. The subject (S) sees its own ideal self mirrored in the attraction (a), to the exclusion of the other (O). *Source:* MacCannell (2011, p. 111).

In fact, Lacan's theorisation of desire states that it is always the desire of the Other, even when we experience the desire as our own. The subject's necessary entry into language and social relations, or the symbolic register, comes at the expense of the loss of the maternal 'Thing' (*das Ding*) and the accompanying sense of wholeness imagined by the infant in its primordial, unified state with the mother. The lack that sits at the heart of the subject can therefore be thought of as an irreversible dislocation from the real and a consequent lack of the *jouissance* (enjoyment) situated within this register. It is this irretrievable sense of loss that sets into motion the unending process of desire in a futile attempt to recapture the lost *jouissance*. The barring of the subject from access to the real and the resulting traumatic kernel of lack around which subjectivity is constituted is formulated by Lacan as, most fundamentally, a lack in the Other, which the subject identifies with. Consequently, Lacan states that 'It is qua Other than man desires' (E, p. 690). This can be interpreted first in terms of the subject's desire being structured by the symbolic order, which predates the subject and affords the very possibility of its desire. However, perhaps more elusively the statement also reflects the interpellation of the subject through the Other's enigmatic question '*Che vuoi?*'—'What do you want?'—to which the subject responds by fantasmatically positioning itself as the object of the Other's desire, as that which can fill in the lack in the Other. This fantasy thus functions on the false assumption that in gaining desirous recognition from the Other the lack that resides in both Other and subject can be simultaneously filled and the lost *jouissance* re-obtained. In order to more fully grasp how this fantasy operates, it is necessary to examine the concept of the *objet petit a* (object little a).

The *objet petit a* functions as the object-cause of desire; it is the lack of the real upon which fantasy projects desire, as if onto a screen. This fantasised lost object contains the (false) promise of access to the real and the filling in of lack in the symbolic whereby 'some empirical content, an object, person, experience, or practice, comes to function for us as "it", as what we desire' (Dean 2006, p. 12). Lacan writes this formula for fantasy as *$◊ a,* where the diamond indicates that the barred subject (*$*) can take any number of relationships with the *objet petit a* (*a*) (Johnston 2013). However, this positing of the *objet petit a* as a discernible and obtainable object is a fantasmatic operation which conceals its intrinsic lack:

> For Lacan, human desire … is always, constitutively, mediated by reference to Nothingness: the true object-cause of desire (as opposed to the objects that satisfy our needs) is, by definition, a "metonymy of lack," a stand-in for Nothingness. Which is why, for Lacan, objet petit a as the object-cause of desire is the originally lost object: it not only that we desire it in so far as it is lost—this object is nothing but a loss positivized.
>
> (Žižek 2000, p. 107)

It is this metonymic quality of desire that ensures its perpetuation; the slide of signifiers that keeps us from attaining the elusive *objet petit a*. As Lacan puts it, desire is 'caught in the rails—eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for something else*—of metonymy' (E, p. 167, original emphasis). In a sense, therefore, fantasy can be thought of as illusory in that it conceals lack and reassures the subject that its desire can be

fulfilled. However, it is an illusion that structures subjectivity and our experience of reality such that it makes no sense to oppose it to some form of pre-fantasmatic, apprehendable 'reality'.

Therefore, from a Lacanian perspective, the dualism that MacCannell sets up between 'fantasy' and the 'real' is untenable. In stating that the tourist sees in the attraction only a reflection of itself, MacCannell seems to imply that he is kept from accessing some form of reality beyond this mirage. Indeed, he characterises the tourism imaginary as a 'fantasy', 'fictitious', and a mass illusion that prevents us from accessing the 'real'. The ethical act, according to MacCannell, is to use our *imaginations* to penetrate and traverse this pervasive imaginary in order to gain, one presumes, some authentic knowledge of the Other. This position is problematic first because MacCannell appears to use 'the real' interchangeably with the term 'reality' despite the former having a very particular Lacanian meaning. What we experience of reality actually contains minute access to the real—the order of pre-symbolic intensities—and consists more of our imaginary and symbolic identifications. More importantly, however, is MacCannell's portrayal of fantasy as separate from reality, stating that '[t]ravel imagery produces a fantasy parallel universe inhabited by tourists' (2011, p. 188). This account of fantasy as illusory and opposed to reality is incompatible with a Lacanian account of subjectivity, according to which fantasy is integral to the functioning of what we experience as reality rather than something that conceals a truth beneath it. Thus, while promising a text that uses psychoanalysis to probe the 'depths and intimate contours' of tourist subjectivity, *The Ethics of Sightseeing* falls into familiar reductive traps characteristic of more mainstream engagements of tourism studies and psychology.

Kingsbury (2011, 2005) also uses Lacan to explore the ego and fantasy in the context of the Sandals all-inclusive resort in Jamaica, but his approach is quite different. What sets Kingsbury's work apart from other tourism researchers who have delved into psychoanalytic theory is not only the depth and detail of his analysis but also the way in which he fundamentally reconceptualises the spatial ontologies inquiries into tourism are built upon:

> psychoanalytic space is precariously and terminally liminal, swarming amidst the porosity of borders, spectrality of objects, and the uncanniness of the familiar. Moreover, psychoanalysis enables geographers to theorize space itself by showing how spaces of cultural difference teem with recurrent forces of pain, destruction, and aggressivity borne out of psychical conflicts and deficiencies.
>
> (2004, p. 110)

This focus on the spatiality of affect and the affectivity of space is the domain psychoanalytic geography (Bondi 2005b; Callard 2003; Healy 2010; Kingsbury 2010, 2007, 2004, 2003; Nast 2000; Oliver 2003; Pile 2010, 1996; Philo and Parr 2003; Sibley 2003, 1995; Thomas 2010; Wilton 1998). This critical, highly politicised area of work, which has focused in particular on social exclusion, racism and sexuality, has begun to provide theorisations that go beyond conventional understandings in which 'places typically feature as mere passive containers in which social life happens to unfold'

(Hopkins and Dixon 2006, p. 174). In the case of Kingsbury's work, subjectivity is theorised as inherently spatial, using the concept of extimacy to demonstrate the radical ex-centricity of the subject's self and desires. Furthermore, he connects the extimate, intersubjective subjectivities of tourists and resort employees to the broader spatial flows of capital, images and ideologies that frame certain Third World tourism destinations as a 'pleasure periphery' (Turner and Ash 1975).

The precise empirical areas of interest for Kingsbury are the identifications, signs and interactions that connect employees in the Sandals resort with tourists through what he refers to as a 'politics of enjoyment'. He suggests that enjoyment, in its Lacanian sense, is political because it structures social relations and is 'obtained through socio-economic contestation and negotiation' (Kingsbury 2005, p. 114). Kingsbury is particularly interested in how the official documents, signs and training guides provided by the company to its staff produce patterns of identification, signification and fantasy that enable tourists to enjoy, staff to relieve tourists of the superego injunction to enjoy and staff to experience this enjoyment as a partial fulfilment of the Other's desire. For example, Kingsbury suggests that the Sandals training handbook, which urges employees to appear friendly and likeable to clients, stages two places for identification: 'a place where Sandals workers would like to find themselves and a place where they can impress other people' (2011, p. 660). He designates these two scenarios as the *ideal ego* and *ego-ideal*. The *ideal ego* is the idealised self-representation that we identify with on an imaginary level – the happy, successful, likeable employee that we would like to be. The *ego-ideal*, on the other hand, is a symbolic identification – 'the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love' (Žižek 1989, cited in Kingsbury 2011, p. 660). Kingsbury argues that these two gazes work in synergy and ultimately produce a symbolic identification with the gaze of tourists, who are so deeply invested in the servitude and likeability that the staff attempt to perform.

I argue that Kingsbury produces a more elaborate, psychoanalytic explanation of the ego than MacCannell, taking into account the complex interplay of symbolic and imaginary processes that necessarily support it. Rather than dichotomising the ego (conceptualised as an internal psychic feature of the individual tourist) from the Other, this account demonstrates how the ego can only emerge through the gaze and desire of the Other. Turning to Kingsbury's account of fantasy, he states that:

> In tourism studies, *fantasy* usually refers to tourists' and workers' privately imagined scenarios that stage the fulfilment of desire. From a Lacanian perspective, however, fantasy provides the very coordinates of tourists' and workers' desire and shields them from the traumatic intrusions of the Real.
>
> (2011, p. 663, original emphasis)

Fantasy can thus be conceptualised as the psychic mechanism that teaches us how to desire, providing us with objects of desire rather than merely ways of imagining how we might obtain pre-existing objects of desire. This is one of three crucial differences between a Lacanian and lay understanding of fantasy that Kingsbury delineates. In

coordinating the objects of our desire, fantasy is also rendered radically intersubjective according to an understanding of desire as belonging to, or being located in, the Other. Finally, echoing my own critique of MacCannell's portrayal of fantasy as fictitious and illusory, Kingsbury accentuates the role that fantasy plays in the constitution of reality. Slavoj Žižek (1997, p. 66) states that 'fantasy is on the side of reality', an observation that makes sense when we take into account the inherence of desire to human subjectivity and fantasy's role in moulding it. To step outside of fantasy would equate to being freed from our perpetual desiring – an ontological impossibility according to Lacan.

Kingsbury uses the Sandals Customer Service Checklist to exemplify how fantasy is orchestrated in the resort. The checklist provides employees with tips on how to serve their guests, including prescriptions to always smile, make eye contact, be polite, remember guests' names and introduce oneself when appropriate. Kingsbury argues that this list is not simply a pragmatic set of instructions for ensuring the success of the business, but fantasmatic because 'it instructs workers how to desire … and how to incite guests' desires' (2011, p. 664). As we have already seen, these desires are two sides of the same coin given that the workers' desire to appear likeable emerges in response to the tourists' (Other's) desire to be 'serenaded and served by happy Jamaicans' (Kingsbury 2005, p. 125). Similarly, the Jamaica Tourist Board's 'One Love'[5] mantra can be interpreted as a fantasy that both instructs tourists how to identify the object of their desire in interactions with local people and shields them from 'potentially overwhelming encounters with Jamaicans' enjoyment *qua* the excessive and compulsive choreography of harassment' (Kingsbury 2005, p. 126). Thus, Kingsbury argues that by addressing libidinal patterns of enjoyment and the operation of ideological fantasies, researchers may be able to articulate critiques of tourism's exploitative practices with a more mature theorisation of subjectivity – an account that brings together the psychological with the political.

While Kingsbury undoubtably produces a more rigorous Lacanian analysis of his chosen tourism setting, ultimately both his and MacCannell's work leaves me feeling unsatisfied. Their discussions of the semiotics of the tourist attraction or organisational structure of the luxury resort are valuable analytic exercises for understanding the ideological patterning of affect across various psycho-spatial levels. However, to me, these analyses feel underpopulated with actual tourists and local people in tourism destinations. It is my contention that in order to fully understand subjectivity it is necessary to engage empirically with how people embody, experience and narrate the symbolic and fantasmatic terrains expounded by these two authors. What do tourists *feel* when they stand in awe before an attraction? How do Sandals employees *interpret* the rules handed down to them in the Customer Service Checklist? Can the resonances felt in a tourism destination be traced to events in the tourist's *biography* in addition to their ideological positioning? The psychosocial, Lacanian theorisation of subjectivity that I

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5   One Love, deriving from the title of Bob Marley's hit song, 'One Love/People Get Ready', has been used in advertisements by the Jamaica Tourist Board since 1994 in an attempt to combat the country's negative reputation for being unsafe and unfriendly.

have advocated allows us to pose these questions without running the risk of reverting to crude dualisms between the psychological and the social because a subject's experiences and life history reflect a unique configuration of social discourses and affects – a unique yet not entirely private 'arena of personal subjectivity' (Frosh et al. 2003).

As a means of articulating the psychosocial in tourism, Lacanian theory is an ideal resource. It allows us to reclaim psychological dimensions integral to tourism's functioning—desire, fantasy, enjoyment, anxiety, shame—in a non-reductive way through the Lacanian conceptualisation of subjectivity as extimate, radically intersubjective, and passing endlessly through the Other. The desire of the tourist is experienced on a personal level but emanates from the social field, to which the tourist also belongs and contributes, of course. It is an approach that captures the complexity, fluidity and conflicted nature of subjectivity on both a discursive/symbolic and affective level, possessing the potential to contribute to recent theoretical developments in critical tourism studies that foreground affect and embodiment as essential counterparts to the conventional focus on visual experience. Equally, the heavy emphasis placed on ideology and the political in Lacanian studies lends itself to the branch of enquiry that advocates greater connectivity between our theorisations of tourists in their destinations and their everyday lives at 'home'.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined the project of psychosocial studies and considered how Lacanian theory can form part of a psychoanalytically inflected methodology for researching tourist subjectivity. The Lacanian emphasis on language, *extimité* and topological models such as the Möbius strip provide persuasive theorisations of the psyche as infoldments of the social rather than as private psychological entities. This is captured well in Frosh et al.'s (2003) idea of a biographically and experientially distinct 'arena of personal subjectivity', which they suggest comprises a unique configuration of social and relational elements. This theorisation of subjectivity not only fits well within an empirical focus on personal narratives but also invites researchers to radically reconceptualise dualistic constructions of the psycho-social and the relationship between the subject and society. With its rich theoretical lexicon relating to desire, fantasy and enjoyment, I have tried to articulate how Lacanian theory can be productively deployed in psychosocial research as a way of 'enriching' discursive interpretations of narratives, thus providing analyses with greater explanatory power (Frosh and Saville Young 2008; Frosh et al. 2003). At the same time as advocating this approach, I showed how it was possible to retain a critical stance towards psychoanalysis, ensuring that psychoanalytic concepts are not naïvely imported in a mechanistic fashion.

This theoretical work was used to demonstrate the potential for reclaiming the psychological in tourism studies in a way that can advance a more nuanced, politicised socio-cultural analysis of tourism practices. I argued that the pervasive assumption that investigating tourist psychology necessarily reduces and essentialises subjectivity to an insular, privatised mental world is unfounded in light of the psychosocial approach's emphasis on transcending dualisms and embracing complexity. When done well, a

psychosocial analysis of tourist subjectivity and experience not only enriches our understanding of the regulatory dynamics of this social practice, but it also has the potential to contribute to contemporary theoretical debates regarding the salience of tourists' mundane lives and their embodied and affective experiences. As examples of Lacanian approaches to tourism analysis, I explored the work of MacCannell (2011), who uses Lacanian theory to enhance his semiotic reading of sightseeing, and Kingsbury (2011, 2005), who draws on Lacan's later work in his analysis of the 'politics of enjoyment' in an all-inclusive resort in Jamaica. I argued that MacCannell's study suffers from a misreading of the intersubjective dynamics of Lacan's theorisation of subjectivity and that both studies would benefit from a greater empirical engagement with how people embody, experience and narrate their involvement in tourism.

**Chapter 3**

# Volunteer tourism, culture and ideology

*Going on holidays involve[s] the human capacity to imagine or to enter into the imaginings of others.*

*–Salazar 2012, p. 864*

When tourism and culture are talked about together it is usually in the context of the perceived commodification of indigenous culture in tourism destinations or the reframing of such culture as a form of heritage in need of protection from the marauding outside world. While such intersections are discussed throughout the thesis, in this chapter I elucidate a different sort of culture: the Western culture that frames certain travel practices as ethical, transformative and both ethically and hedonistically positive. While it is common for analyses of tourism to look at the role played by marketing materials in constructing destination image and its knock-on effect on tourists and their perceptions of a place, a wider casting of the net to include broader cultural discourses including the ever pervasive role of the media in the lives of tourists remains under-investigated. By taking a broader view of tourism's cultural determinants, I engage with emerging literature on 'tourism imaginaries' (Crouch et al. 2005; Salazar 2010). Salazar (2010, p. 7) claims that such imaginaries are 'unspoken schemas of interpretation, rather than explicit ideologies' which can still be understood as carrying political significance and which coagulate through a variety of sources including academic discourse, popular media, literature, art, and advertising.[6] By approaching the cultural context of

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[6]    A more specific relation between tourism and the media can be found in the growing phenomenon of 'film tourism' or 'media tourism', which sees fans of cult television

volunteer tourism through the concept of tourism imaginaries I hope to demonstrate how the practice is mediated by discourses and fantasies that extend beyond tourism itself.

This chapter is organised into three parts which mirror the structure of this thesis. The first part introduces the practice of volunteer tourism, situating it historically within the broader tradition of alternative tourism before relating it to ethical consumer culture. The following section explores how through colonial discourse and contemporary media representations, Africa has been constructed in binary terms as a place of exotic promise that can be enjoyed through adventure and exploration, while also harbouring dangerous and needy others; it is a place that invokes desire and also an ethical response in Western subjects and travellers. I argue that an understanding of the imaginative geographies of Africa and the place they hold in the Western tourism imaginary is critical for interpreting volunteer tourists' narratives, drawing as they do on notions of the 'real' Africa and imagery aligned with the 'noble savage'. The final section addresses the ideological framing of ethical action, such as volunteer tourism, and personal transformation through a Lacanian lens. I argue that volunteer tourists' apparent compulsion to achieve ethical self-betterment through travel ties in with neoliberal governmentalities of the self, which are similarly expressed through reality television shows that encourage people to undertake emotional journeys of self-discovery and redemption. Together, these diverse enquiries provide a complex picture of the cultural and ideological currents that frame volunteer tourism and link it to practices in tourists' home societies.

### Volunteer tourism

#### *Volunteer tourism and social transformation*

The term 'volunteer tourism' encapsulates a varied set of practices that scholars have struggled to cohere into a single entity. Stephen Wearing designates volunteer tourism as a practice in which people 'volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment' (2002, p. 240). As this definition suggests, the volunteer work involved in volunteer tourism programmes can range from skilled to unskilled labour and focuses on helping people, animals, ecosystems, or maintaining the built environment and heritage sites. Within the people-related subcategory of volunteer work, which forms the focus of this study, projects include teaching English as a foreign language, working in hospitals as either qualified or unqualified helpers, childcare in orphanages, or manual labour to construct buildings needed by communities such as schools, hospitals, or houses. The flow of such travellers, which is estimated at an annual 1.6 million people from across the globe (Tourism Research and Marketing 2008), is primarily from the West to parts of the Third World, with tourists participating in programmes run by local NGOs,

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programmes or films travel to the places where they were set or recorded (Tzanelli 2007; Reijnders 2011; Beeton 2005; Grihault 2003; Law et al. 2007). While media tourism has the potential to tell us a lot about how its two constitutive elements interact, as a concrete set of practices it is quite far removed from volunteer tourism and will not form a focus of my discussion here.

international charities, or commercial operators and with placements lasting anywhere from a few days to several months.

Volunteer tourism finds its roots in the 'alternative', 'sustainable', and 'eco-' tourism movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Pearce 1992; Butler 1990; Wearing 2001). These advanced ecological and social critiques against mainstream mass tourism for what advocates saw as widespread environmental degradation (Cohen 1978; Pigram 1980), a disregard for contributing to local economies (Cleverdon 1979), exploitative employment practices (Macnaught 1982), and the commodification of indigenous heritage and lifestyles (Cohen 1988). The solution to these damaging practices was perceived to be small-scale, ecologically sensitive experiences that would allow tourists to interact with local people in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial way. These interactions were meant to be in a spirit of cross-cultural learning and exchange so as to foster more equal, ethical power relations rather than uphold a disengaged and morally irresponsible tourist 'gaze' (Urry 1990; Lyons and Wearing 2008a). In permitting tourists to live in small groups alongside local people, with the explicit aim of interacting with and helping socio-economically deprived communities, volunteer tourism, particularly in its humanitarian or community development variety, seems to embody many of the ideals of the alternative tourism movement. Uriely et al. (2003) argue that forms of travel such as volunteer tourism, which offers tourists the opportunity to experience something authentic and alternative, reflects the 'other' postmodern tourism, representing an opposite pole to those tourists in search of hyperreal, simulational attractions.

In addition to the benefits posited for visited communities and environments, volunteer tourism has also been advocated as an avenue for the self-development of tourists. This is both in practical terms such as enhancing communication skills, confidence, determining personal goals and developing general self-awareness (Wearing 2002, 2001; Wearing et al. 2008) and in terms of the propagation of charitable or political consciousness, and lasting lifestyle changes such as becoming a more 'ethical' consumer (McGehee and Santos 2005; McGehee and Norman 2002; McGehee 2002; Zahra and McIntosh 2007; Zahra 2011). Wearing and Neil (2000) suggest that the profound effect that volunteer tourism can have on the tourist's self is determined by perceptions of it as an alternative and ethical travel choice that is personally meaningful and by the renegotiation of identity that can be brought about by interactions with others from different cultural backgrounds. While the claim that identity and sense of self can alter through travel is not specific to volunteer tourism, what sets it apart is the vision of *ethical* change that it presents. Providing an altruistic outlet for tourists and allowing Western citizens to respond to the appeals for help that are aired regularly through the media on behalf of impoverished people in Third World countries, it is believed that they will not only have the time of their lives but will return as better people and global citizens (see Chapter 8).

In line with this promotion of the experiential worth and potential benefits of volunteer tourism beyond the sustainable and ethical operation of the industry itself, Wearing et al. (2005) call for recognition of volunteer tourism's intrinsic worth beyond

the ascription of value as a commodity within a neoliberal framework, and for a 'decommodified' approach to its study. However, the timing of their comments seems to have coincided with a surge of popularity in volunteer tourism programmes offered by commercial providers based in the UK. It strikes me that the small-scale, decommodified and culturally sensitive ideals of volunteer tourism are ill-suited to provision via profit driven companies, which may be more inclined to increase client numbers on tours and tailor volunteer projects to the desires of tourists rather than the needs of visited communities in order to secure popularity and their competitive advantage in the marketplace; hence my focus in this research on one such provider. However, Lyons and Wearing (2008a) draw attention to the difficulty in dichotomizing NGO and commercial volunteer tourism operators, stressing that many, if not most, programmes are created through collaborations between NGOs, charities and businesses; for example, a commercial operator in the West may partner with a local NGO in the volunteer tourism site in order to facilitate the sending of volunteers and ensure that operations can be easily run on the ground with limited set-up costs. Regardless of the precise management of programmes, the profit orientation of much contemporary volunteer tourism is a facet often left out from discussions which frame the practice in idealistic terms and one which undoubtedly modulates our understanding of its ethical potential in the tourism industry.

Despite the vision that advocates of volunteer tourism have projected of an idealistic form of tourism in which an ethos of reciprocity, altruism and care for the environment dominate, some academics are critical of the practice. For example, amid claims that the high level of interaction between tourists and 'hosts' that volunteer tourism provides has the potential to engender cross-cultural understanding, an increased sense of global interconnectedness and world peace, there is research to suggest that contact can reinforce rather than dissipate cultural stereotypes and 'Othering' (Simpson 2004; Snee 2013; Wearing and Wearing 2006) and encourage Eurocentric attitudes (Palacios 2010). Raymond and Hall (2008) found that volunteer tourists perceived positive interactions with visited others as being an 'exception to the rule' and treated these encounters as providing fond memories rather than instigating lasting friendships. Similarly, Kate Simpson (2005, 2004), in her work on the British pre-university gap year, points to a shallowness of understanding that is brought away by volunteer tourists regarding poverty, including tendencies to romanticise poverty. Volunteer tourism's charitable emphasis has also been criticised for producing depoliticised responses to poverty that 'preclude political reflection and prevent a collective model for social justice that can transcend cultural particulars' (Vrasti 2013, p. 57). Similarly, it has been argued that philanthropic aims become inverted into an exercise in massaging the egos of tourists by allowing them to feel altruistic (Sin 2009; McGehee and Andereck 2008; Hutnyk 1996). Guttentag (2009) has also discussed the possible negative impacts on host communities involved in volunteer tourism, whose desires in terms of suitable project work may be neglected, who may have to put up with the completion of substandard work and face being undercut by a regular supply of free labour. The normative and practical picture of volunteer tourism is therefore anything

but clear-cut, bringing the potential for a more ethical, sustainable tourism product as well as the possibility of invoking its own set of problems.

### Moral(ised) tourism and ethical culture

Volunteer tourism is situated within a moral framework. It is held up by its proponents alongside other manifestations of the alternative tourism agenda as a more environmentally and culturally sensitive alternative to mainstream, mass tourism. In exploring this ethical dimension further, in terms of its contribution to the social and cultural framing of volunteer tourism and how this impacts on the forms of subjectivity available in this site, I want to consider the practice as a form of ethical consumption. The link to ethical consumerism and ethical discourses more generally is important because alternative tourism has come under fire from some quarters by critics who claim that rather than providing a genuinely ethical tourism practice, alternative tourism merely allows people to participate in a prescribed, coerced form of pseudo-ethical action in order to conform to social norms, assuage guilt associated with travel to poor parts of the world, and accrue cultural capital. In this section, I explore how far volunteer tourism can be read as an example of ethical consumerism and pose the question of whether it can be best understood as moral or moral*ised* tourism.

Framing volunteer tourism as a form of ethical consumerism allows us to reflect on the more general shift towards 'ethical' and 'responsible' consumer culture in the UK, of which tourism is just one part. Across nearly all spheres of consumption, consumers are faced with choices and 'ethical' alternatives that will supposedly counteract the environmental and social damage usually associated with buying products, together with a plethora of guidelines and regulations to steer us in the right moral direction. Such guidelines can be seen in 'how-to' guides, ethical consumer magazines, and codes of conduct that are especially prevalent in the tourism industry, ranging from those issued by supranational institutions such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism to more localised codes applied to tour guides and tourists travelling with specific tourism operators. The growth of the ethical market can be attributed to an increase in consumer consciousness regarding the potentially nefarious global effects of consumption and to how businesses have attempted to capitalise on this awareness to gain a competitive advantage (Weeden 2004, 2002; Keynote 2002). As a measure of how this sector has grown in the UK, the Co-operative Bank and think-tank the New Economics Foundation designed the Ethical Purchasing Index (EPI), which opened with a baseline of 100 in 1999 and expanded to 115 in 2000, signalling an increase of 15 per cent in the ethical consumption market within the space of just one year (Goodwin and Francis 2003, p. 272). This figure has subsequently continued to increase, indicating the significance of this economic sector.

The advent of ethical consumerism has forced difficult questions to be asked about the evolving nature of subjectivity in Western societies, distinctions between citizens and consumers, and the avenues available to subjects for ethical and political action. For example, contrary to arguments that pit individualistic 'consumers' again collectively oriented 'citizens', Clarke et al. (2007) suggest that 'new forms of *citizenly action* are

currently being configured through creative redeployment of the repertoires of consumerism' (p. 5, original emphasis; see also Barnett et al. 2010, 2005). Setting ethical consumerism apart from outright rejections of the practice, embodied in movements such as the voluntary simplicity movement (Cherrier and Murray 2002; Shaw and Newhold 2002) or anti-globalisation campaigns such as Naomi Klein's (2000) *No Logo*, the authors argue that people can feel empowered through their position as consumers, which can enable them to engage in ethico-political action that they might otherwise feel excluded from or dubious about. Furthermore, the blurring of public and private spaces brought about by modern-day consumerism—the link between mundane actions such as making meals or doing the laundry and 'big' social issues such as poverty or climate change—is implied to contain within it the seeds of consumerism's redemption through the 'transnationalisation of responsibilities' and fostering of more cosmopolitan sensibilities amongst consumers (Clarke et al. 2007, p. 23; Mitcheletti 2003). This may be particularly the case for ethical tourism, in which these linkages between consumption and distant people and places become tangible and enacted through the act of travel, and where the development of a sense of global citizenship is often promoted as one of its aims.

In an opposing camp, ethical consumerism has been denounced by critics as an expression of charity that actually precludes the possibility of more radical political action, which would be needed to overturn the current global capitalist order and emancipate those living in poverty. Žižek (2009a, 2009b), to take a notable example, has argued that the ethicalisation of products by multinational corporations reflects their embeddedness in a system of 'cultural capitalism' characterised by the consumer's desire for commodities that are neither needed nor wanted as status symbols, but can provide meaningful experiences. By purchasing Fair Trade or organic products, 'we are not merely buying and consuming, we are simultaneously doing something meaningful, showing our capacity for care and our global awareness' (Žižek 2009a, p. 52). Žižek's argument is that corporations tap into this desire for experiential commodities in order to maximise their profits, in the process disingenuously leading their clients to believe that they have acted ethically, leaving them with a satisfied 'warm glow' and distracting them from the true horror and enormity of the social and ecological challenges faced by the planet. In other words, ethical consumerism might be considered in some quarters to be 'pseudo-activity' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997) – an ideologically driven action which upholds the current economic order by 'register[ing] discontent, without in any way disrupting the symbolic order' (Cremin 2011, p. 74). The ethical act, for Žižek (2003, p. 83), is always a 'crime' or 'transgression', and so these socially (and corporately) sanctioned forms of ethical action such as ethical consumerism reflect alternative interests.

Colin Cremin (2011, 2007) argues that this collection of ethical discourses and sanctioned practices amounts to an 'ethical injunction'. This injunction interpellates Westerners as ethical subjects and provides them with a positive way of actualizing their subjectivity rather than being merely prohibitive. My primary concern is this process of interpellation and the codes prescribing ethical behaviours amongst consumers and

driving a 'moral imperative' in tourism development (Spencer 2008), rather than broader debates about the ethics of tourism practices themselves (c.f. Fennell 2006; Smith 2008; Smith and Duffy 2003; Jamal and Menzel 2008; Butcher 2008, 2003). While Žižek's assessment of the moralisation of consumerism is deeply pessimistic, Smith suggests that such disingenuous prescriptions nonetheless contain within them the possibility of an ethical awakening or raising of awareness for the tourist:

> That we are now called upon from all kinds of quarters to behave in terms of a privatised, individualised, responsibility (even if this 'calling' is sometimes only a deceitful way of those promoting the developmental model of global capitalism avoiding the blame for its downside, its systemic destructive repercussions) actually offers individuals a real chance to recognise the limits and possibilities of responsibility (ethics) as such.
>
> (2008, p. 269)

Here, Smith is drawing on Bauman's (1995) argument that postmodernity offers inherent ambiguity, presenting the potential for complicity with social actors promoting supposedly ethical actions for their own benefit at the same time as the chance to engage critically with these discourses. This potential is overlooked in Žižek's analysis, but the question remains of the extent to which contemporary ethical discourses circulating in Western culture serve to raise awareness of global social and environmental issues, or channel altruistic and ethical tendencies away from radical action and towards multinational corporations.

Returning to the context of alternative or ethical tourism, Jim Butcher (2008, 2003) has been one of the most outspoken critics of what he sees as the encroachment of ethical codes and regulations upon tourists. Rather than providing a genuinely ethical alternative to mass tourism, the 'New Moral Tourism' (NMT), as he calls it, strips travel of its innocence and fun while denying Third World nations the opportunity to fully embrace development by condemning them to a future in which the relationship between people and their environment remains static in the name of ecological conservation. Butcher's implicit advocacy of large-scale developments, either through tourism or in spite of its ethical variants, has been critiqued for failing to acknowledge the activist roots of the alternative tourism movement, for unreflexively challenging a Western vision of development from his own Western standpoint, and for advocating a model of development that would potentially lead to an expansion of the moralised global marketplace:

> [T]he privatisation of 'moral' responsibility comes hand in glove with the social conditions in which 'life-politics', including the moralisation of consumerism, is presented as the only (a)political alternative. In other words, *the situation which Butcher objects to so strongly, is precisely the product of the kind of developmental model he advocates following*.
>
> (Smith 2008, p. 269, original emphasis)

One of the most interesting oppositions that Butcher draws is between a coerced, guilt-

laden, moralised tourism on the one hand and innocent, carefree, fun holidays, which he associates with a bygone era, on the other.[7] From a Lacanian perspective, this opposition is invalid because beside the pervasive ethical injunction which regulates the tourism experience is the injunction that exclaims, 'Enjoy!' (see Cremin 2007). In other words, the pressure to have a good time on holiday (and in everyday life) can be as oppressive as the discourses that instruct us to act ethically and, similarly, enjoyment can be derived from participating in ethical tourism; the dichotomy simply does not work (Lisle 2009).

The intersection between ethics and enjoyment is particularly relevant to volunteer tourism given its apparent duality between work and leisure (Lyons and Wearing 2008b). Debbie Lisle argues that a deterritorialization of the 'pleasure periphery' has been accompanied by a deterritorialization of the labour market, resulting in the dissolution of distinctions between home/away and work/pleasure, which has enabled ascetic ethical tourists to 'shape their holidays through a familiar *work ethic*' (2009, p. 150, original emphasis; Lash and Urry 1994; Rojek 1995). Despite this blurring of social boundaries—a characteristic of neoliberalism—balance between elements of volunteer tourism programmes which can clearly be identified as either volunteering or leisure is significant and a continuum exists between projects offering tokenistic volunteering experiences as part of a more conventional holiday on the one hand and more immersive, long-term volunteer tourism programmes on the other. The extent, duration and seriousness of volunteer tourists' involvement in projects is relevant to debates regarding the practice's class dimensions and competitive advantage bestowed, particularly on young people taking pre-university gap years, in terms of cultural and social capital (Heath 2007; Simpson 2005; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Munt 1994). The implication is that people are motivated to participate in volunteer tourism partly because of its associated prestige as a middle-class and expensive activity, at least in the British context. Additionally, the tourist's desire to become fully immersed in volunteer projects may be limited if the prime aim is to tick an ethical box in order to present the self in a positive light upon return from the travel.

Whether volunteer tourism and its alternative counterparts are supported as more ethical options to mass tourism or derided as pseudo-activity harnessed by corporations to gain a competitive advantage and uphold the political and economic status quo, what is undeniable is that these practices are part of a broader culture of ethical consumerism that has had a wide-ranging impact on Western subjects' perception of what ethical action looks like. In the following section, I explore the representations and fantasies that contribute to volunteer tourists' experiences of Africa and then return to consider in greater depth how features of this culture of ethical subjectivity perform ideological functions through media discourses that present the experience as 'life-changing'.

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[7]    Butcher illustrates this 'innocent fun' towards the end of the book with a photograph of children smiling and playing on the beach in Britain, which comes as quite a surprise given that the majority of the book considers ethical tourism ventures in the Third World. One has to wonder what a comparable scene would look like in a developing country; could the claim of 'innocence' really be upheld in a context imbued with postcolonial positionality, inherently unequal power dynamics between tourists and visited communities, and the unavoidable environmental impact that comes with long-haul flights?

### Otherness, fantasy and the imaginary

#### *Tourism imaginaries*

In engaging with tourists' perceptions of a visited landscape and how these derive at least in part from historical, cultural representations of places, we are invited to put forth an understanding of space that considers its articulation with cultural processes, ideology, identification and affect. With this in mind, I want to draw on two interrelated notions—imaginative geographies and tourism imaginaries—that present ways of looking at tourism destinations from a critical, cultural angle. Imaginative geographies[8] is a term from Edward Said's seminal critique of Orientalism and the West's more general discursive and spatial practices of Othering that led to the oppression and marginalisation of people living under colonial rule (1978, 1993; see also Gregory 1995). Through the concept of imaginative geographies, Said presents us with a way of looking at space that disavows any neutral, asocial or prehistorical geography that exists before and beyond the operation of power and ideology. Duncan and Gregory (1999) lament the persistent misreading of Said which, they say, opposes 'imaginative' and 'real' geographies (e.g. see Schwartz and Ryan 2006); instead, they stress that *all* geographies are imaginative geographies and that 'our access to the world is always made through particular technologies of representation' (p. 5). In essence, Said's analysis of colonial representations of the Orient points to the operation of power in socially constructing spatial entities and territories. This seminal text elaborates on the spatial dynamics of 'self' and 'Other' contained within such discourses:

> as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.
>
> (Said 1978, pp. 4-5)

What Said is concerned with is documenting the cartographic, textual and discursive mechanisms employed by colonisers, or the West more broadly construed, to conceive of self and Other in terms of space and identity. In the words of Gregory (2009), imaginative geographies act to legitimise and produce 'worlds', producing facticity and authority about particular spatial representations. There are two key facets of this notion that I want to highlight here and which I will return to below in regards to Western representations of Africa. Imaginative geographies are intimately related to geo-spatial dynamics of power/knowledge, which call into question whose voice is expressed through geographical representations and what social or moral order this serves to uphold. The second relates to those elements of the imaginative process that are not wholly conscious or rational, which rely on desire, fantasy and unconscious affects

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[8]  It is important to differentiate the concept of imaginative geographies from David Harvey's (1973) 'geographical imagination', which he developed from Mills' (1959) 'sociological imagination'. This refers to a conceptual tool for examining the relations between different scales of social and spatial relations; for example between individuals and the societal level, with a particular emphasis on bringing to light spatial patterns of injustice and oppression.

embedded in cultural practice (Gregory 2009; Pile 1998). Following these perhaps more intangible aspects of spatial construction, Said draws on Bachelard's poetics of space to express the endowment of space with particular resonances or qualities:

> The objective space of a house—its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms—is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel: thus a house may be haunted, or homelike, or prisonlike, or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here.
>
> (Said 1978, p. 55)

This 'poetic process' alludes to the subtlety with which imaginative geographies can be crafted and experienced; they are not simply of relevance when analysing geo-political topographies or the operation of power at state level but rather affect our everyday understandings of space and the way we are permitted to think about it and sense it.

Tourism imaginaries, as a possible subset of imaginative geographies, is a term that has been popularised by Noel Salazar (2012, 2011, 2010) to similarly convey the creative, cultural and ideological dimensions of tourism destination images and their perception by travellers. Salazar (2010) sets out certain defining features of tourism imaginaries, suggesting that it is possible to distinguish between imaginaries existing at the socio-cultural level and personal imaginations, although he later brings these together in a more integrated definition of imaginaries as 'socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-making devices' (2012 p. 2). Thus, in their creative and enunciative function, we can link these imaginaries to recent theoretical explorations of the worldmaking power of tourism, part of a range of practices with the potential to shape destinations, cultures and subjectivities (Hollinshead et al. 2009; Hollinshead 2009, 2004; Meethan 2003, 2001; Ahmad 2011). Whereas the literature on imaginative geographies places an accent on the exercise of political power in the imaginary forging of space, imaginaries in a tourism context has tended to focus on more indirect ideological tools such as marketing materials, popular cultural constructs of places and the media (Crouch et al. 2005; Delfin 2009; Hughes 1992; Strain 2003). O'Reilly (2006) draws on Appadurai's concept of global cultural flows to articulate a travel imagination grounded in 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes', which together provide the narratives, images and ideological frameworks that fuel desire and create the scripts followed by travellers. Furthermore, Caton and Santos (2008) point to the role played by tourists' own photographic images in perpetuating ideological representations of the toured Other, thus 'closing the hermeneutic circle'.

From a psychosocial perspective, the term 'imaginary' points to the possibility of psychic processes such as desire and fantasy constituting cultural narratives about tourism, particularly given the Lacanian meaning of the terms. Delfin (2009, p. 141) formulates the relationship between the tourist and toured landscape as one of the superimposition of fantasies whereby 'the tourism site will reflect that which is desired

by the tourist'. Although the conceptual underpinning of the terms 'fantasy' and 'desire' remain rather vague here, what is significant is the suggestion that the tourist's perception is mediated by culturally and psychologically derived imaginings. Skinner and Theodossopoulos (2011, p. 2) similarly attempt to articulate 'the dialectic of expectation and imagination in the interaction between tourists, their object of desire, and the people who prepare or embody the object of the tourist desire'. They recognise that tourism is mediated by powerful psychological dynamics of anticipation, expectation and either the fulfilment or thwarting of tourists' desires. Here, I use the concepts of imaginative geographies and tourism imaginaries to investigate how Africa has been constructed, primarily through Western discourse from colonial and contemporary sources, as a place of desire, derision and fantasy, how it has emerged through an imaginative geography linked to geo-political power relations and psychosocial processes of Othering. Similarly, I consider how tourism marketers sell images, myths and stories about Africa that contribute to tourism imaginaries in an attempt to better understand the cultural context within which volunteer tourist subjectivities emerge.

### *Imaginative geographies of Africa*

A postcolonial reading of colonial and contemporary depictions of Africa in Western discourse could comprise an entire thesis in itself, so presented here is a selective account of those representations that are of particular relevance to the tourism context of my research and which focus on the case of British colonialism. The colonial relationship with the continent of Africa has been one characterised by ambivalence; by a 'cherished series of dichotomies' between desire and derision with respect to both its landscape and peoples (Torgovnick 1990, p. 3; Bhabha 1996). Kevin Dunn (2004, p. 488) quotes the 18th century travel writer Michael Adanson as describing Africa as 'a perfect image of pure nature: an agreeable solitude bounded on every side by a charming landscape', capturing an exotic, paradisical vision that was mirrored by more tenebrous literary representations of Africa as the 'dark continent' (Conrad 1990; Brantlinger 1985; Weisse 2006). Travel writing and novels set abroad were consumed widely in 18th and 19th century Britain, second only to religious texts in popularity, giving access to powerful and evocative depictions of the colonial lands to members of the public who were unable to visit in person and beginning to embed particular images and narratives into the collective psyche (Wheeler 1999). Stiebel (2001) argues that such literature produced a Western cultural discourse of 'Africanism', paralleling Orientalism as a set of dominant, stereotyping and often subordinating representations about Asia and the Middle East (Said 1978).

Faced with new lands which in some way bore resemblances to the familiar landscapes back home and in many other ways were drastically different, '[c]olonists were compelled to make the new landscape their own, to employ familiar visual idioms in the construction of a coherent national identity at once separate from the colonized Other, yet not wholly dependent on the metropolitan landscape they had abandoned' (Neumann 1998, p. 18). For Neumann, this process of rendering the colonised land

intelligible to European eyes and minds, of creating an aesthetic and culturally embellished 'landscape', involved the perception of Africa as an animal-infested, wilderness, the like of which once existed in Europe but had been lost through our domestication of nature, cultivation of the land, and progression towards modernity. Through this creative process the very concept of 'Africa' as a cultural symbol and entity was generated.



**Figure 2.** An image of desire: Africa as an exotic paradise. *Source:* Author.

Placing Africa in an imaginary temporal relation to Europe within a linear model of development and progress invoked a nostalgia that became fixated, more so than in most other parts colonised of the world, on Africa; this land, this state of pristine nature unrestricted by human habitation was something that Europe had lost and become alienated from (Taylor 2001; Biccum 2002; Frow 1991; Torgovnick 1990). In Dunn's terms, there was then, and continues to be today, a sense in which a trip to Africa is a 'trip back into history' (2004, p. 489). Such portrayals of Africa as frozen in time contribute to a broader trend in which 'images of the Third World … tend to reflect a western, white, male, colonial perspective' whereby 'a dynamic First World contrasts itself with a static, timeless and unchanging Third World' (Morgan and Pritchard 1998 pp. 169, 242).

This aspect of the colonial imaginative geography of Africa had profound implications for the conceptualisation and treatment of people inhabiting the supposed 'wilderness'. An emotional investment in Africa as a sort of 'Eden' allowed colonists to question the compatibility of the natural landscape that they desired with its native people:

> Much of the emotional as distinct from the economic investment which Europe made in Africa has manifested itself in a wish to protect the natural environment as a special kind of 'Eden', for the purposes of the European psyche rather than as a complex and changing environment in which people actually have to live … Here, at its crudest, Africa has been portrayed as offering the opportunity to experience a wild and natural environment which was no longer available in the domesticated landscapes of Europe.
>
> (Anderson and Grove 1987, p. 4)

It is interesting to note that while earlier colonial writers (circa 16th and 17th century) praised the ancient cities and civilizations of the continent, later derivatives fixated on the natural landscape to the effect that even today Africa's cities and urban population remain practically invisible in mainstream Western imagery of the 'authentic' Africa (Pieterse 1995, p. 36; Wels 2002). Thus, in attempts to uphold the mythic vision of an empty, pristine African wilderness, thousands of local inhabitants were relocated through initiatives such as the creation of national parks – restoring vast swathes of land to an uninhabited state that had in reality never existed (Akama 2004; Neumann 1995). Dunn (2004) has argued that the uncontrolled movement of African people was perceived as a threat to Western spatial control and dominance—an indication of a fear of chaotic and unordered African space—leading in part to this extensive reordering and the depopulation of the land.

However, other commentators point out that in other ways colonists tolerated native people in the landscape by way of their perceived savagery and wild characteristics:

> The Edenic vision of the landscape was capable of accommodating an African presence, because incorporated in the Eden myth is the myth of the noble savage. The noble savage, being closer to nature than civilization, could, hypothetically, be protected *as a vital part* of the natural landscape.
>
> (Neumann 1998, p. 18, original emphasis)

This naturalisation of Africans, and in particular tribal people, as part of the landscape is intimately linked with negative racial profiling that designated black people as being subhuman, more akin to the great apes than to European man; in short, as just another part of Africa's diverse and exotic flora and fauna. Harry Wels (2002, 2004) argues that Africa became a model in the European imagination regarding the authenticity of nature and the ideal relationship that people should have with nature, achieving harmony and blending in to one's environment. Furthermore, he suggests that the linking of the native people to the landscape became such a sedimented and prolific motif in colonial discourse that their surroundings became a defining feature of their subjectivity. Thus, '[i]t seems that in the European perspective on Africa, its people only get shape, meaning and a personality against the physical background of landscape' (Wels 2002, p. 57). This formative role of the landscape in terms of identity was not only attributed to the native people, however, with tales of Western mastery over the brutal African wilderness through intrepid expeditions, game hunting, and battles against the torrid and inhospitable climate coming also to define colonial subjectivity (Pieterse 1995).

While it is unambiguous that these perceptual configurations have contributed to a set of imaginative geographies about Africa that continue to affect how it is understood and treated in the West today, as I will explain in relation to the tourism context momentarily, it is necessary to go beyond descriptive accounts of colonial discourse in order to focus analytically on the cultural, psychosocial and ideological dynamics that imbue colonial representations with authority. For this task, I will turn to the writings of post-colonial scholars Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, but begin with this quotation:

> Landscape might be seen more profitably as something like the "dreamwork" of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance.
>
> (Mitchell 1994, p. 10)

Making a connection with psychoanalysis, Mitchell points to two elements of colonial discourse crucial for understanding its functioning: fantasy and ambivalence. While colonial power may appear forcefully coherent in its depictions of places and its stereotyping of dominated people, and consciously articulated, what post-colonial writers have drawn our attention to is the ways in which such narratives can be interpreted as drawing on unconscious sources such as dreams, images, fantasies, myths and obsessions, and their inherently unstable nature. Hook (2008b, p. 399) suggests that psychoanalytic postcolonial enquiry has the potential to apprehend 'certain systematic patterns and operations occurring within a given discursive formation' amounting to the articulation of the 'libidinal economy' of colonial discourses and thus contributing to an account of the unconscious that transcends a focus on individual diagnostics.

In his critique of Orientalist discourse, Said (1978) refers to 'manifest' Orientalism and 'latent' Orientalism, the first of which refers to overt discourses and explicitly stated views about colonised societies, whereas latent content represents an unconscious positivity and may be underpinned by collectively held affects, desires and fears; together, these two facets demonstrate how the Orient is both 'an object of *knowledge* and an object of *desire*' (Yeğenoğlu 1998, p. 23, original emphasis). While Said tries to unify the manifest and latent aspects of colonial discourse, for Bhabha, it is the productive tension and dialectic between the two that allows us to begin to appreciate the contradictory, ambivalent and unstable system that perpetuates colonial representation. In questioning the 'mode of representation of otherness' (1983, p. 19), Bhabha approaches the colonial stereotype using the concept of 'ambivalence' to reveal multiple senses of instability in the operation of colonial power/knowledge. To begin with, there seems to be a duality to the colonial stereotype which casts the Other as simultaneously an object of desire and derision (Bhabha 1996). Thus, '[t]he black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar' (Bhabha 1994, p. 82). Or, as Wels (2002, p. 57) puts it in relation to the African context, '[o]n the one hand the African was considered an authentic "noble savage", on the other

hand the African was considered a violent and promiscuous barbarian.' In this first sense, ambivalence refers to this fetishisation of the stereotype, opening it up to simultaneous love and hate, which relates to volunteer tourists' perceptions of their host communities.

The second sense of ambivalence comes into play through attempts to cast the colonial subject as wholly 'Other'. Bhabha draws attention to the disavowal of the fact that the stereotype is created through colonial discourse, rendering it 'entirely knowable and visible' (1994, p. 71) and thus precluding the possibility of the colonial subject being completely Other. As Hook states, in colonial depictions of Otherness 'we witness a situation in which the confrontation with radical difference *threatens to give way to the possibility of identification*, to the perception of similarity' (2005b, p. 10, original emphasis). This reliance of the colonial construct on Western modes of representation links with Said's comments about the treatment of newness in the colonial encounter:

> a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things … The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either 'original' or 'repetitious' … The orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty.
>
> (Said 1978, pp. 58-59)

This passage draws our attention to how colonial representations can be viewed simultaneously as portraits of a geographical Other and of the Western collective psyche, or the 'self-constructions of "the West" that underwrite and animate its constructions of the other' as Gregory (2004, p. 200) puts it in his discussion of Coronil's (1996) text on 'Occidentalism'. Just as Bhabha reveals the bipolar nature of the stereotype in terms of desire and derision for the colonial Other, Said shows how this Other is perceived through Western eyes, ideas and frameworks of meaning and how such an epistemological standpoint can induce anxiety when evaluating new phenomena, threatening the 'established view of things'. From this perspective, perceiving the Other can be read as *itself* a process that is both desired and derided, for the simultaneous kick that can be derived from an encounter with difference and the ontological instability and insecurity that this brings with it. These theoretical insights can help us to think about how colonial and contemporary representations of Africa are not merely cultural products of a particular time, place, or episteme, but also contain psychosocial qualities—affects, fears, desires and contradictions—that give these depictions their force and contribute to their ideological dimensions.

Given this brief historical exposé of European representations of the African landscape and people under colonialism, how are these strands of thought woven into contemporary discourses on Africa? In much the same way that colonists are accused of representing the continent within the rubric of the stereotype to political ends, modern-

day commentators condemn the Western media as being complicit in perpetuating such distortions in the public domain (Hagos 2000; Ukadike 1990; Carruthers 2004; Brookes 1995). Ukadike (1990) complains of the dominant image of condescension and paternalism found in Western films about Africa. Similarly, Lutz and Collins' (1993) analysis of images from the popular magazine National Geographic finds a continued portrayal of non-Western people as exotic, with subjects often pictured with backgrounds devoid of any meaningful social context – again pointing to the stereotype of the colonial Other as subsumed within the natural landscape. Negative constructions of Africa, perhaps more than any other part of the Third World, abound in contemporary public discourse within the Western media, portraying it as a 'dark continent' (Jarosz 1992), as 'disease-ridden, poverty-stricken and disaster-prone' and in need of Western help (Bankoff 2001, p. 19), and as defined by a development discourse (Escobar 1995). Such conceptualizations of the African as primitive and backward continue to have political ramifications for the Western treatment of native people, limiting the responsibility invested in them and being used to legitimate neo-imperial technologies of social and economic control (Neumann 2002).



**Figure 3.** Elephants in Tsavo National Park: the 'real' Africa? *Source:* Author.

However, while Africa may bring to mind famines, genocides, civil wars and droughts, with 'crisis and decay' as the leitmotif for the continent (Watts 1989), it also remains the place where colonial style adventures can be had, the land of exotic animals, the safari, and authentic cultures lost to Europe still exist. Ambivalence and a duality in the Western representation of Africa are still rife today and I suggest that in the tourism context this ambivalence can be best conceptualised as one invoking desire and ethical obligation from the Western subject. Morley and Robbins (1995, p. 155) argue that 'The 'Orient' exists because the West needs it; because it brings the project of the West into focus'. Here, we could read 'Africa' instead of 'Orient', but the point remains the same

– that the Third World provides a fantasmatic, ideological function for the West and provides 'a possible source of integration for a fragmented Western psyche' (May 1996, p. 722). Thus, on the one hand Africa provides a sanctuary from which to escape the pressures of modernity and experience a closeness and connection with nature; it is a place that exists before the split between nature and civilization and, to put it in more Lacanian terms, perhaps provides access to this mythic lost enjoyment that disappeared through this divide (Terkenli 2002). At the same time, the frequent depiction of Africa as poor, developing, unable to govern itself and as a recipient of aid—as 'fragile' and in need of Western assistance (van Beek and Schmidt 2012)—invites Western subjects to respond in a charitable manor, through compassion or pity, in order to do their bit for these distant others in need.

Imaginative geographies provide powerful representational resources that tourism practitioners are able to draw on in marketing Third World destinations. Sturma (1999) refers to a 'representational loop' in which colonial imagery is reiterated and recycled through neo-imperial processes. Regarding tourism in Africa specifically, authenticity relating to primitivism, tribal displays and the pristineness of the environment is marketed as an important part of the experience. Tourism marketing materials that have been analysed reveal a romanticised, exotic vision of sub-Saharan Africa that draws on colonial imagery to present primordial nature, primitive culture and scenes devoid of any evidence of industrialisation or socio-economic development (Norton 1996; Silver 1993; Salazar 2009; Dunn 2004; Mowforth and Munt 1998). These colonial vestiges are very much present in tourism discourses that, in Dunn's terms, create the 'emplotment' of Africa and Africans within specific Western-scripted narratives'[9] (2004, p. 485). Wels's depiction of the scene that Western tourists to Africa expect to be greeted with is strikingly similar to the colonial stereotypes that have already been examined:

> African landscapes with the picturesque thatched roofs dotted and blending into it and expect to hear the drums the minute they arrive in Africa, with Africans rhythmically dancing to its ongoing cadenza. That is Africa. That is the Otherness … for which they are prepared to pay money.
>
> (2002, p. 64)

There is a distinct sense in which what is being sold through tourism is not just an authentic encounter with a stereotype, but a fantasy in which landscapes are marketed as able to fulfill the tourist's 'dreams' and in which native people take on almost 'magical' qualities (Garland and Gordon 1999; Echtner and Prasad 2003; Silver 1993; Picard 2011; Adams 1992). Britton (1979) argues that the tourism industry is apparently incapable of representing Third World countries as 'real places', while Simmons (2004) and Kaplan (1996) suggest that tourists' perceptions are coloured by colonial nostalgia and fantasies that imbue their travels with meaning.

Echtner and Prasad's (2003) analysis of marketing materials used in relation to

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[9] While such 'emplotment' can originate from Western tour operators or media (see Fürsich 2002), Fürsich and Robins (2004) point out that stereotypical representations are also drawn upon by local actors within the tourism industry in Africa, as evidenced by their analysis of national tourism websites which found many cases of 'self-exoticization'.

Third World tourism destinations is one of the most cogent accounts available of how tourism imaginaries feed off and reinforce colonial discourse in their perpetuation of certain 'myths' and emphasis of oppositional binaries. The three myths that they discuss of the unchanged, unrestrained and uncivilized correspond to three geographical clusters of countries and demonstrate the dominant discourse used to market these areas to Western tourists. They use the myth of the 'unchanged' to refer to parts of the Orient which are portrayed through tourism as 'unchanged and exotic remnants of another time' (p. 669), where the accent falls heavily on architecture and beautiful cultural artefacts that can be enjoyed by visitors. The myth of the 'unrestrained' is used in the marketing of luxury island destinations such as the Caribbean, emphasising opulence, indulgence, the clement climate and people who are 'smiling, serving and submissive' (p. 674). The third myth, of the 'uncivilized', corresponds to sub-Saharan Africa and other 'frontier' destinations that are deemed to be on the outskirts of civilisation, where people exist in a state of nature and nature is wild and untamed. Here, 'savages' can still be observed living their primitive, tribal way of life, presenting 'a fascinating pureness and raw sensuality' which forms 'a contrast against the industrialization and complication of Western society' (p. 677). In terms of authenticity, it is the Africa myth that perhaps best coheres with the tourist's search; Lattas (1991) and Hughes (1995) both suggest that the primitive Other or union with nature provide a spiritual and physical 'authenticity' that has been (perceived as) lost in Western materialist, secular society.

In this section, I have shown how discourses emanating from colonial literature, modern media sources and tourism marketing materials converge to form tourism imaginaries and broader imaginative geographies of Africa. While it could be argued that volunteer tourism is set apart from its counterparts that continue to peddle outdated, neo-imperial representations of Third World countries, recent research suggests that the search for authenticity remains a crucial element of the experience (Brown 2005; Carter 2008; Conran 2011, 2006; Wearing 2001). Thus, it is suggested that volunteer tourists visiting these parts of the world are likely to play a part in the reproduction of controversial representations. What is crucial to note from this discussion is the collective affective investment in representations of Africa as an untouched, wild, primitive place that the West—past and present—seems to hold. As Echtner and Prasad put it, we indulge in a 'myth' of an Africa that not only does not currently exist, but never did. This gives us a first glimpse into the spatial configuration of the psychosocial through tourism. I argue that these myths are collectively held fantasies that conceal the West's unconscious sense of fragmentation and loss, positing a remedy to its socio-cultural state in a distant, mysterious land. The affective resonance of such cultural fantasies, as they are experienced by individual tourists, is a theme that I will explore throughout this thesis.

### *Volunteer tourism marketing*

Surprisingly little has been written about the promotional materials and marketing strategies used by volunteer tourism providers to market their products (see Simpson

2004; Coghlan 2007; Cousins et al. 2009; Raymond 2008; Cremin 2007 for exceptions). In this section I examine advertising materials displayed on the websites (taken as being the most accessible and popular way of browsing potential providers) of ten major UK based volunteer tourism sending organizations: Africa & Asia Venture (AV), BUNAC, Camps International, Frontier, Gap Year Volunteering (GVI), i-to-i, Madventurer, Original Volunteers, Raleigh International and RealGap. This group includes charities and commercial operators alike on the basis that regardless of the financial aims of the sender they are in direct competition with one another. The organizations were selected according to their ranking in an internet search engine search using the key words, 'volunteer tourism', 'volunteer abroad' and 'gap year'. Rather than conduct a complete analysis of all of the advertising materials provided by these organizations, my aim was to navigate to the first relevant page (usually the homepage) within the website dealing with community based volunteer tourism and to take note of how volunteers and visited people were positioned through the pictures and surrounding text. I also sought to discover how poverty was depicted and described as an element of the experience to be anticipated, and potentially alleviated, and how the volunteer tourist self was constructed through these materials.



**Figure 4.** Volunteer tourists holding Maasai children from the Original Volunteers website. *Source:* http://www.originalvolunteers.co.uk/

The portrayal of members of the visited communities on volunteer tourism websites is most vivid in the use of images. The images used are comprised almost entirely of photographs taken from previous programmes and vary in the emphasis they place on the volunteer tourists or local people. For example, Raleigh International, with its selling point of 'expeditions' has relatively few pictures of host communities and many more of the intrepid explorers trekking through dense forest or working together in teams. The more usual range of photographs tends to show groups of volunteer tourists either working on projects or socialising, groups of local people or wildlife (depending on whether the programme is conservation or community development based) and volunteers posing with local people. It is this final category of images that is potentially the most intriguing, as it positions local people and volunteer tourists in relation to one another. A high proportion of these images feature children, which is in part a reflection of the popularity of childcare, teaching and orphanage projects but which may also point

to broader tendencies in volunteer tourism marketing. For example, Figure 4 shows an image from the Original Volunteers website advertising a programme not explicitly focused on childcare but which uses Maasai children to depict the project. The pervasive use of local children in volunteer tourism marketing is significant in the framing of 'host-guest' relations in the volunteer tourism encounter. Additionally, children are frequently cited by the volunteer tourists I spoke to as an important part of their visit to Kenya.



**Figure 5.** Lone white volunteer tourist against a backdrop of black children from the Camps International website. *Source:* http://www.campsinternational.com/

The use of children in the Figure 4 performs several functions in framing the volunteer tourism encounter and depicting visited communities. First, a racial opposition is set up in which the tourists are almost invariably white and people in the visited communities are black. Volunteer tourism is a predominantly white, middle-class phenomenon in the British context and black volunteers are almost never depicted in organizations' marketing materials as to do so would risk losing the clear focus of which person is the volunteer tourist – the protagonist of the story. This framing of the volunteer tourist against a backdrop of black children can be seen even more clearly in Figure 5 in which a single volunteer is depicted in a crowd of schoolchildren. Still, if such images are designed to allow the viewer to identify with clearly defined characters and to imagine themselves in their place, this could easily be achieved using photographs of volunteer tourists with adults from the host communities. I believe that the use of children in these materials provides two other important functions. First, given that volunteer tourists are typically young adults of school leaver age, their juxtaposition against children provides an air of seniority and superiority which may on some level counter claims that such young volunteers have nothing in the way of skills, qualifications or experience to offer poor communities in Third World countries. Secondly, I argue that the image of the child conveys a sense of innocence and warmth that neutralises and depoliticises the potentially intimidating or troubling features of the volunteer tourism encounter – the difficulty of being away from home for the first time, the potential culture shock, and the possibility of having altruistic actions looked down upon by more senior community members.

The children shown in Figure 6, this time on their own, similarly emphasise this

message of the warm welcome that will be extended to visitors. The caption reads 'Happy local kids' and although the children do not seem to be smiling two are giving a thumbs-up at the camera. Dressed in dirty and torn clothes, and without any shoes on, these children are immediately recognisable as those who are most in need of our help, as the faces that could appear on any Third World aid advertisement (see Hutnyk 2004). Their obvious need legitimises the volunteer tourists' presence as ethical actors in their country and yet at the same time the viewer is reassured that the children are alright, despite their poverty. This image of the 'happy poor' is a powerful component of the tourism imaginary within the practice. O'Reilly (2006, p. 999) suggests that such discourse perpetuates a myth of the '"happy" native who gets by with very little and appears not to mind living in poverty—a corollary being that their culture or religious beliefs somehow inure them to suffering' (see also Simpson 2004).



**Figure 6.** 'Happy local kids' from the Mozambique Village Project on the Frontier website. *Source:* http://www.frontiergap.com/

The children in the picture demonstrate that there is a social issue to be engaged with and alleviated through essential volunteer work in developing countries but that this engagement need not trouble or call into question the tourists' own practices or identities as Westerners or consumers because they are being welcomed with open arms and wide smiles. This representation further depoliticises the encounter between 'hosts' and 'guests', conveying the message that the sorts of interactions to be valued and expected with the local people will be intimate and non-threatening. Rarely are such images replaced by depictions of volunteer tourists and local people working collectively on projects or engaging in conversations and cross-cultural exchange, and so collectively gap year organisations reinforce particular expectations about whom tourists are going to meet and how they should behave in their presence.

The volunteer tourism providers surveyed varied in the degree to which they highlighted the ethical, altruistic elements of the experience and the leisure elements. For example, i-to-i's project advertisements tended to emphasise the desirous, touristic

aspects of destinations whereas GVI labels its volunteers' work as 'crucial' and 'critical' to come to the assistance of impoverished, 'needy' others. Between these two extremes, most of the sending organisations presented texts that implicitly point to the need of visited communities. So instead of detailing the various ways in which visited communities are poor, deprived and in need of help from volunteer tourists, seven out of the ten organisations surveyed made repeated references to their provision of opportunities to 'make a difference' in poor parts of the world, which already contains within it the notion of need. The discourse of 'making a difference' or 'giving something back' therefore echoes the imagery provided by the local children in presenting a message of need that does not reach excessive proportions; enough is said for the volunteer tourists to know that they are needed but not so much that they might feel intimidated by the prospect of helping out. The choice of words and images across these websites also culminates to present a positive vision of volunteer tourism in which the focus is on how visited communities appear happy rather than despairing in their poverty, and on how volunteers can help to ameliorate the situation rather than focusing on the nature of that situation.

What this section demonstrates is the potency of historical practices such as colonialism for providing a language, imagery and collective fantasies that continue to inform contemporary tourism practices in Third World destinations. In other words, my aim has been to historicise our conceptualisation of the tourism imaginary, consider how it continues to be reproduced through media and marketing discourses, and to relate it to the specific context of volunteer tourism in Africa. In the final part of this chapter I return to the discussion regarding ethical consumer culture in order to develop an understanding of the ideological pressures exerted upon Western subjects, including volunteer tourists, to become more ethical and charitable. This will consider how ideological discourses that help to shape volunteer tourism also intersect with neoliberal practices of governmentality that regulate the self in Western societies and will be key to interpreting the volunteer tourists' personal transformations later in the thesis.

### Ideological injunctions

#### *Enjoyment, ethics and enterprise*

So far, I have explored how volunteer tourism can be located within a cultural context and investigated how various discourses circulating through tourism marketing and the media converge to form 'tourism imaginaries' (Crouch et al. 2005; Salazar 2010). As Tzanelli (2007, p. 8) suggests, tourism destinations are not simply produced by industry marketing but are 'over-determined' by various other media and cultural sources. In this final part of the chapter, I want to explore how such cultural and ideological sources mediate the volunteer tourism experience. I begin by drawing on Žižek's reading of Lacanian subjectivity in order to commence a deeper reading of the volunteer tourist's compliance with ethical norms, charitable impulses, and feelings of guilt or enjoyment. The tripartite constellation of ideological 'injunctions' that Cremin (2011, 2007) identifies provides a politicised way of articulating the divergent demands placed on tourists by their home society. I then consider how the self has become regulated by a

form of neoliberal governmentality in late modern societies in order to understand why volunteer tourists feel compelled to claim to have undergone ethical transformations as a result of their travel experiences. This builds on Vrasti's (2013, p. 4) contention that researchers should judge volunteer tourism 'in terms of how well it helps (re)produce subjects and social relations congruent with the logic of capital in seemingly laudable and pleasurable ways' in order to produce politicised understandings of how the practice contributes to the functioning of neoliberal ideology.

Lacanian theorists have advanced an account of political subjectivity that explains ideology's grip on the subject in terms of its fantasmatic dimensions (Žižek 1997, 1994, 1993, 1989; Glynos 2008, 2001; Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008; Stavrakakis 1997). In opposition to the traditional Marxist line of thought that construes ideology as a 'false consciousness' concealing the reality of one's social conditions, Žižek (1989, p. 45) suggests that ideology is 'a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our "reality"'. Fantasy in this context of course refers to the formulation of *objet petit a* in response to the Other's enigmatic desire – the process of identification with people, things or ideas in which the subject invests hope that its 'lost' *jouissance* will be recaptured. In other words, ideology does not conceal reality but fantasmatically sustains it, enabling us to evade and 'mask the Real of our desire' (Žižek 1989, p. 45). Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, p. 263) remark that this fantasmatic process 'links the "dry" socio-symbolic field … to the "sticky" affects of the subject', providing a potential answer in terms of emotional investment to the question of how ideology exerts its power. This reconceptualisation allows us to move beyond a critique that sees neoliberal ideology as a discursive formation that dupes its subjects; instead, we can ask what neoliberalism *does* for people, how it sustains reality, protects them from their desire, and constitutes identities.

The Lacanian thesis presents a transfiguration of the Freudian super-ego in which it now commands the subject to Enjoy!, to pursue its desire in all arenas of existence in search of its (mythic) lost enjoyment that originates from the subject's entry into the symbolic order, or language (XX, p. 3). Turning the Freudian concept on its head, Lacan therefore implies that the superego is not a prohibitive force or moral conscience that keeps subjects in line with societal norms and ideals, but rather an 'anti-ethical agency' that commands that the subject acts in line with its desire (Žižek 2011). Indeed, in his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan reconfigures ethics as any act that conforms with one's desire (VII, p. 311). The superego results from our inevitable betrayal of this 'law of desire' through adherence to social norms which mean that we do not always act in accordance with our desires, generating in us feelings of guilt. Žižek comments that this version of the superego is particularly linked to the cultural conditions of late capitalism, with social prohibitions having been relaxed and consumerism playing an ever more significant role in the formation of subjectivity. The contemporary complaint to the therapist, he claims, is not one of how to be released from societal constraints preventing the patient from enjoying themselves but of how to be released from this injunction to Enjoy!, which finds the subject always falling short, never quite enjoying themselves as much as they could be.

Cremin (2011, 2007) suggests that enjoyment comprises one of three significant ideological, psychosocial injunctions that currently regulate the functioning of Western society; the others being the ethical and enterprising injunctions. The ethical injunction and the injunction to enjoy converge when the subject is faced by troubling social or environmental issues that arouse feelings of guilt, and Cremin takes the example of poverty to demonstrate how guilt becomes fetishised (in both a Marxist and Freudian sense) through an excessive fixation on images of distant, suffering others. Such 'intolerable images' (Rancière 2009) with which we are confronted on practically a daily basis through either the news, charity appeals or imagery associated with ethical consumerism, necessarily elicit an ethical and affective response from the viewer. However, Cremin argues that this response is one that allows the subject to adopt a purportedly ethical position (as charity giver, volunteer, Fairtrade consumer, and so on) whilst in fact turning away from the object of concern. Thus, these 'objects serve as empty vessels into which guilt can be transferred every time we make a donation' (Cremin 2011, p. 97) and the guilt fetishist gets a kick out of the repeated failure to eliminate these images from his consciousness while at the same time constructing an ethical identity through this failure. Or, to put this another way, 'The object cannot deliver but the more it appears to be delivering the greater the ethical value' (Cremin 2011, p. 104).

Žižek suggests that this mechanism, which provides an ethical outlet for affects experienced by the Western subject, releases guilt through transferring it to the Other:

> By surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breath: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other is sacrificed instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt, and so on.
>
> (1997, p. 109)

According to Žižek, these characteristics, found in both traditional societies (the 'weepers' hired at funerals in the Middle East) and in postmodernity ('canned laughter' on television sitcoms), are extensions of the primordial substitution of symbolic order for the real; the signifier takes the place of the subject and in the process the very fabric of social reality is constructed. The name he gives to this process of transfer or substitution is 'interpassivity' – a play on the concept of 'interactivity' that today's social media and technology are supposed to have engendered. This suggests that rather than actively interacting with these interfaces, the postmodern subject allows the object/signifier/Other to respond and act on its behalf, adopting a passive position, freeing him momentarily from the incessant pressure of the injunction to enjoy. The link to Lacan's neologism, 'extimacy' (*extimité*), is clear here; that affects and beliefs—that which is closest to the core of our subjectivity, the most intimate to our sense of self—can be expressed and enacted through the Other, so that our enjoyment *is* the canned laughter on the television screen rather than merely a resonance of it, perfectly expresses his conception of the radical ex-centricity of the subject, the self-knowledge that can only be obtained through the symbolic order.

In one example, Cremin (2011) relates these processes to the marketing of Fairtrade brands such as Divine chocolate. He argues that the brand's tagline, 'Eat Poverty History', accompanied by images of a healthy black woman holding a piece of chocolate with a backdrop of a typical African village scene, enjoins ethical consumers to enjoy the product by transferring their guilt onto the person who the chocolate signifies. Going one step further, Cremin suggests that the positive imagery allows the Other to enjoy poverty for us, implying that there is something pleasurable about consuming poverty and its symbols. These ideas contribute an important dimension to our consideration of the culture of ethical consumerism in terms of understanding the role of affects in charitable giving and reconsidering to what extent such actions are active and aimed at generating global social change. In the case of volunteer tourism, for example, the discourse of the 'happy poor' reflects precisely this form of interpassivity in which the Other enjoys poverty for us. These portrayals serve to relieve any guilt possessed by the volunteer tourist and articulate ethics and enjoyment so that ethical action is fashioned as a channel through which enjoyment can be obtained, either actively or passively.
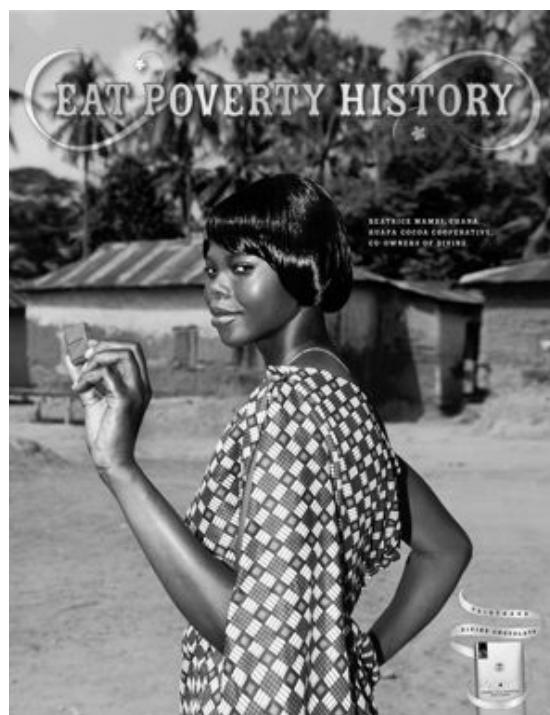


**Figure 7.** Divine chocolate advertisement from 2006.
*Source:* http://www.greenawards.com/

The intertwining of discourses or injunctions surrounding ethics and enjoyment at the cultural level can also be observed beyond the ambit of ethical consumerism in charity appeals such as the high profile televised *Red Nose Day* appeal or *BBC Children in Need*.[10] These spectacles are designed to raise funds for important charities by putting

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[10]   Three high profile telethons are broadcast annually in the UK: *Red Nose Day* and *Sport Relief*, which both support the British charity Comic Relief, and *Children in Need*, a fundraiser for the charity of the same name belonging to the BBC.

on a good show—something fun and enjoyable, with comedy and cabaret acts—with a serious message behind them. The televisual model is also increasingly being rolled out to do-it-yourself fundraising initiatives such as Amnesty International's 'human rights parties' and the popular McMillan Cancer Support coffee mornings, replete with cupcakes. At such events, disturbing and challenging images of torture or death are held at a safe distance; as Cremin puts it, 'The event permits us to have fun while affording us the opportunity to gift our guilt in the form of a donation to those we party for' (2011, p. 103). The model and marketing of volunteer tourism certainly feeds off this culture of doing good deeds through fun, providing a new slant on the debate surrounding the moralisation of tourism (Butcher 2008, 2003; Smith 2008; Lisle 2009); if volunteer tourism can be conceptualised as fun-made-moral (moralised *tourism*) then can it not also be considered as morality-made-fun (fun *volunteering*)? The latter interpretation begins with the assumption that subjects are seeking an outlet for their philanthropic impulses, the transfer of guilt, and the construction of an ethical identity. What is offered to them is, in Butcher's (2008) words, a carefree package of 'sun, sea and saving the world'.

This psychosocial exploration of the dialectics of ethics and enjoyment in discourses used by charities and ethical brands highlights several key issues for contemplation. First, it shows that any easy separation between what counts as ethical action and as enjoyment will be problematic given their imbricate nature. Secondly, a consideration of the subject's investment in ethical consumer practices and charitable giving demonstrates the ideological nature of many of these activities in that they effectively uphold the status quo. To return to the example of Fairtrade chocolate, Cremin discusses how eradicating global poverty would remove the process through which people can positively adopt the subject position of the ethical consumer and would simultaneously delegitimise the purchasing of luxury items such as chocolate, ridding them of this source of enjoyment. In order to maintain a positive self-image as an ethical consumer, volunteer or charity supporter, it could be said, cynically, that it is in the subject's interest for these causes to remain unalleviated, unsolved and in need of help. Similarly, the very framing of ethical actions in terms of consumerism, as is so frequently the case, and very much so for volunteer tourism, ensures that energy and concern are tamed and diverted from more radical courses of action that might go further to addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality, climate change, and so on.

### *Neoliberal technologies of the self*

Messages conveyed through charity appeals and the marketing of ethical products give a good indication of the ideological pressures on volunteer tourists to conform to standardised ways of responding to global poverty, which serve to depoliticise these responses and perpetuate existing consumer practices. In this final part of the chapter, I examine how such pressures are expressed as neoliberal 'technologies of the self' (Burkitt 2002; Foucault 1988; Kiersey 2011), which converge on volunteer tourism as a site for the surveillance, regulation and transformation of the self, particularly in moral terms. The ways in which neoliberalism as a mode of political and economic governance

has seeped into the cultural sphere and mobilised particular subjectivities in Western societies has increasingly been a focus of psychosocial studies (e.g. Bondi 2005a; Burkitt 2008; Gill 2008; Layton 2010; Rose 1996, 1990; Walkerdine 2002; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Walkerdine et al. 2001). Neoliberalism's reliance on autonomy, individualism and privatization as ideological ideals has engendered practices of self-construction that encourage the subject to be self-reliant, enterprising and freely choosing their path in life (Ren 2005; Rose 1990; Vrasti 2013; Mostafanezhad 2014), which links to the observation that late modern subjects are expected to reflexively construct their own biographies as part of individualistic identity projects (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

Nikolas Rose (1996, 1990) has devoted considerable attention to the psychologisation of such reflexivity and individualism, arguing that the advancement of psychological knowledge and therapies has provided new ways of knowing ourselves. He suggests that technologies of the self, or modes of subjectification, have taken hold particularly strongly through a culture of confession, manifested through formal therapies, life coaching, self-help guides, makeover television programmes and the like. Such practices encourage the subject to better themselves through often public disclosures of their most intimate thought and feelings, opening them up to expert surveillance, judgement and evaluation (Rose 1990, p. 240; see also Berlant 2000). Thus, by envisioning a self-reliant, autonomous subject, freely choosing its destiny and with multiple resources at hand to transform itself, neoliberalism has removed socially deterministic excuses for people to be deficient or lacking in any way:

> Selves dissatisfied with who they are can engage in therapeutic projects to refurbish and reshape themselves in the direction they desire. The psychotherapies provide technologies of individuality for the production and regulation of the individual who is 'free to choose'.
>
> (Rose 1990, p. 228)

I want to use these ideas to think about how volunteer tourism markets itself as a form of 'life-changing' travel, providing the tourist with a means of becoming ethically bettered which feeds off other media that similarly convey messages about personal transformations. I explore volunteer tourism marketing through another brief analysis of website materials before describing the resonances between these messages and those found in reality television travel programmes.

Words such as 'worthwhile', 'rewarding' and 'life-changing' litter the advertisements of volunteer tourism programmes, trying to entice travellers seeking a meaningful and deeply personal experience that exceeds a mere holiday. King (2002) relates this aspect of ethical tourism to lifestyle marketing, in which an accent is placed on how a product will enhance the self rather than focusing on its physical characteristics. Four of the websites that I surveyed suggested that their volunteer tourism programmes would 'change your life' or be the 'experience of a lifetime', with these labels often set against a visual backdrop of awe-inspiring scenery or moving scenes of volunteers helping vulnerable people within the visited communities. As

examples, Raleigh International adopt a moral tone, saying that travelling with them will help you to 'become clearer about your values' and Frontier similarly talk about developing a changed 'outlook on life' as a result of the experience. AV was the only organisation to explicitly mention the promotion of global citizenship as part of their vision, again as one of the more values or ethics related ways in which participants could change and grow as a person. This pervasive discourse seems to point to volunteer tourism as a commodified technique of ethical self-improvement, fitting with the broad ideals of neoliberalism.

The company i-to-i goes even further in its message of self-betterment, stating that in travelling with them one can become a 'better person' and emphasising that the potential for such personal change is greatest when volunteering takes place abroad. Their website states that volunteering abroad is 'life changing and inspiring. You get an enormous feeling of satisfaction and feel that you have made a difference and come home a better person for it', whereas volunteering in one's local community 'doesn't have as much of an impact on who you are or how you see the world and though it can help to make you a better person, it will do it on a much smaller scale' (i-to-i 2012). While never actually stating where in the world counts as 'abroad', it is clear from the site's references to 'culture shock', lack of 'luxuries', and 'poverty' that Third World countries are being referred to. i-to-i seems only to make explicit a message contained in other organisations' marketing; namely, that Third World countries are in the greatest need of foreign help and therefore it is in these places where the most 'rewarding' and 'worthwhile' experiences can be attained and the influence on the self will be most profound. These messages resonate with broader tourism portrayals of the Third World as a static, authentic Other against which the Western subject can actively develop and improve itself (Bruner 1991; Silver 1993; Echtner and Prasad 2003; Munt 1994; Morgan and Pritchard 1998).

Volunteer tourism's invitation to adapt the self is not unrelated to popular media representations of travel. The relevance of reality television was first flagged up to me in interviews with several of my participants who mentioned programmes either featuring celebrities or members of the public who had undertaken arduous journeys to Third World countries but come back transformed, often in a moral sense, as a result of having encountered shocking poverty:

> *Tess*: I'd just watched *Mount Kilimanjaro*? The thing you know with the celebrities. They climbed Mount Kilimanjaro last year. So I'd watched that and I was like *really*, you know when … you're like right I'm gonna do something with my life. I'm gonna make my parents proud, blah, blah, blah.
> (Interview 1)

> *Sarah*: I probably saw something on the telly or something and thought I wanna do something like that. And there's all the programmes on like um (.) BBC 3 which are like the people going out into Africa and doing all the volunteering and stuff. So you watch that and think yeah I wanna do what they're doing. So I suppose that, I probably watched a programme and thought yeah I'll do that.
> (Interview 1)

> *Amy*:   Have you seen that TV show I think called like (.) *Blood, Sweat and Luxuries*? [*Émilie*: Yes!] … They kind of go out there and they really kind of like appreciate it like when they actually see what it's like and they come back and they're all really into charity work and they've also changed their lifestyles. I thought oh wow, that's exactly like is how it is.
> (Interview 1)

The format of such shows may seem familiar owing largely to televised charity appeals such as Red Nose Day, which allow us not only to witness the dire reality of those living in conditions of poverty, but also the journey—spatial, emotional and moral—of the celebrities who take us to these needy locations, performing the social responsibility that has become so enmeshed with modern-day celebrity (Littler 2008; Tsaliki et al. 2011; Kapoor 2012; Mostafanezhad 2013b). However, since 2010, British viewers have been able to watch not only celebrities but also ordinary fellow citizens experience the redemptive power of poverty through programmes such as BBC 3's *Blood, Sweat and Luxuries* (mentioned specifically by several of the participants), which brings young consumers face-to-face with the producers of their luxury goods, BBC 2's *Toughest Place to be a…*, which gives British workers the opportunity to try out their jobs in a Third World country, or Channel 4's *Holiday Hijack*, which takes families and groups of friends who had signed up for a free holiday out of their opulent, all-inclusive resorts after only one night and moves them into a home stay with a local family.[11]

The proliferation of this type of programme conveys the neoliberal message to viewers that the appropriate response to global social inequality is one of sentimentalism and individual morality (McMurria 2008; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Vrasti 2013). These programmes have propagated a narrative that is strikingly similar to those found in volunteer tourism marketing and volunteer tourists' retrospective accounts (as will be explored in Part III) in which the featured individual typically comes to realise their own luck, privilege and wealth in the face of poverty and vows as a result to become more grateful, appreciative and ethical as a consumer. The Western self is thereby morally transformed and redeemed against a backdrop of an impoverished Third World Other. For example, in the following passage we find Natalie's emotional testimony after spending a week with a family in The Gambia:

> I mean it makes you realise that how much we (.) we, we should be so fortunate for what we've got. And it's a total world away from what we're used to.
>
> (*Holiday Hijack: The Gambia*)

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[11] Domestic-based varieties of this type of reality television, such as Channel 4's *Secret Millionaire* and *How the Other Half Live*, point to the propagation of a media script that exceeds the overseas travel dimension. More broadly construed, these programmes can be thought of as shaming the wealthy and privileged by bringing them directly into contact with people less fortunate than themselves, sparking accusations of creating 'poverty voyeurism' (Webb 2009). The programmes noted in this discussion take financial privilege as their basis, but extending the genre still further we could draw analogies to other shows such as Channel 4's *Beauty and the Beast: The Ugly Face of Prejudice*, in which 'beauty addicts' are confronted by a person with a facial deformity; the trauma of witnessing poverty is replaced by disfigurement but the moral remains the same, challenging the protagonist and viewer to appreciate the things that they have and so often take for granted.

After Natalie finishes speaking, she and her travel companion break down into tears and hold each other, sobbing. Programmes such as *Holiday Hijack* might be thought of as providing 'moral makeovers' for their contestants, giving them an avenue to be saved through 'constitut[ing] a moral vision of consumption as a right action leading to improvement. The promise is of self-realization, even a secular form of salvation' (Redden 2007, p. 152). The format also seems to confirm Hawkins' (2001) observation that 'ethics have become entertainment' in television, although rather than moralising to its viewers there has been a televisual privileging of the liminal zone inhabited by ethical dilemmas, uncertainty and struggle. Natalie's emotionality can also be interpreted as contributing to the contemporary confessional or therapeutic culture based on the public disclosure of intimate thoughts and feelings – something which has become a hallmark of reality television (Aslama and Pantti 2006; Biressi and Nunn 2005; Lupton 1998).

Viewed critically, the discourse surrounding volunteer tourism and ethical travel could not be any further from the politically neutral invitation to have fun abroad and do some good deeds along the way. Volunteer tourism can instead be read as an ideologically crafted product that provides an outlet for people's ethical urges through consumption, ties in with the neoliberal agenda of self-actualization by accentuating the need to transform through the travel, and reinforces the psychologised confessional culture that Rose (1990) describes in its emotive marketing and the resonances it shares with the traumatic journeys displayed in programmes such as *Holiday Hijack*. Just as the previous discourses we explored appeared to depoliticise indirect encounters with poverty through psychosocial processes of interpassivity and making charity fun—the enjoining of the injunctions to be ethical and to Enjoy!—a focus on the volunteer tourist's personal transformation seems to shift the activity's purpose away from the primary goal of helping deprived communities or degraded ecosystems. What I have shown in this section on the ideological dimensions of volunteer tourism is how the practice's ethical and transformative emphases can be located within wider discourses, such as ethical consumerism, and practices of neoliberal governmentality that affect what it means to be a subject and how selfhood is to be constructed. Volunteer tourism, in other words, is deeply enmeshed in a web of power relations, ideologies and fantasies that construct tourists' experiences of volunteer projects as well as suturing them to their home societies throughout the process.

### Conclusion

What I have attempted to show in this chapter is how volunteer tourism is framed and impacted on by cultural and ideological processes that connect the practice to tourists' everyday lives and societies, and which create spatial linkages between home and away, self and Other. In my discussion of tourism imaginaries and imaginative geographies of Africa, I described the colonial discourses and fantasies that continue to reverberate through tourism branding and marketing today – selling a myth of a pristine, untouched land and therefore preparing tourists for particular ways of knowing, desiring and experiencing the toured destination. Colonial vestiges continue to play an important role

in creating the '"emplotment" of Africa and Africans within specific Western-scripted narratives' (Dunn 2004, p. 485) and carry with them an ambivalent disposition towards Otherness. As we saw in Bhabha's (1994) analysis, the creation of the stereotype through colonial discourse renders it knowable and apprehendible, precluding the possibility of the colonial subject being completely Other. In a second sense, ambivalence refers to the fantasmatic creation of the African subject as simultaneously desirable and menacing; we can see these representations played out in contemporary media stories of the continent as plagued by disease and civil war, and in the idealised portrayals of Africa's exotic fauna and tribal people perpetuated through tourism marketing.

In terms of volunteer tourism advertising more specifically, an analysis of materials taken from popular providers' websites revealed recurrent depictions of white volunteer tourists foregrounded against groups of smiling black children. I argued that such representations depoliticise the encounter with visited communities, rendering local people passive, poor-but-happy recipients of the volunteer tourists' help and thereby reinforcing a powerful fantasy of agency and benevolence in which volunteer tourists become invested. The stark racial contrast presented by these images conveys the message that African people are Other yet knowable. Images of children are used to suggest that locals are non-threatening and ready to extend a warm welcome to foreigners, thus aligning them with the positive side of the colonial stereotype. However, despite the ideological rendering of these people as content in their way of life, visible traces of poverty and discontent remain, creating the potential for ambivalence in their perception. The African child's essence is defined by happiness and poverty; at times these properties cohere within the image to reinforce the poor-but-happy fantasy but they also risk fragmenting into opposing impulses of desire and derision. I will return to this discussion of tourism imaginaries in Part II, which centres on the volunteer tourists' perceptions of Kenya's aesthetics, interactions with local people and conceptualisations of helping through volunteer projects.

The chapter also considered the ideological framing of ethical action, such as charity donations and ethical consumerism, in terms of absolving consumers from sentiments of guilt and enjoining them to effectively uphold the political and economic status quo through more enjoyable ways of giving. Just as volunteer tourism can be conceptualised as moralised *tourism*, it can also be thought of as fun *volunteering* (Butcher 2008, 2003; Smith 2008; Lisle 2009). In both cases, it brings together the ethical injunction and the injunction to enjoy, providing commodified ways of caring for the Third World Other while having a great time abroad. Furthermore, I explored how the messages conveyed through volunteer tourism marketing and a new wave of reality television travel programmes advocate sentimentalism and individual morality as the appropriate response to global social inequality (McMurria 2008; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Vrasti 2013). I argued that these cultural messages provide ways of ethically transforming the self which, rather than bringing about subversive changes in Western subjectivity, actually nourish neoliberal governmentality of the self. Again, this discussion will be pertinent to Part III, which explores volunteer tourists' claims of self-

transformation and the ideological ties of their home society that prevent them from experiencing more radical, ethical changes in lifestyle or politics.

By exploring the imaginative geographies and tourism imaginaries that frame volunteer tourism, we can begin to appreciate the difficulty of delimiting the practice analytically. While volunteer tourism is, in one sense, a discrete activity within the tourism industry, it also feeds off popular culture, is regulated by neoliberal practices of governmentality and extends historical discourses that make distant places knowable. Crucially, I have argued that these cultural and ideological determinants operate within a libidinal economy of unconscious desire and fantasy that volunteer tourists become invested in and in turn help to reproduce. The intertwining of desire and the ethical injunction in this libidinal economy complicates our understanding of ethical action in volunteer tourism, disturbing the conventional distinction between tourists' altruistic and egoistic motivations (cf. Crossley and O'Mahoney forthcoming; Coghlan and Fennell 2009; Godfrey and Wearing 2012; Gray and Campbell 2007; Mustonen 2007). More broadly, this exploration has begun the task of elucidating the complexity of volunteer tourist subjectivity as a nodal point for these at times conflicting cultural narratives and images. In the chapters that follow, I build on this analysis by continuing to trace the contours of the volunteer tourism imaginary and by considering how these collective practices and fantasies affect volunteer tourists' experiences and the choices they make.

**Chapter 4**

# Methods

> *Different methods privilege different temporal registers, which in turn reveal particular affective registers.*
>
> *−Thomson 2012*

Researching tourists brings with it the inherent challenge of moving in tandem with a highly mobile and fluid population. This is exacerbated by any attempt to study tourists longitudinally, given the diverse geographical and social spaces that tourists inhabit before converging upon a single destination, often vast distances away from 'home'. Trying to find a methodology that adequately embraces the spatial, temporal, social and affective complexities of becoming a tourist is therefore a difficult task. In this chapter, I begin by explaining how the research is framed by a longitudinal, psychosocial design intended to elaborate a temporally sensitive understanding of volunteer tourists' subjectivities and personal transformations. This is followed by a discussion of the procedures used to select a suitable volunteer tourism organisation and to recruit participants. The data generation methods used include repeated in-depth narrative interviews, photo-elicitation, participant observation and a reflexive field diary. I discuss how the data were analysed using psychosocial procedures and how their longitudinality required both case-study and cross-sectional readings of the interview material. The chapter concludes with reflections on the ethical challenges of doing the research, including the difficulty of living and volunteering alongside the tourists in Kenya, the personal nature of some of the topics that arose during the interviews, and issues of anonymity in presenting parts of the data as individual cases.

**Framing the research**

*Research design*

In designing the research, I wanted to be able to capture some of the complexity of volunteer tourist subjectivity by producing a nuanced, theoretically engaged account with significant explanatory power. I also wanted to develop a politicised appreciation of how psychosocial processes configure volunteer tourist subjectivity by showing how volunteer tourism connects to broader ideological processes playing out within the toured site or in tourists' home societies. The overarching research questions that guided my enquiry were:

- Can a psychosocial approach reveal volunteer tourism's affective dynamics?
- What ideological and power relations are produced through volunteer tourism?
- Does volunteer tourism create (lasting) ethical change in tourist subjectivity?

These theoretical concerns lent themselves to a qualitative research design capable of capturing the meanings and experiences produced through volunteer tourism. A longitudinal approach was also taken in order to trace processes of change across time and space. I perceived this longitudinal element as particularly important because in addition to opening up temporal dimensions of subjectivity for analysis and permitting me to become mobile alongside the tourists, it would also allow me to better gauge how tourism experiences become integrated into everyday life and how tourists transition back into a non-tourist state (Graburn 2002; Crouch et al. 2001).

The burgeoning field of qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) can be thought of as an approach to studying transitions, pathways, changes, continuities, adaptations and temporality that encompasses an array of methodologies and methods (McLeod and Thomson 2009; Neale 2012; Neale and Flowerdew 2003; Shirani and Henwood 2011a, 2011b). Within the tradition there are varying conceptualisations of what exactly constitutes longitudinality; some authors suggest the need for research to elapse over a period of several years while others stress the importance of a qualitative engagement with temporal experience (Neale et al. 2012; Saldaña 2003; Thomson and Holland 2003). Saldaña (2003) expands on this by drawing a distinction between researching change *over* time, in which change can be observed as a product emerging from discrete 'now' and 'then' periods, and change *through* time, which focuses more on the qualitative process of change. The approach taken in this research resembles most closely what McLeod and Thomson (2009, p. 61) refer to as one that permits researchers to '"walk alongside" individuals or groups over time in such a way that privileges the present in which they are encountered'. In other words, depth of engagement in the volunteer tourists' temporal and transformational experiences was foregrounded rather than setting a specific timeframe for the research to be completed in. Due to the time constraints on the project, this research was limited to one year.

A psychosocial approach to subjectivity appears to be complemented by a longitudinal methodology despite the two having been brought together in only a handful of studies so far (e.g. Henwood and Finn 2010; Henwood and Shirani 2012) (see

Chapter 2). Rachel Thomson (2010) suggests that longitudinal methods can help researchers access the psychosocial by providing insight into the temporal accumulation of 'contradictory accounts of self' and enabling researchers to deepen their reflexivity through a sustained engagement with participants (cf. Hollway 2004; Pillow 2003). For those working in the psychodynamic vein of psychosocial research, adopting a longitudinal approach to data generation and analysis seems even more apposite given the emphasis placed on child development and biography. The work of Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody on gender and class is one example of foregrounding psychodynamic processes in an analysis of people's life changes and transitions, giving the researchers greater purchase on the desires, contradictions and traumas often inherent in such events (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Lucey et al. 2003). Hollway (2010, p. 20) goes further by suggesting that methodologies sensitive to temporality enhance our understanding of psychic mechanisms, such as the concept of 'duration', which marks the conflictual space between wish and reality or, in developmental terms, between dependence and autonomy.

A longitudinal psychosocial methodology was designed that would use in-depth interviews together with participant observation to capture rich descriptions of the volunteer tourists' perceptions, experiences and accounts of personal transformation through time, emphasising the processual nature of change or continuity. Conventionally, qualitative studies of volunteer tourism have generated data either through conversations with participants held in the ethnographic site (e.g. Broad 2003; Simpson 2004; Gray and Campbell 2007) or by using retrospective interviews following a volunteer placement (e.g. Wearing 2001). The longitudinal design of this research, however, meant that it would be necessary to speak to the tourists before their departure, during their time in Kenya, and also retrospectively, necessitating a multi-sited data generation strategy and more complex participant recruitment procedure. The intensive and time-consuming nature of repeated interviewing and psychosocial analysis meant that the scale of the study had to be limited in terms of the number of participants. A total of ten participants were sought which, with four interviews per participant, would yield forty interviews. Because the study is focused on the production of meaning and the availability of different forms of subjectivity, generalisability of the findings was not a primary consideration. Rather than trying to establish norms, the principal aim was to show the possibility of particular subjectivities arising in the volunteer tourism context and to document them in detail. Accordingly, participants were selected through purposeful sampling that allowed me to select tourists of interest to interview without seeking to generalise their data to a broader research population (Marshall 1996).

### *Recruiting volunteer tourists*

The demographics of volunteer tourists tend to point towards high levels of participation from women across a range of different age groups and nationalities (Brown and Morrison 2003; McGehee 2002; Stoddart and Rogerson 2004). In the British context, volunteer tourism has a close association with the pre-university gap year and within this population we see the additional overrepresentation of white, able bodied, middle-

class young adults who are likely to have been privately educated and to live in the South of England (Jones 2004; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005). Because of the popularity of this form of travel amongst young people in the UK and a theoretical interest in the links between youth and self-change through travel (Graburn 1983; Cohen 2003; O'Reilly 2006; Beames 2004; Desforges 2000), I decided to focus on volunteer tourists aged 18 to 24 years. Selecting young people also increased the chances that they would not have travelled in this way before and might thus experience culture shock or personal change on a more profound level. It was also important for the volunteer tourism programme to be located in a developing country, aimed at helping local communities, and of mid- to long-term duration (months rather than weeks) in order for substantial cultural immersion and extensive project work to have occurred.

A further parameter guiding the choice of research participants was the logistical necessity of all the volunteer tourists being available for the first wave of interviews in the UK and the second wave in the destination country. Due to the financial constraints of the project, it would only be possible to visit one volunteer tourism programme and the longitudinal design of the research, including crucial pre-departure interviews, meant that participants could not be recruited on site. The solution lay in selecting a volunteer tourism sending organisation through which participants could be recruited. I searched for UK based companies and charities offering volunteer tourism programmes in Third World countries and began to compile a shortlist of those whose programmes catered specifically for young people, were intended to benefit local communities, lasted at least one month, and took across larger groups of tourists to increase my chances of being able to find research participants. This last requirement was particularly problematic given that sustainable tourism encourages smaller groups visiting ecologically and culturally sensitive destinations in order to remain 'low impact'. Using this shortlist, further enquiries were made in order to determine the suitability of various organisations. Several commercial providers refused to divulge information that was needed in the selection process because of worries that the information might get into the hands of competitors. However, one company agreed to assist with the research in exchange for access to the final data report and provided that they would be guaranteed anonymity.

The selected company is one of the UK's major commercial volunteer tourism providers, organising trips for young people taking gap years as well as for other clients of different ages and nationalities. The company operates in a number of countries across Africa, Asia and South America, supplying opportunities to volunteer on a wide range of community development, wildlife and environmental conservation projects requiring mainly unskilled manual labour and supervised by local staff. The programmes on offer last from between two weeks to three months and can cost in excess of £3,000 for the longer stays, not including flights, insurance or vaccinations. Accommodation in the rural locations where the projects are run is either in the form of basic communal living or home-stays with local families. While my initial search for potential sending organisations had included a mixture of commercial and charitable providers, I felt that a company would be particularly interesting to examine given the

apparent contradiction between volunteer tourism's ethos of small scale trips working for the benefit of host communities in poor localities on the one hand, and the drive towards maximizing profits and satisfying clients associated with the commercial sector on the other.

Due to data protection issues, I had to request that the company contacted its clients on my behalf. A promotional electronic leaflet explaining some of the key aims of the research was circulated from March to May 2010 (see Appendix A). It was decided that recruitment efforts would be focused on the company's Kenya gap year programme run during the summer holidays because of the large numbers it usually attracted, thus increasing the chances of finding ten participants in the same group. As an additional recruitment opportunity, I attended a pre-departure briefing day, which allowed me to meet some of the prospective volunteers in person and to discuss the study with them. I also joined groups on the social networking site Facebook that had been set up by the company and volunteer tourists to keep in touch before their trip. I contacted approximately twenty potential participants through these groups, extending invitations to take part in the research. As a result of this publicity, nine people volunteered to take part in the research, leaving one final participant, Ash, to be recruited in Kenya. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the first interview using a consent form, which they were given time to read and then allowed to ask further questions about before signing (see Appendix B). Participants were given a copy of their consent form to keep and after this consent was treated as an on-going process of negotiation between the respondents and the researcher, rather than as a static state that could be obtained and then forgotten about (Miller and Bell 2002; Miller and Boulton 2007; Sin 2005; Christians 2005). I made all participants aware that they could contact me at any time with queries about the research, their participation, or to withdraw from the study.

| | **Gender** | **Class** | **Age** | **Qualifications** | **Break type** | **Duration** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Amy** | Woman | Middle | 18 | A-levels | Gap year* | 1 |
| **Ash** | Man | Working | 24 | Undergraduate | Post-university | 1 |
| **Jane** | Woman | Middle | 20 | A-levels | University break | 2 |
| **Josh** | Man | Middle | 18 | A-levels | Gap year | 3 |
| **Kate** | Woman | Middle | 21 | Postgraduate | Post-university | 2 |
| **Linsey** | Woman | Working | 18 | A-levels | Pre-university | 1 |
| **Lisa** | Woman | Middle | 18 | A-levels | Gap year | 2* |
| **Sarah** | Woman | Middle | 19 | GCSEs | Work break | 2 |
| **Tess** | Woman | Middle | 21 | Undergraduate | Post-university | 2 |
| **Tom** | Man | Middle | 18 | GCSEs | Work break | 2 |

**Table 1.** Participant demographics and volunteer tourism programme details.

Table 1, above, shows the participants' demographics and travel characteristics. The group came from a number of different geographical locations in Britain and comprised mainly white, middle-class women. The participants' qualifications ranged from GCSE level to postgraduate degrees. Similarly, the break from education or employment varied from time out from work, pre-university gap years, short pre-university 'gap summers', to post-university breaks, presenting a more complex picture than I had originally envisaged when I framed the research in terms of the pre-university gap year (see Appendix A). The average duration of stay in Kenya was two months, with programmes varying from one to three months' duration.[12] This variety of programme durations meant that I departed with the majority of my participants for the fieldwork in July 2010 and met Josh there, who had already been in Kenya for a month as part of a longer three-month stay.

### Generating data

#### *Interviews and photo-elicitation*

Interviews were conducted in four waves across a period of just under one year in order to examine how opinions, aspirations, identities and experiences fluctuated, metamorphosed and were actively negotiated by the volunteer tourists through time. In addition to the exploration of these longitudinal dimensions of subjectivity, repeated interviewing was also used in the hope that it would enable the building of rapport with my participants. The role of rapport and trust in research relationships is important for making participants feel comfortable enough to talk in depth, explore their thoughts and feelings, and potentially go beyond 'well-rehearsed' narratives that are developed for presentation in different interactional settings (Czarniawska 2004). Also, as Hollway and Jefferson (2000) point out, repeated interviewing allows participants time to reflect on what has been said, remember other pieces of information, or modify their opinions. Therefore, each participant was interviewed four times, which resulted in a total of 40 digitally audio-recorded interviews, each lasting between 15 and 90 minutes, and a set of ten photo-elicitation exercises that took place at the end of the final interviews.

Wave one of the interviews took place prior to the volunteer tourists' departure (May–June 2010) and was designed to obtain background information on the participants' lives, their previous experiences of travel and volunteering, their reasons for becoming a volunteer tourist, and any expectations or worries about the trip. Participants were given the option of being interviewed in their own home, following Adler and Adler's (2002, p. 528) suggestion that interviewing in a respondent's home 'casts a guest ambience over the researcher's presence and imbues the researcher with an aura of friendship', or in a more neutral environment such as a café. Across the whole dataset there was an even split between the number of interviews which took place in the participants' homes and those that were conducted in cafés and so on. A handful also

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12    Most of the volunteer tourists completed the break and programme that they had signed up for with the exception of Amy, who extended her pre-university summer break to a full gap year whilst away and Lisa, who had originally planned to stay for one month but ended up staying for a second month in Kenya. These changes are marked by asterisks in Table 1.

took place in my own home due to the convenience of this arrangement for the participants involved. The second wave of interviews took place in Kenya (July 2010) and was designed to provide detailed accounts of the volunteer tourists' on-going activities and the meanings that were being produced during the trip. Due to the lack of private or closed off spaces in the accommodation and work sites in Kenya, it was difficult to find a setting that would allow the interview to take place confidentially and as a result many of these interviews suffered from interruptions in the form of beach vendors shouting to get our attention or other group members wandering by.

Wave three was the first of two retrospective sets of interviews designed to provide insights into how elements of the experience were framed as significant in memory, reinterpreted and narrated once the volunteer tourists had returned to the UK and resumed their everyday lives. These took place immediately after the volunteer tourists' return from Kenya (August–October 2010) and a large portion of these interviews was used by participants to tell me what else had happened after I had left their group.[13] Wave four took place approximately seven to nine months after the volunteers had returned (March–April 2011) in order to provide a longer-term retrospective. By this time, most of the participants had either started work or gone to university, with many moving away from home for the first time. I was interested to see how significant Kenya was to them after such profound life changes and whether they perceived it as having had any long-term impact on their values, consumption patterns, or identity. Typically, these interviews were much shorter than the others as there was often a sense that the participants were simply reiterating what they had told me in the previous interview. Nevertheless, this later retrospective often allowed the volunteer tourists to articulate subtle changes in their perspective or to reflect on continuities of experience.

A photo-elicitation exercise was used at the end of the final interview as a stimulus for further discussion and in order to probe from a different angle the memories and retrospective framing of meaning generated in relation to the volunteer tourism experience (Schwartz 1989; Prosser and Schwartz 1998). Taking photographs is 'a deeply rooted, institutionalized part of the tourism experience' (Cederholm 2004, p. 226) and volunteer tourism is no exception. Cameras were brought to every activity, including dirty, manual projects. By asking the participants to talk about photographs that they had taken themselves, the elicitation exercise was used as a way to further my understanding of their touristic practice and expand existing narratives surrounding the trip. It was also a way of giving the participants greater control over how they chose to tell their story (Cederholm 2004). I asked each person to bring 10 to 15 photographs from Kenya that summed up the trip for them or were meaningful in some way. I then asked them to describe the photographs to me in turn, saying why they had chosen the images and photographed the scene in the first place, and what the photograph meant to them. Thus, I attempted to capture both aspects of what Chalfen (1998) refers to as the 'shooting event' and the processes of 'editing' and 'exhibiting' the photos upon the

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[13]   In the case of the one month group, I left to join the two month group halfway through my stay. The two and three month groups remained in Kenya until the end of August and thus had a great deal to say about the remainder of their trip.

travellers' return home. Eight of the participants were able to complete this exercise as envisaged with the exception of Tom, who had not taken a camera and instead used photographs taken by one of the other volunteer tourists and Tess, whose camera was either lost or stolen during her return journey.

*Interview format*

An interview format was used that would allow narratives to emerge relatively undirected by the interviewer so that links and disjunctions in the interviewee's speech could be examined for evidence of unconscious or emotional associations that might benefit a psychosocial analysis (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Cartwright 2004). Duncan Cartwight (2004), one of the few writers to have addressed the question of data generation in psychosocial research in some detail, argues that technical decisions about the psychoanalytic research interview rest on a set of epistemological assumptions including: a) the construction of meaning, b) context, c) the associative nature of interview material, and d) inchoate transference-countertransference impressions. By the 'construction of meaning' Cartwright (2004, p. 218) suggests that the interview is a site for the co-construction of narratives rather than one in which the interviewer should attempt to 'excavate' material buried deep in the interviewee's psyche. This perspective resonates with the postmodern stance attributed to Lacanian psychoanalysis in which the idea of a deeply structured psyche is overturned in favour of a view that sees psychic processes as emerging through interaction (Frosh and Emerson 2005). This interactional focus connects with Cartwright's second point on the importance of context in enabling or constraining the production of material in the interview. Thus, the co-construction of meaning can be seen as occurring simultaneously at a discursive or narrative level and through intersubjective, psychodynamic processes.

Cartwright's third epistemological feature focuses on the associative nature of interview material. Using the term 'associative' is not to imply that interviewees are 'free associating' as might be expected in a clinical psychoanalytic session, because clearly the structured nature of the interview constrains their capacity to do so (Kvale 1999; Stopford 2004; Frosh 2010). Rather, this point suggests that thoughts and ideas expressed through the interview dialogue may at times be linked according to an unconscious logic. What these three ideas point to is an interview practice that is conversational and interactive, in which the interviewer plays an active part in the co-construction of narratives rather than striving to maintain a neutral, non-leading stance, but where the interviewee is simultaneously given enough space to talk at length so that their narratives can be analysed in terms of structure and associative links. This is not an attempt to return to a situation of looking for evidence in these narratives of a deeply structured, interior psyche. Rather, this approach highlights the need to allow participants to develop and explore meanings at length and in detail, while at the same time accepting the interactional and co-constructive nature of the interview.

The final epistemological feature that Cartwright draws attention to is 'inchoate transference-countertransference impressions'. Conventionally, transference refers to the projection of the analysand's unconscious desires onto the analyst, and to the ways in

which analysands relate to the analyst as a significant other from their childhoods (Giami 2001). The countertransference is thus the response of the analyst to this transference, and can be defined in the research context as 'the sum of unconscious and emotional reactions, including anxiety, affecting his/her relation with the observed subject and situation' (Giami 2001, p. 6). These transference and countertransference dynamics result in a theorization of temporally complex encounters in which the 'past and present of both participants, as well as their mutual reactions to past and present, fuse into a unique emotional position involving both of them' (Kernberg 1965, cited in Giami 2001, p. 4). Some psychoanalysts have posited the countertransference as harbouring potentially significant information regarding the progressing analysis. Yet Lacan was dismissive of this suggestion, defining the countertransference as 'the sum total of the analyst's biases, passions, and difficulties' (E, p. 183; see also Parker 2010). Cartwright (2004, p. 221) concurs to some degree with Lacan that analysts/interviewers can be susceptible to 'observer bias'. However, more optimistically Cartwright believes at least in theory that:

> the evocation of feelings states during the interview can be distinguished from observer bias in that the former points to feelings evoked during the interview by the interlocutor, whereas the latter refers to the influence of the interviewer's personal conflicts on the interview process.
>
> (2004, p. 223)

Whether it is possible to identify transference and countertransference impressions in research interviews is a contentious issue that raises questions about the transposition of psychoanalysis from its clinical parameters and about the mechanisation of psychoanalytic concepts (Frosh and Baraitser 2008; Hook 2008b; Kvale 1999). Frosh and Saville Young warn that discussions of 'the countertransference' in social research can look 'only schematically like the intense exploration of unconscious material characteristic of psychoanalytic reflection on the countertransference in the clinical situation' (2008, p. 113). However, the legitimacy of these terms put to one side, what Cartwright's 'inchoate impressions' point to is a deepening of reflexivity within the research encounter and considerations of how the researcher's subjectivity is always present. Hollway suggests that working with forms of deep reflection like countertransference impressions constitutes a type of deep reflexivity and thus provides the researcher with ways of going 'beyond the rather mechanistic operationalisation of reflexivity in qualitative social science in terms of the main, socially-given identities' (2004, p. 8). Whether or not an interviewer may be able to infer unconscious traffic from participants from their own feeling states, the fact remains that these feelings may be able to shed light on the interactional dynamics guiding the co-constitution of narratives (Sprague 2005), especially in terms of extra-discursive, embodied and affective features of the interview.[14] They may also enable the researcher to become attuned and

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[14] This type of reflection, as well as stemming from clinical psychoanalytic practice and psychosocial research, also finds its roots in the feminist research tradition (e.g. Krieger 1983).

affectively receptive to their interviewee so that they can proceed with greater sensitivity and responsiveness (Jervis 2009). Indeed, Clarke (2002) emphasises the 'communicative and constructive' aspects of transferences through the term 'projective communication'. Therefore, 'researchers who pay attention to what is going on inside them … may discover that a respondent has communicated something of how they feel without actually verbalizing it' (Jervis 2009, p. 148).

I describe my interviewing style as conversational and active. At times I paraphrased my participants' statements to gain clarification on what they had said and at times confronted them with contradictions or tensions in their narratives (Saville Young 2011). I also aimed to give interviewees space and encouragement to develop their narratives, for example leaving silences to linger if it seemed that they might want to say more. While needing to ensure that certain procedures were followed in order to enable a psychosocial analysis, I was conscious of not wanting to fall into the trap of allowing the interaction of the interview to become constrained or obscured by a 'dense screen of technical procedures' (Mishler 1986, p. 7). In this respect, I found it useful to keep in mind Tim Rapley's (2004) advocacy of a form of interviewing that he refers to as 'mundane interaction'; he sees this style as not requiring any extraordinary skill but simply as a way of interacting productively with a person in order to try and understand their experiences and views. In other words, at times in the interview when I found myself over-thinking how I was asking questions or responding to participants, I found it valuable to remind myself that what was taking place, most fundamentally, was a conversation between two people that I was there to facilitate.

Taking inspiration from Tom Wengraf's (2001) model of biographical narrative interviewing, the first interview began with a broad, open-ended question inviting the participant to tell me about themself. This elicited quite detailed and personal life stories from some participants, whereas others took the question as an invitation to provide a more succinct account of their background, listing where they had grown up, what they were studying at school or university, and what they hoped to do in the future in terms of careers and travel aspirations. Similarly, in waves two to four, the interviews began with broad questions regarding what had happened since we had last spoken or how they were finding the volunteer tourism programme. Subsequent questions in all of the interviews were guided mainly by the flow of the participant's narrative, asking for elaborations and further reflections at various points. After exhausting this process, a small number of additional questions relating to theoretically or thematically salient areas were posed. I also devised procedures to enable systematic reflection, which involved recording any reflections that arose prior to, during or after interviews, or whilst transcribing them and reading through transcripts in order to make the data generation and analysis processes more transparent.

### *Participant observation*

The four waves of interviews necessary as part of the longitudinal data generation design of the research necessarily entailed one set of interviews being conducted in Kenya to capture the creation and negotiation of meanings in the volunteer tourism site.

In line with the psychosocial methodology used, these interviews had to be conducted face-to-face rather than remotely. With an impending trip to Kenya, I took the decision to extend this stay to include an element of participant observation in order to maximise the opportunity of being abroad, experience volunteer tourism for myself for the first time and generate additional data. By putting myself in the position of my participants, I hoped to gain a more detailed, first-hand appreciation of what volunteer tourism programmes involve and gather supplementary data by observing activities, interactions and conversations that might not be mentioned in the interviews. It was also an opportunity to develop better rapport with my participants in order to facilitate the interviews, and develop my reflexivity by becoming more aware of the meanings that I was, consciously or unconsciously, bringing to the research (Birkeland 2005).
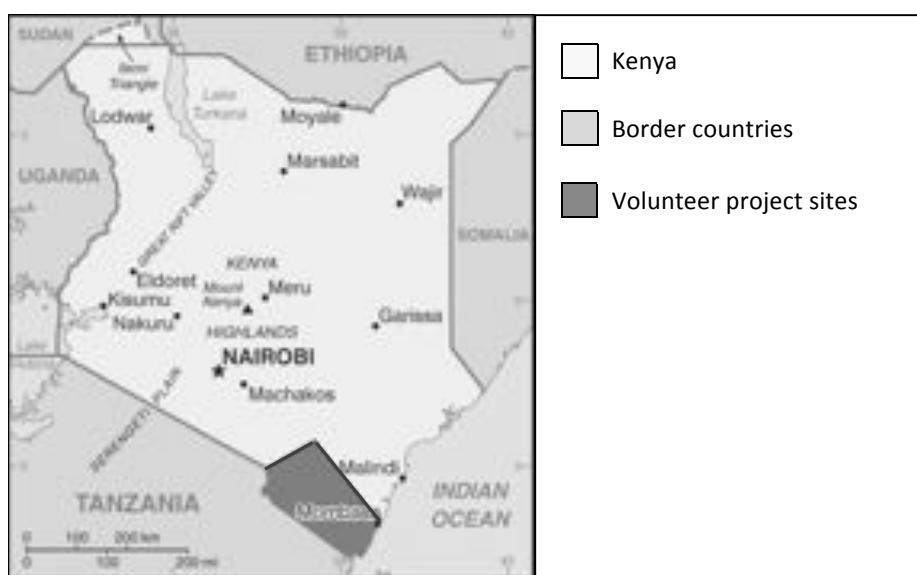


**Figure 8.** Map showing location of the volunteer tourism company's projects in Kenya.
*Source:* Adapted from http://goafrica.about.com/

In order to participate in the volunteer projects, live alongside the other volunteer tourists, gain access to National Parks and other planned leisure activities, and guarantee transportation between the various work and accommodation sites, it was necessary to register formally as one of the company's clients. The fee for the programme, exceeding £1,000, meant that it was not financially viable to stay in Kenya longer than a month. Additionally, given the primacy ascribed to the interview data within the research, this length of time seemed adequate for conducting the second wave of interviews and gaining a flavour of the projects' set-up. I had originally envisaged spending time with all of my participants over the course of the month, getting to know them better, but once I arrived in Kenya it quickly became apparent that the volunteer tourists staying for one month and those staying longer would be living and working separately for most of the time. Therefore, I split my time between the groups, spending two weeks with each of my participants. My planned schedule of interviews was revised and I instead

conducted many of the interviews in quick succession, including several in a single day.

The volunteer tourism programme involved living with other volunteers in communal accommodation and participating in projects on a rotational basis. This meant that groups of volunteers spent about a week in each location before moving to the next village, which was often situated several miles away. Projects were located in rural parts of Kenya, so the volunteers were either based in or close to villages, and were aimed at improving the socio-economic position of these communities. The volunteer work was primarily manual and involved constructing school buildings, toilet blocks and houses for the community. Occasionally, the volunteers would teach computing or conservation lessons in the local primary and secondary schools, help out at a medical clinic, or participate in a school 'feeding programme'. Additionally, environmental and animal conservation activities were aimed at improving the lot of local communities by providing them with extra income through sustainably harnessing their ecological resources. Examples of this type of work included habitat improvement for endangered species and tending to tree nurseries. Volunteering usually took place during the week with leisure activities timetabled for the weekends, which included safaris, days on the beach, and outings to sample the local nightlife.

The approach that I took to the participant observation was overt, with all members of the volunteer tourist group and staff on the ground being made aware of my presence as a researcher, and of total immersion in the field. Beginning with the former, it was necessary to be open about my researcher status for ethical reasons given that the setting was one that would not have justified the use of covert measures as well as because many of my participants talked openly with other group members regarding their involvement in the study. The resulting status that I was attributed within the volunteer tourism groups was one which involved a 'constant tension between the position of "member" and "stranger"' (Atkinson 1990, p. 157). The other volunteers would oscillate between treating me as just another traveller, appealing to my expertise in times of uncertainty regarding some of the volunteer activities, and positioning me as an outsider through conversations about my research, our very different motivations for coming to Kenya, and the age difference between us.[15] With regards to my total immersion in the field, due to the inherently communal, social aspects of the volunteer tourism experience, combined with the practicalities of accessing rural, often remote work sites, it made sense to live and volunteer alongside the tourists for the whole month rather than joining the group each day. This resulted in an intense fieldwork experience. The lack of privacy within the accommodation, which consisted of dormitories and communal eating areas, the long days of volunteering and then socialising in the evenings, and the sense of never being able to switch off from my surroundings contributed to this intensity.

Delamont cautions that participant observation does not necessarily entail 'doing

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[15]  I was almost 26 years old at the time of the fieldwork, making me nearly eight years older than most of the other volunteer tourists. At the time of writing the research proposal I had considered this a small, manageable gap that would enable me to easily build rapport with my participants. However, once in the fieldwork site it quickly became apparent that our different stages of life marked a clear distinction between us.

what those being observed do, but interacting with them while *they* do it' (2004, p. 206, original emphasis). However, I felt that it was important in terms of my reflexivity to experience volunteer tourism first-hand, particularly given that I had not travelled in this way before. Inger Birkeland's (2005, p. 17) account of her positioning as a 'reflexive tourist' in the North Cape in Norway has been influential in this respect. Like Birkeland, I too wanted to explore the preoccupations and taken-for-granted meanings that I brought to the research by sharing my participants' experiences and reflecting on how this made me feel. Having said this, it was necessary to obtain a balance between my participation in and observation of the volunteering, and between these two activities and time spent writing up field notes. Notes were taken on pieces of paper to record the day's events, notable topics of conversation within the groups, and feelings about the volunteer tourism or research. I tried to take part in as many of the volunteer tourists' activities as possible, including the volunteer work, leisure activities and socialising in the evenings, although in order to keep up to date with my fieldnotes it was necessary to take the occasional evening or day off.[16]

The resulting document, which amounted to approximately 30,000 words, was written as a daily reflexive field diary that captured not only the interactions and activities of the volunteer tourists but also gave an account of my most intimate thoughts and emotions during the fieldwork in order to allow greater reflexivity when it came to analysing the data (Coffey 1999; Delamont 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Drawing on literature dealing with the psychodynamic aspects of fieldwork (Hunt 1989; Brody 1981), I also decided to include any dreams, parapraxes or fantasies that I experienced in the field diary in order to deepen my reflexive practice. Hunt argues that the encounter between researcher and participants should be read as 'a script which contains a latent psychological as well as a manifest cultural content' (1989, p. 26) and that this psychological content, such as affects and transferences can impede empathic understanding and communication if not exposed and interpreted. I used data from my reflexive field diary to comment on volunteer tourist practices that were either not mentioned in the interviews or did not feature substantially in them, to enhance my reading of the interview data by linking my participants' narratives to the practices I had witnessed, and to enable a reflexive account of how the data were produced and interpreted through my own subjectivity.

### *Data analysis*

Prior to analysis, the interviews were transcribed verbatim using a selection of the conventions from the Jeffersonian system (see Appendix C) and then anonymised. The

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[16] Out of the month spent in Kenya I took three days off to catch up on writing my reflexive field diary, which caused friction with some of the other volunteer tourists. Some of the people in the group would routinely not turn up for the volunteer work or shy away from the more gruelling manual labour, leaving more work for the others to do. Accusations of 'laziness' and being in Kenya for the 'wrong reasons' circulated regularly and at one point I found myself caught up in them despite having tried to explain to the others my need to write up my field notes. I experienced resentment towards these individuals at the time as, if anything, I felt that I was working harder than anyone else: participating fully in the work they were doing but carrying out my research on top of this.

fine-grained method of transcription was used in order to convey to the reader enough information regarding the pace, tone, deliberation and humour of the conversation; all important contextual clues needed for interpreting the narratives. The decision to code the transcripts and research diary manually rather than using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) reflected a personal preference for the tactility of noting down thoughts on paper together with the manageable size of the dataset. However, I was also mindful of Yates's caution that computerised coding can invoke a 'quantitative and technical logic: that every case was considered in the same way, that the data has been 'thoroughly' searched. This is a different logic … to our multiple readings, dialogical reflections within and across the interview material *and also outside it*' (2003, p. 227, original emphasis). Maintaining a qualitative mind-set throughout the coding process also involved thinking holistically about the data, even when in the process of chopping it up. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 108) reflected on their own experience of coding, 'the more we subdivided categories to be sensitive to differences, the more these risked fragmentation, thus threatening the whole that gave them their meaning'.

The analysis commenced with a basic discursive/narrative reading before attempting to explain participants' investments in particular identity or attitudinal positions by exploring unconscious or affective mechanisms. In developing my analytic approach, I was particularly influenced by Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) 'three levels of analysis' and Lisa Saville Young's (2011) 'concentric' analytic procedure. I tried to bring together these approaches with the addition of several other elements relevant to my dataset due to its longitudinality and the theoretical significance of the Lacanian concepts of desire, fantasy, and enjoyment. Saville Young (2011) uses a 'concentric' analytic procedure consisting of reading narratives for *content*, *structure*, *interruptions*, *linguistic formulations*, and *reflexivity*, where 'each layer moves outward toward psychoanalytic theory, to the extent that talk is increasingly read for the investment positions of the researched/researcher, and yet analysis remains grounded in the text or talk as the central axis' (p. 49). Therefore, my first step was to code the data thematically, focusing on the *content* of the narratives, in order to determine which parts of the interviews were of theoretical interest. I read the transcripts a case at a time rather than processing each wave of interviews in order and coded the text thematically focusing on volunteering, Africa, travel, poverty, self, and relationships. These categories were to some extent moulded by my theoretical interests and subsequent questioning during the interviews, yet they were not predetermined and the thematic analysis sought to develop themes as emergent through the data. As a way of further refining this information I created thematic maps for each participant and then for each theme, showing the relations between themes as presented in the narratives.

The second analytic step entailed returning to parts of the transcripts of theoretical interest and focusing on the *structure* of the narrative. This involved investigating the discourses drawn on, discursive positioning, relevant biographical information, and the narrative's co-constitution through interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. These first two steps are akin to Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) first level of analysis, which

addresses the content and structure of narratives produced in an interview. I then looked for evidence of *interruptions* – narrative breaks or ruptures that suggested emotional 'work' (Saville Young 2011, p. 49) and also for overt references to emotionality and affectively laden encounters. This was followed by paying closer attention to *linguistic formulations*, such as word repetitions and extreme case formulations, again working to ground the analysis in the text. However, in order to ensure that the analysis did not become reduced to a discourse analysis, I took inspiration from Walkerdine et al.'s second level of analysis in which they too looked at word use, images and metaphors, but were more concerned with how these linked to affective and defensive intersubjective processes. At this point I departed from Saville Young's procedures in order to consider the longitudinal aspects of my data, reading the interviews as individual cases for changes, continuities and narratives of transformation before exploring patterns across cases (Thomson and Holland 2003; Thomson 2007).

I also applied the Lacanian concepts of dynamics of defence or enjoyment, the construction of objects of desire, fantasy, and positioning in relation to the Other to further interrogate the participants' investments in particular subject positions and the psychoanalytic properties of the broader discourses that they drew on in constructing their narratives. Mindful of Frosh and Baraitser's (2008, p. 363) warning about the dangers of turning psychoanalysis into an ungrounded system of expertise that can be 'mined for its technology', I was careful not to import the Lacanian concepts uncritically or in a mechanistic fashion that drained them of their excessiveness and disruptive qualities. Instead, I tried to deploy the concepts as a way of opening up and problematising the narratives in terms of investment in subject positions and other affective dynamics rather than as a way of ordering them under a single, coherent explanation. This was an attempt, in Frosh's (2008, p. 11) terms, to replace 'interpretation' with 'interruption', and to provide 'a set of provoking questions' rather than 'a sense of holistic closure'. In this way, I hoped to be able to harness the theoretical power of some of Lacan's ideas about desire, fantasy, and enjoyment without losing the critical edge of psychoanalysis, both as practice and theory.

The final step of the analysis involved my *reflexivity* as a researcher in relation to the data and analytic process. I achieved this by drawing on the reflections I had written after each interview, which documented thoughts and 'feeling states' arising during the interviews (Cartwright 2004), as well as maintaining an awareness of any further impressions during the process of transcription and the initial read-through of the transcripts. This reflexivity allowed me to investigate intersubjective psychodynamics during the interviews and the impact of my own subjectivity on the generation and analysis of the data. Comprising their third level of analysis, Walkerdine et al. (2001, p. 97) suggest that a psychoanalytically informed reflexive practice allowed them to pose the following salient questions: 'to which part or parts of me is the subject speaking? Which part of me is responding? In other words, who do I represent for the subject, and who do they represent for me?' Adopting the same approach allowed me to reflect on the discursive and psychodynamic processes affecting my and the participants' positioning and creation of meaning in the interviews. In selecting quotations to

illustrate the data in the analysis chapters, I was mindful of presenting lengthy excerpts that showed as much of the context of that part of the interview as possible and that would also show my contribution in terms of questioning, responses and transference.

I also sought to go beyond the discursive dimension of the interview data by drawing on participants' affectively laden responses, descriptions of the physicality of being a volunteer tourist, the observational data that had been gathered and my reflexive field diary to understand the experience's material, embodied, intersubjective and affective dynamics. I enrich and enliven the interview data by presenting quotations alongside photographs taken in Kenya that are evocative of the scenes and activities typical of the volunteer tourism programme, rich ethnographic descriptions based on my observations in the field, and intimate accounts of my own dreams and fantasies that contributed to my understanding of the other volunteer tourists' experiences and subjectivities. Additionally, several of the analysis chapters use case studies as a way of exploring the data in greater detail and Chapter 9 is entirely based on Lisa's story. The use of case studies enabled me to present a greater level of biographical and experiential detail, contributing to an intricate picture of how volunteer tourist subjectivity is lived and negotiated. It is also an appropriate mode of presenting data because of the holistic focus within psychosocial analysis on narrative structure, biographical elements, and unique investments in subject positions (Hollway and Jefferson 2000).

### *Ethics*

#### *Research relationships*

It was necessary to carefully manage how I related to my participants because at times the boundaries between research relationships and friendships seemed to blur. Three factors in particular contributed to this problematic aspect of maintaining ethical conduct: the informal nature of the interviews, online contact, and travelling together. The conversational, informal nature of the interview format used meant that some participants felt that it was more like having a 'chat' than being 'interviewed', as they understood the term. The longitudinal repeated interviewing also contributed to a diminishing of formality over time; by the time of the final interview, I had known my participants for almost a year and had spoken to them on many previous occasions, leading to a more relaxed interview than when we had only just met. I had emphasised the ease and informality of the participation during the recruitment process and this had seemed to attract respondents. However, it was crucial to remind participants that these 'chats' were being recorded and that their words would be analysed and quoted in the research outputs. Together with the other factors discussed below, the interview format made it difficult to distinguish at times whether I was holding a conversation with a participant, a friend, or someone who had effectively become both.

By 'online contact' I mean that in addition to email correspondences all but one participant requested that I become their 'friend' on Facebook. The social networking site, which I use personally, had been used to encourage participation in the research thereby making my profile visible to other volunteer tourists. I had decided in advance that any attempt to 'add' potential participants to my contacts on the site would be an

unethical encroachment of their personal space. However, when the requests for online friendship came from my participants, I felt comfortable in acquiescing and allowing them to find out about me and my life, given that some lines of questioning used in the interviews were aimed at probing biographical details and thus highly personal. This appeared to be one simple way to redress the inherently unequal power dynamics within the research relationship, heeding Behar's (1993, p. 273) observation that in research we 'ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves'. However, as a consequence, our online interactions became very informal and almost indistinguishable from other friendships conducted through this medium. Having access to this online content also allowed me to learn about details of participants' lives which were sometimes omitted or contradicted in the interviews.[17] This left me in the difficult position of knowing that I was sometimes being told a different story to the participants' online friends, but being unable to raise this because drawing on information that had not been divulged as part of the research process would have constituted a breach of ethics.

The third factor contributing to the blurring of boundaries in my relationships with participants was that we travelled, volunteered and lived together in Kenya. In this setting, I was just another volunteer tourist who occasionally would take people away to do interviews rather than being marked out as a researcher, as someone different. This sense of sameness was further developed by the bonding that resulted from having to deal with the harsh living conditions, homesickness and gruelling manual labour involved in the volunteer work. Living together raised similar ethical dilemmas to those brought about by my online relations with participants in that I would overhear conversations, or be involved in them myself, that were not intended to be shared as part of the research. One mistake that I made was to raise in an interview sensitive information regarding one participant's family, which she had disclosed to me in a conversation as a friend. In that moment of questioning, my drive for understanding as a researcher overtook ethical considerations and on reflection I recognise that it was highly inappropriate to introduce such sensitive material into a recorded interview when it had not been the participant's intention for it to be used in this way. This anecdote illustrates some of the difficulties and ethical quandaries I encountered due to the often ambiguous status of my relationship with the participants.

My various entanglements with the participants—personal, professional, online, offline—meant that bringing my research relationships to a close would be problematic. Ceasing the data generation was relatively straightforward with none of the participants requesting any further interviews, as has been found to be a potential problem in other studies when respondents found therapeutic value in their conversations with researchers (Bird and Miller 2000; Frosh et al. 2002). I offered to send participants a copy of their interview transcripts and of the final thesis when it was ready. Participants were then sent a brief electronic exit questionnaire, which was anonymous, to give an indication of

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17   All of this information was posted for all of the participants' online friends to see and was automatically viewable on my homepage; I did not use the social networking site to deliberately pry into participants' private lives or as a supplementary means of eliciting data.

how they had felt about the research process. The results of this survey were largely positive with only two respondents expressing discomfort about my presence in Kenya and the questions that were asked in the interviews. However, my online 'friendships' with all but one participant meant that we have stayed in touch beyond this formal end to the research. I was conscious of not wanting to come across as having 'faked friendships' in the name of building rapport, as Duncombe and Jessop (2002) put it, and where friendships did emerge this was not out of false pretences on my part but a result of having an affinity with that person. Remaining in touch with some of the participants, on their terms, was therefore my way of demonstrating to them that my feelings and actions towards them had been genuine and not just a means to the end of gathering data.

*Questioning*

Due to the focus on subjectivity and the psychosocial approach used in the research, questions in the interviews were aimed at eliciting responses that were rich in personal, biographical, and affective meaning. This type of questioning on potentially sensitive topics presented an ethical challenge in terms of not being overly intrusive or causing the participants distress (Lee 1993; Corbin and Morse 2003). The capacity to cause harm has to be understood in the context of the inherently unequal power relations that are set up by the interview context (Kvale 2007, 2006; Dowling 2005; Stanley and Wise 1983). Taking the issue of intrusion first, the repeated interview method allowed for follow-up questions on themes of particular interest, including personal and sensitive information. Even though I had briefed the participants about the fact that my approach meant that I wanted to gain a holistic understanding of their lives, I sensed at times that some were uncomfortable with being asked very personal questions and may have felt that these were digressions from what had been advertised as the central research foci: volunteer tourism and the gap year (see Appendix A). Whenever asking such questions, I tried to become attuned to how the participant was feeling and when I sensed discomfort, either through hesitation, expressions of uncertainty, or emotionality, I always asked the participant whether they were happy to continue or whether they would like to move onto another subject. It was reassuring, in terms of the interviews' power dynamics, that several participants did feel able to decline certain questions and change the course of the interview.

*Anonymity*

Participants were reassured from the outset that their identities would be concealed as far as possible within the research outputs. This was important because of the personal and at times controversial responses that were given in the interviews, but it soon became apparent that guaranteeing complete anonymity would be a huge challenge. Given the investigative focus on subjectivity, one interpretative dimension of the data was biographical. Therefore, a problem was presented in how to provide enough contextual detail regarding participants' lives in order to adequately analyse the data without giving so much away that they would be easily identifiable. The case study,

Chapter 9, required particularly extensive amounts of detail in order to construct a persuasive analytic picture of Lisa's life. This problem was compounded by the fact that all of the participants not only knew each other but knew exactly who else was taking part in the study through having talked to one another. Members of staff at the volunteer tourism company who had helped to recruit participants for the research were also aware of who had put their name forward. I therefore rendered the data as anonymous as possible, by assigning all participants a pseudonym, removing contextual details that were not pertinent to the analysis and altering some biographical details. No changes were made that would affect the conclusions able to be drawn from the data.

A second issue regarding anonymity was the volunteer tourism company who, for reasons of reputation, did not want to be identified in the research. This made reporting details of the travel and volunteering projects difficult and for that reason I have not included actual place names within Kenya, the names of schools, or details of the projects beyond what was required to interpret the data. Similarly, in the photographs included in the analysis chapters to illustrate the volunteer tourism programme care has been taken to omit any identifiable company logos or members of staff. As part of our working agreement, the company requested that I sign paperwork stating that they should have access to research outputs prior to publication in order to check that their commercial interests were not being harmed. Whilst I agreed to these terms, I made it clear that I would not tolerate any censorship of the research. The company had provided a discount on the normal price of their programme due to financial difficulties on my part[18] in exchange for a data report tailored to their interests, but it was made clear from the outset that this did not amount to the company funding the research or having any influence over the form that it would take or the conclusions that would be made.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the decisions that were taken to frame the research in terms of its theoretical focus, participants, methodology and methods of data generation and analysis. A longitudinal psychosocial approach was used in an attempt to capture some of the intricacies of volunteer tourists' lived experiences as they unfolded temporally and spatially. I explained how data from the participant observation and a reflexive field diary were used to supplement the interviews. I also discussed how the analysis attempted to draw on procedures devised for narrative research within the psychosocial tradition while also being inclusive of non-discursive forms of data such as those pointing to embodied or affective experiences. Finally, I considered the ethical considerations that were needed in terms of negotiating often complex research relationships, being sensitive to participants' feelings during interviews and maintaining

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[18] Because of the extremely high cost of such commercial volunteer tourism programmes, often amounting to thousands of pounds excluding flights, the ESRC's Overseas Fieldwork Allowance did not cover the expenses of the fieldwork. In order to make up the costs, I had to use more than a year's worth of the Research Training Support Grant and some of my own money. It was in light of these difficulties that the company offered me a 20% discount on their programme.

the anonymity of all parties during the write-up.

# PART II

# THE IMAGINARY AND DESIRE

**Chapter 5**

# Poverty, authenticity and ambivalence

*Development has been and still is the Westernisation of the world.*

*–Latouche 1993, p. 160*

As part of the sustainable and eco-tourism movements, volunteer tourism is often promoted as an option that can bring economic and social benefits to localities, particularly in Third World destinations. It is also believed to limit damage to natural or cultural resources as well as serving as a potential force for their preservation (Mowforth and Munt 1998; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Wearing 2004, 2001; Gray and Campbell 2007; Jackiewicz 2005; Clifton and Benson 2006). This chapter deals with volunteer tourists' popular understandings of the tension between their presence in Kenya as agents of development (Simpson 2004) and their perceptions of the environmental and cultural damage that such development and their Western influence can cause. These social representations of development through tourism can be understood as framed by debates regarding pro-poor tourism (Hall 2007; Ashley et al. 2001, 2000; Roe and Urquhart 2001; Schilcher 2007; Chok et al. 2007; Harrison 2008), post-development theory (Pieterse 2000, 1998; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Latouche 1993; Escobar 2000, 1992; Kiely 1999), and the mobilisation of tourism and development through new forces of globalisation (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Meethan 2001; Teo 2002; Higgins-Desbiolles 2008). In this chapter, I examine how volunteer tourists' understandings of development and conservation can shape social constructions

of poverty, authenticity and, in turn, perceptions of visited communities. Additionally, I argue that they impact the form of projects undertaken through commercial volunteer tourism.

Building on my discussion of African authenticity outlined in Chapter 3, I argue that authenticity shapes volunteer tourists' desires in a way that directly implicates poverty. The central argument of the chapter is that particular objects in the visited landscape, or characteristics of the people, are simultaneously symbolic of authenticity and poverty, thus drawing volunteer tourists' desire and making them resistant by way of their commitment to the ethical imperative of their charitable endeavours. I outline the sustainable development context before exploring volunteer tourism as a form of 'poverty tourism' (Frenzel and Koens 2012; Frenzel et al. 2012; Rolfes 2010; Scheyvens 2011; Selinger and Outterson 2011) in an attempt to tease out the attraction that poverty (perceived as authenticity) holds for Western tourists. I then turn to two sets of data, the first of which deals with an enjoyment of poverty in the built landscape, resulting in volunteer tourists prioritising preservation of the aesthetics of visited places over the economic rights of their residents (Butcher 2003; Gray and Campbell 2007; Vrasti 2013). The second analytic section examines the volunteer tourists' perceptions of their role in cultural erosion and the 'demonstration effect' (Fisher 2004; McElroy and Albuquerque 1986; Brunt and Courtney 1999) in host communities. I conclude that the volunteer tourists are involved in a dilemma to reconcile nostalgic representations of Africa with their pursuit of ethical subjectivity—pitting a conservation discourse against developmentalism—and that in their deliberations it is evident that their own enjoyment takes priority over concerns for the local people, even when efforts are made to present an ethical stance.

### Volunteer tourism and sustainable development

The damaging impacts of mass tourism in terms of environmental degradation, cultural erosion and economic exploitation have nowhere been lamented more than in the Third World context. The tourism industry has been portrayed as an exploitative, neo-imperial enterprise, which has permitted the continuation of colonial structures and reinforced the theory of dependency on the West (Harrison 1992; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Britton 1982, 1981). The industry is criticised for the commoditisation of traditional cultures, performances and crafts, and expanding into ever more remote and ecologically fragile areas in the pursuit of profit. However, despite such a negative profile, tourism remains vested with the hope that it can bring revenue and development to some of the world's poorest countries, especially in light of the continued growth of international tourism arrivals to developing countries, which have increased by an average of 9.5% per year since 1990 compared to 4.6% worldwide (Roe and Urquhart 2001, p. 1). This possibility of harnessing the economic and infrastructural potential of tourism to Third World countries has been captured in the agenda of pro-poor tourism (PPT), an approach to tourism management and development rather than a specific set of practices, which seeks to generate net benefits for poor communities as part of domestic and international poverty reduction strategies (Ashley et al. 2001, 2000; Hall 2007).

Volunteer tourism intersects with both the PPT and sustainability agendas, expressing a more ethical, alternative tourism product with seemingly fewer negative environmental or cultural impacts and greater socio-economic benefits for host communities. However, the reception of such initiatives has been critical, if not hostile, at times. Harrison (2008) questions the conceptual distinctiveness of PPT and other commentators argue that corporatised tourism has espoused a pro-poor agenda and the rhetoric of sustainability merely to lend it credibility in the face of more discerning, ethically motivated consumers and anti-globalization sentiments (Higgins-Desbiolles 2008; Scheyvens 2009, 2007; Pleumarom 1994). Furthermore, PPT has been criticised for belonging to a neoliberal approach to poverty alleviation with a focus on growth instead of equity, implying that strategies might be deemed a success if they yield benefits for the poor, even if the rich benefit disproportionately (Schilcher 2007; Chok et al. 2007). Tourism's embrace of developmental responsibilities also leaves it open to critique from proponents of post-development theory who have argued that the discourse of development produces the object of the Third World (Escobar 1995, 1992; Latouche 1993) as an 'inferior alterity' that is needed for the West's self-construction as 'developed' (Biccum 2002, p. 39). While this postcolonial critique needs to be taken seriously, the plurality of approaches to development of which alternative tourism practices are indicative may support the counter-argument that post-development thinking essentialises and homogenises the idea of development (Pieterse 2000, 1998; Kiely 1999).

While the ethos of sustainable tourism and development certainly implies reconciliation between achieving socio-economic development and minimising ecological damage in Third World countries, a tension remains between these two facets of alternative or volunteer tourism, because development infers modernisation and infrastructural expansion with inevitable environmental impacts, at least to some extent. This is a tension which seems to become particularly prominent when we examine volunteer tourists' lay understandings of development, conservation issues, and their role in relation to both. Butcher (2003) complains that what he terms the 'New Moral Tourism', which includes volunteer tourism, has resulted in the 'elevation of nature above development' (p. 60). Similarly, Gray and Campbell's (2007) research on volunteer tourists in Costa Rica found that many were more concerned with protecting their environmental values than assisting with economic development. While this might not seem surprising given the researchers' focus on sea turtle conservation projects, I will attempt to show below that even in the context of humanitarian or community development based volunteer tourism, tensions remain between tourists' sense of obligation towards visited communities and the landscapes that they admire. Simpson (2004) sheds light on this finding through her analysis of volunteer tourism and gap year organisations' promotional materials, demonstrating how exotic, idealised representations of destinations as tropical paradises are balanced with the conveyance of local people as a needy Other requiring volunteer tourists' help. Whilst rarely using the term 'development', organisations invite their clients to take part in a 'worthwhile' experience where they get to 'make a difference' at the same time as consuming a

supposedly perfect place, thereby constructing a paradox which, I argue, becomes integrated into volunteer tourists' subjectivities.

This construction of the volunteer tourist site as at the same time perfect and deficient, as desired and troubling, brings to mind the postcolonial concepts of ambivalence and double-inscription elaborated at length by Bhabha (see also Chapter 3). According to Bhabha, colonial discourse constitutes the colonised as an '"otherness" which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity' (1983, p. 19). In attempting to bring the colonised within the system of Western knowledge, an affinity and affection is created which simultaneously ruptures attempts to maintain a sense of difference and Otherness, creating unstable representations of the Other. While I am not trying to suggest that volunteer tourists are deliberately trying to subjugate or dominate local people, the imagery and discursive presentation of modern-day tourism in the Third World does seem to borrow from colonial representations. Wels (2004) notes that this is particularly the case for Africa given its strong colonial imagery as an 'Edenic' place which also harbours great darkness and savagery. Thus, the duality between marketing volunteer tourism destinations as perfect and idyllic while riddled with unsettling poverty and need, coupled with tourists' own sense of ambivalence towards these places, hints at deep-rooted cultural fantasies that continue to influence the construction of Africa as a place of desire and identification for Western travellers and also one that is distanced and defended against, made 'Other', positioned as inferior and in need of help.

### Tourists in poor places

Volunteer tourism's integration with discourses of development and sustainability is not unique. What does set volunteer tourism apart, at least in its humanitarian variant, is the centrality of poverty to clients' motivations and desires to travel. I want to argue that social constructions of development towards which volunteer tourists contribute cannot be understood in isolation from meanings associated with and desires projected towards poverty – an object which is implicated ethically in the pro-poor dimension of volunteer tourism and aesthetically in its environmental sustainability aspect. Scheyvens (2001) cites volunteer tourism as an example of poverty tourism, a category associated with Third World tourism in which poor places are actively sought out to be toured. In its urban context, poverty tourism is often referred to more specifically as 'slum tourism', where in places such as the Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro or Mumbai's Dharavi tourists can take part in organised and now well established tours of slums (Burgold et al. 2013; Freire-Medeiros 2012, 2009; Frenzel 2013; Frenzel and Koens 2012; Frenzel et al. 2012; Halnon 2002). To some, the idea of travelling with the explicit aim of witnessing poverty is an abhorrent and 'unacceptable form of voyeurism because it *displays an asymmetric presence that reinforces social stratification*' (Selinger and Outterson 2009, p. 22, original emphasis; Hutnyk 1996). However, while this assertion of an 'asymmetric presence' is certainly a fact, the moral question surrounding poverty tourism cannot be straightforwardly resolved given that one cannot make assumptions about how poor people feel about being observed, as to do so would itself be a

disavowal and undermining of their agency (Whyte et al. 2011; Selinger and Outterson 2009).

This situation is further complicated by the fact that scholars very often fail to make the distinction between tourists who travel to poor places with the explicit aim of witnessing or attempting to alleviate poverty, and those who are in such places primarily for other reasons (e.g. Scheyvens 2011). Rolfes (2010), for example, notes that witnessing poverty may not be the sole or even primary motivation for participating in poverty tourism, with many tourists citing the desire to learn about local culture and people as the impetus for their travels. In the volunteer tourism context, I have discussed the ways in which tourists appear to simultaneously desire and defend against spectres of poverty, indicating a complex picture where the extent to which poverty is sought out may depend on its positioning within existing meaning and affective frames (Crossley 2012a). One reason why tourists pursue poverty may be that it signifies a form of authenticity associated with Third World travel. Mowforth and Munt (1998) locate the tourist's enjoyment of poverty within a constellation in which 'Otherness and authenticity are united in a desire to ensure that culture and ethnicity are preserved and aestheticized' (p. 74). In other words, poverty may be experienced in a romanticised fashion as an expression of an authentic, perhaps more primitive Third World 'Other'. Jaakson (2004) regards such 'contrast seekers' who go in search of unspoilt places and unmodernised cultures, avoiding signs of global culture, as enacting a form of neo-colonial tourism.

Mowforth and Munt (1998) enlist the concepts of fetishism and aestheticisation to understand the tourist's relationship to poverty in Third World tourism. Many tourism commodities function to conceal social relations, such as exploitative labour practices and resulting poverty, from the consumer. We can see such fetishism taking place in mainstream tourism such as all-inclusive holiday resorts, providing oases of luxury often in the midst of socio-economic deprivation. However, in the case of poverty tourism and volunteer tourism, with such overt motivations to visit poor communities, the notion of aestheticisation is perhaps more relevant. In terms of the aesthetics of poor landscapes, such as slums, Baptista (2012, p. 132) comments that 'the enchantment of neglected spaces and peoples mirrors the desire of the wealthy "West" for the unmapped, different, illegal and disordered'. This informality of the settlements found in poor places can therefore be perceived as exotic, but Dovey and King (2012) put forward a number of other elements that may appeal to the tourist, such as the organic aesthetics of slums, rendering them perceptible as picturesque, and as nostalgically evocative of traditional villages through a 'vernacular architecture, spatial structure or social life' (p. 285). Through this powerful combination of exoticisation, nostalgia and authenticity seeking, an aesthetics of poverty is constructed within a gaze which reinforces colonial representations of the Third World as a repository for a lost wilderness and primitivity, and opens out a space of desire for the tourist who can experience and admire 'real' life.

While the notion of aestheticisation is compelling, Dovey and King caution that this does not guarantee a pleasurable experience for the tourist gazing upon poverty:

> Any quest for the 'real' or 'authentic' city in the slums soon yields to the 'shock of the real' – the terrible realization of the world as given, against Utopian dreams of what should be. … There is an inevitable tension between our own moral discomfort and a real concern for the state of humanity. The tourist's horror in confronting the slum and its denizens is always tinged by the dread of a loss of morality and a loss of self – the preservation of the moral subject is at stake.

(2012, p. 287)

These reflections on the potential for enjoyment and, as Dovey and King put it, 'horror' brought about by poverty in the toured landscape brings to mind once again the concept of double-inscription salient in colonial discourse; poverty is at once alluring— recognisable within a set of meanings that inscribes it as authentic and beautiful—and unsettling, beyond symbolic expression, a threat to ethical subjectivity. This duality is reflected in the ambivalence of tourists' affective and perceptual responses to poverty. While the nature of such responses may at first seem a secondary concern to tourists' motivation to participate in poverty tourism in the first place and their interactions with locals on the ground, Roy (2004, p. 302) reminds us that 'the aestheticization of poverty is the establishment of an aesthetic and aestheticized (rather than political) relationship between … First and Third Worlds. It is an ideology of space'. Within such an 'ideology of space', aestheticised representations of poverty become imbued with particular affects in ways which can modulate the response expected from the observer, whether it be admiration or taking political or charitable action. Furthermore, Mostafanezhad (2013c, p. 156) demonstrates the strategic value of aestheticisation by arguing that when 'volunteer tourists confront poverty, they often become uncomfortable and seek ways to negotiate personal anxieties regarding the inequality of the encounter by aestheticizing the host community members' poverty as authentic and cultural'.

A desire to witness poverty undoubtedly throws the volunteer tourist's own wealth and Western subjectivity into sharp relief. The contrast brought about by interactions between Western tourists and inhabitants of Third World tourism destinations led to early anthropological observations that a 'demonstration effect' was taking place in which local people were emulating Western consumption patterns, thereby instigating social transformation and the erosion of traditional culture and lifestyles (McElroy and de Albuquerque 1986; Mathieson and Wall 1982; Fisher 2004; de Kadt 1979). Harrison (1992, p. 30) remarks that 'demonstration effects are the cultural equivalent of the spread of market relationships and commoditisation' and that such acculturation might be considered as a form of 'cultural imperialism'. In addition to irreversibly altering traditional cultures, the presence of Western tourists has also been posited as creating disappointment and frustration when material wealth is not easily attained, particularly amongst young people who have been reported as being more impressionable (Wall and Mathieson 2006; Clifton and Benson 2006). These aspirations could alternatively be positively interpreted as showing young people's determination to lift themselves out of poverty, yet the phenomenon remains cast in a deeply negative light (Fisher 2004). In these ways, contact with host communities that is so often heralded as an ethical and progressive asset of volunteer tourism has been posited as nefarious and intrusive

(Guttentag 2009; Wearing 2004, 2001; McIntosh and Zahra 2007).

The emphasis placed on the demonstration effect has received numerous criticisms. Calls for a more for sensitive approach to Third World tourism which avoids displays of wealth such as cameras and mobile phones is critiqued by Butcher (2003) as a shallow concern because tourism did not create these inequalities, while Harrison (1992, p. 30) notes that 'there is more than a hint of hypocrisy … when members of developed societies bewail the desire for consumer durables among residents in LDCs [Less Developed Countries]'. A concern with the erosion of traditional cultures has also been criticised for portraying them as weak and in need of protection from external, usually Western forces (Harrison 1992; Salazar 2004). Empirical evidence suggests that from the perspective of host communities involved in volunteer tourism, tourists are not perceived as a cultural threat and, on the contrary, give communities a sense of pride in where and how they live (Jackiewicz 2005; Clifton and Benson 2006). Furthermore, the role of tourism in creating the demonstration effect has also been called into question by Fisher (2004) who highlights urbanization, industrialisation and the presentation of foreign lifestyles and consumption in advertisements and the media in Third World countries as more likely culprits for observed value changes. It may be these forces of globalisation that are reshaping Third World countries socially and culturally (Teo 2002; Meethan 2001) and, as Amin (1997, p. 129) reminds us, when it comes to the unprecedented changes brought about by globalisation, places would do better trying to harness the 'interaction between evolving "in here" identities and capabilities and "out there" influences, rather than … to avoid global connection or "contamination"'.

I argue that the demonstration effect has entered into popular understandings that volunteer tourists draw upon to make sense of their presence in poor communities, forging part of the 'imaginary' of Third World tourism (Salazar 2010). This stance at first seems counterintuitive; why would tourists willingly believe that they are having a negative impact on their host communities, effectively eroding the authenticity of cultures and traditions that they have travelled to observe, especially after selecting a supposedly ethical tourism product? One reason to suggest that an awareness of the demonstration effect is greater in the case of volunteer tourism is that it represents a tourism practice which is developmentally interventionist, seeking to *change* destination localities beneficially through its projects. Secondly, in positioning themselves as potential invaders and destroyers of the local culture, I argue that volunteer tourists unconsciously reinforce their own perceptions of the visited people's authenticity and alterity – qualities in need of protection and preservation so that they can continue to be admired by foreign visitors. In the sections that follow, I will attempt to develop these ideas and elaborate on the theorisations explored in this literature review, presenting data that demonstrate how volunteer tourists simultaneously desire and are troubled by sites of poverty as well as how they reflexively engage with their positionality with respect to the local people, constructing them as markers of an authentic, exotic Other.

## Landscapes of authenticity and poverty

### *Imaginary and symbolic ambivalence*



**Figure 9.** The perfect white sand and blue sea of Kenya's beaches. *Source:* Author.

On our third day after arriving in Kenya we were taken to a beach not far from the village in which we were staying. The bus sped along the bumpy road and eventually the coast started to come into sight. Everyone was excited and gasped in amazement when we saw the striking blue crystal waters gleaming on the horizon, teamed with white sand, blinding in the African sun. I too suddenly felt arrested by the scene, seduced by this image of paradise, and wanted to lie on the hot sand and swim in the ocean. Over the coming days, the volunteer tourists discussed the beach scene and others that we were touring, and while they seemed to unanimously find these landscapes attractive, their perceptions were framed by a distinctive sense of alienation. Linsey commented that it did not 'feel real' to be here, Joanna said that it was strange to be in a very rural place 'like you would see on TV', and others reflected that when we had been at the beach it had felt 'like being inside a postcard'. These comments are reminiscent of what Urry (1990, p. 151) refers to as the 'mediatised gaze' in which places that have been used as the sets of films, for example, are collectively gazed at, allowing tourists to relive the media event. While the Kenyan landscapes lacked the specificity of scenes that would be found in cinematic tourism destinations, they were clearly evocative of more general media imagery that might have been seen in wildlife documentaries, advertisements for safari holidays, and the like. This finding similarly resonates with Crang's (1997) observation that the signifiers associated with tourism destinations can become free-floating, taking on greater importance than the site they mark and leading to 'a kind of alienation which has become a prototypical hallmark of photographic "seeing" in tourism' (Albers and James 1988, p. 136).

What can be inferred from these statements is that a paradoxical situation arose whereby the landscape, in resonating with stereotypical media representations, acquired

the status of an authentic desired object—the 'real Africa' as some of the volunteer tourists put it—but in this conformity a distance was created by the spectator recognising the superficiality of the scene as an image, as something lacking in immediacy. In other words, the volunteer tourists' statements point to a sense of having seen the landscape before (in a postcard or on the TV) which appeared to have the dual effect of affirming its authenticity and leaving it perceptually out of reach, unattainable, and perhaps not providing the expected enjoyment (it did not feel 'real'). It is possible to interpret these perceptions as located in the imaginary, which, as Lacan reminds us, is an order of inherent instability and alienation because we can never become one with the images with which we identify, leaving at the core of subjectivity 'a relation of gap, of alienating tension' (II, p. 323). I want to argue that this sense of alienation from the authentic landscape, however slight, constituted the first of two moments of ambivalence characterising the volunteer tourists' pursuit of the object of their desire, the second being located in the symbolic. While I primarily investigate symbolic ambivalence in this first empirical section, I also illustrate how fantasised notions of authenticity may be powerfully shaped by media imagery, leading to a lack of immediacy in their perception. This is because of its potential to elucidate the intersections of poverty/authenticity and the competing desirous/ethical urges experienced by volunteer tourists.

I wanted to find out more about how the volunteer tourists were experiencing the landscape and in the interviews conducted in Kenya I asked each person to tell me how they felt about it. What emerged from these conversations was a further sense of ambivalence towards the landscape, only this time one reflecting the dual symbolic inscription of many features of the built environment as simultaneously markers of authenticity and poverty. For example, Ash expresses this problematic succinctly:

> *Ash*:  °Mud huts° I- I didn't know whether that'd be a myth or there would be actually be mud huts, you know kinda thing. I-, but it is you know it is, they're living in houses of mud and stick. (*laughs*) You know just like ah no, no they'll have brick. (*coughs*) (.) That was good though. Real. Not good for them I suppose but I suppose they're pro- probably not bothered (*laughs*) but you know, °authentic°.
> (Interview 2)

In his account, the mud hut is valorised as an authentic, exotic object of Ash's desire, possessing an almost mythological status through its correspondence to a stereotyped cultural vision of rural Africa. Ash evaluates the huts as 'good' because they provide sought-after authenticity but quickly adds that they are 'not good for them', for the local people who have to live in this basic type of accommodation. He then trivialises this concern by light-heartedly reassuring himself that the locals probably do not see a problem with their standard of living. As such, Ash attempts to resolve the tension between his desire for authenticity and his sense of ethical responsibility towards the Kenyan people that he has come to help.

**Figure 10.** Traditional house in the forest: a rural idyll to be preserved?
*Source:* Author.

Mud huts also make an appearance in Sarah's narrative and she too seems struck by how her surroundings so accurately matched her preconceptions and the images she may have been exposed to through the media:

*Émilie*: What did you make of the landscape and everything?
*Sarah*: Um it's c- it was crazy. When we were landing in the plane and you can see like all the huts at the side and you're like oh my god it <u>actually</u> looks like that. And then when you're driving through and it's like (.) and like one of the first people I saw was like a woman with a vase on her head carrying something. Like, it is cool (.) and everything's, it's like really sad that there's poverty and that everything's like that (.) but.
*Émilie*: Yeah (.) w- why is it sad?
*Sarah*: 'Cause it's so different. 'Cause everything's all run down and they haven't got like (.) you just take what you've got at home for granted, don't you? And then you see the people like (.) living with <u>barely</u> anything and walking around like (.) in like a dishevelled town and it's like, it's like one of the <u>main</u> cities, yet it's like (.) falling apart. It's yeah (.) I like it but it is sad if you think about it.
(Interview 2)

There is a tangible excitement in Sarah's voice as she describes the stereotypical features of the Kenyan landscape that she admires yet, as in Ash's narrative, this is interrupted by her recognition of the poverty that it contains. Sarah expounds this notion of poverty in terms of a material lack and precariousness in the built environment; she mentions everything being 'all run down', a 'dishevelled' town, and one of the main cities 'falling apart' in contrast to the stability and security of things at 'home'. The formulation of Sarah's culminating statement is telling of how the contradiction she is wrestling with is structured. The immediacy of her desire and enjoyment are hinted at by Sarah putting herself in the first person, active voice ('I like it'), which is in contrast to

the sadness evoked by the poverty that surrounds her, which she at no point explicitly admits to feeling herself and is instead constructed as an objective state of affairs that requires reflection ('it is sad if you think about it').

In both Sarah and Ash's accounts we can see an instability of the stereotypical images that they draw upon to construct their perceptions of the Kenyan landscape. While features of the landscape such as the mud huts can be understood as doubly symbolically inscribed as simultaneously objects of desire and derision, it is this signification that also supports the imaginary identification with the huts as an object of fantasy. In other words, it is the symbolic inscription that both enables desire and threatens to destabilise it through bringing forward associations of poverty that volunteer tourists are so resistant to. This process illustrates neatly Yeğenoğlu's point that the Third World is rendered through Western power/knowledge 'an object of *knowledge* and an object of *desire'* (1998, p. 23, original emphasis). The ambivalence expressed in these narratives similarly echoes Bhabha's (1996, 1994) account of colonial knowledge and desire, in which they are defined by ontological precariousness, contradiction and irrationality that undermine the functioning of colonial discourse. From the accounts that we have explored so far, it seems that contemporary tourist experiences are still reliant on dominant cultural ways of knowing that borrow from historical, colonial discourses and shape deeply held fantasies of Otherness.

### *Saving Africa from Westernisation*

During the first set of retrospective interviews, I asked my participants to reflect on what we had just been a part of and whether it was right and necessary for volunteers to go out to help in Third World countries. What emerged from some of their responses was the continued thematic intertwining of authenticity with poverty and the sense of contradiction this caused for volunteer tourists. However, this was complicated further by an urgent sense of needing to preserve the authentic landscape from the potentially destructive influence of Westernisation, development and volunteer tourism itself:

> *Tess*: It's still a developing country. So it still needs to be developed and then, and we're helping with that. … But then at the same time I don't think, I don't think (.) it would be nice for those parts that we saw to become (.) developed, in a way a-, not like I want them to develop but not in a way like buildings and, you know (.) d'you know what I mean? Um developments and um not um, like your kind of hou- not houses, but you know what I mean? Like we have here is so much now, so much land has been wiped out. For, 'cause obviously the population is too big but, I dunno I think Africa is so beautiful as it is and no- I want them to have proper houses, I'd love for them to h- but not to change the style of it. Like to keep it as it is but to make sure, you know, that they have water. You know, m- water, electricity, would be great. But I don't think they, I'd hate to see it completely, you know stripped of its natural (.) what's the word. Its natural whatever.
> (Interview 3)

In this excerpt, Tess struggles to express her opposition to development in a way that still acknowledges the 'need' for a country such as Kenya to develop and overcome

poverty, and legitimises her role in that process through volunteer tourism. Tess repeatedly asks 'd'you know what I mean?' and searches with apparent difficulty for a vocabulary to articulate the sense of wanting to preserve the aesthetic authenticity of Africa while seeing the local people's basic needs being met. The desirous aspects of Tess's narrative come closer here to equating authenticity with the natural landscape, within which dwellings and settlements are subsumed, as she talks about Africa's beauty, not wanting to see more 'buildings', land being 'wiped out', and the stripping of a certain 'natural' something. Her resolution of the tension between her desire and the demands of ethical subjectivity is to propose a type of development that keeps Africa 'as it is' and does not change its 'style' while, under this aesthetic surface, alleviating poverty. However, the primacy for Tess seems to belong to this aesthetic preservation rather than the flourishing of the Kenyan people, as she suggests that only the bare minimum ('water, electricity') should be done to improve living standards – amenities whose addition would not radically disrupt the authentic facade that forms the locus of her desire.

Ash continues to work through themes of poverty, authenticity, and whether and in what ways Africa should become developed:

> *Ash*: You could tell that it, you know, the place was (.) it was poverty wasn't it? Everywhere there was poverty, and to see a mansion or even just you know a li- just you could tell it was someone with money who was (.) maybe alien, I just maybe there's money in Mom-, I don't know but just seemed very alien to, in keeping with it. D'you know what I mean, just seeing poverty and then a mansion next door to (.) you know, so it just didn't (.) just didn't fit. D'you know what I mean? [*Émilie*: Yeah] And it, that's the worst thing I'd ever, I'd hate to go back and the worst thing I'd ever s- I'd hate to see it if it was like, as much as they would but to see it like our city or something. I'd hate that, I'd hate that. And the- there's just few places like that left in the world.
> (Interview 3)

Ash's narrative begins by defining Kenya as poverty and positioning the few visible signs of wealth as 'alien' and not in keeping with their surroundings. Although this could be read as Ash's unease at the gross wealth inequalities shown by the juxtaposition between 'poverty and then a mansion next door', his targeting of the mansion as the thing that is alien and does not 'fit' suggests that his real issue is with this external imposition of something not native or belonging to the landscape; perhaps a wealth whose presence contaminates the authenticity of a place which is in many respects defined by poverty and primitivity. This interpretation seems to be confirmed as Ash's narrative then links to a part where he talks passionately about not wanting Africa to become like 'our city', evoking a sense of loss and repeatedly using strong language – such development would be the 'worst thing' and something that he would 'hate'. In drawing on a discourse expressing the homogenising tendencies of globalisation, he amplifies the sense of urgency with which this account of the potential destruction of the authentic Africa is conveyed, hinting at the need to preserve a precious and rare resource: one on the brink of irrevocable annihilation.

**Figure 11.** Gazing upon a scene of Kenyan rurality. *Source:* Author.

The next part of this extract returns to considering poverty as Ash positions himself as an ethical subject by saying that he would not like to see poverty 'as much'. However, this addition at the end of the sentence again hints at the links between poverty and the authentic African landscape, and thus potentially at the impossibility of erasing the former completely without radically altering the latter:

> *Ash*: Alright I wouldn't like to see the poverty as, as much. You know I'd like to see it more (*coughs*) um (.) well I don't know, 'cause I dunno are they, are they (.) are they happy? You know they seem happy to me. You know there's poverty and that. Obviously there's, there's stuff that does need to change like the, the whole disease and you know AIDS and stuff like that and, but uh as long as you can get them some kinda (.) fresh water and something. I dunno, I dunno. I-, I- I d- you're torn 'cause you're like, you do have to believe that you need to help them and all this but th- they seem pretty happy to me. And I- I'd hate to it, for that to end up like this city so (.) you know where it's, it's very organised, straight and you know (.) civilised, d'you know what I mean kinda thing. Well that's the wrong word isn't it. Just very (.) hard to explain. There's just, there's such few places like that left in the world d'you know what I mean kinda thing it, I'd hate it to just turn into like a, a whole place turns into (.) you know, just set the whole of Africa up as a safari park and that *d'y- d'you* know what I mean?
> (Interview 3)

Ash begins to say what we might guess as 'I'd like to see it more [developed]' but interrupts himself by posing the question of whether the local people are happy and concluding that they appear so to him. After this digression, Ash returns to discussing development and, like Tess, suggests that only the bare minimum should be done to improve the locals' standard of living (dealing with AIDS and supplying 'fresh water'). At this point, Ash again stumbles with his words and interrupts this flow of

developmental discourse with the motif of the happy poor; he says that he feels 'torn' between having to believe that they need to be helped and his own perception of the local people as happy. Ash's narrative brings a new element into the complex of desire and ethical injunctions oscillating in dynamic tension at the core of volunteer tourist subjectivity. On the one hand, we see the continued insistence of the ethical injunction that justifies Ash's presence in Africa as a volunteer and urges him to 'help', but on the other, we now see two manifestations of an anti-development reasoning: the threat to the authentic landscape *and* the redundancy of helping in terms of the locals' happiness.

I want to argue that these elements are both desirous in nature and that the recognition of the local people as 'happy' is in part an imaginary identification, or *mis*recognition, that forms an extension to the central locus of desire on the spectacle of the authentic landscape. This is not to say that the locals did not appear happy and that this was a fantasmatic facade placed onto an overtly miserable populace, but rather that there was something excessive about the way that this happiness was described (see Chapter 6 for further examples) and how it functioned strategically in relation to the narratives. Positioning the locals as happy is significant in two respects: first, it constitutes a subsidiary locus of desire and enjoyment for the volunteer tourists and, secondly, it functions in the service of preserving the authentic landscape from the potentially damaging force of development. This complex picture of being invested in an ethical discourse of development yet drawn into a desirous resistance against it— what Ash experiences as feeling 'torn'—is a situation that Ash seemed unable to resolve. Instead, he repeated the sentiment that he would 'hate' for Africa to become like 'this city', to lose its difference, peculiarity, and exoticness.

Ash's final statement from this excerpt, when he notes that he would hate to see Africa set up as a 'safari park', points explicitly to authenticity as an object of desire. This is an implicit reference to an earlier part of the interview in which we discussed an actual safari that the group went on in Kenya. Ash had been looking forward to this part of the trip because he had thought it would be a chance to really get away from civilisation and into the wilderness; the 'proper Serengeti' in his words. However, he felt that there was something artificial and organised about our safari – something reminiscent of the safari parks that can be found in the UK that left him feeling dissatisfied. Volunteer tourism markets itself as an authentic alternative to such artificial and commercial tourism experiences but even within this alternative model there are detectable traces of the mainstream. Ash therefore highlights two distinct threats to the authenticity of Africa, both coming under the rubric of globalisation and Westernisation, but one of which is linked to the development agenda and the other to tourism and the cultivation of a different sort of enjoyment to that sought by the volunteer tourists, perhaps more akin to postmodern, 'simulational' tourism in which authenticity is no longer deemed important (Uriely 1997; Lash and Urry 1994; Munt 1994; Urry 1990; Cohen 2008).

**Figure 12.** A less idyllic landscape: typical Kenyan roadside scene. *Source:* Author.

My response to Kate and Ash's narratives oscillated between disapproval for what I perceived as an unfair elevation of the need to preserve the environment and village aesthetics over the rights of the Kenyan people, and sympathy towards their attempts to articulate a progressive vision of sustainable development. Getting the balance right between ensuring the survival of ecosystems and human flourishing is no easy task and I found it admirable that the volunteer tourists adopted a position of respect and veneration for the place that they were visiting rather than seeking to impose Western models of development and progress. However, there was something about the way in which Kate and Ash talked about the local people that really got to me. Butcher and Smith (2010) suggest that rejecting Western development norms resists a neo-colonial relation to the toured Other and yet the resultant narratives seemed to portray the Kenyans as bare life to be preserved (by eradicating disease and providing fresh water) rather than people who might aspire to true prosperity. It struck me that even in the supposedly ethical act of not trying to Westernise Africa, the volunteer tourists were still making the assumption that they were best placed to offer a developmental solution, despite limited interactions with the local people.

### *Cultural preservation or curbing aspirations?*

In addition to conceptualising volunteer tourism as a threat to the authenticity of the toured landscape, several of the volunteer tourists voiced concerns about their influence as Westerners on the cultural integrity of the local communities:

Sarah:   You don't wanna destroy the culture. But it's gonna get Westernised? Like you can see it getting Westernised already. Like the places that you do go where there're like, and like in Makuya where the kids, they're already Westernised just from seeing like the mzungus more often than other people. You can see that they're different to kids in other places.

*Émilie:* In what way?

Sarah:   Like they're (.) I dunno they're not as (.) they just seem less like (.) they

seem to have less of the culture.

*Émilie:* Really, yeah?

*Sarah:* In like Makuya and stuff because they, just they have been Westernised by people going there all the time. But, then it's still like (.) they do still have the culture and everything at Makuya. It's difficult. To try and help them out without ruining it. It's like, if it's sorted out by them then they can keep their culture. But it's not possible for it to just be sorted out by them, they need help, which will start to destroy the culture.
(Interview 3)

Sarah portrays Westernisation as an inevitable process resulting in a loss of cultural distinctiveness, exacerbated by the presence of foreign tourists or 'mzungus', to use the Swahili word usually applied to white people. The situation that needs to be 'sorted out' that Sarah refers to is quite obviously Kenya's poverty and lack of development. She frames this as a choice between retaining the African/Kenyan/local culture and attaining development, because external help to develop will necessarily entail an erosion of this culture and help is needed because local people are portrayed as incapable of solving their own problems. The meaning of 'culture' and its erosion was elaborated on by Lisa before our departure:

*Lisa*: They've got like pictures of (.) some of the (.) people in the projects with their like iPods and everything and you've got to think like as much as you (.) think you might not be like, d'you know what I mean, like (.) they know that they don't have that. Like they're aware of it and the (.) you're still kind of changing their culture really. We're bringing it like, bringing in all the Western (.) like technology and I dunno, on the one hand it's a good, it's a really good thing because (.) like you're helping them °but it's° (.) yeah, I dunno. Just seems a bit (.) I don't think you can completely go without (.) damaging a little bit of their (.) culture.
(Interview 1)

Referring to the images used to promote the volunteer tourism company, Lisa describes the brandishing of objects symbolic of Western wealth, such as MP3 players and cameras, in front of the local people. We see the recurrence in this narrative of the ethical aspect of volunteer tourism—that it is a 'good thing' to be 'helping'—which is constructed as also potentially damaging, this time in relation to the authentic local culture. Thus, I argue that an ethical injunction is pitted against the need to preserve the authentic object of desire, which in this case is culture. Furthermore, there is an *additional* sense in which a sort of violence is inflicted upon the locals through this flaunting of wealth and subsequent cultural loss. This is encapsulated in Lisa's statement, 'they know that they don't have that'.

In her final retrospective interview, Lisa elaborates further on this point:

*Lisa*: But like I think it's very difficult to not kind of impose Western views on their communities by going in and helping? Like, I mean the amount of times that like the kids ran up and wanted to play with my camera or like (.) I do just kinda think oh god do I really wanna be showing them this camera 'cause they're never gonna have one. Like and it's a treat to play with now

but are they gonna then (.) spend their whole life aspiring to have like a
camera rather than, d'you know. … They're just so happy. Like and I just
think like I do wonder whether our, like the amount of money we have does
kind of dictate our happiness here like. … Yeah they definitely, they're
definitely really happy out there but I'm wondering kinda whether we're
making them (.) less happy by going out and volunteering.
(Interview 4)

Lisa points out that Westernisation through the presence of people such as the volunteer
tourists is problematic not only in terms of the erosion of the authentic object of desire
that tourists have come to experience but, from an ethical perspective, because of the
propagation of desire *in the locals themselves*. Not only do the local people 'know that
they don't have that'—for example, a camera—but according to Lisa they will never be
able to obtain one and she therefore worries about the children developing unattainable
aspirations for material objects from the West. Lisa also links this narrative to the
idealising 'poor-but-happy' discourse that occurred repeatedly throughout the
interviews, portraying the locals as already happy in the absence of material possessions
and at risk of becoming 'less happy' as a result of fixating on money and material
wealth (see also Crossley 2012a). It is possible that Lisa's use of the discourse at this
point in her narrative, after describing her camera and own unease at the Kenyan
children's placement of desire onto this object, functions defensively to absolve her of
any negative feelings associated with her positionality as an affluent Western subject in
a context defined largely by poverty.



**Figure 13.** A volunteer tourist places headphones on a child at a local primary
school. *Source:* Participant.

Jane refers to an incident that she told me about in detail during a previous interview
in which a fellow volunteer tourist was approached by an adolescent boy who told her
that he 'hated' his life and wished that he had been born into her family:

*Jane*: I don't know if us (.) bein- like to the children and that, 'cause a couple of them were like oh I wish I had your life and um I think that kind of maybe (.) doesn't have a brilliant effect on them. … I dunno whether that sets sort of expectations that they can't achieve, d'you know? Like (.) um (.) like they'd probably love to be able to travel to different places but th- they'll never be able to. They'll (.) never be able to afford it. Um and things like that (.) so (*laughs*) (.) Like gives them like sort of false hope.
(Interview 4)

Like Lisa, Jane's narrative constructs the volunteer tourists' presence as giving the children unattainable expectations and aspirations, 'false hope' for a better life that they see embodied by the Western visitors. Going beyond the obvious material symbols of wealth such as the iPod and camera drawn on by Lisa, Jane uses travel itself as an example of the privileges afforded by being a Western subject and projects her own desire to travel onto the local children by saying that it is something that they would 'probably love' to be able to do. So there is not only a desirous resistance to the ethical injunction, linked to fantasies of authenticity in the African landscape and culture, but also an ethical resistance against the ethical. The 'false' hope generated by the local people's misrecognition of a solution to their problems in the image of the West embodied by the volunteer tourists was perceived as damaging for the locals in the long run. Thus, the volunteer tourists were provided with an ethical reason for not intervening in the local people's affairs.

These data paint a rather bleak picture in which volunteer tourism is perceived by its clients as having unavoidable, damaging consequences despite its marketed intentions of helping people in Third World countries to lift themselves out of poverty. In relation to the theme of unattainable aspirations, we could ask why it is that Lisa and Jane think the children that they came into contact with in Kenya will never, in their lifetimes, be able to break free of poverty and enjoy some of the luxuries that they have. It is worrying that some volunteer tourists feel it is better for people in Third World countries to be content and passive in their poverty than to aspire to a better life, even if achieving this may be a struggle or if such desire is misplaced onto Western visitors and material wealth. There appear to be at least two reasons for these opinions: first, and most obviously, aspirations for a Western lifestyle present a threat of cultural erosion and potential destruction of the authentic object of the volunteer tourists' desire, and secondly, these aspirations challenge the fantasy touched upon by Lisa of the local people being happy in their poverty, thereby problematically positioning the volunteer tourists as comparatively prosperous.

### Conclusion

This chapter has sought to build on my previous elaboration in Chapter 3 of the two facets constituting the imaginative geography of Africa drawn upon in the marketing and practice of volunteer tourism. Broadly, the desire for exotic authenticity and the ethical requirement to address the issue of poverty come into dynamic tension, producing particular understandings of poverty, culture and landscape. In the volunteer tourists' accounts of their experience of the Kenyan landscape, it is clear that a

perceived authenticity and exoticness, possibly derived from colonial representations of Africa, holds great affective value and is held up as something special and in need of protection from the encroachment of modernisation. In this respect, the findings presented here appear to support the idea that volunteer and other ethical tourism products are conducive to an 'elevation of nature above development' and the fostering of environmental values at the expense of the economic flourishing of host communities (Butcher 2003; Gray and Campbell 2007; Vrasti 2013). This was seen clearly in the responses from Tess and Ash, who both felt that only the bare minimum should be done to ensure that the local people have a decent standard of living, such as providing them with clean water and electricity, in order for the aesthetic integrity of the built and natural landscape to be preserved.

However, this desire for an authentic landscape is by no means straightforward and many of the participants struggled to express their desire and maintain an ethical stance with regard to the poverty that symbols of authenticity, such as the mud huts, often simultaneously suggested. The difficulty with which this inadvertent enjoyment of poverty in the built environment was dealt brings to mind the double-inscription characteristic of colonial discourse, which painted a picture of Africa as at once a place of pure primitivity, beauty and as also harbouring disorder and savagery (Bhabha 1983; Wels 2004), and Simpson's (2004) analysis of volunteer tourism marketing which presents destinations as idealised and deficient in terms of poverty at the same time. The consequent dual affective response experienced by the volunteer tourists, of admiration tinged with guilt or even, on some level, 'horror' (Dovey and King 2012), complicates the picture of whether witnessing poverty is a primary motivation in a variant of poverty tourism such as volunteer tourism (Scheyvens 2001; Rolfes 2010). On the one hand, poverty certainly drives volunteer tourism through allowing participants to perform ethical subjectivity by helping poor communities, but in terms of a desire to experience such sights purely for aesthetic pleasure it would seem that tourists are looking primarily for authenticity and exotic notions of beauty which inadvertently brings them to gaze upon poverty which has been rendered desirable through a Western aestheticisation (Mowforth and Munt 1998).

Not only were the volunteer tourists clearly aware of, and active in reproducing, discourses of sustainability, environmental conservation and development in responding to the landscape around them, but they also demonstrated an awareness of the demonstration effect and the threat to cultural authenticity through their Western, 'asymmetric presence' (Selinger and Outterson 2009). The prevalent belief that tourists in rural Africa would exacerbate the process of Westernisation and cultural homogenisation reinforces the typical conceptualisation of demonstration as a negative phenomenon (Fisher 2004) and in this respect the volunteer tourists' responses were similar to those in relation to the authentic landscape in that they wanted to see development minimised in order to protect the desired object, only this time pertaining to a perceived cultural authenticity. The participants' level of contact with young children in the local villages (see also Chapter 6) together with a popular understanding of children and young people as especially impressionable and susceptible to the

demonstration effect—a finding also supported empirically in the academic literature (Wall and Mathieson 2006; Clifton and Benson 2006)—led the volunteer tourists to be wary of the effect their presence was having on this social group in particular. However, concern with the preservation of cultural difference and authenticity appeared to take a backseat to a more ethical discourse of not wanting to interrupt the local people's happiness and give them unattainable aspirations for an economically and materially more advantaged life.

The worry that giving the Kenyan villagers 'false hope', in Jane's words, for a life lifted out of poverty functioned to bolster the volunteer tourists' ethical subjectivity by presenting them as caring, as looking out for the best interests of the local people. Knowing full well that money could not buy happiness and that Western society has descended into purposeless, superficial consumerism, they were able to authoritatively and somewhat paternalistically assert that the local people were better off in the conditions under which they were currently living. Furthermore, in stating that the local people were already happy, they were able to absolve themselves of any guilt associated with their position of privilege and wealth within a poor community and justify preserving the desired objects of cultural and environmental authenticity in an ethically sound way. In the following chapter, I examine a very different reaction to the local people's desire being placed onto the volunteer tourists. In this case, the desire positioned the volunteer tourists problematically and threatened to dissolve the difference between the volunteer tourists and the Kenyans, a difference which had to be maintained in order for the tourists' enjoyment to be perpetuated (Bhabha 1983). In this sense then, the volunteer tourists were conscious not only of the need to save African authenticity from the rampant globalisation and modernisation for which they, at least by association, were responsible, but also *from the African people themselves* who, through their desire for a Western lifestyle, threatened to undermine the project of aesthetic preservation elevated to such importance by the visitors.

In terms of the implications of these findings for the sustainable tourism and PPT agendas, I suggest that there is a need to explore further the desires and subjectivities of tourists on the ground who participate in and reproduce these ethical initiatives. In a market dominated by commercial alternative and volunteer tourism providers, the wishes of the paying client are significant and have the power to shape programmes. Therefore, if there is a reluctance to support development, or particular manifestations of development such as more Western buildings and infrastructure, because these conflict with volunteer tourists' desires to experience an aesthetically authentic landscape, then organisations are likely to steer their projects in a different direction. This course of action will not necessarily be of most benefit to the communities volunteer tourism providers are supposedly trying to assist. The response of volunteer tourists to the landscape—understood as the inadvertent desire for poverty-as-authenticity—seems to support the notion that aestheticisation invites tourists to respond in a depoliticised fashion, subsuming social issues under aesthetic concerns (Roy 2004; Mostafanezhad 2013c). The participants are caught diplomatically between trying to construct an ethical identity as volunteers and responsible travellers, and upholding fantasies about exotic

authenticity and the happiness of the local populace in order to maintain their enjoyment of both. In the end it would appear that desire has the upper hand.

**Chapter 6**

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# Interactions, intimacy and identification

*The consumption of intimate experiences is at the heart of volunteer tourism.*

*–Conran 2011, p. 1459*

Volunteer tourism has been marketed as a travel experience founded upon an ethos of equality, reciprocity and cross-cultural learning between so called 'hosts' and 'guests'. It is presumed to offer a radically different and significantly more ethical alternative to mainstream tourism, particularly in a Third World context. In a shift that sees a move away from exploitative relationships and the re-enactment of colonial Othering and exoticisation, volunteer tourism invites Western subjects to enter into a doubly ethical practice in which they can help poor communities through voluntary development projects and also interact with or befriend community members in a decommodified setting (Wearing 2001; Wearing et al. 2005). These two dimensions have led to the construction of volunteer tourism as a site of investigation regarding closeness, interaction, and intimacy seeking behaviours by tourists as aspects of their broader socio-cultural immersion in the visited location (Conran 2011, 2006; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Sinervo 2011). Reciprocal relationships of care can also develop between tourists and their hosts in the volunteer tourism encounter (Sin 2010). However, this thread of research has only recently begun to emerge and the psychology of encounters between tourists and visited communities remain undertheorised in the tourism studies literature.

This chapter examines interactions between volunteer tourists and Kenyan people, and considers the potential and limitations of reciprocal relations in volunteer tourism. This argument is organised around three concepts: interactions, intimacy and identification. The first reveals in the data how local people were perceived, communicated with, approached, befriended, or avoided by volunteer tourists, while the second places an accent on the intersubjective experience of closeness and affection that was idealised in their narratives. Finally, the concept of identification is used in a Lacanian sense to understand the psychosocial processes enabling the positive perceptions of, and affective relations towards, the local people by linking them to fantasy and desire. The data presented in this chapter are also divided into three sections, beginning with an exploration of idealised accounts of the local children and the intimate interactions that many of the volunteer tourists were able to have with them. I then consider how the practice of photography mediated 'host-guest' interactions, drawing reflexively on my own experience of a cultural visit to a Maasai village to explore emergent dynamics of enjoyment, objectification and shame. The final section considers problematic interactions with beggars, beach vendors and others that were avoided by the volunteer tourists due to the fantasmatic rupture that they caused. I conclude that volunteer tourism does not straightforwardly produce more reciprocal interpersonal relations and that it is necessary to critically engage with the fantasmatic dimensions of these interactions in order to develop the potential for more ethical conduct.

### Seeing, knowing and desiring 'hosts'

It has been suggested that the relationship between the tourist and toured objects operates primarily in a visual register, leading to an academic fascination with the links between tourism and visual culture (e.g. Burns et al. 2010; Crouch and Lübbren 2003; Feighey 2003; Osborne 2000; Urry 1990). As MacCannell succinctly puts it, '[s]ightseeing is tourism's default' (2011, p. 42), or to quote McGrane, 'travel is essentially a way of seeing, a mode of seeing: it is grounded in the eye, in our visual capacity' (1989, p. 116). By extension, one could suppose that the tourist's orientation towards visited people, particularly in the case of ethnological tourism where it is people that form the sights, is also constructed through a longing to *see* the locals and to *observe* their way of life, thereby subjecting them to a subordinating tourist gaze. Feighey (2003) has commented that this 'ocularcentric nature' of tourism reflects the practice's modernist origins, constituting a peculiarly Western scopic regime of visuality, knowledge and power in which 'looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined' (Jenks 1995, pp. 1-2). If the tourist's gaze is taken as a fundamental component of host-guest encounters and interactions and the act of looking is epistemically problematic, as Jenks warns, in terms of deriving knowledge about others, then these relations become ethically and politically problematic. In this section, I explore the extent to which volunteer tourism conforms to these norms of visuality, whether alternative forms of interaction are possible, the benefits and challenges associated with host-guest interactions, and the epistemological link between seeing,

knowing and desiring toured people.

Credited as the first author to extensively consider the structure of visual consumption in tourism, John Urry's (1990) *Tourist Gaze* proposed a conceptualisation of the gaze as a historically and geographically constructed mode of envisioning toured landscapes, architecture and people that relied upon an opposition to 'non-touristic experience' in order to function. Urry suggests that this gaze can be endlessly reproduced and recaptured through selective media circulation of iconic images of tourism destinations and tourists' own production, or selection, of images through photography, the sending of postcards, and so on. Urry's work opens up the visual in the social field of tourism:

> [G]aze cannot be taken as simply a physical mechanism of perception but is a fundamental structure in the subject's relationship with the physical, cultural and social order in which they live. It is tied up with formations and operations of subjectivity.
>
> (Fuerty and Mansfield 2000, p. 71)

As this quotation neatly expresses, a consideration of the gaze should not constitute a narrow focus on tourist perception qua sensory mechanism, but rather a way of understanding the ideological structuring of social space and subjectivity in tourism encounters – a fundamental element of the 'tourism imaginaries' discussed in Chapter 3. This perspective can help us to think about how visual encounters with toured people are framed by the social conditions and ideations of the tourist's home society.

An obvious avenue of enquiry into the visual framing of hosts by tourists is the practice of travel photography, which has been the subject of extensive investigation (Albers and James 1988; Caton and Santos 2008; Cederholm 2004; Chalfen 1979; Cohen et al. 1992; Crang 1999, 1997; Feighey 2003; Garrod 2009; Haldrup and Larsen 2003; Jenkins 2003; Larsen 2006, 2005, 2004; Markwell 1997; Neumann 1992b; Robinson and Picard 2009; Scarles 2013, 2012; Teymur 1993). Garlick (2002, p. 295) highlights the centrality of photography in the tourist experience by suggesting that by 'producing knowledge of the other, [it] allows for the production of the subjectivity of the tourist', which is a process that continues through showing photographs to friends and family after tourists return and constructing biographical narratives around them (Desforges 1998). The foremost academic concern regarding photography as a mode of interaction between local people and visitors has been its potential as an act of intrusion, violation and objectification. This perspective has been expressed perhaps most acerbically by Susan Sontag, who argues that 'to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed' (1977, p. 14). Similarly, Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2005) argue that tourists use photography to control and tame native people who embody a threatening sexuality or potential for violence, 'reducing them to two dimensions' (p. 56). The result is a superficial reading of others, often grounded in a quest for stereotypic visual markers of authenticity and the exotic inscribed on the local person's body. Yet despite its nefarious potential and

negative associations with stereotypical tourist behaviour, photography remains a defining feature of host-guest interactions in many tourism contexts.[19]

In recent years, however, the conceptual emphasis on the potent gaze of the tourist and its instantiation through travel photography has been challenged by work that has sought to present what has been referred to as the 'host gaze' (Chan 2006; Enevoldsen 2003; Gillespie 2006; Kingsbury 2005; Lutz and Collins 1993; Maoz 2006; Moufakkir 2011; Moufakkir and Reisinger 2013). The host gaze reveals ways in which toured people are not powerless in the face of objectifying practices, but rather have an active role in negotiating interactions with tourists, casting their own 'reverse' gaze onto visitors which, in turn, is perceived and internalised by them. A second body of critique comes from theorists who have argued that the practice of photography is deeply corporeal, embodied and performed, not just visual as suggested by the end product of representations (Crang 1997; Larsen and Urry 2011; Larsen 2006; Scarles 2013). Together, these two strands of critique have opened the door to considering these conventional forms of relating to and perceiving visited people in more complex terms than had previously been the case. For example, the host gaze has the potential to affirm or disrupt the tourist's desirous gaze, effectively altering how local people can be seen and known, which echoes Ankor and Wearing's (2013, p. 181) contention that 'the encounter [between tourist and host] is the nexus of a range of social and cultural readings, where the knowledge informing the gaze is challenged by the presence of the Other and the new context.' Similarly, conceptualising photography as an embodied practice introduces subtle interactions between the photographer and their subject that may change the dynamics of this otherwise purely visual encounter.

In an original and insightful approach to the topic, which links well with the recent work on the host gaze and the potential for resistance in oppressive power relations, Ariella Azoulay (2008, 2012) traces the ethico-political contours of photography as a mode of citizenry and 'civil contract' between actors. She argues that photographic practice invokes a set of power relations in which individuals are positioned by the powers that govern them, while at the same time resisting the totalising potential of this power through a form of relations that configures individuals as equals under the contract (2008, p. 85). This enables anyone to become a citizen in the citizenry of photography, regardless of their social or political status. The tacit social arrangement gives rise to sets of conventions that govern the photographic encounter in which:

> each of the sides is generally responsible for its part and knows what is expected of it. Even the refusal to be photographed or the refusal to be photographed in a certain way is institutionalised – the photographed persons and the photographers act according to conventional expectations.
>
> (Azoulay 2008, p. 106)

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[19]  To cite an example of the pervasive nature of photography in tourism, Cederholm (2004) found that backpackers regulated one another's photographic practices by signalling their approval or disapproval. For example, those who attempted to shun or become more conservative in their use of a camera were often met with scorn from other backpackers who felt that photography was an integral part of the travel experience.

Conceptualising photography as a contract that follows certain patterns and conventions in this way can provide the theoretical apparatus for understanding the potential for resistance against, or through, tourists' photographs and visualisations of the Other. It also invites us to pay attention to the subtle, embodied dynamics between tourists and the people that they photograph, and to consider these interactions as potential sites for the negotiation of political subjectivity.

As a corollary to the negative image of typical, camera mediated host-guest relations, volunteer tourism presents itself as a remedial model in which ephemeral, superficial, visual encounters are replaced by a longer-term involvement in visited communities with the potential for the emergence of cooperation, communication and friendship (see also Chapter 3). McIntosh and Zahra (2007, p. 179) suggest that volunteer tourism gives rise to an intensity of social interaction that creates a new narrative between host and guest, promoting the development of 'personally meaningful relationships', which are actively sought out by tourists (see also Brown and Morrison 2003; Conran 2011, 2006). With its key emphasis on reciprocity, cultural immersion and social interaction with members of the host community, volunteer tourism has been put forward as an ideal site for the development of cross-cultural understanding[20] (Raymond and Hall 2008; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Guttentag 2009; Jones 2005; Lewis 2005; Broad 2003; Brown 2005; Clifton and Benson 2006; Wearing 2001). In other words, the interactions facilitated by volunteer tourism are considered to provide new ways of 'seeing' and 'knowing' local people that are not available in other contexts.

The more intimate form of contact fostered by the volunteer tourism context echoes calls from cross-cultural contact theorists who have emphasised the need for face-to-face interactions and closeness between people in order for mutual understanding to arise. For example, Stening (1979, p. 291) comments that the development of 'favorable attitudes towards … hosts depend[s] largely upon the establishment of close and friendly relations with individual members of the host society'. Gail Robinson explains one premise of cross-cultural understanding theory as the need to uncover the culturally specific meaning frames that shape our perceptions of the Other:

> By understanding the basic principles of person perception, and the natural effects of one's own cultural experience and learnings on perceiving other people, unproductive explanations of crosscultural misunderstandings as prejudice or even just differences may be replaced with productive methods of avoiding misunderstandings and stimulating positive perceptions of other people.
>
> (1988, p. 49)

These perceptual predispositions will clearly be loaded with historical and postcolonial potentialities that politicise the cross-cultural encounter, carrying implications for how

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[20] Cross-cultural understanding resulting from interactions between volunteer tourists of different nationalities and social backgrounds has also been posited as a beneficial outcome of participating in volunteer tourism but does not form a focus of our enquiry here (see Raymond and Hall 2008; Hustinx 2001; McIntosh and Bonnemann 2006; McGehee and Santos 2005; Wearing 2001).

learning can be fostered (Hall and Tucker 2004; Lisle 2009; Schutte 1998; Crossley 2013). Furthermore, Robinson's reference to 'misunderstanding' could be related to Lacan's concept of misrecognition, which he explains in the following terms: 'Misrecognition is not ignorance. Misrecognition represents a certain organisation of affirmations and negations, to which the subject is attached' (I, p. 167). This 'attachment' of the subject to particular ways of perceiving the Other, based on affective processes rather than rationality, is important to bear in mind, especially in light of evidence suggesting that even in volunteer tourism cross-cultural learning and understanding do not necessarily develop, that contact between social groups from the First and Third World can reinforce rather than dissolve stereotypes, and that positive relationships with others may be perceived as being simply an exception to the rule (Sin 2009; Simpson 2004; Raymond and Hall 2008).

In spite of these findings, hope persists for the cross-cultural learning potential of volunteer tourism to be realised with suggestions for its development often focusing on creating more in-depth, close interactions. For example, Raymond and Hall (2008) advocate placing volunteers with host families and creating social events to bring together hosts and guests, placing the issue of intimacy in the volunteer tourism site right at the heart of an important experiential learning agenda. Conceptualising the relations that volunteer tourists demand as a form of 'intimacy' allows us to understand a final important dimension to how visited communites are framed perceptually and desirously. While interactions might provide the opportunity for the sharing of experiences and dialogue, intimacy additionally carries connotations of an embodied closeness, an emotional resonance between people, and possibly also a moral obligation of care, which mesh well with the ethical, and often emotive, humanitarian aims of volunteer tourism. Mary Mostafanezhad[21] (2013b) has argued that such sensibilities converge within the assemblage of a 'humanitarian gaze' that provides particular ways of seeing or imagining visited people in Third World countries, and which creates a tendency for locals to be perceived as in need of care.

In her extensive work on volunteer and hill-tribe trekking tourism in northern Thailand, Conran (2011, 2006) has described the touristic search for intimacy as an aspect of the commodification of 'primitive peoples' in ethnological tourism, which allows tourists to purchase supposedly authentic experiences of closeness with this pre-modern Other – an experience that takes place in the 'back stage' space of the tourism encounter (MacCannell 1976; Sin 2009; Trauer and Ryan 2005). She assigns this development in the practice of volunteer tourism to a broader depoliticised cultural politics in which recognition of structural inequalities at the core of the encounter is subverted by the logic of individual care, responsibility and morality. Conran suggests that for tourists from Western societies, intimacy can serve as a palliative to the alienation and loss of a sense of authenticity brought about by the social conditions of late modernity: welcoming, warm local people are sought out who will embrace tourists, thereby allowing them to 'relieve their own perceived alienation through experiential attachments to the Other' (2006, p. 281). In each case, fantasy functions to frame the

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[21] Née Mary Conran.

local people as an object that can satisfy the tourists' desire through achieving closeness with them and Conran identifies children as a social group that are invested with particular significance for volunteer tourists in their pursuit of intimacy, which, as we will see, is echoed by the findings of this research.

This brief discussion of the theoretical approaches to host-guest encounters allows us to begin to think about the possibilities of interaction, intimacy and identification with visited people, and the political, ethical and epistemic ramifications of each. A trend in volunteer tourism away from the act of gazing upon local people as symbols of authenticity towards seeking intimate and meaningful interactions with them is evidenced in empirical research. Yet the psychosocial dynamics underpinning such a shift remain poorly understood and there has been scant consideration of the possibility that rather than being mutually exclusive, the tendency to seek intimate relations with visited communities may actually *accompany* conventional visual, photographic practices. The remainder of this chapter sets out to explore these issues through data documenting three distinctive sets of interactions between volunteer tourists and people in the visited communities.

### Kenyan encounters

*Jambo!: welcoming communities*



**Figure 14.** Adoring crowds of schoolchildren wave the volunteer tourists goodbye. *Source:* Author.

The volunteer tourist accommodation was situated on the outskirts of Makuya, the first village we were based at. Others would be more remote, requiring a lengthy walk or drive to get to the nearest settlement. Although close to the village, the housing was closed off from it and tightly guarded, with only the odd stray dog or cat making it through the perimeter. Sometimes children would wait for us at the gate, shouting 'jambo!' ('hello' in Swahili), eager to hold our hands, go for a walk, or play. These were

the sorts of interactions that many of the volunteer tourists had told me that they were looking forward to – a deep socio-cultural immersion in daily village life, becoming one of the locals, and playing with the adorable and adoring children. However, it was ultimately the tourists who decided when these interactions happened, always having the option to retreat into the confines of our base. Indeed, some lamented the fact that we were not closer, in a sense, to the communities; that we were living separately, got driven between locations in buses belonging to the company rather than using the local *matatus*,[22] and found it difficult to communicate with our limited Swahili and the locals' limited English.

What I want to explore in this first analytic section is the positive interactions that the volunteer tourists had with their Kenyan counterparts, the settings within which these occurred, and how they configured the embodied and representational dynamics between both sets of actors. A prominent feature of the participants' narratives was the frequent discussion of the warm welcome they had received from the Kenyans, and in particular from the local children:

> *Kate*: I wanted to come to Africa 'cause they, you know I've always heard everyone says like how happy and welcoming they are and it's so true? (Interview 2)

> *Sarah*: That's kids waving when we drive past. Just 'cause everyone always waved and I loved that. That was one of my favourite bits. When you were just driving along and every single person would wave and shout hello and stuff. That was my favourite bit about the whol- like about Kenya. (Photo-elicitation)

Kate and Sarah share a stereotypical perception of the local people as joyful and welcoming, echoing the stories that they had heard from others about Africa and the imagery of holiday brochures. Their accounts point to a sort of atmospheric intimacy that could be enjoyed in the communities through feelings of being made welcome, people waving in the street and smiling at the tourists. Reflecting on a photograph depicting a group of three small children stood in front of houses waving, Sarah's framing of the encounter using extreme case formulations—that they were greeted by 'everyone', by 'every single person'—presents an excessiveness that hints at the potentially fantasmatic nature of this discourse. I was surprised by the extent to which the volunteer tourists not only made broad generalisations about the host communities' state of contentment, but also by how they seemed to interpret acts such as waving and smiling as an indication of the Kenyans' happiness, as opposed to perhaps treating them as simply natural and polite greetings for visitors to their country. Alternatively, it would be possible to suggest that these volunteers were just viewing their hosts through the lens of the cultural stereotypes that we have already explored, but I think that this would be an oversimplification.

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[22] *Matatus* are privately owned minibuses that operate across Kenya and other East African countries, sometimes serving as the only form of public transport.

Lisa sheds more light on the nature of these perceptions:

*Lisa*:    I love this photo 'cause she's so happy and like it's just me holding a little African child. (*laughs*) But um (.) yeah she just, I just <u>love</u> the fact that she smiled so much. Like they're so happy to be there and like they just, you look at them and you know they're smiling so much because they see the camera. And like they're like oh my gosh what is this I have to, but yeah I dunno like (.) I think she was just the kind of like epitome of like happy child there?
(Photo-elicitation)

The image of the white volunteer tourist holding a young African child is emblematic of the practice, as we observed in the analysis of advertising materials in Chapter 3, and seemed to be a photograph that many were keen to take back with them. What is interesting about this extract is that Lisa's pleasure at her interaction with the smiling child does not seem to be derived from anything specific or unique about that particular child, but because the child is a manifestation of a broader, more generic category that she desires – 'a little African child' and 'epitome of happy child'. Thus, rather than being presented as divergent desires, the search for intimacy and authenticity seem to intertwine in this account. Lisa's enjoyment overrides her earlier concerns about the damaging impact of Western artefacts, such as the camera, on the African culture and children's aspirations. Instead, the camera is placed in a causal relationship to the children's happiness who are 'smiling so much because they see the camera', and we could say that Lisa, as the one who brings this object, is by association positioning herself as the object of enjoyment and desire.



**Figure 15.** Volunteer tourist holding a smiling Kenyan girl. *Source:* Author.

The excessiveness of the volunteer tourists' characterisations of the local people as happy can again be interpreted as an imaginary identification taking place. This defensive, fantasmatic process presents the locals as completely happy, whole, and

perfect, resulting in a misperception or, in Lacan's terms, misrecognition that neutralises the threatening potential of their material inscription as signifiers of poverty (see also Crossley 2012a). This is particularly apparent in Lisa's account because of the clear opposition she had previously voiced to displaying objects of wealth within the poor communities. Establishing an imaginary identification therefore renders the local people 'poor-but-happy' (Britton 1979; Crossley 2012a; Hutnyk 1996; Lepp 2008; Mathers 2010, 2004; Raymond and Hall 2008; Simpson 2004; Ver Beek 2006; Vrasti 2013). This prominent discourse allows locals to be subsumed under the positive side of the colonial stereotype (the happy, subservient, welcoming native), to be naturalised as part of the toured, seductive landscape, and removes the threat to the volunteer tourists' subject positions as wealthy westerners and ethical consumers. Lisa's account then goes beyond this by positioning herself as the object of the children's desire, which can also be seen in the following extract:

> *Kate*: And the children bit I love. … And that felt so lovely the way they kind of all ran up to you and greeted you and held your hand. You felt like the queen, you're just like this special person. Well no but they're all you know that's what it's like. I was saying to [my friend] when we were on the bus and like were waving, I felt like the queen the way they all kind of look at you and wave at you and you're kind of looking down. You know it feels awful but it's so nice to kind of feel special and look at, looked up to. (Interview 2)

Again, in Kate's narrative there are elements of intimacy described, such as the children greeting her and holding her hand. Then, in a more explicit imaginative positioning of herself as the object of desire, Kate says repeatedly how the children made her feel 'special' and 'like the queen' in the way that, as a volunteer tourist, she was 'looked up to'. This spatial imagery is deployed in two senses, the first being literal in that the generalised encounter Kate is describing is one of being raised above the road in the bus so that she looked 'down' on the children who were looking 'up' at her, much as royalty might be processed through gathered crowds of adoring subjects. However, the rupture in this narrative of enjoyment signified by Kate saying 'it feels awful' indicates an awareness of the power relations and dynamic of superior/subordinate that is implicit in her spatial positioning of 'looking down' on the local children, a discourse which certainly carries colonial overtones. There is thus ambivalence in Kate's narrative, as imagining that she is the object of desire for the local children gives her a feeling of being 'special' and allows her to derive enjoyment from these encounters, and yet, again, this enjoyment can never be complete because it is interrupted by the ethical injunction which highlights the unequal power dynamic between the volunteer tourists and the local people.

The enjoyment of the local people by the volunteer tourists was also closely linked to a cultural comparison between Kenya and the UK, in which the Kenyans seemed to be idealised against a backdrop of 'home' as a place of unfriendliness, suspicion, and a lack of appreciation. Jane expresses this sentiment in the following way:

> *Jane*:  Like they're so, they're really close communities as well. Which is so different from England 'cause no-one talks to anyone in England. Like you'll go, like walk and if you like so much looked at someone else they'd probably go and like stab you or something. … And you kinda felt that right, like you got that straight away? Like that everyone was really friendly and yeah. And they're like interested in you.
> (Interview 2)

Jane characterises the Kenyan communities as 'close', 'friendly', and 'interested in you' – again positioning herself as the object of the local people's desire. This is contrasted to her almost caricatured portrayal of British society as unfriendly, distant, and even dangerous. Extreme case formulations are used to exaggerate these differences: in Britain 'no-one' talks to 'anyone', whereas in Kenya 'everyone' is friendly. Josh also portrays this cultural difference in his discussion of how the volunteer tourists are permitted to interact with the local children:

> *Josh*:  Everyone's like picking up the kids, like taking pictures of the kids f- and stuff like that and in England that just (.) you couldn't *do that* (.) at all. It's very, it's very different (.) in that way. But, it's kinda like, it's none of that assumed evilness.
> (Interview 2)

Josh notes the very different norms regulating the social interactions, at least of visitors, with children in Kenya. In saying that in Kenya there is none of the 'assumed evilness' of strangers that prevents such interactions from occurring in Britain, Josh constructs the UK as a place of suspicion in much the same way as Jane's narrative about the fear and distrust of strangers in the street. These constructions of geographical and cultural difference reinforce the sense of enjoyment that can be derived from the welcoming communities in Kenya. Positive interactions with children are possible *here* that would not be possible *there* and enjoyment is also derived from the sense of freedom, which is evident in both Josh and Jane's narratives, from the affectively negative and constricting social norms and regulations back home.

Kate again constructs this spatio-cultural difference between Kenya and the UK in relation to volunteer tourists' enjoyment, but in such a way that draws again on the discourse of the 'happy poor' and links with ideas about 'appreciation':

> *Kate*:  They have absolutely nothing, yet I haven't, I've, I thought I've not seen one kid cry. You know, back home there's, kids are always, the babies, the toddlers that are, they're always crying, always screaming, you can hear them on the bus and the, it's just not like that here? … But yeah they're just so different. Every, e- they're all (.) even the grown-ups as well they're all, well most of them all seem they're happy and smiling and just like I've come from London and no-one even looks up at you in the eye, *you know*.
> (Interview 2)

Kate contrasts the unappreciative children who are 'always screaming', back in the UK to those in Kenya who, despite having 'nothing' are appreciative, well behaved, and

happy. Again, Kate provides a discursively exaggerated picture where in Britain the babies are 'always' crying and 'no-one' looks you in the eye, and in Kenya the people are 'all' happy and smiling, although she falters a little in making this inclusive judgement about the happiness of the local adults, shifting from 'they're all' to a more hesitant 'most of them seem'. This uncertainty regarding the adults was found across the participants' narratives; it appeared to be more straightforward to judge the children's exuberance and smiles as signs of happiness and as something that could form an object of enjoyment for the volunteer tourists, whereas the adults were sometimes described as being more 'distant' or 'dubious' of the volunteers' presence. As a result, the local children were the focus of more interactions and appeared more centrally in the interview narratives.



**Figure 16.** Volunteer tourists interacting with local children at Makuya village.
*Source:* Author.

Kenyan people form part of a constellation of psychic objects that become desirously appropriated by the volunteer tourists for their enjoyment. The cultural comparison that occurs in evaluating the local people in these narratives is one that emphasises difference and idealises the Kenyan communities while negatively portraying the volunteer tourists' home society. In this way, it spatially locates and bounds the volunteer tourists' enjoyment, not only of these local communities specifically, but of community and interpersonal interaction in general. Just as the exotic, authentic African landscape is something that can only be experienced and enjoyed 'out there', so too is this sense of welcome, warmth, and friendliness exhibited by the local people. However, despite the Kenyan communities being framed as a desirous object through their isolation and difference from the West and, by association, from the volunteer tourists as Western subjects, the participants' enjoyment also contains a highly self-referential element. This was exemplified by Kate's narrative about how the children made *her* feel special, by Lisa positioning *herself* (by association with the camera) as a cause of the children's happiness, and by Jane enjoying the fact

that the local people were interested in *her*. These examples resonate with the marketing of volunteer tourism in terms of foregrounding the traveller against an often static backdrop of an amazing landscape, friendly people, or any other seductive scene, in which it is the tourist who is the protagonist and the one who changes as a result of their experiences (Bruner 1991; Silver 1993; Munt 1994). In Lacanian terms, this could also be interpreted as the volunteer tourists imaginatively identifying themselves as the object of the local people's (the Other's) desire; in this sense, then, it is not so much that the local people form the object of the volunteer tourists' desire, but that what they really desire is the desire of the Other.

In terms of the types of interactions between the volunteer tourists and members of the visited communities that can be inferred from the narratives and observational data, there appears to be support for the proposal that a key characteristic of volunteer tourists is their search for greater intimacy, interaction, and friendship with members of host communities, setting them apart from more conventional tourists (Conran 2011, 2006; Wearing 2001; Sinervo 2011). The forms of closeness displayed spanned from what could be understood straightforwardly as intimacy, such as picking up the children and thereby creating a shared experience through physical contact, to a more atmospheric sense of closeness to the local people formed by the locals waving at the tourists. However, Lisa's comments show the convergence of intimacy seeking and photographic practices in which objects such as cameras were used as a toy with the potential for creating an intimate, shared moment with the local children, rather than as an objectifying barrier. Similarly, for Lisa, part of the enjoyment derived from the intimate moment could be attributed to her closeness to the child qua symbol of authenticity, thus enmeshing the objectifying gaze with embodied intimacy in a way that has not been considered before.

### *Photographic practices*

It was the second week of our stay in Kenya and we were about to leave on an excursion to look for roaming herds of elephants in the verdant hills that surrounded our accommodation. As we were gathering our rucksacks and cameras, ready to get on the bus with the guide, one of the girls said that her camera had broken and that she would not be joining us. Some of us suggested that she might still enjoy coming along and seeing the elephants, but she explained that there would be 'no point' in going if she could not take pictures. It was at this point that I realised how deeply intertwined photography, seeing, and experience were for volunteer tourists. I also realised how important it was for them to be able to document, package and take home their travels. In addition to their pivotal role in experiencing and enjoying safaris, the volunteer tourists also regularly brought along a camera to the work sites, lodging it in a pocket as we undertook often demanding, dirty manual work. The volunteers would pose in groups to have their picture taken, often with a shovel or wheelbarrow in hand as evidence of the work they had done. I too succumbed to this impractical urge to document my efforts through photographs and returned with images of myself hoeing land and shovelling soil.

**Figure 17.** Volunteer tourists building the school toilets. *Source:* Participant.

In exploring the volunteer tourists' photographic practices, I was particularly interested to understand how these mediated their interactions with the local people, such as through the intimate encounter of holding a small child while having one's picture taken as described by Lisa, above. A recurring feature of the photography that I observed was the failure to ask people's permission before taking their picture, despite having been advised to do so by the organisation. On one occasion, during a walk through a village, a woman in traditional dress appeared from behind a house, one infant in her arms and a second child standing shyly by her side. Kate went up to the woman and, without addressing her, took a photograph. Moments later, Lisa approached the woman and asked whether she could take a picture, at which she shook her head, raised her hand and softly said 'no'. Kate laughed a little nervously and said 'Oh well, too late!' Similar scenes of assumed consent were played out regularly in other settings, for example during a visit to a secondary school in which we were invited into a classroom and, as the students sat at their desks, supervised by their teacher, the volunteer tourists took out their cameras and started photographing. One girl even went so far as to approach a male student, crouch down beside him, put her hand on his shoulder and pose, grinning, as her friend took a picture; all without properly greeting or conversing with him. The student looked glum and did not smile.

I asked my participants to reflect on how and why they had taken photographs in Kenya. I posed the question of whether there was anything that they did not *want* to or felt they *could* not take pictures of, and the almost unanimous response was 'no':

*Ash*:  No, looking at these no. [Émilie: Yeah?] It's inside someone's house and everything. … I mean obviously there's that, that moral thing and like th- I'll never forget like on the way there (*coughs*) like that poverty you know where they were begging and stuff like that. Obviously I wouldn't've took a photo of the woman with the limb missing begging and stuff like that, there is that. (Photo-elicitation)

Here, Ash makes an important distinction, in moral terms, between acceptable and unacceptable photographic subjects. He seems aware of the intrusiveness of taking pictures within a stranger's home but for him it was the sights of poverty and deformity that crossed a voyeuristic line. Jane also exercised caution in who she chose to take pictures of, suggesting that the older people in the villages were more deserving of respect than, say, the children:

> *Jane*: Um (.) don't think so. [*Émilie*: No?] (.) I did, like sometimes when we were just walking past and we'd just take pictures of like (.) like people that they might think like why are you taking pi- 'cause if someone did that here you'd be like "why are you taking a picture of me?" *Like* so they were probably like "why, what are you doing?" *like*. I dunno sometimes I didn't wanna take pictures I suppose of (.) like, just I dunno like of the villagers or whatever 'cause. Like the children were fine 'cause they loved it. They like loved looking, then looking at the pictures. But some, like the older like people just di- (.) kind of respected a bit more to not, I dunno.
> (Photo-elicitation)

Just as in Lisa's narrative, Jane described the children as enjoying being a part of the tourists' photography but she also seemed aware of how other community members might feel, putting herself in their shoes and being careful not to be insensitive. This sense of differentiation between the willing, joyful children and the more reserved adults will be explored in greater depth in the final analytic section of this chapter.

However, while Ash and Jane seemed cautious of approaching some people for photographs due to how they might feel about the situation, the 'respect' that was due to certain community members, or the dignity that might be infringed upon in the case of the beggar with a deformity, other participants, such as Sarah, were much more zealous and uninhibited:

> *Sarah*: Not really, I think they were way too, like all the people were way too welcoming for that? There was nothing that you couldn't take photos of 'cause if you didn't they'd be like "take photos! take photos!" Wouldn't they? [Émilie: Yeah] And they loved cameras and stuff like that so there was nothing really that (.) you kinda think oh I can't take pictures of that. Because I didn't take any pictures until (.) they were all like "take pictures! take pictures!" And they did it every single place you went. They all wanted you to take pictures, so no. There's nothing that really, that I was like oh I can't take a picture of that because if I didn't they'd ask me to? 'Cause they all wanted their picture taken? … Made you feel like you could do whatever. Made you one of the locals.
> (Photo-elicitation)

Sarah constructs her photography as, to a degree, coerced by the local Kenyans. Again, her account uses extreme case formulations—'all' the Kenyans in 'every single place'—to accentuate the acceptability of her conduct and her lack of choice in the face of such avid encouragement. As in Lisa's narrative, we can interpret this construction as positioning Sarah as the object of the Other's desire; the locals are described as desiring

something from the volunteer tourists, desperately wanting to have their picture taken and hounding them to do so. In this fantasmatic context, taking a photograph became more than simply fulfilling the tourists' desires with the locals' blessing – it was a way of fulfilling the desire of the locals themselves. This subtle shift in emphasis between fulfilling one's own desire and that of the Other, which according to Lacan of course, is the proper locus of desire, may have been what allowed Sarah to feel that she could do 'whatever' and position herself as 'one of the locals'.

Sarah's account of being encouraged to take pictures of the local people is particularly reminiscent of a cultural excursion that took place in which we visited a Maasai village. In order to gain entry to the village, each person had to pay US$5 after which the villagers would sing, dance, demonstrate traditional skills, show us around the village, sell beaded handicrafts and allow us to take as many photographs as we wanted. Having to pay made some of the volunteer tourists feel uncomfortable and led to an element of scepticism as several questioned the authenticity of the village,[23] suggesting that they did not really live there and went to the village purely to profit from easily duped tourists such as ourselves. I remember feeling a strange mix of reserve and excitement at the prospect of photographing the tribe members dressed in their traditional clothes. Importantly, I also experienced a sense of entitlement due to having paid to be in their company and this commodified relation effectively meant that we could not be refused pictures. The Maasai took our hands and led us off quite forcefully to pose for photographs, again perhaps adding to Sarah's sense that this was what *they* wanted rather than what *we* wanted.

The photograph below shows me posing with two members of the Maasai tribe. Unlike many of the other photos that I have from the visit, in which it was the Maasai who had encouraged us to pose for pictures, this is one that I requested. The main focus of my attention was the man standing to the left, who seemed more authentically dressed, adorned with traditional white beads, red cloth and face paint, and who had been telling us that he would have to slay a lion as part of his coming of age ritual. The result is an awkward picture in which I am leaning closely into the aesthetically authentic man, holding the souvenirs that I bought from him, with another, more modestly dressed man who stood at a distance with his hand on my shoulder. The first man and I look directly at the camera. The second man observes us and almost blends into the background with his darker robes and oblique gaze; yet at the same time he seems to destabilise and threaten the coherence of the image's desirous message. What I think this photograph illustrates is, first, the nature of my desire to see and bring back home symbols of African authenticity and, secondly, the potential symbolic violence contained in the act of tourist photography. I had simultaneously objectified one man through a neo-colonial indulgence in his appearance and excluded another for his lack of conformity to my preconceptions. Today this image is hard for me to look at as it arouses strong feelings of shame.

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[23]    Bruner (2001) refers to such scepticism in his study of Maasai tourist attractions in Kenya as the 'questioning gaze', in which tourists may question the credibility and authenticity of what the cultural attraction being put on show for them.

**Figure 18.** Me posing with two members of the Maasai tribe. *Source:* Author.

Despite really enjoying the visit to the Maasai village at the time, the following day I was troubled by a strange dream that seemed to evoke the imagery of the village together with feelings of anxiety and fear of which I had not previously been aware:

> *I came across a group of men and women on the grassy outskirts of a town who were standing amongst a multitude of tethered snakes. There were snakes of every type and colour imaginable, and I worried that many could possess a lethal bite. The people wouldn't let me leave, saying that I had to have my picture taken with the snakes. I was afraid. ... I finally managed to get away by promising that I would return the following day with another 20 people and that we would all pay to be photographed with the snakes.*

After thinking about possible interpretations for the dream, I concluded that the snakes most likely represented the Maasai – their colourful skins evoking the brightly coloured clothes of the Maasai and the elongated way that the men appeared as they performed the *Adumu* (a traditional jumping dance). Being under pressure to have my photograph taken with these creatures, the obligation to pay, and the large number of people that I promised to bring were then clearly references to the commodified relation that had been established between the Maasai and the volunteer tourists. The reason I share these reflections here is not to indulge in my own experiences, but rather to draw attention to the ambivalent psychosocial dynamics underpinning the encounter that may have been shared by others. The fantasy relation in which the local people were beckoning us to go and enjoy their authenticity papered over a far more traumatic realisation of the exploitative and in many ways neo-colonial practice we were participating in and enjoying.

### *Avoiding the host gaze*

Volunteer tourists exhibited imaginary identifications with the local people that were based on experiences of intimacy, warmth and friendliness. These allowed a continuation of a fantasmatic relation to the Other in which the Kenyans framed the tourists as objects of desire, reassured them that they were poor-but-happy, and invited them to enjoy their authenticity without the usual restraints found in their home society. In this final section, I present data showing the threat of rupture to this fantasy through experiences of a series of host gazes emanating from the adult and adolescent community members that challenged rather than affirmed the volunteer tourists' desires. I will refer to the first of these as the *dubious gaze*, drawing on a term used by Tess:

> *Tess*: I feel sometimes like the older people in the community (.) are slightly, are a bit maybe suspicious? Or dubious? I don't know. Like I always feel they're not <u>as</u> welcoming or think, you know, we're coming here, we haven't, they all think we have loads of <u>money</u> and have come here because (.) you know we can. But it's kind of like well we are helping you, we are trying to do something good.
> (Interview 2)

Tess portrays the Kenyan adults as regarding the volunteer tourists with an air of suspicion, creating a contrast to the more usual sense of atmospheric intimacy. What is particularly interesting about this statement is how this rather hostile, unappreciative gaze provoked a defensive response from Tess regarding what she saw as a judgement against her on the basis of her unethical possession of wealth. The failure of her hosts to act in accordance with the imaginary identifications that would have sustained the image of the volunteer tourists being needed and wanted by the community instead opened a fantasmatic fissure revealing an underlying anxiety about Tess's positionality as a privileged Westerner in Kenya.

The volunteer tourists also utilised this discourse of the distant adults to emphasise a distinction between the adoring younger children and a generalised 'older' demographic of the community:

> *Tess*: I got the sense that the older ones sometimes were a bit like (.) didn't really enjoy, you know the kids loved us and everything. But the older ones were very, I dunno I didn't feel that welcome sometimes by the older ones.
> (Interview 3)

> *Amy*: All the guys at [the accommodation] seem really friendly, like the workers and even round here like all the kids are so sweet and some of the adults are a little bit distant but think they're just (.) do- doing their own thing to be honest.
> (Interview 2)

While it was with the children that the volunteer tourists primarily established imaginary identifications, casting them in an idealised light, the adults did not return the tourists' gaze in the same way, thus obstructing the identificational process and perhaps creating

this sense of 'distance' between them. This may have in part related to the embodied dynamics of interactions with each group; it was far easier (not only physically, but in terms of the volunteer tourists' advertisement driven expectations of how to behave) to approach the children and pick them up or hold their hands, leading to an immediate sense of intimacy and closeness, whereas the adults may not have seemed quite so approachable. While Tess framed this distance as negative because she perceived it as a reflection or judgement on her own subjectivity, Amy expressed greater acceptance of the adults' behaviour by suggesting that they were merely engrossed in their own activities. It is important to emphasise, however, that what was perceived by the volunteer tourists as distance and disengagement in reality constituted a very powerful engagement in the power dynamics of the situation (of which the children, presumably, were less aware); as Azoulay (2008) reminds us, even in the refusal to participate in a tourist or photographic performance, one is participating in the political and ethical context of that performance.

A second, related host gaze was the *mocking gaze,* which created in the volunteer tourists a suspicion that the local people were surreptitiously insulting and ridiculing them. My first awareness of this gaze came through a personal experience during an ordinary bus ride into a nearby town. Until that point, I had very much enjoyed these journeys, the roads lined with smiling waving people, to which we would wave back. However, on this particular journey we passed a group of children cavorting about who shouted 'mzungu!' at us, and then two men who started blowing kisses at us. I took offense to what I perceived as mocking behaviour and the sexualised gestures of the men, and following the incident became far more restrained in waving back at the locals that we passed. The gaze then emerged again during a discussion with a group of three volunteer tourists as we were taking a break from a building project at one of the schools in which one of them voiced concerns that the schoolchildren were mocking us in Swahili without our knowing. They would sometimes call us 'mzungu', which some of the volunteer tourists took offence to as it was perceived as a rather derogatory, stereotyping term that carried negative colonial resonances, sparking concern that behind the angelic smiles the children were having a laugh at our expense. This may point to the inherent instability of imaginary identifications and the minute, subtle changes in the local people's ways of looking at the tourists that can profoundly alter how the gaze is perceived.

Finally, the *demanding gaze* was projected by adolescent boys, beach vendors and beggars, all of whom made (usually monetary) demands on the volunteer tourists, casting them as an object of desire but in such a way as to highlight the problematic and deeply uneven socio-economic relation between the two sets of actors. The social group discussed most frequently was the adolescent boys, who were described as actively disrupting the volunteer tourists' enjoyment of the communities through pressuring and hassling them, as Tom explains:

*Tom*:    I like the kids. They were pretty cool. There was uh there, the ones, the older ones annoy me. The ones who were like my age.
*Émilie*: Really?

> Tom:  'Cause they've uh they like tried to do the bracelet thing and then say "Ah you can give me your shoes" and then you're like "No I need these". But like yeah the little kids are cool. I like them, they're good. They're fun.
> (Interview 2)

Tom contrasts the little children who are 'cool' and 'fun' to the older ones who, instead of just emanating joyfulness and wanting to interact with the volunteer tourists as an end in itself, tried to instigate commercial relations through these attempts to sell them bracelets. Josh elaborates further on these commodified encounters and how he dealt with them:

> Josh:  The older ones are (.) got a bit, it's bad to s- it's not nice to say but like tiresome sometimes. 'Cause (.) they were always expecting something.
> Émilie:  Really?
> Josh:  °Kind of°, every well they'd make you kind of bracelets without you asking and then expect you to pay them, pay for them and stuff. Which is like, it's quite hard to say no (.) to stuff like that but you have to 'cause, but (.) °it's hard°. And the s- even with the beach boys at [the bar], like the first day we went to [the bar] like they all kind of swarmed on us as we wa- we were all on the beach. But over time you just got used to just being really *rude*. Ignoring them and stuff 'cause it's the only way.
> (Interview 2)

Josh talks about the older children and beach vendors as two groups who persistently tried to sell things to the volunteer tourists in sometimes quite manipulative ways. What Josh and Tom do not mention about the bracelets is that the children would ask you what your name was and then come back the following day with a beaded bracelet spelling out your name, leading to a feeling of pressure to buy the item because it had been made especially for you and would be useless to someone with a different name. Josh says that, despite it being hard, you 'have to' resist these attempts to be sold these trinkets, although he fails to explain why.

There may be several reasons why the volunteer tourists experienced these encounters as 'annoying' or 'tiresome'. Volunteer tourism is marketed and advocated as a decommodified alternative to mainstream tourism, in which its participants can help the visited communities through their labour rather than their money. Yet in being drawn into these commodified relations with the local people the volunteer tourists may have been reminded of the touristic dimension of their travel and their status as privileged, wealthy Western subjects within an overwhelming poor country. Additionally, young men desperately trying to get money out of the volunteer tourists reveal cracks in the fantasy of the local people as completely happy and content despite their poverty, the image of which had been constructed through narratives of the cheerful, welcoming communities. Thus, these encounters may have interrupted the volunteer tourists' enjoyment of the communities by destabilising their idealised depiction of Kenyan society and in the process acting as a potentially troubling reminder of their relative wealth and position within the unequal dynamic of 'host' and 'guest'. The adolescent boys and beach vendors therefore marked the boundary of the intimacy

and identification with the locals that could be achieved and segregated a part of the community that was actively avoided.

These encounters also raise issues of agency, control and giving. An important aspect of the volunteer tourists' presence in Kenya was to be able to enact ethical subjectivity through volunteering and helping poor communities, yet in order for this performance of giving to work the volunteer tourists had to position themselves as active agents against the backdrop of the passive, grateful recipients of their efforts. Not only did the young men selling bracelets represent ungratefulness for the volunteers' work by forcefully trying to extract money from them and always 'expecting something', as Josh put it, but they broke from the passive norm of the grateful recipient, positioning themselves as economic agents in relation to the visitors. In analysing these interview extracts, I was reminded of an incident in Kenya, which I recorded in my field diary, regarding a woman who approached the vehicle that the group was travelling in as we were stopped at the side of the road and started begging for food and money. The girl who was sitting closest to the begging woman became very uneasy, tried to avoid looking in her direction, did not give her anything, and reasoned that the beggar did not realise that we were 'there to help'. What the girl seemed to be expressing was that she was already giving and wanted to be allowed to give as she saw fit without having to contend with demands for more.

These findings resonate strongly with Kristin Lozanski's (2013) research on tourists' encounters with beggars in India. She too found that while 'travelers often highlighted a desire to interact with locals, they represented varying degrees of openness in those encounters that did not take place on their terms' (p. 54). In their overt demands for money, beggars commodify interactions with travellers who perceive themselves to be on 'shoestring' budgets, highlighting the structural inequalities of the encounter and drawing attention to the travellers' racialised, classed and nationed subject positions. Lozanski also picks up on the active/passive dynamic that characterises interactions between travellers and local people, suggesting that 'beggars represent the limitations of passivity as a defining feature of cultural Otherness' (p. 49). In her analysis, Lozanski draws on Ami Harbin's (2012) notion of 'disorientation' to describe the bewildering and dilemmatic experience of being confronted by a beggar. Harbin theorises disorientation as a moment of rupture in the habitual that creates an opportunity to re-evaluate learnt patterns of relating to others, thus enabling moral agency. Despite this potential for ethical change, Lozanski argues that the uncertainty of how to respond to beggars appropriately can subject travellers to a state of vulnerability that in turn can be 'blocked' (2013, p. 50) or, in psychoanalytic terms, defended against. The volunteer tourists that I spoke to seemed to feel threatened by these uncomfortable, disorienting encounters with certain local people, resulting in a tactic of avoidance rather than careful reconsideration of their moral stance towards the Other.

Accounts from some of the female participants also revealed a gendered dimension to the interactions with the adolescent boys. Whilst the young men in my research emphasised the annoyance at the boys' attempts to sell them bracelets and other trinkets, the young women focused far more on the way that they would try to hang around them

or get their contact details, as Tess explains:

> *Tess*:    Like Makuya's definitely like the best community out of, Nyagisi didn't
> have a go-, it had a really good community but the guys were so annoying, it
> was just like.
> *Émilie*: Really?
> *Tess*:    Yeah th- th- they would wait for you like outside [the accommodation] and
> like me and Jen like got these two guys and they thought that they were like
> our boyfriends. They'd like wait for us every night and we were like (.) °we
> don't know you°. And then they were like asking for our Facebook and they
> were just really annoying. But the other kids in the community were
> amazing like.
> (Interview 3)

These 'annoying guys' form an interruption in Tess's narrative about the 'best' communities and the other 'amazing' children in them, and also a disruption of her enjoyment of these elements of her experience. This time, instead of a pressure to enter into commodified relations with the locals, there was a pressure to enter into social relations that Tess deemed inappropriate. When Tess mentions that these young men started waiting for the volunteer tourists outside the building they were staying in, it should be noted that it was commonplace for many of the children to do so but that this did not appear to be a problem when it was the small children waiting; indeed, the volunteer tourists seemed to relish the fact that they could pick up 'their' child at the gate and go for a walk. But Tess perceived the actions of the older boys as being overshadowed by gendered, sexualised connotations—thinking that they were the girls' 'boyfriends'—which made her resistant to the boys' attempts to engage them in conversation or give away her contact details. Tess's wariness of the boys qua strangers, exemplified by her saying 'we don't know you', comes as a contradiction to the participants' more general consensus that it was precisely this friendliness and interest from strangers that they found enjoyable in Kenyan society.

This gendered wariness and sense of danger associated with the older local boys is also evident in this passage from Jane, which returns to the theme of poverty in a slightly different way from the previous narratives:

> *Jane*:    Um obviously some, some ask you questions like, like mainly teenage boys.
> Megan got a boy, like he was telling her that um (.) he basically that he
> wished he was born into her family.
> *Émilie*: Really?
> *Jane*:    And that was, I suppose just 'cause of the poverty and um, and she was like
> didn't really know what to say. Like there's not much you *can* like. Um how
> he hates his life here and everything like that. But then like, so she was
> chatting to him one day and then the next day he was like waiting for her
> outside the camp?  … Um but uh (.) yeah so like I think you've gotta be
> careful (.) like who you talk to and stuff.
> (Interview 2)

While Jane's anecdote is about a friend, she draws a more general lesson about exercising caution when interacting with the local people from it. Again, she focuses on

the adolescent boys as the social group causing friction in relations between the volunteer tourists and locals and, as in Tess's narrative, the problem is with one of the boys waiting for a girl outside the accommodation. However, in this passage the reason for the boys wanting contact with the Western visitors is made far more explicit as the boy in question tells Megan how he desires her life and hates his own. In confronting this volunteer tourist so bluntly with his unhappiness and dissatisfaction, the boy again disrupts the fantasy upheld by the majority of the visitors that the Kenyan people are content and joyous. With his story he forces Megan and Jane to concede that either he is an exception to the norm or that their perceptions are wrong and that the smiling faces are facades concealing a more troubling current of frustration and unhappiness beneath. Either way, this may have been disquieting for Jane because it drew attention to her own privilege and the system of inequality which she plays a part in sustaining.

These data show the other side to the volunteer tourists' experience of the happy, welcoming local communities and their enjoyment of the intimacy and interaction that could be had with strangers and, in particular, the small children. Negative encounters with the teenage boys, beach vendors and beggars not only caused a disturbance in what was otherwise uniformly described by the participants as a positive experience of the Kenyan people, but also disrupted the comforting fantasy of the locals as happy and content that created the foundation for such an enjoyment in the first place; a fantasy that removed the need for the volunteer tourists to examine their own subjectivities and position within unequal relations of power and wealth. This resulted in the volunteer tourists actively trying to avoid encounters with these particular social groups and being defensive and evasive when such interactions were unavoidable. For example, Tom and Josh both emphasised the need to say 'no' to boys trying to sell them bracelets, Josh said that it was necessary to be 'rude' and 'ignore' beach vendors, and Jane warned about being 'careful' to whom one spoke. Feelings towards the local people were therefore modulated by a deep ambivalence rooted in psychosocial dynamics of desire, the construction of fantasy, enjoyment of the communities and the perturbations in all of these caused by the self-reflection brought about by these encounters.

### Conclusion

This chapter has traced the multifarious possibilities of interactions between volunteer tourists and visited people, emphasising the dialectical relationship between representing, desiring and actually encountering 'hosts'. The data suggest that volunteer tourists seek out interactions that uphold their imaginary identifications, thereby preserving a fantasy that tames local people and neutralises their threatening Otherness. A clear example of this was close contact with the younger village children, who constituted politically 'low-risk communication partners' who were unlikely to challenge the tourists' motivations (Caton and Santos 2008). The findings appear to confirm Conran's (2011, 2006) observation that volunteer tourists are increasingly being drawn to programmes that will provide intimacy with their hosts, although as we have seen, this trend accompanies the search for visual authenticity as opposed to completely replacing it. The volunteer tourists' narratives of their photographic practices seem to

point to an equally complex picture in which photography was acknowledged as having a potentially objectifying effect on host communities but was also perceived as an instrument for creating intimate encounters with children through playing with the camera. Participants also demonstrated an awareness of how their use of a camera could be a way of negotiating moral boundaries emerging through their travels, such as that delimiting observation from intrusion. An analysis of how the host gaze was perceived and interpreted by the volunteer tourists provided an additional dimension to our understanding of the visual dynamics of the tourism encounter, supporting suggestions that visited people are agential when it comes to shaping tourists' representations of their communities (Gillespie 2006; Moufakkir 2011; Moufakkir and Reisinger 2013).

In terms of the potential for fostering cross-cultural understanding and more reciprocal relations, the sorts of interactions observed between the volunteer tourists and host community members appeared very different from the friendships and close relations described by other studies (McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Brown and Morrison 2003; Raymond and Hall 2008; Stening 1979). Rather than experiencing closeness with particular others, it seemed that the volunteer tourists valued a more generalised Other— an atmospheric intimacy created through communal expressions of warmth such as groups of people waving, smiling and greeting the visitors—which did not easily generate productive dialogue or the sharing of experiences. This sentiment is captured by Lisa's description of holding 'a little African child', in which her embodied encounter with a particular local child only became interpretable through the symbolic prism of a cultural stereotype. The volunteer tourists' accounts of enjoying an atmospheric closeness rather than developing friendships with particular members of the host communities may reflect language barriers, the difficulty of integrating with a community whilst living separated from it, the unconscious expectation of being foregrounded against a generalised Other, and anxieties about becoming too involved with individuals, as the tale of the bracelet-vending boys exemplifies.

The learning potential of these experiences also needs to be understood in relation to the finding that not all members of the host community were interacted with equally. The example of the adolescent boys, beach vendors and beggars, who were actively avoided, demonstrates the need to recognise the heterogeneity of host communities and the impact of this on the types of interaction sought out by volunteer tourists. Whereas the small children and groups of waving adults were constructed fantasmatically as an object of desire through an imaginary elevation to the position of an idealised other with the capacity to extend recognition on the visitors and with the quality of being poor-but-happy, the young men's commercial advances presented a challenge to the decommodified ideals of volunteer tourism (Wearing 2001; Wearing et al. 2005) and to the ethical premise of the tourists' presence in Kenya. Most importantly, I have argued that the young men disrupted the fantasmatic perception of the local people by presenting a poor and unhappy exception that brought into sharp relief the volunteer tourists' wealth and ruptured their enjoyment of the Other by breaking identifications and creating a sense of difference between the two groups. There was also a sense in which groups were perceived as threatening when either their innocence or authenticity

failed to be reified; the young men, for example, were presented as a source of untamed, unwanted sexuality and harassment that was not to be found in the innocent faces of the younger children or the authentic, object-status of the Maasai. I am arguing, therefore, that the volunteer tourists' intimacy seeking was driven more by the pursuit of desire than by a longing for comprehension of the Kenyan people and that their defensive avoidance of some groups in the communities may have compromised the potential for learning about their economic and aspirational reality.

Analysing host-guest relations through a psychosocial lens allows us to explore how volunteer tourists' interactions with local people are shaped by intersubjective dynamics, cultural expectations, and desires. By using such an approach, it becomes easier to see why even within the purportedly more ethical practice of volunteer tourism traces remain of objectifying, insensitive and stereotyping actions, because it is these that remain fundamental to touristic desire and enjoyment. To quote Lisle's observation, 'all tourism encounters—even supposedly 'ethical' ones—are saturated with the existing power relations endemic to cultural difference, and are continually generating new subject positions that enact new power relations' (2009, p. 153). Therefore, any attempts to foster more ethical, reciprocal relationships within volunteer tourism need to take into account and devise strategies for surmounting these strongly influential factors.

**Chapter 7**

# Mama's house: constructing help and care

*Care does not, at first sight, seem to respond well to distance.*

*–Robinson 1999, p. 68*

The defining feature of volunteer tourism is the time and effort that is given up by tourists to participate in voluntary projects for the benefit of struggling ecosystems and poor communities, yet very little is known about what draws volunteers to particular projects, how they gauge a sense of achievement through voluntary work and what sort of connection, if any, they feel with the beneficiaries of their efforts. These questions matter because the projects that are popular among volunteer tourists have the potential to shape commercially operated programmes catering for the desires of a paying clientele. They are also important because of the broader debates that they intersect regarding the potential for fostering cosmopolitan empathy (Beck 2006; Mostafanezhad and Crossley forthcoming; Swain 2009), new geographies of responsibility, care and compassion (Massey 2004; Mitchell 2007; Popke 2007, 2006; Sin 2010; Mostafanezhad 2013a), and the development of ethical subjectivity or global citizenship (Lyons et al. 2012; McGehee and Santos 2005; Heron 2011; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Diprose 2012; Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011). In this chapter, I examine the construction of ethical identity through volunteer work and travel choices, considering whether this mode of subjectivity can be conceptualised as enacting a relation of care towards visited communities.

The chapter begins by situating volunteer tourism within a theoretical context of

helping, care and compassion. The spatial dynamics of volunteer tourism, which primarily involves young Westerners who travel to developing countries, presents many questions regarding the practice as a legacy of colonial relations. I present extracts from interviews in which the participants justify their choice of volunteer tourism and start to imagine the types of work that this participation would include. The volunteer project that proved to be the most popular among the volunteer tourists in Kenya was the building of a traditional mud and stick house for a precariously housed woman. This house came to be known as 'Mama's house'. The volunteer tourists' narratives reveal how this house came to be imagined as a personally meaningful gift to Mama, one that allowed them to experience a sense of connection to the beneficiary of their efforts and which provided a deeply desired recognition in the form of Mama's approving, grateful gaze. In addition to yielding important insights regarding the psychosocial dynamics of this particular helping experience, the house building project also reveals the values associated with other projects that placed it at the top of a volunteering hierarchy. I conclude by arguing that the sense of closeness and recognition sought by the volunteer tourists leads to an individualistic understanding of how help and care can be enacted, with potentially negative consequences for host communities.

### Volunteer work, help and care

Volunteer tourism is a curious form of ethical consumption. Unlike purchasing products, such as Fairtrade coffee, in a supermarket or café, tourists as end-consumers are brought into direct contact with the people supposedly benefiting from their ethical travel choices (Sin 2010); it is a practice that transforms imaginings about the suffering of distant others into a proximate act of help and care. The structural facilitation of this practice is rooted in the reconfiguration of space brought about by processes of globalisation, through which spatially distant groups of people now regularly interface, be it physically or virtually. Anthony Giddens notes that, '[i]n high modernity, the influence of distant happenings on proximate events, and on intimacies of the self, become more and more commonplace' (1991, p. 4) and as a result, geographers have begun to consider the extent to which such contact and mediation can result in 'the closing of moral distance' as well as the bridging of geographical distance (Chouliaraki 2006). An example of such work can be found in Massey's (2005, 2004) articulation of a 'relational politics of place', which foregrounds the historical formation of places and the relations between them, thereby advocating a sense of responsibility towards others by way of these connections. Viewed in this way, volunteer tourism ceases to be simply a compassionate, depoliticised response to distant suffering or poverty. Rather, it can be conceptualised as part of a broader reparative project of the West making amends for structural violence imposed on poorer countries through the legacies of imperialism and capitalism.

This new social interconnectedness and cultural hybridity has had an impact not only on how we conceptualise our place in global society, but also on how we *feel* about our connection to others. As a result, authors have begun to question commonly held assumptions about spatial ontologies of feeling and affect. For example, Callon and Law

(2004, p. 3) describe naturalised understandings of space as a 'fiction of "natural space"' while Katharyne Mitchell (2007, p. 1) complains that there is a dominance in theoretical discussions about cosmopolitanism of formulaic linkages between '[d]istance=coldness and nearness=warmth', which would seem to preclude the possibility of extensions of care or compassion towards distant others. Ulrich Beck (2006, p. 6) suggests that there has been a 'globalisation of emotions' in which 'the spaces of our emotional imagination have expanded in a transnational sense'. This has enabled what he terms 'cosmopolitan empathy' to arise, which refers to people's ability to adopt the perspective of geographically distant others and to feel compassion for their plight; to put ourselves in the place of victims of war, famine, drought and so on. As Kyriakidou (2008, p. 159) puts it, cosmopolitan empathy 'describes the infiltration of people's everyday local experiences and moral life-worlds with emotionally engaging values that orient them towards the global and geographically distant others'.

Two positions can be identified from the debates that have ensued regarding how to respond to our empathetic feelings towards global others. Lisle (2009) refers to the first position as 'progressive' cosmopolitanism, associated with the 'cosmopolitan manifesto' advocated by Beck (1996), which conceptualises subjects as self-reflective individuals and promotes the development of universalistic ethical norms and codes of practice towards the end of global emancipation. 'Critical' cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, has emerged as a feminist critique of the dominant discourse of cosmopolitanism, criticising it for presenting a masculinist version of individualised subjectivity and abstract, disembedded systems of ethics and rights (see also Anderson 2001; Brassett and Bulley 2007; Calhoun 2002; Cheah and Robbins 1998; Delanty 2006; Derrida 2001; Erskine 2002; Linklater 2007; Lisle 2009; McRobbie 2006; Mendieta 2009; Mitchell 2007; Molz 2005; Robinson 1999; Swain 2009; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). What arises from this second vision of cosmopolitanism is an awareness of the importance of relationality, intersubjectivity, and what Judith Butler sees as an endless undertaking of subjects being '(re)constituted through dialectical processes of recognition, within multiple networks of power' (Mitchell 2007, p. 711). So, while conventional cosmopolitanism advocates an ethics based on universal rights and responsibilities, its critical variant is founded upon a feminist ethics of care that conceives of ethics as something that cannot be practiced or theorised in the abstract but which emerges through specific sites and social relationships producing the need for care (Gilligan 1982; Held 1995, 1993; Jagger 1995, 1991, 1989; Koehn 1998; Lawson 2007; Tronto 1993).

A psychodynamic ontology of subjectivity complements this feminist standpoint on care ethics by theorising the subject as arising through intersubjective, relational dynamics, initially through the care bestowed upon the infant by the mother figure and later through connections within society. While a feminist position would acknowledge this interconnectivity, psychoanalysis posits a more radical intersubjectivity at the level of affect and the unconscious that emerges as a developmental prerequisite for subjecthood. What I think this approach adds, therefore, to the feminist care ethics used in the critical cosmopolitan perspective is Hollway's (2006b) observation that the

quality of the asymmetrical care received through the maternal relationship primes people at an affective level to then develop their capacity for more 'reciprocal, interdependent care giving and care receiving' (p. 128). Similarly, Meyers (1994), drawing on the work of psychoanalytic feminists Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin, shows that people can be seen as social in two ways: first, because every infant is cared for by an adult and secondly, because people derive their social and empathic capacities through the receipt of '*adequate* nurturance' (p. 122, original emphasis). Meyers argues that the latter creates the capability and willingness of the subject to adopt the perspective of others, thereby setting up what she views as the cornerstone of a feminist care ethics arising from a relational conception of subjectivity: empathy.

However, given my chosen theoretical apparatus, notions of care and empathy appear antithetical to the fundamentally alienated Lacanian subject, caught in the play of signifiers and constantly misrecognising others through the mirage of fantasy. While Lacan essentially outlines the impossibility of care, intimacy and empathy, what he does articulate cogently is the fantasmatic dynamics of these forms of relating, how the imaginary creates a locus of desired plenitude, communion with the (m)Other and identifications that aim to know the Other only to be refracted endlessly through the ego. So, while Lacanian theory does not advance relational ethics,[24] it does provide insight into the desire to receive or give care and the fantasies underlying these pursuits. In Chapter 2, I discussed Lacan's maxim that 'Man's desire is the desire of the Other' (XI, p. 235) and explained how this propels the subject towards obtaining the love and recognition of the Other as a way of both receiving its desire and having one's own desire recognised. In the analysis that follows, I illustrate how the process of caring about and for others can be understood in terms of recognition and desire emerging from symbolic and imaginary identifications in the field of care.

Although it may be commonplace to think of ourselves as enacting care towards family and friends who are both emotionally and spatially close to us, it is more difficult to imagine such relations towards distant strangers. As the quotation from Robinson (1999) at the beginning of this chapter suggests, care seems not to respond well to distance. This also resonates with Thien's (2005, p. 193) discussion of intimacy, which, she says, 'assumes a distance covered, a space traversed to achieve a desired familiarity with another. As a vision/version of an achieved relationship (self to other), it is the antithesis of distance'. Silk (1998) suggests that caring at a distance can be facilitated by three structures of interaction: face-to-face interactions, mediated interactions and mediated quasi-interactions (such as reading about distant others in the media). He also draws on Smith's (1998) distinction between benevolence, caring *about* others, and beneficence, caring *for* others, stressing that the former need not always precede the latter, as in the case of enacting care out of a sense of guilt (Silk 2000, see also 2004; Smith 2000). These theoretical threads are useful for situating volunteer tourism, which

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[24] Lacan does formulate a psychoanalytic ethics grounded in the notion of acting in accordance with one's desire in Seminar 7, which rejects, or problematizes, many of the central tenets of conventional approaches to ethics such as the 'good' and pleasure. However, this complex argument is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

initially involves mediatised quasi-interactions with others through advertisements, charity appeals and the news, and later face-to-face interactions, during which care is enacted through the voluntary work. Therefore, in volunteer tourism benevolence occurs at a distance whereas beneficence is enacted proximately.

While a feminist ethics of care grounded in cosmopolitan empathy may appear progressive, the way in which it has come to frame debates around development has been critiqued as reinforcing and, indeed, reproducing a discourse that constructs 'Northern actors as carers who are active and generous, and … Southern actors as cared for, passive and grateful' (Silk 2004, p. 230). The emphasis placed on responsibility and care in volunteer tourism has been critiqued as normalising a dynamic of activity/passivity in which the volunteer is assumed to be the natural active, moral agent (Sin 2010; Barnett and Land 2007). Harng Luh Sin (2010, p. 985) points out that the problem inherent in forming relationships of care is that they 'immediately imply the lack of equal relationships since the carer naturally assumes the position of privilege and power'. Mostafanezhad (2013b) similarly levels criticism at the non-reciprocal relation of care advanced by volunteer tourism, which she sees as embodied in a 'humanitarian gaze' that provides a discourse for imagining helping relationships and scripting the roles of who is for saving and who is the saviour in the tourism encounter. Mostafanezhad argues that this missionary-style gaze sets up a binary and hierarchy between care givers and receivers that maintains a paternalistic power dynamic.

Some types of volunteer tourism provide highly embodied, physical, and intimate caregiving, such as in the case of orphanage tourism where volunteers are expected to 'care' for children, be responsible for them, and provide them with affection (Sinervo 2011; Sin 2010). Richter and Norman (2010, p. 222) cite examples of orphan tourism advertisements that encourage potential volunteers, some of them involved only on a short-term basis, to go beyond the basic requirements of caregiving and 'make intimate connections' with the children in their care. Mostafanezhad (2013a) comments that the figure of the vulnerable Third World child, drawn from the imagery of development and carrying colonial connotations, constitutes the predominant object of compassion in volunteer tourism, highlighting how practices of care may be directed to some causes based on their symbolic and fantasmatic content rather than on the basis of greatest need. Mostafanezhad also suggests that there is a profoundly gendered dimension to caregiving in volunteer tourism. With the practice dominated by female participants, looking after children can be used as a way of performing the nurturing, maternal aspects of hegemonic femininity. Tourists look to celebrities such as Angelina Jolie as role models in this respect, and some even try to replicate photographs of her so that they too can possess an iconic shot of themselves holding an African child (Mostafanezhad 2013b; Mathers 2010).

It is clear that the work undertaken by volunteer tourists is informed by a number of discourses framing what it means to care for the Third World Other, the spatial configuration of affects involved in benevolence and beneficence, the power relations inherent in such actions, and the extent to which a relation of care is conceptualised as political or individualised act of compassion. Aviva Sinervo (2011) refers to this

entanglement of discourses, affectivity and ethical frameworks as the 'moral economy' of volunteer tourism, which produces particular expectations and obligations for both tourists and local people. While observations regarding the image of the Third World child clearly resonate with the findings documented in Chapter 6 in terms of the popularity of the children and the volunteer tourists' desire to hold and interact with them, the type of volunteer projects that they were involved in typically did not include childcare. In what follows, I explore how relations of care were enacted through other forms of voluntary work and critically interrogate how these helping actions can best be conceptualised.

### Imagining helping

Many of the volunteer tourists that I spoke to had never been to Africa before, nor had any prior experience of volunteering, either at home or abroad. I wanted to find out what had possessed them to travel to Kenya as volunteers and what they hoped that this voluntary work would add to their experience. When asked to reflect on their travel choices during the initial interviews, several of my participants discussed the allure of conventional holidays, which were ruled out as an option for them because their chosen destination was such a poor country:

> *Sarah*: I wanted to do volunteering because (.) like it would be nice to like go on a holiday out there but if I went to visit like the tribes or anything like that I'd feel so bad that I wasn't helping them. I was out there and I was like sunbathing while they're all working really hard and living off nothing, I'd feel like crap.
> (Interview 1)

In Sarah's account, the primacy of travel over volunteering is clear; she would have liked to have taken a holiday in Kenya but this would have caused her to feel guilty in the face of local people struggling to survive. A similar sentiment can be observed in Lisa's justification for travelling as a volunteer tourist:

> *Lisa*: It was … something that (.) I dunno that I could always look back on and think that I like (.) made a small difference rather than like, 'cause as I said a lot of my friends are going to Thailand and you look at their photos and all they're doing is getting drunk. … Like I have grown up in quite a privileged area and everything and like so many of my friends have just paid like ridiculous amounts of money to go like round the world and everything and they haven't like done anything with it? Like it just seems (.) it just seems really mean, doesn't it, to like spend that much money to go somewhere and then not do anything to help like (.) a poorer community. It just seems really (.) bit heartless really, doesn't it?
> (Interview 1)

Lisa distances herself from friends who, as she sees it, have behaved unethically by spending excessive amounts of money only to benefit themselves. Reflecting on her affluent background, Lisa implies that having money carries a moral obligation to act on behalf of less privileged others; to 'do something' with it, as she puts it. By constructing

such travel as 'mean' and 'heartless', Lisa is able to indirectly present herself as the benevolent opposite without coming across as self-righteous.

Amy also discussed the desire to travel as her main motivation to volunteer:

> *Amy*:    I liked the look of like conventional gap years kind of partying and stuff but then I kinda thought oh well, it'd be a shame to like a- like treat it as a holiday when could be there doing something actually worthwhile. … Like obviously I know that helping out there for a month is not going to make the biggest difference in the world, but even if it does make a small th- you know at least I've tried. It's not (.) it's not like I just sat here doing nothing like. Mean it's b- you know I've got a long summer ahead before going to university. (.) It seemed a shame just to waste it sitting around here doing nothing or just like going to Malia or somewhere.
> (Interview 1)

Places such as Thailand and Malia are constructed in these narratives as typical destinations for hedonistic party holidays that many young Westerners flock to. While Amy does not frame her decision in terms of any expected guilt at not having helped a poorer community, she opposes 'conventional gap year partying' on the grounds that it is not a 'worthwhile' use of her summer out between secondary school and university. She also sets up a spatial opposition in which help and worthwhile deeds can only be enacted through travelling to a different place; by saying that remaining in the UK would involve 'sitting around here doing nothing', immobility is presented as a form of passivity and a waste of time, implying that travelling abroad would enable to her be agential and make good use of her time. This resonates with the finding from other studies that volunteer tourists identify poverty as belonging to distant, non-Western places and, therefore, that it is only through travel to such places that one can experience the feeling of being charitable and virtuous (Simpson 2004; Cremin 2007).



**Figure 19.** Imagining building work: construction site for one of the volunteer projects. *Source:* Author.

This opposition between staying 'here' to do 'nothing' and going 'there' to do 'something' could also be seen in Sarah and Linsey's accounts:

*Sarah*: I wanted to go and work with kids and you watch like all the programmes and everything and you don't wanna just sit at home and do nothing. … I like the thought of helping people and everything like that, helping them get along. And it- it's not a nice thought is it to think of them like (.) not being very happy. So it's nice to go out there and actually do something rather than sit here and do nothing about it.
(Interview 1)

*Linsey*: I want um, mainly looking forward to like seeing all the little children and that when they come out the school at lunchtime and things and (.) like knowing that I've made a difference in somebody's life who's like (.) obviously needed it a lot more than I did. If, if I can, instead of spending my money on some clothes or material things, I'd rather spend it doing something that (.) not only am I getting something out of it but I'm helping other people as well, so. And they'll be more appreciative than a lot of other people. … And that you can actually see something that you've like helped (.) to like create, so if you ever went back there you'd be able to say ah I made that building or something d'you know what I mean, so. Rather than just doing something with my money and then like never, never seeing it again sort of thing, never knowing what they do with it. … Um and obviously like volunteering means that I can make difference and I can see that difference happening rather than just watching (.) people suffer and not be able to do anything because you're going to see it sort of thing.
(Interview 1)

Both talk about witnessing the suffering of distant people through the media and attempting to surmount the resultant sense of powerlessness by volunteering abroad. Linsey's explanation of her desire to volunteer is particularly interesting in the way that it frames the practice as an unusual act of consumerism, which allows her to see her money transformed into something meaningful, tangible and lasting, such as a building. What Linsey says about wanting not only to make a difference in a poor community but to 'see that difference happening' is important to note in terms of the frequent popular suggestion in public discourse that volunteer tourists and gap year students would be better off just giving their money to charity. However, Linsey points to a powerful fantasy of co-presence, of effecting a physical change on the ground with the volunteer tourists' own hands, and of absorbing the appreciative reaction of their beneficiaries. There is a sense in which doing voluntary work oneself provides a form of accountability that might be lacking in a charity donation, which would leave the would-be volunteer tourists as spectators to distant suffering, wondering what exactly their money had been used for.

Kate and Josh similarly expressed a desire not only to make a difference in Kenya but to witness this difference being made, and wanting to be able to chart the progression of their voluntary work:

*Josh*:    I am really excited about if we get kind of a project somewhere doing (.) and we do kind of see it kind of go from nothing to something. And so it's always a good feeling when you (.) even like at home if you kind of build a shed or something. It's a good feeling to know you can stand back and (.) like see you've done something.
(Interview 1)

*Kate*:    Um, I love working with people and I think it'd be lovely to work with children as well, so I think it would be really rewarding. Um to like see if you can make a big difference and things, um kind of the personal side I think I'd really love that.
(Interview 1)

Again, Josh uses the example of constructing some sort of building to illustrate the satisfaction and 'good feeling' that can be derived from working with one's hands and seeing something grow out of nothing. Kate links this idea to working with people and being able to see a difference being made at the level of the community, while at the same time emphasising her desire to work with children, as did Sarah and Linsey in the previous set of extracts. The mention of the children by so many participants during the first wave of interviews seems to accentuate Mostafanezhad's (2013b) observation regarding the figure of the Third World child as the primary object of compassion and care in volunteer tourism. Indeed, as the analysis in Chapter 6 demonstrated, the embodied closeness sought with the local children would form a central focus of the tourists' interactions and experience more generally, and this could be interpreted as an outlet for a desire to enact care towards members of the host communities.
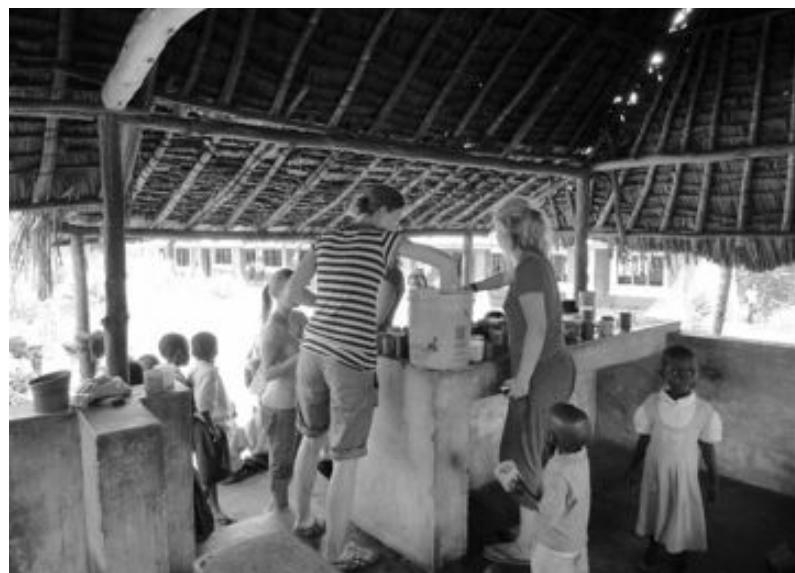


**Figure 20.** Imagining caring for children: feeding project at a Kenyan primary school. *Source:* Author.

Several important points can be inferred from the extracts above regarding the nature of volunteer tourists' imaginings of the helping/caring role that they were about

to adopt. First, choosing to volunteer in the first place seemed to be symptomatic of a compulsion to be productive with one's time, of not 'wasting' time and needing to partake in activities sanctioned as ethically 'worthwhile' – part of a broader trend in contemporary youth travel (Cremin 2007; Crossley and Duncan forthcoming). Sarah was the only participant to frame this ethical injunction in terms of guilt avoidance, or at least, to use her terms, to avoid feeling 'crap', although this may have been an unrecognised or unacknowledged factor for other volunteers too. It seems that for the volunteer tourists that I spoke to, the powerful urge to go abroad was the primary determinant for their travel and volunteering was a way of doing this in an ethically acceptable way.[25] While the subject of guilt as a fetishised object that becomes defensively transferred from the Western consumer to the consumed signifier has been explored in the context of ethical consumption (see Cremin 2012, 2011), volunteer tourism seems to differ in the inability of tourists to simply rid themselves of the guilt emanating from their privileged subject position and part played in global structural violence by purchasing a product and then continuing with their daily lives. As we could see in the previous chapter, the co-presence of tourists and visited people ensures ongoing opportunities for tourists to be reminded of their affluence and for their guilt to re-emerge.

In terms of the help and care that the volunteer tourists envisaged themselves as enacting, there appeared to be a narrative of making a transition from passive spectator to active volunteer; a move that also involved a spatial transition. If we accept the volunteer tourists' claims that viewing the suffering of distant others through the media was a strong motivator for them to travel to Kenya, then this could be interpreted as a manifestation of cosmopolitan empathy and evidence to support Chouliaraki's (2006) suggestion that globalisation may result in 'the closing of moral distance' as well as the bridging of geographical distance. Crucially, the spatially proximate encounter with Kenyan people was framed as essential in the ability to enact a relation of care and to experience having made a difference for host communities. So, while caring *about* others (benevolence) could be experienced at a distance through mediated channels, caring *for* others (beneficence) required co-presence and proximate action in order to be able adequately to gauge the success of the volunteer tourists' intervention (Smith 1998; Silk 2000). Additionally, volunteer tourists repeatedly referred, both literally and metaphorically, to their desire to build something in Kenya, as a tangible way of being able to see the effect their volunteering was having and as a means of feeling a sense of achievement at having seen something go from 'nothing' to 'something', as Josh put it. This appeal of construction projects is significant to note as we proceed to the next part of this chapter, in which I focus on a building project that came to dominate the volunteering experience.

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[25]    Lisle (2009) critiques supposedly ethical tourism for what she sees as the naïve addition of 'ethical' elements, such as volunteering, to existing practices rather than fundamentally reassessing these practices themselves for ethical value or potential harm.

**Houses, homes and mothers**

*Thinking about home*

On the bus, driving back from a hard day's work digging foundations for a new classroom at the local primary school, the volunteer tourists inspected and compared the callouses and blisters that had appeared on their hands after weeks of digging trenches, shifting rocks in heavy wheelbarrows and chopping wood. The physicality of the manual labour was intense at times, working under the hot Kenyan sun, sometimes in pain, and feeling under pressure not to let down the team by taking too many breaks. The blisters were admired; they were evidence of having worked hard. I even decided to take a photograph of mine as a way of documenting my efforts. Despite the unusual exertion, there was a peculiar satisfaction that could be derived from the manual work. Not only did it leave traces on the body (blisters, callouses, sweat, dirt, grazes) that confirmed having worked, but it was also satisfying getting into a rhythm of, say, shovelling and seeing a mound of soil grow by your side – again, a tangible way of monitoring our on-going contribution to the projects. It also provided many of us with a sense of having 'earned' our leisure time and meals, legitimating our enjoyment of the holiday aspects of the programme as a form of reward.



**Figure 21.** Plasters covering the blisters on my hands
following manual work. *Source:* Author.

One of the projects involved creating a school garden containing aloe vera plants that could be processed into soap in order to generate extra revenue for the school. When we arrived on site we were presented with a grassy expanse of land in the school

grounds, which we then had to weed, hoe and plant the aloes into. I remember really enjoying the gardening, being under the dappled shade of trees, a cool breeze in the air, and nurturing these wonderful plants, yet most of the others that I spoke to afterwards were much less enthusiastic about the work. I recorded the following reflections in my field diary from the day:

> *I really enjoyed the gardening and could easily do that again for several more days, but the others seemed less keen. It felt poignant to me because of how much I miss the garden now that we live in a flat; I regret not helping my mum more in the garden when I had the chance. It felt satisfying to see the plot of land transformed from tall grasses and weeds to an orderly aloe vera patch.*

My mother's house has a large garden and as I was growing up she often encouraged me to help her tend to it, yet I was very resistant to her suggestion. The garden in Kenya led me to compare my mother's house, as an idealised place of unity with nature, with my more urban home at the time, and I experienced a deep sense of regret at the missed opportunity to connect with nature and with my mother. Reflecting on how this personal reminiscence had made the gardening project more meaningful to me, I began to consider how biographical factors and meanings of home might have impacted on the volunteers' reception of different types of work.



**Figure 22.** Me as I prepare to clear the ground for the school garden.
*Source:* Author.

The manual work that seemed most popular was a house building project commonly referred to as 'Mama's house', which allowed the volunteer tourists to take part in supervised constructions of traditional wood and mud huts. At least two separate Mama's houses were constructed during our time in Kenya and in each case the 'mama', as the organization's local staff referred to the women, was poor, middle-aged, precariously housed, and did not have a husband. One mama had a large number of

children, possibly with some having been adopted, while the other had a son with a severe a mental illness. After an initial group of volunteers who were already in Kenya by the time our cohort arrived in July were involved in Mama's house, word spread to the others and discussions about the volunteer work became almost obsessively centred on this project. Just as the garden project resonated with my memories and connections with home, or *one* of my homes, I wanted to try to understand whether the allure of Mama's house was in part informed by personal meanings and attachments to home. Being at a stage in their lives during which many were in the process of moving out of parental homes and on to university or work, what constituted 'home' was the topic of frequent discussion in Kenya. Some felt severely homesick, some reminisced less intensely about home, and others felt liberated from its constraints, but all seemed to be actively negotiating the meaning of home in some way.

All of the volunteer tourists that I spoke to seemed to be involved in a process of recreating 'home' in Kenya, often emphasizing particular villages as the place that felt most like home:

> *Tom*:   Makuya's the best. [*Émilie*: Yeah?] Clearly. Makuya's home.
>    (Interview 2)

> *Tess*:   I love it here. I think this is one of my, I thought Makuya was my favourite. And I still love Makuya, I think it's really cool, I think (.) like that's seen as your first home I suppose. [The other accommodation] was more of like a stop, stoppi- stopping place.
>    (Interview 2)

For both Tom and Tess, Makuya, the first village that we were based at and at which we were first welcomed into Kenya, was identified as 'home' in the context of their travels, being our initial and most permanent base. It struck me as strange that the tourists would feel the need to locate a transitional home in their travel destination, perhaps due to the prevailing spatialisation of tourist mobilities as circular, moving between the fixed polarities of 'home' and 'away' (Hui 2008; Franklin and Crang 2001). However, Sarah's account shed additional light on the matter:

> *Sarah*:   I miss like Kenya a lot. So much, like I loved it out there. It was like, like I was talking, I was talking to [a friend] yesterday and I nearly said "at home" when I was talking about it? (*laughs*) … Like 'cause I called it, you call it home when you're out there. But I do whe- anywhere I go when I'm on ho- on holiday I'm [*Émilie*: Really?] like "let's go home" but like it was <u>actually</u> like home.
>    (Interview 3)

Her reflections illustrate how the notion of home was used to express a love for Kenya, an emotional attachment, and a profound feeling of belonging to the place. Other accounts also highlighted the importance of the friendships and lasting bonds that were made between the volunteer tourists as a way of co-creating this sense of home, and even family.

The volunteer tourists were involved in an on-going process of conceptualising,

reconstructing and negotiating meanings and locations of home, not only by way of their spatial dislocation as tourists but due to the life changes and rites of passage that they were undertaking. I argue that this process imbued the house-building project with added significance. Mama's house became entwined with these processes and positioned as another site for the creation of 'home'. Wanting to provide a home for a poor Kenyan woman may have been a way of expressing a deep-felt need to create stable, protective spaces at a vulnerable and changeable time of life, and perhaps on some level the volunteer tourists identified with Mama's vulnerability and precarity. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the cases of Tom and Linsey to explore in greater depth the entanglement of personal meanings, conceptualisations of home, and perceptions of the Mama's house project. In each case study, I draw on a psycho-biographical level of explanation to construct an interpretation of the participants' affective investments in the house-building and the way in which it provided an outlet for the enactment of care towards members of the host community in Kenya.

### Tom: agency and kinship

Tom:    I think, think back to Kenya I instantly go to Mama's house 'cause that is, that is, that is uh the best part, the number one. My numero uno. It's brilliant. (Photo-elicitation)

At eighteen years old, Tom was my youngest participant and also the youngest child in a large family. The significance of family for Tom in relation to his trip to Kenya was immediately apparent as I was introduced to him through his sister, Sarah, with whom he travelled. The pair formed an interesting exception, as most of the volunteer tourists on the programme had gone on their own. While Tom did not describe his bond with Sarah as being exceptionally close, both stated that they got on well enough to be able to travel comfortably together and to be able to support one another through any difficult times that might arise. Tom seemed to pride himself on the positive family relationships that he enjoyed and the happy, functional home from which he came. When I first spoke to Tom he expressed a strong desire to volunteer in an orphanage in Kenya. In the end, this project was not available and so he turned his attention to the house-building project, which, as the quotation above shows, became the highlight of his trip. Yet, I will argue, the desire that drew him to work in the orphanage continued to infuse his experience of Mama's house as a result of a confluence between a struggle on his part for agency and his idealisation of non-biological kinship relationships.

Tom talked about being brought up in a family where there were always lots of children around, some of whom his mother babysat. He said that he had grown up within a diverse, multicultural environment, which had contributed to his cosmopolitan outlook and engendered in him intolerance for the racist and insular world views that he complained some of his current friends harboured. Tom also told me about having a half-brother, whom he thought of no differently from his other siblings and looked up to as a role model, saying that it was because of him that he dressed the way he did, liked the music he did, and so on. I want to suggest that this idealisation of his brother—his

imaginary positioning as Tom's ideal ego—and the children that he grew up with led Tom to be heavily invested in non-biological kinship relationships, which came to be expressed in our final conversation during a discussion about what he hoped to achieve in his life:

> *Tom*: I'm well into adoption. … Yeah I think that's so much better than (.) yeah if there's kids about (*laughs*) there's no point in me making any. Yeah that's, that's, that'll get done at some point.
>
> *Émilie*: Really? Yeah.
>
> *Tom*: Adopt some kids. 'Cause I g- when uh my mum babysat loads of like kids when I was little. So, and I've got like friends now like um who I wouldn't have really known like that well.
> (Interview 4)

In this extract, Tom explicitly links his desire to care for children that are not biologically his own to his positive early childhood experiences of more fluid, less conventional forms of kinship.

The importance of family and kinship for Tom was fused with a second, biographically derived concern with agency that appeared to stem from his negative experience of school, which he had left at the age of sixteen. Tom told me that his relationships with teachers had often been fraught and that he disliked the feeling of someone else having power over him and treating him 'like a child'. However, his struggle for agency in the face of the negative control that he felt had been exerted upon him at school appeared conflicted by Tom's simultaneous self-identification as a child. For example, in the first interview he said that part of the reason he enjoyed the company of children was because they saw him as one of them and stated elsewhere that he is 'not an adult'. Similarly, when discussing the impetus for the trip to Kenya, Tom told me that it had been Sarah's idea and that he had been quite happy to go along with her plans, even down to the details of which country they would visit and the type of volunteering they would take part in. Tom's ambivalence regarding his adoption of the adult subject position may have arisen from a conflict between his desire for mastery over his life and being daunted by the responsibilities and commitments associated with adulthood. He was particularly resistant, for example, to the idea of taking up certain types of employment that he felt would kill off his creativity and trap him, both spatially and psychologically, in a mundane, worthless existence.

After leaving school at this early age, Tom drifted, neither studying nor working:

> *Tom*: I left [school] and then (.) I think my next year of life was (.) probably contrary to what I want to do living wise. I was in my own little bubble … at home just in my little bubble without, that's before I turned seventeen, so I hadn't even started to drive. So I was cut off from the world. I imagine this is kind of me like um (.) uh (.) making up for that lost time really.
> (Interview 1)

Tom conveys a sense of impotence that came from his limited mobility, socio-spatial separation in a 'bubble' and lack of accomplishment. Kenya was therefore poignant as a

way of making up for lost time that also staged a spatial escape, given the restrictions and isolation that he had described. This experience of an aimless year in which Tom achieved very little led him to engage in a powerful fantasy about affecting change in the lives of others:

> *Tom*:    I couldn't stand that you, your whole life where you, you've done all these things but you, if you weren't there nothing would've changed. (.) Everything else would be the same. That would just be terrible. …
> *Émilie*: How would you like to make your kind of mark on the world then?
> *Tom*:    Um, it's i-, yeah mark on the world. Well (.) er (.) *(sighs)* I dunno I'd li-, I'd like at least (.) one person to (.) have changed to something better 'cause I was there.
> (Interview 1)

Faced with the recognition of the potential insignificance of his life—ultimately through acknowledging his own mortality—Tom took solace in the prospect of leaving a piece of himself, his influence, on somebody else to prove that he had existed and exerted his agency. His fantasy of helping in the orphanage became an expression of this desire to leave his 'mark on the world':

> *Tom*:    I'm more looking forward to the kids than anything. … Kids and orphans and tryin'a (.) I, that's another thing of making someone's life a little better.
> (Interview 1)

In this statement, we witness the convergence of the two predominant factors guiding Tom's attraction to volunteering: wanting to make other people's lives better as a demonstration of his agency and wanting to enact care towards orphans as a re-enactment of his sibling relationships.



**Figure 23.** Schoolchildren watching the foundations of their new building being dug. *Source:* Author.

Once in Kenya, Tom was keen to find a project that would allow him to feel that he had made a real difference. What is surprising about the following passage is that it shows Tom comparing Mama's house to a classroom building project; from his investment in caring for children, one might have assumed that Tom would be more drawn to the school based project and yet he complained that it lacked a closeness and sense of completion that left him unable to gauge the effect it had had on these schoolchildren:

> *Tom*:   I still haven't found that one thing which I think like, like Mama's house to think ah you've really helped. But yeah the l- tha- that's my, that was my biggest thing. … I'm waiting for that one project they give us where you think ok I've actually like (.) helped here. A definite thing. … [W]e haven't had anything that's quite close to the people. Whereas Mama's house was right with Mama and the, and all of the kids, we've been kind of (.) uh with the, with the, with the school kids and the classroom we didn't, you didn't get to see them using the classroom. … Um yeah so I- I just want something where it's kind of like (.) directly helping either one person or a few. I just, kind of like "I've made your life quite a bit better".
> (Interview 2)

As voiced in the volunteer tourists' prospective narratives, Tom reinforces the sense of importance that was attached to completing projects; having only just begun to dig the foundations for the school classroom, none of the volunteers got to see the building finished and in use. This undoubtedly contributed to Tom's statement about a sense of distance that he felt from the schoolchildren, despite the fact that many of them often stood around as we worked on the building site, whereas he perceived Mama's house as being 'close to the people'. By saying that he wanted to 'directly help either one person or a few', Tom seemed to infer that it was the quality of the connection that he wanted to feel to a beneficiary rather than the scale of a project. While the classroom had the potential to benefit more people in the community, the house provided more of a personal and tangible link to Mama and her family that allowed Tom to feel that he had left his mark in Kenya.[26]

Tom was also keen to emphasise the fact that the house was being built not only for Mama, but for her children too. When I asked him whether the children were all her own (as I had heard from other volunteers that she had about fifteen), he said that he was sure some of them were adopted. It is possible that Mama was symbolic for Tom of his own mother as a woman who embraced and cared for other people's children, fostering the sort of sibling relationships that he idealised. In this way, Mama's house seemed to provide Tom with the perfect project that not only allowed him to experience meaningful agency through completing a building and enacting care towards a vulnerable family, but also resonated with his desire to protect the cohesion of non-orthodox sibling relationships and family structures. Reflecting on his experience of

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[26] Tom's need to leave a mark in Kenya also extended to other projects. While building the school toilet blocks, for example, he and some of the other volunteer tourists wrote their names in the wet cement of the wall. During the photo-elicitation exercise, Tom showed me a photograph of this wall, saying that it was 'a nice little mark to leave' that would hopefully last a few years before getting worn down.

finally participating in a house build, Tom confirmed enthusiastically that it had met his expectations:

> *Tom*:    Sitting on the roof, tying on the little things, can't remember what they're called. Um, yeah that was, that was brilliant. That was really, really, really good. And then the next day making mud balls to put in the house, that was, but yeah, easily my best bit, that was brilliant. That's just what I wanted to do. If I'd done that for the whole time I'd've been like happy. Just making houses. … [T]here's a section of her house, if I hadn't been there that would not have like you know roof or a wall. So yeah that, no it was good, that's what I wanted. That kind of (.) I have definitely helped someone.
> (Interview 3)

Tom also emphasised the embodied physicality of the work as providing part of its satisfaction:

> *Tom*:    I did the roof, tied the roof on with Ben. Which was a killer, like kills your legs. The guy who does it stays up there all day. We're taking like (.) a fifteen minute intervals like every half an hour just 'cause it (.) really gets to your legs? Um yeah that was, that was really good, Mama's house. Um like the finishing one thing. They said that she cried and stuff at the party. [*Émilie*: Really?] Which was nice.
> (Interview 3)

Both of these extracts seem to show how the act of making a mud ball or tying thatch onto the roof and experiencing the resultant pain in his legs were ways of physically registering the contribution that Tom had make to the house build, just as the other volunteers had seen their blisters as evidence hard work. The tangibility of this manual labour thus allowed Tom to locate himself concretely in the work by identifying an illustrative 'section of [Mama's] house' that he had built.



**Figure 24.** Volunteer tourists completing the roof on one of the Mama's houses. *Source:* Participant.

Finally, Tom's statement about Mama having cried at the handing over ceremony seems to point to a second way in which his contribution to the project was able to be estimated. While the embodiment of the manual work allowed the volunteer tourists to see what they had physically built and achieved, the outpouring of emotion that Tom describes—an expression of Mama's grateful gaze, if you like—may have been a way of confirming the *meaning* of the house and the personal effect that they had on Mama. Even though Tom had not directly witnessed the completion and handing over of the house, he was able to take the accounts of others as proof that his efforts really had resulted in making somebody's life better, leaving a physical and emotional mark on the Kenyan community. This emotionality may have fed into Tom's sense of closeness to Mama, which he felt could not be achieved through the school classroom project. This sense of emotional connection may have contributed to the popularity of Mama's house as an individualisation of care through volunteer work, leading volunteers away from projects that aimed to help groups and towards helping individuals. For Tom, Mama's house provided an emotional connection as proof of his exertion of agency and a way of creating home for others that strengthened the bond to his own home, family and siblings.

### *Linsey: the gift of home*

Linsey came from a family that was undergoing significant upheaval at the time we first met, with her parents in the process of divorcing after her father had left her mother. When I first arrived at Linsey's house, the sitting room was bare, without any photographs, ornaments or personal objects in sight, and it was filled with boxes as she, her mother and younger sister prepared to move out. She told me quite matter of factly how almost everything we could see around us was for sale as the bulky furniture would not fit into her mum's new house. Linsey showed little emotion as we talked about the profound changes that were taking place in her life, putting more emphasis on the stress of her A-level exams that had just started, and yet I felt a welling up of sadness for her and her family that I found difficult to contain in the interview, intimating a potential transference. At times, she hinted at animosity towards her father, saying that they were not currently on speaking terms and positioning him as the cause of her parents' breakup. However, her father also formed an important link for Linsey to Kenya, having been before himself through work. When I asked Linsey why she had chosen to travel to Kenya rather than to another country in Africa, the first reason she gave was that her father had always returned with stories and pictures showing how good it was out there.

Despite this link to her father, it was her mother that Linsey described as the more central parental figure in her life. She said that going to Kenya on her own had made her mum proud and that her decision to go away only for one month was partly as a result of worrying about being away from her mum for too long. With the move immanent, Linsey told me how her mum and sister were looking forward to a 'fresh start', but that they had only been able to afford a small house with two bedrooms that was not large enough to accommodate her as well. As she would soon be leaving to go to university anyway, Linsey insisted that this was not a problem and yet her account of home seemed

to reveal an ambivalent stance regarding the thought of leaving home in the knowledge that she would never be able to return permanently:

> *Émilie*:  How are you feeling about (.) leaving home … ?
> *Linsey*:  I am worried about leaving my family 'cause obviously we're not in a very good situation sort of thing but um I, like I say I've been to boarding school so I don't get homesick or anything like that and I know what it's like to be away from my family for a long time.
> (Interview 1)

In this first extract, Linsey reveals anxiety about leaving her mum and sister at a highly precarious and vulnerable time in their lives. However, she quickly reassures me, or herself, that while they may need to rely on her for emotional support, she has developed a resistance to homesickness through her attendance of boarding school. This association not only allowed Linsey to feel prepared for the separation from her family and home that was about to occur, but also lessened its significance by likening it to more routine separations that she had previously endured and which had built up her resilience.

Embracing mobility as a result of frequently moving house was a theme that ran throughout Linsey's narrative. Their many moves and the family's choice of school for Linsey was, she told me, a result of her father's profession, and this had resulted in a strong identification on her part with movement, change and new places. Rather than expressing sadness at having to leave her existing home and at being excluded from her mother's new house, Linsey described her displacement as both positive and normal:

> *Linsey*:  It's really nice our new house, they'll be happy there. … I can't wait to get out of this house anyway, like I said I just want a change now 'cause I think we're all bored and (.) we're like used to changing and it's, it's weird when we don't like change, it just feels like (.) we're sort of bored and stuck and that so we like to move on anyway. I think it's about time we moved house.
> (Interview 1)

> *Linsey*:  I don't need home, uh- I don't (.) don't need to stay in one place, I don't really wish to stay in one place. I'd rather, that's why I would like to travel and everything. I quite like the fact that I'm (.) in a [village] and then in another [village], that's quite nice actually 'cause I get to go like all different places rather than being like just in one place.
> (Interview 2)

In resisting being 'in one place' and insisting that she did not 'need home', I suggest that Linsey was presenting a well-rehearsed defensive response to being cut off from her family, which had begun with her time at boarding school and been intensified by the break-up of her parents. By resisting a strong investment in home, Linsey was able to protect herself from the traumatic events unfolding there. Similarly, by locating the house move within the family's regular pattern of mobility as opposed to a devastating rupture of their reality, as a timely change from being 'bored' and 'stuck' in their

humdrum lives, she was able to play down the significance of the dismantling of her family home.[27] Travelling abroad thus allowed Linsey to perform a positive escape from her home life.

At the end of our first week in Kenya some of us were sitting, relaxing in the central banda when two other volunteer tourists walked in, their clothes and hair spattered with mud, and bearing broad smiles. They told us that they had been helping to build a house and when Linsey found out about this she told me that she was 'upset' and 'gutted' because she would have loved to have helped. From that point onwards, Linsey became determined to build a house:

> *Linsey*: I wanna uh finish something so I can say like take a picture take it back to my mum and say I, I've helped build that. Like I would love to do a house actually. … 'Cause I think we're only building a toilet (.) and um even though we will've done something and achieved something … when you look at it it's a toilet. (.) Like (.) probably sounds so stupid but like they don't have to have a toilet, they can just pee in a bush it's like d'you know what I mean, like? (*laughs*) Not saying they have to pee in a bush but like, like it's not like it was <u>necessary</u>, like really necessary as a house for a woman who hasn't got a house d'you know what I mean, you're giving her something like she'd never, she'd never forget. Give them a toilet, "Oh thanks". Like and I dunno it's just like "So w- what did you do in the summer?" (.) I came here and I built a toilet, like (*Laughter*) It just doesn't sound the same, does it like. So I wanna do something really useful. Like (.) that somet- they're gonna appreciate.
> (Interview 2)

In this complex statement, we can begin to appreciate the multiple resonances that the house building project held for Linsey. She contrasts the house to another project in which we built toilet blocks for a school, deeming the latter as not 'really necessary' and something for which she would receive little gratitude. Stemming from the obvious elevation of houses above toilets in terms of cultural worth, Linsey seemed desperate to participate in a project that would provide her with recognition from three interconnected parties: her mum (who will be proud to see what her daughter has built), Mama (who will be grateful to receive a new house), and a more general Other (the audience that will be impressed by her house building stories).

This counterpoint of Mama, Linsey's mother and the (big) Other that she alludes to suggests to me a connection between the two mothers as manifestations of a more general gaze that Linsey was trying to appease and appeal to. In Mama's house, Linsey found an embodied metaphor for her relationship to her own mother and home. In both cases we find a vulnerable, single woman in need of shelter: in Mama's case, Linsey presented herself as a provider of shelter; in her mum's case, Linsey's sacrifice of not moving into the new house was instrumental in allowing her family to afford the move.

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[27] It is also telling that the second extract shown here came shortly after a passage in the interview in which Linsey was telling me how much she missed her mum and about an unexpected bout of homesickness. The emotions aroused by the spatial and communicational separation from her family seemed to again prompt this defensive response to difficult feelings about home.

In other words, her relationship to these houses and the creation of home within them was one of enacting care towards others rather than claiming them for herself. While Linsey had been explicit about distancing herself from home, the provision of home for those she cared about was extremely important to her. In this context, I interpret Linsey's initial statement of wanting to give her mum a photograph of the house that she had built as going beyond a simple demonstration of what she had achieved that summer; it is possible that the picture would have signified the gift of the house to Mama that was a physical re-enactment of the more intangible gift of the house given to her own mother by not claiming a space within it.



**Figure 25.** A view inside one of the houses being constructed. *Source:* Author.

However, despite her attempted positioning as the provider of shelter and care, in Linsey's retrospective narrative of the house build we find an interesting depiction of Mama as both a receiver and giver of care:

> *Linsey*: The woman at the house was so sweet like. She had <u>nothing</u> like she didn't even have like a proper bed or anything. And she walked all the way, like miles to the shop to go and get us all bread. … It was so sweet 'cause like she literally had nothing yet she like gave us so much. We felt <u>so</u> bad eating the bread but it was like, well we had to eat it. … Ah that was so like heart-warming to see that. I really liked that. So, um and she could t- every time she came over she just had a massive smile on her face and she loved it so. Yeah it was really good.
> (Interview 3)

This description of Mama's arduous journey to fetch food for the volunteers constructing her new house brings to mind Sin's (2010) observation that volunteer tourists often find themselves in a position of vulnerability when adapting to a new environment abroad and require the care and assistance of host community members. As the literature reviewed at the beginning of this chapter suggests, volunteer tourists are susceptible to adopting a mind-set in which they are the active providers of care and visited people are passive recipients (Barnett and Land 2007; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Silk 2004; Sin 2010), and yet Mama's act of care and kindness towards the volunteers did not seem to create any dissonance between the parties. Instead, Mama's hospitality was gratefully received and taken as an act of exceptional generosity given the fact that she had so little to begin with. Linsey used this episode to illustrate, in a similar way to Tom, the affective resonance that she was able to gain from her encounters with Mama: the 'heart-warming' feeling that came from receiving her care, seeing the smile on her face and sensing her enjoyment of the experience. Eating at the house thus potentially strengthened the maternal association by putting Linsey on the receiving end of care and also allowed her to gauge Mama's response to their charitable intervention through the intimacy of this shared encounter and being able to witness her approving gaze.

Linsey further developed this sense of having a connection to Mama in her evaluation of the project, which again featured a comparison with the school toilet block that, in the end, she was also involved in building. Her account is similar to the way in which Tom used the signs of Mama's personal approval as evidence of having done worthwhile work:

> *Linsey*:  [I]t was nice to do that, like give someone something really personal as well? 'Cause it felt like you were, and you could see like h- the affect you're having on that person. Whereas the toilets you can't really see how that's like affe- 'cause the toilets weren't in so we didn't, don't even know what they're gonna look like.
> (Interview 3)

Linsey again expresses her frustration with the toilet project, having difficulty imagining them and the effect that they would have on the students' lives. She describes Mama's house, on the other hand, as a personal gift that precipitated a direct sense of having helped someone, allowing her to envision the effect that she would have on Mama. This ability to see the impact of her work would clearly have been accentuated by seeing Mama's minute gestures and facial expressions signifying her approval and recognition. Mama's house, then, provided for Linsey a way of strengthening the bond to her mother through caregiving practices related to houses that contained multiple resonances for her, both positive and negative. Linsey's mobility through travelling to Kenya was a way of escaping from a difficult domestic situation, reinforcing her defensive investment in limiting her attachments to home and, in particular, houses. Yet at the same time her departure was a catalyst enabling her mother and younger sister to move to a new house, thus constituting an indirect act of care in itself.

### *The maternal signifier*

These case studies demonstrate the potential for a given set of symbolic coordinates within the house-building project to be inflected through the volunteer tourists' own biographical and relational investments. Even though the experiences of Tom and Linsey, and their respective reasons why Mama's house was such an appealing project, differ, there are also many crucial overlaps in the way that the project was symbolically and affectively constructed. Mama acted as a maternal metaphor, or signifier, within the encounter, organising a dense web of symbolic and imaginary identifications for the volunteer tourists. If we examine how Mama was portrayed in the narratives we find a nameless woman known only as 'Mama', 'the woman at the house' or 'the old lady', who is defined by her relation to children, vulnerability, dependency and lack. As Linsey's account demonstrated, Mama was known for her generous acts of care towards the volunteer tourists but was more fundamentally regarded as a needy figure requiring care herself, lacking adequate shelter, without a man by her side for assistance and surrounded by dependent children. Together, these characteristics may have evoked the maternal through Mama's caregiving role and a lack that is recognised in Lacanian accounts of the (m)Other.

Mama as the maternal signifier seems to be interpretable in two senses. First, Mama appeared to occupy the place of the ego-ideal, a symbolic gaze observing the subject from the locus of the ideal ego – the fantasised ideal to which the subject aspires to becoming. As the ego-ideal, Mama's gaze functioned as an embodied instantiation of the more abstract ethical injunction (see Chapter 3), spurring on the volunteer tourists to give the best of themselves, to work hard for her and to aspire to attaining their caregiving ideal. Secondly, as I have already mentioned, Mama was defined as the lacking (m)Other and thus part of the volunteer tourists' role in relation to her was to fill this lack through the gift of the house. Both Tom and Linsey seemed keen to locate their work, or themselves, within the house, with Tom's emphasis on the wall that would not be there had he not contributed to the project and Linsey's desire to present a photograph of the house to her own mother in order to be able to say, 'I've helped build that'. In terms of their symbolic relation to the maternal as lack, we could theorise this tendency as exceeding a desire to prove their achievements through the volunteer work and as an attempt to offer themselves as the object to fulfil the (m)Other's desire as arising from this lack.

Conceptualising the volunteer tourists' relation to Mama in terms of lack and the fulfilment of desire in this way also allows us to enrich the interpretation of why it might have been important for Tom and Linsey to witness her grateful, approving gaze through her tears or heart-warming smile.[28] I suggest that this gaze not only provided the volunteer tourists with evidence that their efforts had made a difference and contributed to a meaningful change for Mama, but it sustained a fantasy that they were able to fill in her lack by positioning themselves as the object of her desire, her *objet petit a*, that was

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28  Several other participants also told me about enjoying seeing Mama's reaction to her new house, about how she cried and appeared so grateful and happy. Witnessing these reactions therefore seemed to form an important conclusion to the project for many of the volunteer tourists.

able to solve Mama's problems through their benevolent actions. To return to the Lacanian assertion that desire is always the desire of the Other, this relation to Mama showed both how the volunteer tourists' desire was structured by the gaze of the Other and how they were caught up in an existential struggle to have their desire recognised by this Other. This does not mean to say that the volunteers' desire to help should be reduced to a deep-rooted psychological longing for recognition from the Other, but that relating to Mama as a maternal signifier in this way may have added an extra dimension to their experience of providing care and receiving gratitude.

Finally, we can read Mama qua maternal signifier as a symbolic support for the imaginary identifications that helped to sustain the volunteer tourists' investments in the house-building project. For Tom, this imaginary identification circulated around his childhood experiences of kinship bonds with siblings and other children that he was raised with, centring children as a significant symbol of togetherness for him. Linsey's identification, on the other hand, focused on her mother and the sense of connection that could be achieved with her, paradoxically, by distancing herself from home. In both cases, the volunteers were describing a place of relation, connection and family togetherness, evocative of the imaginary. Their symbolic identifications with the maternal signifier as ego-ideal and lacking/desiring (m)Other, which invited them to work hard on the house and to deliver it as a gift for Mama, provided the volunteer tourists with an impetus located in Kenya for enacting relations of care that corresponded closely to their own relations with significant others at home. For example, Linsey's desire to build the house was symbolically a response to Mama's plight, yet through her inscription as the maternal signifier this plight carried a resonance of Linsey's own mother. Thus, in building the house for Mama, she may inadvertently have been strengthening her bonds and imaginary identifications with her own family and home.



**Figure 26.** A completed Mama's house. *Source:* Participant.

**Conclusion**

The data presented in this chapter explicate the multiple and complex reasons why prospective travellers may be drawn to volunteer tourism and why some volunteer projects may appeal more than others. The spatiality of how volunteer tourists envisage their practices of help and care could be seen particularly vividly in their prospective narratives, in which caring *about* others in need (benevolence) could be experienced at a distance through mediated channels, while caring *for* others (beneficence) was framed as requiring co-presence and proximate action (Smith 1998; Silk 2000). Accordingly, many of the prospective volunteer tourists described their journey as a transition from passive spectatorship to active intervention on behalf of needy others in Africa. The sense of obligation to help distant others that was expressed by the volunteer tourists could be interpreted as an example of cosmopolitan empathy. Yet, this was problematised by narratives suggesting that the volunteer work was used as a way of reducing the guilt associated with travel to a developing country (Beck 2006; Mostafanezhad and Crossley forthcoming). The spatial dynamics of the volunteer work were also explored in terms of ways in which enactments of care towards the host community were at times also symbolically or imaginatively directed towards the volunteers' homes, generating affective resonances that linked the two places.

There was an overwhelming desire to participate in Mama's house, followed closely by the popularity of working with children. The project gave the volunteers a tangible sense of achievement through building the house from start to finish with their own hands and they were able to sense an emotional closeness to Mama, allowing them to witness her reactions and gratitude. As McGehee and Andereck (2004, p. 19) point out, volunteer tourists want to give 'but they also want to receive – they want to be thanked for their efforts and to feel good about what they have done.' Despite not being a child, Mama corresponds closely to Mostafanezhad's (2013a) depiction of the predominant object of compassion in volunteer tourism – a vulnerable, impoverished figure constructed as passive, destitute and in need of saving by the humanitarian gaze. While descriptions of Mama provided by the volunteer tourists usually fitted with these characteristics, allowing them to present themselves as her saviours, Linsey's narrative of Mama's generous gifts of food and drink pointed to the potential for conceptualising care as a more reciprocal activity within volunteer tourism (Sin 2010). Her account presented an exception to the normally accepted binary between active, Western care giver and passive, host care receiver that the practice has been taken as reinforcing (Barnett and Land 2007; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Silk 2004; Sin 2010).

I argue that the appeal held by Mama, which directed the volunteer tourists' efforts towards the house-building project, resulted in an individualisation of their caregiving practices. Projects such as the school toilet block or the new school classroom that was being constructed had the potential to generate more collective benefits for the host community but lacked the emotional connection to the beneficiaries, whereas the impact of the house was likely to be much smaller in scale but more profound for Mama, allowing the volunteer tourists to come away with a more recognisable sense of having helped somebody in desperate need. Indeed, a number of my participants explicitly

stated that they did not mind what kind of impact their volunteering had had on the host community as long as they had helped one person. This need for an emotional connection to the people helped through volunteer tourism carries potential benefits and risks for the industry. On the one hand, helping an individual such as Mama certainly produced a passion in the volunteers that led to strong commitment and hard work on the project; on the other hand, commercial programmes are to a certain extent dictated by the desires of their paying clientele and such individualisation in terms of the expected outcomes of volunteer work may result in the adaption of programmes to suit the desires of tourists rather than the needs of communities.

Thinking about help and care psychosocially offers an alternative perspective on the psychological implications of volunteer tourism. It would have been possible to talk about these data in a very different way, possibly just focusing on the satisfying nature of manual work and the individualism resulting from wanting to sense the tangibility of the work through a connection to beneficiaries, as I have just described. However, as Tom and Linsey's cases show, these trends and tendencies were underpinned by complicated meanings that implicated cultural norms as ways of establishing the worth of projects, biographical factors that created resonances between the houses constructed for the various Mamas and volunteers' own homes, and associations with the maternal as a signifier constructing the social coordinates of the encounter. Viewing the volunteering socio-biographically in this way enabled me to trace the contours of practices of care that may have been enacted in response to Mama's symbolic gaze at the same time as providing an imaginary function of reinforcing investments in the volunteers' family and home. Despite a Lacanian approach resisting a theorisation of subjectivity in which intimate bonds with and knowledge of the Other are possible, as in other psychosocial or feminist accounts of care, the analysis provided a way of examining fantasies of care and connection to others in a way that begins to explain the meanings associated with helping in volunteer tourism.

# PART III

IDEOLOGY AND TRANSFORMATIONS

**Chapter 8**

# Becoming grateful: poverty and transformation

> *One does not simply see more of the world ... one also accepts the invitation to become a better person.*
>
> *–Rojek and Urry 1997, p. 4*

Travel has long been associated with ideas of self-transformation. Through travelling there is a sense in which we can see our lives with renewed clarity, recognise desires and callings that previously appeared hidden from us, and ultimately forge new identities. Journeys have a 'capacity for mirroring the inner and outer dimensions that makes possible the "inner voyage", an archetypal form in which movement through the geographic world becomes an analogue for the process of introspection' (Stout 1983, p. 13). In volunteer tourism, or 'international service learning' as it is sometimes referred to in this context, this potential for change in self and identity has taken on a peculiarly moral character as the practice is framed by debates on experiential learning (Annette 2002; Coghlan and Gooch 2011; Crabtree 1998; Jones 2005; Kiely 2004; Kraft 2002; Lau 2012; Ross 2010; Wearing 2001), the development of cross-cultural understanding (Sin 2009; Raymond and Hall 2008; Simpson 2004; Nyaupane et al. 2008) and global citizenship (Lyons et al. 2012; McGehee and Santos 2005; Heron 2011; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Diprose 2012; Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011). As an activity which provides its participants not only with experience of other cultures but also with a supposedly altruistic, service-based purpose in instigating this contact, commentators have questioned whether volunteering abroad has the potential to foster 'global forms of

belonging, responsibility, and political action [which] counter the intolerance and ignorance that more provincial and parochial forms of citizenship encourage' (Lyons et al. 2012, p. 361). If this potential can be realised, creating forms of ethical subjectivity that would lead to more charitable, cosmopolitan, and socially responsible global citizens and more ethical consumers, then volunteer tourism could rightly be viewed as one pathway to global social transformation.

In part II, I explored some of the perceptions and representations of host communities that volunteer tourists produce. I discussed criticisms that the practice does not guarantee cross-cultural understanding through contact alone (Raymond and Hall 2008; Sin 2009) and in some cases even presents a regressive model in which tourists come away with reinforced stereotypes of people in Third World countries and rationalisations of poverty (Simpson 2005, 2004; Guttentag 2009). This chapter builds on this work by shifting the emphasis from representations of others to the integration of these experiences into the self through the creation of ethical identities as a traveller, citizen and consumer. Specifically, I analyse narratives of ethical transformation that are pervasive in the participants' accounts, in which many hope that through encountering poverty in Kenya they will become more appreciative for the luxuries that they took for granted back at home. I elucidate these narratives through conceptualising the volunteer tourists' travel as a youth experience framed by self-change discourses, which intersect with concerns about global citizenship.

### Gap years, service learning and pedagogy

Young people's engagement in volunteer tourism reflects a close association in the British context with the gap year and, more broadly, the cultural significance placed upon youth travel as a formative life experience. Recent estimates put gap year participation at between 250,000 and 350,000 people annually (Jones 2004) and the UK market for travellers aged 18 to 25 years at approximately 200,000 (Mintel 2005), accounting for a significant segment of the market. The pre-university gap year has become increasingly professionalised in recent years and with young people urged to undertake 'structured' and worthwhile activities volunteer tourism has been marketed as a suitable option due to its credentials as a prestigious, skill-enhancing, productive and ethical use of time 'out' from formal education or employment (Heath 2007; Simpson 2005; O'Reilly 2006; Munt 1994; Crossley and Duncan forthcoming). However, the modern day gap year's emphasis on skills and CV enhancement effectively means that it does not constitute time 'out' at all, but rather a set of activities and experiences designed to prepare students for further education or, equipped with a more 'global' attitude, for the transnational corporate employment market (Cremin 2007; Jones 2011; Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011; Vrasti 2013). It is in this context that the gap year has become framed by a pedagogical discourse, so much so that some providers in Australia, where school finishes in Year 12, have gone so far as to call the gap year 'Year 13' (Lyons et al. 2012) and others have noted how the gap year forms not only an extension of school but equally feeds back into further education, potentially enhancing the university experience (O'Shea 2011; King 2011).

Another relevant set of international youth volunteering practices which promotes the concept of skill development, cross-cultural learning and global citizenship but does not use the term volunteer tourism can be found in 'service learning' programmes run by many Western universities, particularly in countries such as the USA and Australia (Lyons and Wearing 2008b). The growth of international service learning (ISL), which entails many of the same activities as volunteer tourism, albeit undertaken within a more structured, reflective and educational framework, can be seen as reflecting a globalisation of higher education in which universities are under pressure to produce graduates with a 'global perspective' (Porter and Monard 2001; Heron 2011). As Robbin Crabtree describes the mission of ISL:

> The goals for linking international travel, education, and community service include increasing participants' global awareness and development of humane values, building intercultural understanding and communication, and enhancing civic mindedness and leadership skills.
>
> (2008, p. 18)

The interrelation between 'global awareness' and 'civic mindedness' is well captured in the concept of global citizenship, the development of which is promoted through ISL (Annette 2002; Kiely 2004; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). Diprose describes the process of developing global citizenship as one of 'building on experiences of transformed consciousness to radically reconfigure one's sense of rights and responsibilities within an imagined global community' (2012, p. 190). While many programmes stress the service element and reciprocity of working closely with a community abroad as formative of global citizenship, poverty—because ISL, as with volunteer tourism, most frequently involves the movement of Western travellers to Third World countries—is also posited as a factor which will promote concern for suffering and injustice in places and contexts distant from the students' own homes (Heron 2011; Kiely 2004).

While conventional volunteer tourism has been heralded by academic advocates as a transformative practice that can bring about positive changes in the self (Wearing 2002, 2001; Wearing and Neil 2000; Wearing et al. 2008; Matthews 2008; Grabowski 2013), ISL brings to the fore certain ethical and political dimensions that sometimes remain implicit in other forms of volunteering. For example, calls from within gap year volunteer tourism for greater pedagogy, structure and teaching travellers not only about cultural difference but also about the socio-economic, political and historical forces which bind together different societies (Simpson 2005, 2004; Barker and Smith 1996; Sin 2009) seem to be answered in ISL's focus on experiential, reflective learning and its attempt to move students from 'a charity orientation toward more of a social justice orientation' (Crabtree 2008, p. 26).[29] Similarly, in discussing moral transformations that

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[29] In its social justice emphasis, which is explicit in ISL and also finds expression in some forms of volunteer tourism, international youth volunteering could be identified as an example of 'justice tourism' (Scheyvens 2002, 2001; Higgins-Desboilles 2010, 2008). Higgins-Desboilles (2009) identifies volunteer tourism as existing midway along a spectrum of justice tourism, which spans from 'responsible tourism' at one end to 'transnational solidarity activism' at the other – a form of tourism that represents the greatest depth of

occurred in students that he led to Nicaragua, Richard Kiely describes how working alongside local communities allowed students to 'transform their sense of moral obligation into seeing the importance of building solidarity with the poor, valuing collective action, and using their power and privilege to support social change efforts rather than just "giving to the needy"' (2004, p. 13). Kiely also notes that on returning to their home country, students:

> feel compelled to act on their emerging global consciousness, which tends to involve significant personal risks and interpersonal conflicts, such as rejecting previous habits, ending relationships, changing jobs, engaging in counter-hegemonic practices, and resisting aspects of the dominant norms and rituals of mainstream U.S. culture.
>
> (2004, p. 16)

Kiely therefore claims that the moral and political transformations observed in volunteers goes beyond attitudes and changes in ways of thinking, with attempts made to bring their lifestyles in line with newfound values and sense of self.

However, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) make a similar argument for politicised learning in volunteer tourism. They suggest that the practice can be interpreted as a form of 'transformative learning' (Mezirow 1991) in which the tourist's social position and naturalised ideologies are critically re-evaluated through shared experiences with others. They illustrate this using data from Coghlan and Pearce (2010) in which a volunteer tourist reflects that 'it is sobering to realise how much you take for granted', concluding that the excerpt demonstrates 'the reappraisal of personal values, lifestyle choices and issues around development' (Coghlan and Gooch 2011, p. 721). While it is clear that such reflections do entail, at least to some extent, a reappraisal of one's life, what remains unexamined in this account are the ideological and longitudinal contexts surrounding the statement. What I mean by this is that our perspective on the statement can quickly change if one posits a normative expectation to perform such emotive, morally loaded reflections as part of the task of being a volunteer tourist. The authors also give little consideration to whether the reappraisal constitutes a lasting change for the volunteer tourist in how they see themselves, their travel practices, and the world around them.

By constructing international youth volunteering within an explicitly pedagogical and education related framework, the gap year and ISL create repercussions that are relevant for the type of volunteer tourism on which this research is based. The emphasis on learning frames youth volunteering as an activity designed to develop and enhance the traveller's self. This may be in a very practical, employability directed sense as advocated by structured travel through the gap year, involving the learning of soft-skills, languages and ways of living more independently, or the objectives may be broader. The range of potential changes is captured well in Kiely's (2004) six 'transforming forms', which includes moral, political, intellectual, personal, cultural and spiritual learning domains that he observed as developing through ISL. Similarly, within these

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solidarity with host communities facing injustice.

practices youth becomes naturalised as the obvious locus within the life course for the development of global citizenship as part of students' transition to responsible adulthood within a globalised world. Thus, within this pedagogical context, moral transformations are constructed not as a natural reaction to witnessing poverty in Third World countries but as part of a self-conscious practice of learning, development and self-improvement. Furthermore, particularly in the case of ISL, moral responses to poverty and suffering are guided by an imperative to *enact* newfound ethical subjectivity through more politicised actions such as lifestyle changes and activism (Kiely 2004; Crabtree 2008; O'Shea 2011). I argue, therefore, that the gap year and ISL bring together youth, pedagogy and international volunteering to provide normative models for self-improvement and ways of apprehending poverty and cultural difference that can be used to construct ethical subjectivity.

### Youth transitions and self-change narratives

A discussion of the youth dimension of volunteer tourists' claims of ethical transformation would not be complete without a wider consideration of the social construction of youth as a time of change, transition and development. That is to say, ethical self-change might be considered a subset of a broader set of narratives relating to self-change in a non-moralised context, such as backpacking or youth travel that does not conform to typical notions of a gap year. Conceived of as a social construction, our understanding of youth becomes intimately tied to changing social conditions and processes, and open to the possibility of following fluid, diverse forms rather than a rigid transitional format between childhood and adulthood (Barry 2005; Coles 1995; Wyn and White 1997). For example, the disembedding of traditional social structures and hierarchies, and new trends in employment and training pathways that have impacted on youth transitions within the late-modern period (Hall et al. 1999; France 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The effects that these changes have precipitated are threefold: first, there is a perception that youth in Western societies is now characterised by an increasingly protracted period of liminality and transition resulting from the delayed entry of many young people into full-time employment,[30] marriage, or financial independence; secondly, linear theorisations of youth transitions have largely been rejected in favour of more plural models that understand young people as experiencing a number of different transitional processes rather than a single rite of passage (James and Prout 1997); thirdly, transitions to adulthood are seen as more individualistically and self-consciously enacted as part of reflexive biographical identity projects (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Henderson et al. 2006). As a result, young people actively pursue travel as part of the creation of transitional experiences and constructions of possible future adulthoods and biographies.

In relation to these theorisations, youth travel has thus been conceptualised as one of multiple contemporary 'rites of passage' (Graburn 1983; Cohen 2003; O'Reilly 2006;

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[30]    Bynner (2001, p. 12) notes that despite this being a general trend within British society, the delay in taking on full-time employment needs to be contextualised as a highly classed phenomenon, with extended transitions through prolonged periods in education or training being the 'prerogative of the middle class'.

Beames 2004), providing both a way of 'postponing the assumption of adult responsibilities' (White and White 2004, p. 201) and a series of trials that permit young travellers to demonstrate their independence and maturity. Furthermore, these travel experiences can be used as narrative resources with which to construct adult or 'transitioning' biographies and identities as part of a more reflexive conceptualisation of self-identity (Desforges 2000; Giddens 1991). Narratives of self-change through travel certainly exceed the youth dimension and constitute part of the culturally recognisable patterns of accounting which all travellers draw upon to make sense of their experiences. Accordingly, self-discovery or transformation can form part of a plot in which travellers overcome adversity, such as the physical and mental endurances of climbing (Neumann 1992a), can be precipitated through meaningful encounters with other people and cultures (Desforges 1998), or by engaging in risky activities in an attempt to break with the mundane (Elsrud 2001). However, although not exclusively the remit of youth travel, self-change narratives may well take on extra significance for young travellers due to the socially constructed accent placed on this time of life as one of experimentation, growth and the trying on of adult identities.

The most comprehensive account of self-change narratives in young travellers provided to date can be found in the work of Chaim Noy (2007, 2004a, 2004b). 62% of the young Israeli backpackers he interviewed spontaneously commented on how their lives had changed through travelling, and when questioned specifically on this matter all of the other participants agreed that they had changed to some extent (Noy 2004a, p. 88). While the self-changes reported were usually quite vague, such as claims to have gained new self-knowledge, self-confidence, or a new 'attitude' in life, they were presented as significant in terms of the backpackers' identities and life trajectories (Noy 2004a, 2004b). He describes these narratives as articulations of identity occurring during 'dramatic episodes' or 'pivotal moments' in their biographies, showing an affinity to Giddens' (1991) concept of 'fateful moments'. However, rather than accepting such transformations as occurring organically and spontaneously from any given situation, as many of his participants' accounts suggested, Noy (2004a, p. 88) argues that positive personal change is an 'inherent feature of the rhetoric' surrounding youth travel:

> [I]t is noteworthy that all descriptions refer exclusively to positive and beneficial changes. It suggests that within their rhetoric the transformative theme is a powerful, inherent one, and that consequently, "being a backpacker" amounts to experiencing personal change and narratively testifying to this experience.
>
> (2004a, p. 90)

This invites us to ask whether a degree of rhetorical inevitability to the collective self-change narrative extends to other groups of backpackers, young travellers, or volunteer tourists, and, secondly, whether these claims of transformation should be understood as purely discursive constructions presented as part of an identity performance in interaction within the interview setting (see also Uriely et al. 2003). This is also reminiscent of Dann's (1996, p. 65) suggestion that tourism can be viewed as a tautology in which tourists 'merely confirm the discourse which persuaded them to take

the trip'.

Remarkably little is known about how the ethical impetus of volunteer tourism intersects with these processes of self-change in youth travel. Some inquiries have been made into the basis of volunteer tourists' participation in terms of ethical values or altruistic tendencies (Gray and Campbell 2007; Mustonen 2007), changes in ethical perspectives and subjectivity as a result of encountering poverty through volunteer tourism (Zahra and McIntosh 2007; Zahra 2011; Crossley 2013, 2012a, 2012b) and practical outcomes of an increased ethical awareness such as charitable and activist activities (McGehee and Santos 2005; Kiely 2004). The part played by poverty in these changes is even less known, although some work suggests that volunteer (or other) tourists often come away from their travels feeling 'lucky' due to their wealth and privileges as a Western subject, which is performed as an indication of moral self-change having occurred (Simpson 2005, 2004; Pearce 2012; Tiessen 2012; Snee 2013). Indeed, Simpson's (2004) gap year participants said that they felt 'luck' as opposed to 'guilt' when reflecting on the poverty that they had seen. She refers to this trend as a 'lotto logic' of social justice in which global disparities in wealth are explained by the luck of the draw rather than by structural factors (Quinby 2002). While I support Simpson's critical stance, her proposed solution of providing travellers with more information about the systemic causes of poverty seems to miss the point that when these tourists say that they feel lucky they are making a *moral* statement about themselves and how they are attempting to ethically deal with their encounters of poverty.

In a retrospective study of young volunteer tourists, Anne Zahra and Alison McIntosh (2007; Zahra 2011) conducted interviews between 7 and 18 years after participants had taken part in volunteer tourism programmes. This study sought to probe the meanings that remained after this significant lapse of time and attempted to demonstrate the lasting impact of sustained contact with cultural and economic difference through tourism, with former volunteer tourists reporting personal, arguably ethical, transformations such as relinquishing materialistic attitudes in favour of a greater focus on their families, having become more aware of social justice issues and involved in activism, becoming more giving towards other people in their lives and being more concerned with bringing happiness to others. In Zahra and McIntosh's (2007) write-up of the study, one aspect of these transformative narratives that is foregrounded is the volunteer tourists' emotions or 'catharsis', which they define as an 'emotional release following the witness of tragic event(s) that lead to a moral influence on the person that is later transferred into virtuous action' (p. 115). The suffering and poverty that was witnessed left a deep impression on the volunteer tourists which had at the time 'provoked emotive reactions including sentimental outbursts of grief, tears, action, giving away money, and even escape' (p. 117). While Zahra and McIntosh do not demonstrate precisely how these reactions linked to the transformative narratives, their work implies that the affective force and shock of these experiences contributes to the volunteer tourists' reassessment of their lives.

Diprose (2012, p. 190) notes that within social justice pedagogy there is an 'emphasis on the primacy of emotional response, recognising the humanity in others, as the catalyst for acting ethically' (see also Freire 2001; Osler and Starkey 2003). In addition to resonating with Zahra and McIntosh's findings, this observation of the link between emotional connection to others and ethical action supports my argument in Chapter 7 regarding the need for a cosmopolitan ethics to be grounded in a relational conception of subjectivity and embodied practices of care rather than in abstract ideals. Just as Tom and Linsey were able to enact ethical agency by way of their perceived emotional connection to Mama, so Zahra and McIntosh also emphasise the importance of experiencing an emotional response to others in claiming to have undergone an ethical transformation. At the same time, such catharsis also echoes the emotional and very public process of using poverty to attain gratitude that was observed in the reality television travel programmes of Chapter 3, in which featured travellers would frequently present tearful testimonials attesting to their transformed worldview. This suggests a complex interplay between affective processes that enable subjectivity to be transformed in an ethical sense and the cultural models of emotional performance that infuse the imaginary of volunteer tourism.

There are several ways in which our understanding of such catharsis in the process of self-transformation can be enhanced using a Lacanian theorisation, which involves viewing poverty as a lack that is both threatening to and desired by the volunteer tourist. Poverty can be theorised as a symbolic lack in the Other, representing an economic and material deficit in what is culturally accepted as a normal standard of living which is threatening to the Western subject not only because it highlights the incompleteness of the Symbolic order but also because it challenges the subject's position of wealth. The unsettling nature of poverty as a lack arising simultaneously in the Other and, in a moral sense, in the volunteer tourist's subjectivity is in part, together with cultural narratives of self-change through travel and emotional performance, the driving force behind claims of ethical transformation. Asserting that a moral change has arisen from encounters with poverty not only allows the volunteer tourist to perform ethical subjectivity in line with the demands of the ethical injunction, but provides a defensive function by changing the guilt that may be associated with poverty for Western subjects into something positive and allowing poverty to fantasmatically conceal its own lack through the volunteer tourist's self-construction as a more ethically complete person.

The narratives that I present below attempt to tie together bodies of literature on youth, learning and citizenship, self-change narratives, and emotional transformations in the face of poverty in Third World tourism. After a brief reflexive exploration of my own response to the poverty-privilege nexus that characterised many of the volunteer tourists' experiences in Kenya, the interview data are organised into two sections. The first section uses the accounts of Amy, Kate and Tess to investigate the ideological dimension of claims to having been ethically transformed, making the argument that encounters with poverty are used to reinforce enjoyment of Western consumer culture by allowing tourists to favourably re-evaluate their own lives. The second section explores the reasons why two of the volunteer tourists, Sarah and Linsey, did not

experience an ethical self-change, which I argue is because of the lack of shock and affective resonance that they felt in Kenya. Together, these sections present a less naïve explanation of ethical transformation narratives that takes into account the social context to which volunteer tourists return, together with addressing potential barriers to positive self-change.

### Ethical transformations

#### *Privilege, shock and change*

We arrived at the primary school where we would be creating the aloe vera garden, disembarking from the bus into a sunny courtyard surrounded by tall, cool trees and grass. A teacher welcomed us to the school and explained the work that we would be doing there. After a morning of making posters to decorate the classroom walls, I went for a wander around the building and happened upon a room signed as being the library:

> *I felt quite shocked by the four dusty bookcases, many of the shelves empty or scattered with droppings. There seemed to be adequate textbooks, but nothing more, with some books in such a poor state that they were practically crumbling. ... I thought of all the books and computers that our primary schools have and was really quite upset. I kept thinking that I wanted to help, maybe by doing some sort of sponsored event to raise money for the school.*

I imagine a library to be a place full of colour and inspiration, crammed full of books that are neatly organised by genre. This barren place, with its disorder and faded, tired looking book covers, was the antithesis of what I felt a library should be. Later, I asked the teacher whether the school was adequately resourced and he told us that it was not. He said that the school was particularly keen to get some computers so that they would be linked up to the outside world. I experienced similar feelings of shock, upset and wanting to help at other schools that we visited, looking aghast at the crumbling buildings and overcrowded classrooms and being confronted by a recognition of the generous educational facilities that I had enjoyed as a child and university student.

The extent of my educational and financial privilege was brought home to me during a conversation with one of the volunteer tourism organisation's staff members in Kenya. We had been discussing how the Kenyan education system works compared to the UK, and in particular how financial barriers prevent many students from progressing on to secondary school. The young man told me about his aspirations to continue his studies, saying that he was applying for bursaries to go to university but that it would be a struggle to secure funding. He then asked whether I had been to university and it was with some embarrassment that I admitted to him that I already had two degrees and was now completing my third. I explained that the Masters and PhD degrees were funded, possibly in an attempt to distance myself from the associations of wealth and privilege that my qualifications may have signified for him. Again I felt a strong sense of wanting to do something to help this young man, to find out about scholarships available in my university, to help with his bursary application, or something.

**Figure 27.** Inside the library at Mukuyana School. *Source:* Author.

Clearly, in my own case, these issues of educational access, resources and privilege resonated strongly due to my position and identity as a university student and lecturer, provoking a strong emotional response that led me to imagine how I might be able to help these schools beyond the volunteering that we were already carrying out. The idea of doing a sponsored run to help the primary school became a waking fantasy that I indulged in over the coming weeks and months. I often thought about the moment when I would send the cheque to the school, about how virtuous I would feel and how much happiness the money would bring to the teachers and pupils. What is disheartening about this is how over time the original impetus to help a struggling educational system and community became distorted into a fantasy about the moral glory and recognition that *I* would achieve by doing the run. This was related to a profound desire not to forget about the poverty that I saw in Kenya. Nearly ten years earlier I had travelled to India with my high school and borne witness to the most appalling, degrading examples of homelessness, illness and destitution and after that experience I had sworn never to forget. After returning to the UK, I was filled with a sense of wanting to carry forward these experiences of Kenya into my everyday consumer practices, political activities and charitable donations. Thoughts of doing the sponsored run lingered for a while but I never took any serious steps towards making it happen and gradually, with time, those thoughts disappeared.

My own example differs from the narratives of other volunteer tourists that I will analyse in the sections below in that I did not hope to become grateful for what I had back home in the West, possibly because I was so familiar with this transformational discourse and because of my very different reasons for being on the trip. However, the desire to become a more ethical person by performing these charitable acts once back in the UK certainly shared elements with the self-change impulse. What seemed vital for me was the experience of shock in the face of poverty; even though in the end I did not translate my fantasy into action, without the emotions that I felt in the library the seed of

wanting to do something charitable for the school might not have even been planted. Finally, I think it is significant that the narcissistic aspect of my fantasy of helping fed into the dominant charity oriented norm of responding to poverty that has been critiqued by advocates, such as those working in the ISL tradition, of fostering solidarity with people living in poverty and of a social justice approach (Crabtree 2008; Kiely 2004). Reflecting on my privilege and failure to transform ethically allowed me to consider more empathetically the difficult pathways taken by other volunteer tourists. In the following two sections, I explore various successes and failures of the self-change narrative using a critical, ideological lens in order to produce a politicised appreciation of why tourists seek out what they describe as 'life-changing' travel.

### *Ideological functions of gratitude*

*Émilie*: What are the different things that you're hoping to get out of, of going?

*Amy*:  Um, I think to kind of have a bit more respect for like everything that I own at the moment. 'Cause I mean I've got a new iPod, a new phone, a new camera. Like some people have never seen that before. Like, well they have but they never can, can conceive of owning that. Um, just kind of a bit more appreciation for everything, um 'cause I've recognised that what I have is, you know, really great like, I shouldn't be so *(laughs)* like down in myself really like thinking you've got nothing when actually (.) you've got so much more than a lot of people have.

(Interview 1)

The words that Amy uses to map out the changes that she would like to see in herself recurred throughout the volunteer tourists' prospective narratives: 'appreciation', 'respect', 'gratitude', 'luck' and 'perspective'. All felt that the experience of travelling and being brought into contact with poverty would engender an ethical and psychological change in them; for some this change meant being less materialistic while for others an accent was placed on renewing their appreciation of family and friends. In all of these accounts, the change was framed as an ethical one that involved an awakening and willingness to confront not only the poverty that they would encounter but also their own positionality in relation to it. It was in this context that I found Amy's account intriguing because of the way that she seemed to draw on this ostensibly ethical narrative to reinforce her enjoyment of expensive possessions – her 'really great' things. This was a strategy that on the surface appeared positive due to the ungratefulness that Amy would be liberated from, but it relied implicitly on a negative evaluation of the Kenyan people's lack of material wealth in order to elevate the status of her own assets.

Amy's account got me thinking about the ways in which this transformative travel narrative might be deployed by volunteer tourists as a way of using their experiences of poverty in Africa to reinforce rather than challenge their existing lifestyles in the West. At the time of travelling to Kenya, Kate was preparing to start work for a major corporation in London. When I asked her how she hoped that she would change as a result of the trip, her response indicated that the travel was a way of preparing her for the new life that awaited her:

> *Kate*:   I think just kind of make myself appreciate how much, oh god this all sounds so horribly clichéd. [*Émilie*: (*laughs*)] Um (*laughs*) be a great sound bite for you.
>
> *Émilie*: I know!
>
> *Kate*:   Make myself appreciate like (.) what you've got and (.) I'm probably gonna come back (*coughs*) come back after this, have a clear out my entire house and empty my wardrobe and all (*laughs*) you know. Probably not, but d'you know what I mean? Just, I don't think we realise how lucky we are and (.) I want to (.) just see how other people live and (.) help other people and yeah (*laughs*) It's all true it just sounds really horrible when you say it. ... I've just never, I've never been to a Third World country before. And I really want to, 'cause as I said I'm going to work in a big city where life revolves around money and I just want to get a bit of perspective before I go and throw myself into that kind of lifestyle.
> (Interview 1)

Kate hoped that her travels to a poor country would provide her with some resilience against the dominant money-centred mind-set of life in the city, suggesting that she might even go so far as to reject some of her material possessions. However, she also seemed intensely aware of the transformative travel discourse upon which she was drawing to make these claims (Noy 2004a, 2004b), referring to her opinions as clichéd and sounding 'horrible'. This reflexivity allowed Kate to simultaneously deploy this discourse and distance herself from it, for example by suggesting that she would get rid of her belongs only to state, 'probably not'. We find a similar example of this from the second interview:

> *Émilie*: Um (.) d'you think this is making you think about certain values, perspectives or anything like that?
>
> *Kate*:   … Um, be less materialistic, just value friends and loved ones and family more. … Which is easy to say now isn't *it*. [*Émilie*: (*laughs*)] When we get back I won't change.
> (Interview 2)

By showing her ethical intentions but remaining noncommittal about whether or not she would actually undergo an ethical transformation—possibly due to the sense of distance from her own experience created by Kate's awareness of drawing on a collective discourse of change—Kate was able to present herself as ethical while also protecting herself from potential accusations that she had not changed enough.

By the time of Kate's first retrospective interview there had been a subtle shift in the way that she framed the ethical characteristics of her self-change. Whereas her earlier accounts had focused on the need to become less materialistic and to rid herself of unnecessary possessions, now Kate's appreciative perspective led her to embrace the abundance and luxury of her Western lifestyle:

> *Kate*:   I love the Western world. Coming back to my bedroom. I couldn't believe how big it was, like wow, it just, you just realise how lucky we are and I've appreciated stuff so much more. … So it did exactly what I wanted it to do which is fantastic. I got to see a new culture, I got to appreciate how much I like what I have and how much I wanted to go back to it and things. …

> Yeah it did exactly what I wanted it to do and I dunno it's like a little com-compartment to my life which seems so bizarre now but it happened t- but now [*Émilie*: Really?] it seems, well it's, I think whenever you go somewhere completely different it's, it, you do have to compartmentalise it 'cause it's so different and it was a short space of time in your life.
> (Interview 3)

Similar to Amy, Kate was able to use her experiences of poverty abroad to positively evaluate her own life and possessions, allowing her to return to the house move and new job that might otherwise have seemed more daunting. As Cremin's (2007) analysis of the ideological functions of the gap year argues, Kate seems to measure the success of her travel by its ability to return her to normality, to 'the same', rather than in its potential to instigate a new, perhaps more ethical way of life. In this context, we can interpret Kate's need to compartmentalise her experiences in Kenya as not only an inability to assimilate them into her everyday life due to their difference, but as a defensive attempt to bracket off memories of poverty that threaten to undo the enjoyment that she now derives from her luxuries and lifestyle. Her use of the term 'lucky' also echoes findings from Simpson's (2004) research suggesting that volunteer tourists are quick to employ depoliticised conceptualisations of their relation to poverty, rather than considering their position within global systems that produce inequalities.

The final and perhaps most complex example of the discourse of gratitude providing an ideological function, in terms of reinforcing the volunteer tourists' enjoyment of their Western consumer lifestyle, comes from Tess. At the time we first met, Tess had just finished her degree and was about to start looking for work with a possibility of having to move out of her parental home. Of all of the participants in my cohort, Tess came from the most affluent background:

> *Tess*: I consider myself from quite a good background like no, not- mean not like privile- not, you know, exceptionally privileged and everything. You know I went to like private school and, my parents worked hard though and like (.) wasn't spoilt or anything but I was brought up, when you go to private school you're brought up around people who (.) you know everyone's quite the same, you know their parents do have money and it's like there's no, not that much diversity? … So I think that's another reason like it's qu- be quite nice to go out and like meet you know and like experience culture and see, and just I think you'll come back and just feel <u>so</u> grateful for what you have?
> (Interview 1)

Tess recognises the potentially negative connotations associated with coming from what she refers to as a 'good background' and is quick to clarify that her private education was funded through her parents' hard work and that she was not 'spoilt' as a child. Her hesitation in terms of identifying fully with what might be considered an upper-class subject position seemed to suggest that Tess had experienced a degree of conflict regarding her identity. In another part of the interview, Tess reiterated this point by saying that she and her friends who attended the private school with her were all very 'humble', aware of the privileges bestowed upon them by their parents, and grateful for

everything that they had. She also described to me difficult childhood experiences of being mocked by other children as she travelled to school, easily identified as one of the rich kids by her private school uniform. For Tess, then, being able to present herself as 'grateful' appeared to be the continuation of a process that she had long been rehearsing in her domestic context due to being stereotyped and treated prejudicially for her family's social status and wealth.

When I asked how she expected to find Kenya, Tess told me how she anticipated being very emotional in response to witnessing poverty:

> *Tess*: I'll be quite overwhelmed I think and I'll probably get a little bit emotional …
>
> *Émilie*: When you say you'll feel overwhelmed, by what?
>
> *Tess*: By like, just like how differen-, just like culture shock, like how different um like it is for them but then I think like (.) that what I've heard from people who've done this kind of thing, they're so happy. They're so happy, it's not like they're there and they're sad because they don't have like a T-, like TV. And like they're just happy in like their way of life. I suppose they're not used to anything else so I think I'll be overwhelmed to think, so much gratitude for everything we have.
> (Interview 1)

As Tess begins to go into the details of the 'differences' that she expects to encounter, she is quick to reassure herself that this poverty will not trouble the Kenyan people, repeatedly saying that they are 'happy'. As I discussed in Chapter 6, this recurring 'poor-but-happy' discourse established a set of imaginary identifications with the local people. They were idealised not only as completed through a contentment not grounded in materialism but also as examples of the ethical, grateful subjects that the volunteer tourists aspired to becoming. However, this passage seems to articulate a fragile fantasy. Tess attempts to portray the Kenyans as poor-but-happy, defending against possible guilt arising from the disparity in her and the Kenyans' level of wealth, and yet the transformative discourse that she draws on constructs poverty as tragic and moving, which provokes the emotional response and gratitude that she is expecting. Thus, the image that Tess constructs of the happy poor is undermined by her more subtle inferences regarding the undesirable nature of poverty.

The instability in her fantasmatic characterisation of the local people appeared to intensify during Tess's time in Kenya. Tess told me how she had come across a young boy in one of the villages who looked sad and was unable to play with the other children. This was apparently because he was ill and his parents could not afford to send him to a doctor:

> *Tess*: I didn't want to cry, I hate crying near them 'cause they like just must think like, I don't know, I don't want to look like they're a sob story, d'you know what I mean? [*Émilie:* Yeah] I don't want them to think like, it's fine, they're happy, 'cause they are, most like the majority of people are so happy here like I'm sure they didn't (.) ask for mo-, some ask for more but you know they all seem quite happy but I really just had to walk away and just kind of collect myself but that's the only thing that really

got to me 'cause it just, they're so <u>young</u> I suppose and like (.) don't
know, they deserve more I suppose.
(Interview 2)

This encounter provided the catalyst for the emotional response that Tess had
anticipated. The sick boy was clearly not happy, his ill health the result of his family's
poverty, and yet Tess tried to reassure herself that he was just an exception and that the
'majority of people' there were content and would not 'ask for more'. As well as
demonstrating the operation of defences against the threatening potential of this poverty,
the passage also shows Tess struggling with the divergent ethical demands of the
situation which required her to simultaneously acknowledge the unhappiness that she
witnessed (partly in order to develop her gratitude, as I have suggested) whilst not
portraying the local people as lacking, deficient, or as a 'sob story'. Her final point
about the boy, or the children more generally, being so young and 'deserving more'
suggests to me part of the reason why this encounter resonated so strongly for Tess. As
we have seen in previous chapters, the children formed a central locus of the volunteer
tourists' desire—the perfect vision of innocence and contentment—so for this same
figure to be presented as wretched and miserable represented the ultimate undermining
of the more general fantasy of Kenya's happy poor that protected the volunteers from
fully reflecting on their own positionality.

Tess did not talk about this incident once we had returned to the UK and when asked
to reflect on how the experience had changed her personally what emerged most
powerfully from her narrative was a sense of relief at having not changed too much:

> *Tess*: I was worried I was gonna come back and be like completely different. Not
> worried n- but a bit like god I hope I don't change too dramatically as a
> person and I'll have all these different views and, but I think I've changed
> for the better. You know, I'm a lot more independent, I'm <u>so</u> much better
> with money now … I'm much more grateful for everything back home now.
> (Interview 3)

Tess positions her newfound gratitude within a set of other achievements linked more
generally to maturation. Her anxieties about changing too much as a result of her travels
seem to reflect an awareness of the discourses of self-change surrounding volunteer
tourism and youth travel, as she later told me about hearing of other people returning
from similar life-altering travel experiences. These people, she suggested, returned with
such radically different views and values that they were no longer able to get along with
family and friends. Her unwillingness to undergo a more profound transformation also
emphasises the paradoxical and pervasive tendency for the volunteer tourists to use their
transformative experiences to return them to their everyday lives. Given Tess's socio-
economic background, the appeal of claiming to be grateful can be seen as not only a
way of managing her travel to a developing country but also a way of reinforcing a
modest outlook on her privilege, protecting her from accusations of being spoilt or
snobbish – achieved in such a way that did not modify her identity.

For Amy, Kate and Tess, becoming grateful or appreciative did not seem to be about

changing completely as a person but about gaining something extra,[31] something required by the imperative to perform and construct ethical subjectivity that, on the contrary, allowed the volunteer tourists to maintain their core sense of self and everyday life relatively intact. As a way of upholding rather than destabilising the status quo of their society (in terms of the valorisation of consumption, materialism and money), I have argued that gratitude was implicated in a broader set of ideological processes of subjectification. The volunteer tourists returned home able to continue contributing to their society not in spite of their encounters with poverty in Kenya but precisely *because of them*, through a process that redirected their desire to the West and reframed their enjoyment of wealth as ethical because they no longer took their luxuries and privileges for granted. For several of the volunteer tourists, this process of reassurance that they could take pride and pleasure in their existing way of life came at a time of change and uncertainty about their future, showing the importance of youth transitions and the reflexive process of identity-formation at the crucial time of life in enabling and framing the ethical transformations (Desforges 2000; Giddens 1991).

### Lack of shock and change

It is possible to understand the discourse of gratitude as much through the narratives of volunteer tourists who reported that they had not undergone a personal change as through those who did. In the first interview with Sarah, I asked whether there were any elements of the trip that she was excited or anxious about; a question which prompted her to think about the emotions that she was anticipating in response to the poverty:

*Sarah*:   Um, well both I suppose for like working in an orphanage, 'cause that's gonna be like horrible to see everything that goes on, but then it's gonna be amazing to be helping? I suppose that everything's a bit like that. But building is just building, isn't it. Like you can't get all the absolute emotions from building, but yeah when you go and like see people, like the way they live, that's like exciting and I'm anxious about it. Because I know that I'll be like, I'll cry, I'll be like o-h! *(Laughs)*

*Émilie*: Really?

*Sarah*:   It'll be sad, won't it, to see everyone like that. But it'll be really good as well, so I'm like excited and anxious altogether. All the emotions *(laughs)*

*Émilie*: Yeah (.) So, um, you think you'll be quite emotional about it then.

*Sarah*:   I imagine so, yeah. Because I, like I'll realise how lucky I am. Because I like, I live in like the countryside, but I've got like a big house, a swimming pool, a big garden. I've got everything I could need. So then I'll go out there and they're like living in these like little huts with, well and they're just living off what they can. Whereas I've got everything I could need and if I need something, if I haven't got the money then I know that my mum and dad can get it for me. So, going to see them like that will be a bit like (.) you'll realise everything that you've got and feel bad *(laughs)* wanna give them stuff.
(Interview 1)

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[31]   Constructed as a psychological asset that can simply be tagged onto the volunteer tourists' subjectivity, the discourse of gratitude echoes Lisle's (2010) critique of the 'progressive' cosmopolitan agenda that conceptualises ethics rather mechanistically as something that can be added to existing tourism practices.

Like her brother, Tom, Sarah was also keen to volunteer in an orphanage. In this passage, she places a strong emphasis on her pursuit of emotions in Kenya, framing the type of people-work within the orphanage as a way of experiencing emotions that she felt would not be available through the construction projects, in contrast to the strong affective significance placed on Mama's house in Chapter 7. Sarah then goes on to contrast her lavish 'big house' to the 'little huts' that she expects the Kenyans to be living in and her ready source of capital available from her parents to the Kenyans' subsistence existence. She suggests that such a stark comparison of living standards will draw attention to her own wealth and make her feel 'sad', 'bad' and 'lucky', creating a link between acknowledging her privilege, responding emotionally to this, and subsequently undergoing an ethical transformation.

Sarah drew on the 'poor-but-happy' discourse in an unusual way, arguing that the Kenyans' contentment with their poverty would only make the situation even sadder:

> *Sarah*: You'll probably find they're really happy like and happy with what they get and everything, which is kind of even more sad you th-, you realise what else they could have and how ecstatic they'd be if they were living our lives. … Probably gonna wanna like bring back a load of them. *(Laughter)* Like adopt a kid or something, bringing it back with me. … I'll come back and (.) be, well be like a nicer person 'cause you know you're gonna be so grateful. (Interview 1)

Sarah makes a simple equation between material wealth and happiness, reasoning that if the people are happy with very little then they would be 'ecstatic' to live her life. This was in contrast to the argument made by many of the other volunteer tourists who suggested that the locals' contentment was derived from a different set of values. She reiterates that the 'sad' situation of the Kenyans' poverty will have a positive transformative effect on her, making her more grateful. Also, in both of the extracts above, Sarah adopts a paternalistic attitude towards the Kenyans' plight by suggesting, however jokingly, that she would be able to help them by 'giving them stuff' or bringing back 'a load of them', showing an urge to draw them into the comfortable sphere of her own life.

Despite this extensive discussion of her expectations of being ethically changed, once we had arrived in Kenya this feature of Sarah's narrative seemed to disappear. I asked her in the second interview whether she had become emotional but she told me that the happy appearance of the locals had prevented her from feeling the pity that she had expected:

> *Sarah*: Not, not really 'cause everyone seems, like I haven't spoken to anyone that's not happy. Everyone seems really happy with everything and I think that (.) like, well I think that they're, they seem happier to us as well, I think they kind of put it on like 'cause we're like white people. … But (.) yeah no I haven't really felt emotional because everyone seems really happy with the way everything is (.) and we're helping anyway so, there's no one that seems (.) unhappy about the situation.
> (Interview 2)

Instead of feeling sad in the presence of the 'happy poor', the locals' happiness had prevented Sarah from experiencing the emotions that she had thought would come from witnessing tragic scenes of deprivation; the emotions that would also act as a catalyst for her ethical transformation. As a consequence, she never claimed to feel more lucky or grateful after returning from her travels. However, Sarah expressed suspicion that this happiness was an act put on by the locals for the 'white people' (meaning the volunteer tourists), implying that the suffering she had expected and hoped to see *did* exist but was concealed from view for foreign visitors, leaving open the possibility that she could still encounter it at some point. Sarah also continued to be very interested in volunteering at an orphanage for part of her stay, as she had mistakenly thought that this would be one of the core projects, which I believe was an extension of her pursuit of emotional experiences.

Linsey had not talked about wanting to gain 'appreciation' or a new 'perspective' before leaving and her reflections on not having changed only came to light during the third interview:

> *Linsey*: I thought though when I'd come back I'd be like all like keeping everything, like corned beef like "No that'll come in handy" and be like "No don't buy this". Like I dunno I just thought like I'd take things, I wouldn't take things for granted anymore. I went out, the next day I went out shopping and spent *like* forty quid like, d'you know what I mean.
>
> *Émilie*: Really?
>
> *Linsey*: I was like, this is quite bad isnt' it? … But um I've not, I've not come back how I thought I would come back.
>
> *Émilie*: Really?
>
> *Linsey*: But um (.) yeah and I'm still eating god knows how much food when I should be, should be thinking "Oh no, can't, I wish I hadn't eat this other biscuit 'cause there are people out there in Africa that don't have any food and stuff". No, I'll eat it anyway, *so*. I, I've like haven't come back how like I expected to but it's not a bad thing.
> (Interview 3)

Linsey thought she would become less wasteful, not take things for granted, and that the poverty she had witnessed in Africa would affect her everyday behaviour. However, she found herself consuming and spending money as usual without thinking about the people she had come into contact with, leaving her trying to reassure herself that this lack of ethical transformation was 'not a bad thing'. Later in the interview, we tried to explore the possible reasons why Linsey had not changed and this led her to reflect upon how the poverty in Kenya did not shock her as she had expected and how it did not feel 'real':

> *Linsey*: It's really weird as well 'cause I thought if I saw someone with no shoes on and like living in just like walking round the street and like living in houses like that it would really like, like be really shocking? But I was there and w-the first day we met them kids when we were playing football and that. And like it was just like (.) literally normal like I just stepped into it straight away and like they didn't have shoes on and they had tattered clothes and everything but it didn't even like, it didn't even cross my mind that they

didn't have that on and stuff. And 'cause Lisa kept crying every time she saw people like poor and everything. But I dunno why it just, it just didn't seem, 'cause ev- <u>everyone</u> was like that. And I dunno I think 'cause I expected it it didn't seem, it come as a shock or anything and I didn't even like notice it or anything like. Um it didn't affect me at all, which I thought it would which is really strange. … Like just didn't, didn't seem to like really grasp the fact that people were living like that until I've come away from it and looked at it, so. … I think 'cause like, that's what you think of when you think of Africa and stuff. And you see it on the telly and you, tha-that's what I expected to see I think, so it didn't really. Dunno. I, I just thought I'd become, come back a lot more like, really like appreciative as well but. But to be truthful I don't think like anything like that's really changed? Like 'cause it feels like it wasn't even real and I've come back it just, I just go on with my normal life how I would've before like. … Probably bad isn't it.

(Interview 3)

Linsey describes a scene of poverty—of inadequate housing and tattered clothes—that she had expected to find shocking and which made Lisa cry (whose case we will come to in Chapter 9), yet because this was the norm it left her feeling unaffected. Elaborating on this further, Linsey suggests that it was both the lack of contrast within the visited communities and the aesthetic conformity of the local people to the media images she had been presented with that prevented her from being emotionally affected. The local people resembled stereotypical images of rural African poverty, an image she was already familiar with and therefore did not find surprising or shocking. As I showed in my reflexive account, the potential to enact ethical changes can be difficult upon return from the volunteer tourism site even when one has been shocked, so Linsey, with her complete lack of emotional response, stood little chance.

Linsey's response could also be related to the way in which this stereotype of African society became the object of volunteer tourists' desires through being perceived as an example of cultural and topographical authenticity (see Part II); as I explained above, this desirous force may have enticed Linsey to inadvertently enjoy the locals' poverty rather than find it problematic. Because there was no social contrast (other than that provided by the volunteer tourists) that might have destabilised poverty as the norm and revealed the fantasmatic qualities of this stereotype, it remained key to Linsey's perception of the communities and instrumental in preventing her from being affected and undergoing any kind of ethical transformation. Furthermore, Linsey explained how her experience in Kenya did not feel 'real', such was the difference of the situation from her everyday reality. So even when she returned to the UK and was able to reflect upon the poverty that she had encountered, she was unable to integrate insights that she gained retrospectively into her life and so she just 'goes on with her normal life how she would've before'. This also resonates with the 'compartmentalisation' of travel that Kate talked about in her account.

Throughout the interview, Linsey alternates between judging her lack of change as 'bad' and 'not bad', between accepting the pressure of internalised ethical demands and trying to downplay their importance to maintain a positive self-presentation and sense of moral integrity. This is in contrast to Sarah, who did not seem concerned by her

abandonment of the goal of ethical change, or at least did not reveal so in the interviews. The examples of Sarah and Linsey demonstrate that ethical transformations are not simply rhetorical in nature. It would have been easy for all of the volunteer tourists to claim that they had become better, more ethical people through their travels, thereby presenting themselves in a positive light to interlocutors, but not all did and even for those who became more 'appreciative' the path to this state was not always straightforward. Rather, transformations were dependent on, and modulated by, a complex mix of discourses, affects, perceptions of poverty, psychic defences, and fantasies in which volunteer tourists were invested. These examples also seem to support Zahra and McIntosh's (2007) findings regarding the cathartic dimension of ethical transformation in volunteer tourism; both Sarah and Linsey failed to be shocked by their surroundings, therefore missing out on the emotional release that featured in the other participants' accounts.

## Conclusion

The accounts of ethical transformation through volunteer tourism presented in this chapter illustrate the diverse possibilities of subjectivity arising from a similar starting point of wanting to construct a more grateful, ethical self after coming into contact with poverty. They also demonstrate the potential of longitudinal data generation for exploring self-change, and continuity, over time. These narratives include rejections and embracements of materialism, a new recognition of the importance of family and friends, and assertions that an internal value change had occurred, corroborating the findings of Zahra and McIntosh (2007) and Zahra (2011). In relation to the youth dimension which I used to frame this chapter, several of the participants listed their ethical transformations alongside other changes in the self linked with maturation, such as Tess's greater responsibility with money, and with the process of learning about self and Other more generally. This lends support to Kiely's (2004) theorisation of moral learning as just one pedagogical domain amongst six 'transforming forms' that are affected through international youth volunteering. The finding also allows us to conceptualise ethical change as an important yet hitherto under-explored component of the reflexive building of identity among young people in late modern societies (Giddens 1991; Desforges 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Henderson et al. 2006). However, in contrast to Noy's (2007, 2004a, 2004b) work, claims of positive self-change did not appear to be a rhetorical inevitability of participating in this form of youth travel, with volunteer tourists such as Sarah and Linsey returning morally unchanged.

In terms of the potential of volunteer tourism to foster radical, political change in its clients and an awakening of global citizenship, as advocated by the sister practice of ISL (Kiely 2004; Crabtree 2008; O'Shea 2011; Annette 2002; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012), these interviews reveal a much more inward looking and less politicised picture. The emphasis that the participants placed was on a change in their perspective and values rather than in altering their lifestyle, and many did not seem to make the move advocated by Crabtree (2008, p. 26) from 'a charity orientation toward more of a social

justice orientation'. Despite my own experiences of shock in the face of poverty and recognition of my own educational privilege, at times I felt gripped by a powerful fantasy of charity that reinforced the dichotomy between active helper and passive receiver of help. In these reveries, I anticipated the enjoyment of being recognised as a good person who would provide the Kenyan schools with funds from a sponsored event. Thus, my own entrenchment in a charity orientation was a potent reminder of the limitations of being informed about a tourism context in the face of deeply held investments in particular subject positions and fantasies.

The familiar discourse of feeling 'lucky' was frequently drawn upon to describe participants' responses to the poverty that they witnessed in Kenya (Simpson 2005, 2004; Pearce 2012, 2011a; Tiessen 2012). I argued that this rhetoric was used to adopt a moral position but it has also been critiqued for demonstrating a lack of awareness of the structural reality of global wealth inequalities (Simpson 2004). If we link this finding to the way in which participants such as Amy, Kate and Tess seemed to use their newfound gratitude to facilitate the continuation of their existing Western, consumer lifestyle then we can start to understand this appropriation of poverty in more defensive terms. A depoliticised response—feeling luck not guilt, responding charitably rather than through activism and experiencing psychological rather than behavioural change—allowed the volunteer tourists to construct ethical subjectivity while maintaining their Western identity investments and being ideologically returned to 'the same' (Cremin 2007). A more radical response would have amounted to conceding an ethical deficiency in the self, calling into question the tenability of existing identity positions and rupturing the fantasy of poverty concealing its own lack through positively transforming and completing the tourist self.

The part played by emotions and catharsis in these transformations is interesting to note, particularly in relation to the psychosocial interpretation I have outlined. Tess and Sarah had anticipated becoming emotional in the face of poverty and both mentioned reality television travel programmes as an inspiration for becoming volunteer tourists (see Chapter 3), flagging up a potential source of influence in terms of a discourse of trauma, triumphing over adversity and publicly narrating intimate feelings (Aslama and Pantti 2006; Biressi and Nunn 2005; Lupton 1998). Indeed, in the case of Sarah, this formula seemed to underpin her capacity to become ethically transformed, resulting in her abandonment of the transformative narrative when she did not experience the sadness she had anticipated. Linsey similarly implied, through her reference to another volunteer tourist, Lisa, who had been profoundly affected by sights of poverty, that her lack of emotionality and shock had contributed to her inability to achieve moral self-change. Affect played out quite differently for Tess, whose narrative oscillated between expressions of emotion or sympathy for the poor and a counter-narrative portraying the Kenyan people as 'poor-but-happy'. I interpret Tess's emotions as a perceived necessary response towards poverty, allowing her to develop gratitude and ethical subjectivity, whilst also opening an unsettling fissure in her fantasmatic construction of the locals as content and unthreatening. So while some of these responses to poverty echo those found by Zahra and McIntosh (2007), a psychoanalytic reading complicates our analytic

picture by drawing attention to some of the conflicts and defences inherent in such expressions of emotion.

This chapter has explored the complex intersection of Western cultural discourses of self-change during youth, the infiltration of a pedagogical emphasis into ethical tourism practices, the marketing of 'life-changing' travel, and defensive responses to poverty. These data suggest that while ethical transformation is almost always an aim of volunteer tourists, whether or not this will be enacted is dependent on the emotional experience and perceptions of visited communities that fit into the transformational narrative. Where transformation *is* achieved it is often described as allowing continued enjoyment to be derived from the volunteer tourists' existing lives rather than prompting a change of lifestyle; instead, ethical change appears to be about constructing an ethical subjectivity as supplementary to, rather than in place of, one's identity. In this way, the process of attaining gratitude has several fantasmatic effects: it creates the illusion that poverty can conceal its own lack through filling in an ethical void in the tourist subject; it creates a tourist imaginary of the Third World as a space of ethical redemption; finally, it allows for a sustained ideological commitment to consumerism. So while there is certainly potential in the volunteer tourists' ethical transformations for the development of global citizenship and more politicised responses to poverty, a psychosocial reading highlights the problematic nature of such a shift in terms of the participants' identities, enjoyment and defences. In the following chapter, I explore these issues in greater depth through a case study of Lisa, who was significantly affected by her encounters with poverty in Kenya and for whom questions of her ethical position as a traveller and consumer remained salient long after her return to the UK.

# Chapter 9

## Lisa: a case study

*You don't have to go home and change anything but ... just think about it for two seconds.*

*–Lisa, Interview 2*

This final analysis chapter explores in detail the case of Lisa, who appeared to be deeply affected by her encounters with poverty in Kenya. My choice to present Lisa's story as a case study reflects a desire to extend the analysis of ethical transformations carried out in the previous chapter by looking more comprehensively at the longitudinal and affective processes that they involve. Lisa was particularly interesting in this respect because her transformative pathway not only entailed several prominent emotional incidents, prompted either by encountering poverty in Kenya or remembering it when back home, but also involved a complex renegotiation of her newfound ethical values and self when confronted with the norms of Western consumer society upon returning to the UK. Therefore, the central question that I want to address is why internal ethical change, even when produced through profoundly shocking and affective experiences, in many cases does not translate into changes in volunteer tourists' actions in terms of politics, activism, or consumerism. In other words, I ask why the radical potential of volunteer tourism to foster critical reflection on poverty and inequality and to bring about more politicised forms of subjectivity amongst young Westerners is lost and discursively reframed as apolitical 'appreciation'.

The chapter is structured longitudinally, starting with Lisa's hopes for attaining a changed perspective through her travels prior to departing for Kenya before turning to

her emotional experiences which supposedly acted as catalysts for developing her new, more ethical perspective. The third data section deals with Lisa's return to the UK, descriptions of her newly attained 'appreciation', and the difficulties she experienced with reverse culture shock and reintegration into Western consumer society. Again, following a Lacanian interpretative framework, I argue that Lisa's claims of becoming morally transformed allow her to conform to the requirements of the ethical injunction and discourses of self-change through travel whilst also providing a defensive function against difficult feelings arising from her problematic positionality as a wealthy subject amidst poverty. The failure of this transformation to alter her patterns of consumerism and spending after the trip reflects Lisa's investment in a Western identity, associated desires to continue her participation in consumer society, and the influence of significant others in her life.

### Anticipating change

As the train pulled into the station, I gathered my documents, stepped onto the platform and made my way outside. It was a bright, warm morning in June, a month before we were due to leave for Kenya. I had already met Lisa once at a briefing day held by the volunteer tourism operator but still felt a bit nervous about conducting the first interview with her. Walking out of the station, I could see that Lisa and her mother were waiting for me in their blue car; they waved and greeted me warmly as they saw me approach. Lisa's mum drove us through sunny neighbourhoods that could have been anywhere in the South of England: semi-detached brick houses, a strip of grass neatly planted next to every driveway, a picture of suburban contentment. We pulled up at the house and were greeted by their little dog, excited to see the visitor. Lisa's mother went into the kitchen to prepare lemonade for us, as Lisa and I went to talk in the lounge. The clean, modern looking home, decorated in neutral colours and tasteful, simple ornaments put me at ease. It was immediately recognisable as the sort of middle-class household that I had grown up in myself and receiving the family's hospitality here—the ride from the station, drinks and snacks—almost gave me the feeling that I was visiting a friend.

We sat down on the couch and began to talk. Lisa is an attractive young woman with long blond hair and a smile that radiates warmth – I found her very easy to talk to. Lisa explained that she lived here with just her mother as her parents were divorced. Having finished secondary school the previous year, Lisa had applied to go to university to study sociology but had ended up deferring her place after the anxiety of leaving home had become overwhelming. Lisa had not felt ready to go to university, describing herself as 'naïve' compared to her friends and incapable of living independently. She attributed this to having been 'mollycoddled' by her parents growing up due to being their only child. In this context, Lisa's gap year had been a chance to learn how to cook, clean and manage her own money and she now felt more prepared to leave home. More generally, Lisa described herself as an anxious person who found it difficult to deal with change, yet huge changes were on the horizon. Her gap year working in retail was coming to an end and she was due to leave her job, family and friends to go travelling for several months, and then take up a university place on her return.

As we got down to discussing the details of her trip, Lisa told me that she had originally wanted to do a wildlife conservation volunteer tourism programme, also based in East Africa, but had to change her plans after this trip was no longer available. She had gone to travel agents, surfed the web and flicked through brochures, seeing advertisements from dozens of different gap year companies, but there was something that caught her eye in the East African volunteer programmes that kept bringing her back to them. After cancelling her original programme, Lisa initially signed up for the minimum duration of one month in Kenya but halfway through her trip decided to stay for another month. This extension was significant for Lisa given that she had experienced severe misgivings about the travel. It would entail leaving home and living with a new group of people; she was not sure whether she would like it, get on with people and be able to cope with the homesickness. In fact, Lisa very nearly did not even get on the plane, telling me about a tearful car ride to the airport and the anxiety that had gripped her as she said goodbye to her parents.

Lisa initially expressed some uncertainty about her aims for travelling to Kenya; she was sure that one of the main reasons for wanting to go away was to escape the boredom and stress of work but other than this her answers were vague. However, through our conversation, one theme emerged reflecting Lisa's desire to come back with a different perspective on materialism and described how she hoped visiting a poor place would enable this:

*Lisa*:     I'm just hoping to (.) come back with a different view of everything.
*Émilie*: Yeah?
*Lisa*:     Yeah I mean like going into like (.) a poor community and everything, it's got to change something hasn't it. Be very, like very unusual to come home and not be affected by it like. … [H]ere you don't really (.) you take for granted like what you have and then I think a lot of it's gonna be (.) to do with coming back with a different perspective on it, just thinking it's just stuff it doesn't matter like.
            (Interview 1)

Lisa draws on discourses that I explored in the previous chapter, including framing her travel as potentially life-changing, linking personal change to encounters with poverty, and anticipating returning with a different 'perspective'. Lisa's account clearly resonates with what Kate said about wanting to become more appreciative and wanting to resist the dominant Western valorisation of consumer goods and money. However, later in the interview Lisa presents a far more personal dimension to her desire for a less materialistic outlook on life that gives new meaning to the collective discourses of change and ethical conduct that she draws on:

*Lisa*:     Where I'm an only child as well I'm quite, like I know it sounds really ridiculous (*laughs*), I'm quite possessive of my stuff? [*Émilie*: (*laughs*)] Like, I don't, like I don't mind, like I'm quite good with sharing and everything but like I get really anxy when I think people are gonna break things. … I think like a lot of it is that I just (.) think of stuff too much as it of, rather than, I don't know like it's just stuff at the end of the day and I think like a lot of wanting to go to Kenya is to do with like (.) I don't really

wanna get worried about someone breaking my, *like* something really trivial. D'you know like and I think like um the culture shock of going into somewhere that (.) poor and everything is gonna be quite good for me, I think.
(Interview 1)

In this extract, Lisa reveals feelings of ambivalence regarding her material possessions. She invests these objects with meaning and yet at the same time their potential loss—the thought that someone might break them—brings her anxiety. Lisa interprets this profound attachment to her belongings as a consequence of being an only child, of having enjoyed sole possession of her things and not having had to share; although she is quick to point out, for the sake of casting herself in a positive light, that she is capable of sharing. She seems to suggest that her perceptions are distorted by desire and possessiveness, that even 'trivial' objects are difficult to let go of or not care about. When taken as identificational extensions of herself, the worry about objects being broken or lost signals a fear of fragmentation and loss of control over the self (Lacan E, pp. 3-6). Lisa had experienced several traumatic episodes in her life including health problems and her parents' divorce, which appeared to biographically underpin her need for control and dislike of change. However, what Lisa seems to articulate is a recognition of the limitations of her control—that inevitably things sometimes get broken—and the need to relinquish some of the meaning invested in her possessions in order to be able to interact more positively with others.

Lisa's anxiety has an impact on how one interprets her desire to return from Kenya with a less materialistic attitude. As an expression of a collective discourse of self-change, Lisa justifies her travel to a Third World country through the ethical injunction. It is an experience that will better her and allow her to learn from the poverty and frugality of the visited community, legitimising in ethical terms her enjoyment of the holiday. However, I argue that the travel also provides Lisa with a way of managing her anxiety and breaking with her attachment to home. She hopes that by coming into contact with people who live without an abundance of wealth and possessions, she too can learn to live with less and be freed from worries about her affective self-regulation and control that have become externalised and located in objects around her. I therefore suggest that Lisa's desire to participate in a form of seemingly ethical travel and her anticipation of personal change results from the confluence of collective discourses framing volunteer tourism and biographically derived affective investments. As I made my way back to the train station, I was left with a sense of Lisa's warmth but also her vulnerability as she embarked on her transition to adulthood.

**Emotional encounters**

Once we had arrived in Kenya, Lisa and I did not socialise a huge amount. She quickly gelled with a clique that I identified as the 'cool girls', whose members were from middle- to upper-class social backgrounds and shared an interest in fashion. It was difficult to interact with this group given that I was distinctly not 'cool' myself, but I still managed to converse with Lisa during moments when she was away from the group. Lisa experienced a series of emotional encounters with poverty and inequality in

Kenya that prompted her to question her own social position and wealth. This emotionality earned her a reputation among some of the other volunteer tourists, who noticed that she often cried when in the presence of poor people. The first of these incidents took place during a visit to a local primary school:

*Lisa*: I, like it sounds really silly but like one of my best (.) days I had was when we went to um (.) the school in Naragata? And like I literally just, like I had a bit of a mental breakdown at the school.

*Émilie*: Really?

*Lisa*: Like, 'cause I just (.) 'cause we were being shown round the school and everything and they were (.) they were like chatting to us about kind of all the kids and everything and then we were like oh why aren't some of them in school uniform. And they said oh they can't afford 'em? So we asked, we said oh like how much is the school uniform and it was the equivalent of £2? And these kids couldn't afford them and I just literally broke down I was like

*Émilie*: Really?

*Lisa*: I just cried and cried and cried, and I just, I- like it just, it's just, I like as much as it was upsetting I think it was a really, really good like lesson for me? Because like I, I was sat there like just getting so upset thinking about what I'd spend £2 – that's not even a coffee (.) and there's a child that can't afford a school uniform because they, like they don't have £2 and it just, oh god it just hit me like I got the biggest reality check in the world at that point. I was just like (.) it was one of those things 'cause I was like on the way there I'd been having a chat about like getting my new iPod when I went home and like, despite the fact that I've got one that works perfectly fine. … I know it sounds silly but when I look back on it now I actually like smile about it 'cause it's made me realise that like (.) stuff's not that important anymore. It's like obviously it's not, you're not gonna change everything, it's just the lifestyle isn't it but it like, even if you just think about it.

(Interview 2)

Lisa framed the severity of the children's poverty in relation to her own wealth, as she reflected upon how easily she would spend £2 on something like a coffee and how she wanted a new iPod despite already having one. These trivial, unnecessary items that Lisa would routinely consume were suddenly thrown into sharp relief against the backdrop of the schoolchildren, whose families could not afford even basic items such as a school uniform. Lisa reacted to the shock of this realisation with a public display of emotion—she broke down and cried—and in some sense this could be taken as part of a performance of the ethical self-change that she had aimed to achieve. I do not want to suggest that Lisa's tears were false, that her response to the schoolchildren was calculated in order to perform a strategic sentimentality, but the reaction certainly allowed her to use the incident to her advantage. It permitted her to present herself as sympathetic to the plight of the Kenyans and to adopt a moral high-ground in relation to other volunteers, as I will show in a moment. She also perceived the emotional encounter as a catalyst for her ethical transformation, remembering the traumatic incident fondly by saying that it was one of her 'best days' and that she looked back and 'smiled' due to the appreciation for her own wealth that it had instilled in her.

Previously in Lisa's narrative, what had been most apparent was a desire to free herself from the anxiety that she perceived as located in her attachments to physical objects. Through this emotional encounter with poverty in Kenya, Lisa seemed to have had her wish granted; she was finally able to realise that 'stuff's not that important'. In this context, I found Lisa's closing statement curious: 'you're not gonna change everything, it's just the lifestyle isn't it but it like, even if you just think about it'. Despite her newfound perspective, Lisa felt that an adherence to her Western consumer lifestyle would prevent her from making substantial changes in the way that she lived. In other words, it was inevitable that no real change would occur to her lifestyle but Lisa had achieved a change in her mind-set that simultaneously freed her from anxiety related to material possessions and allowed her to perform ethical subjectivity. This sentiment was echoed later in the interview when Lisa expressed her frustration at the behaviour of the other volunteer tourists:

> *Lisa*:  It's making me a little bit frustrated because there's still a few people here that just haven't got it yet? ... [N]ot that there's like a- necessarily anything to get but they're kind of like understanding it and taking it into account. You don't have to go home and change anything but just to even (.) just think about it for two seconds. And there's some of the girls here and you, you know they're, *they're,* (*laughs*) they're not like (.) they're not even bothered by it.
> (Interview 2)

Lisa alludes to the fact that other travellers had not been affected by, or taken seriously, the poverty that was right in front of their eyes. This passage has the dual effect of reinforcing Lisa's conviction that a lack of change in her own lifestyle was acceptable because of her extensive reflection and internal change whilst also presenting herself as reasonable and non-proselytising in relation to her fellow travellers; she was not asking them to make massive changes to their lives but just to spend a moment thinking about their surroundings.

I experienced frustration in reading through Lisa's narrative. I felt that she was being too easy on the other volunteer tourists, and on herself, in suggesting that it was not necessary to 'go home and change anything' – that merely reflecting on the situation was sufficient. A memory came to my mind of our first day in Kenya. We were being driven from the airport through Mombasa's crumbling buildings, rusted iron roofs and aged roads scarred with deep potholes. I felt shocked by the state of the city, yet as we passed through the streets one of the other volunteer tourists commented that she thought it was 'brilliant' and 'loved it'. My immediate response was to take offence – how could anyone think that this terrible poverty was a good thing? However, I later reconsidered this swift and rather critical judgement. Perhaps the volunteer tourist was trying to accept and embrace the difference of this new place, or maybe she was mindful of the fact that our driver was Kenyan and did not want to cause offence by focusing on the negatives. This drew attention to my tendency to react critically to the volunteer tourists' actions without having holistically considered their standpoint. While I was frustrated by Lisa's leniency towards her fellow travellers, partly, no doubt, as a result

of my own sense of impotence in relation to the social situation that we were confronted with, it could equally have been read as a fair and sympathetic stance. Lisa was critical of the girls who refused to acknowledge the poverty around them but understood the social pressures that they collectively faced that might prevent them from substantially altering their lifestyles.

The second incident that upset Lisa during her time in Kenya occurred when she was taken to hospital suffering from a suspected infection. It was the volunteer tourism company's policy to use private hospital facilities with standards that would be acceptable to their Western clientele. The level of luxury that awaited Lisa when she was taken ill came as a shock and again prompted her to reflect on the poverty experienced by the local people and the sheer inequality of the situation:

> *Lisa*: It was a 5* hotel.
> *Émilie*: Really, that's what I've heard from other people about it.
> *Lisa*: Yeah it was, it was one of those things where like you walked in and all the black people being carted down one corridor and all the white people were being carted down another.
> *Émilie*: Really?
> *Lisa*: And like, like I literally got into the hospital and I was like wheeled past this massive load of queues of people with like, people who looked like they should've been in like A&E and everything and I'm there like, I was fine honestly like. … I got put into [a private suite] and it literally had a 40" plasma TV with every channel possibly imaginable. … I was like I don't wanna use any of this stuff? I was like I really don't like, 'cause I didn't, I didn't, d'you know what I actually, I had a cold shower while I was there. ... I didn't use the hot tap? I was like I don't want to use it? I was like I'm gonna refuse to use it in a hospital where like, I'm here to get better I'm not here to be like (.) like pandered over and treated like I'm in a hotel? D'you know what I mean like I didn't even turn the TV on and like it's just sad, I dunno I'd got really, I got really upset about it, like I cried on the phone to my mum when she rung. … I was like this is just ridiculous like there's people down the corridor that have probably not been given anything to eat and I've got enough food here to feed probably about ten down that fricking corridor. Like and I got really upset about it and my mum, my mum was just trying to like console me on the phone like "Lisa, they're only doing it because the more they give you the more they, the insurance have to pay out" she was like it's not, I was like but it's just a waste isn't it?
> (Interview 3)

In the previous narrative of the school incident, Lisa's distress was constructed as a response to witnessing the poverty of the schoolchildren, thus allowing her to mobilise the transformative discourse. However, the current excerpt demonstrates the affective result of encountering inequality rather than poverty per se; it was the excessive and inappropriate displays of wealth and luxury in a place where there appeared to be local people going without, or at least having to wait for, basic medical treatment that struck Lisa as obscene. Her refusal to use hot water was particularly significant given that within the volunteer tourist group cold showers became a rite of passage for new arrivals and was symbolic of roughing it and of their unconventional travel. Therefore, Lisa's refusal to use the lavish amenities allowed her to position herself discursively in

solidarity with both the local people in the hospital and her fellow travellers, all of whom had to go without, and to appear ethical while still receiving the treatment that she needed. Lisa's mother tried to console her by providing a rational explanation for the hospital conditions but this was rejected despite the ease with which she could have accepted the inevitability of the situation and the comfort that this might have brought.

Whereas Lisa was able to draw important lessons from the school encounter and transform poverty psychologically into a positive, redemptive object, her experience at the hospital left her only with unresolved feelings of frustration and unhappiness. It is interesting to note that the amenities within the hospital were symbolic of a wealth, excess and materialism characteristic of Lisa's society and, arguably, her own subjectivity and yet her narrative constructed them as separate to herself, locating them within the spaces and practices of the hospital. In fact, Lisa actively distanced herself from these objects by presenting herself as a helpless patient, having luxuries imposed on her by the hospital staff, and using what limited agency she still possessed to reject the excess food, hot water and television. Unlike the school, which was marked by lack, the abundance of the hospital did not prompt the same reflection on her affluence. I interpret this claim of impotence and lack of reflection as evidence of defences against Lisa's problematic status as an affluent Westerner in Africa. The hospital presented Lisa with a constellation of signifiers that were associated with home, but these things that would usually be sources of comfort took on a menacing, violent aura within a context of poverty, inequality and exclusion. On an unconscious level this association of home with violence prevented her from achieving the same level of conscious reflection regarding her lifestyle and social position that had been prompted by her tearful experience at the primary school.

As a result of these experiences, Lisa reflected on how she was changing in Kenya:

> *Lisa*:  I'm quite protective over stuff but like (.) it's just, it has changed in the sense that it's just stuff isn't it, like? Not the end of the world. Like when you see the kids out here that have <u>nothing</u> and they don't (.) dunno they're just not bothered about it, they're just so happy it makes you feel really bad about (.) *like* fussing about stuff. … I can't help but just think (.) like that I'm <u>really</u> like selfish sometimes and it, 'cause they literally have nothing and they're so happy. They're just happy playing. You see them in their like raggedy, torn clothes and they're not bothered. … I've taken a lot of things for granted? And I'm probably gonna go home and just (.) kind of (.) be more appreciative of what I've got and (.) kind of not make (.) not make such a big deal about having the <u>latest</u> of something.
> (Interview 2)

Returning to her concerns about being too attached to, or 'protective' of, her possessions, Lisa initially reflects that she has undergone a positive ethical change in herself that will make her more appreciative and less materialistic. However, this is punctuated by a moment of self-denigration when she compares her 'selfish' tendencies to the quiet contentment of the poor-but-happy local children, whom she frames as another catalyst for her self-change. The image of the local people as poor-but-happy is one that we have seen before (see also Chapters 6 and 8). I have argued that this

characterisation is evidence of an imaginary identification with the local people that subsumes them under the positive side of the colonial stereotype (the happy, subservient, welcoming native) and naturalises them as part of the authentic landscape. This psychological process removes the unconsciously perceived threat to the volunteer tourists' subject position as wealthy Westerners in the midst of poverty. In Lisa's case, this idealisation of the Kenyan children also features an ethical component as they appear to be the epitome of the contented anti-materialism that she strives to achieve.

What interests me most about this passage is the way in which Lisa's attempt to transform is still in flux, still unresolved. Compared to her account of the school visit, there is a change from the children's poverty and lack as Lisa's object of focus to their appreciation, happiness and positivity in the face of adversity. In portraying the children as content with 'nothing', Lisa is confronted with her ideal ego – the imaginary, idealised self-image of how she would like to be seen by others. Faced with such impossible perfection, Lisa has a sudden moment of realisation in which her own imperfections—her selfishness, fussiness and discontent—are thrown into sharp relief. This shift in emphasis in the characterisation of the local children also significantly alters the message that we can derive from Lisa's narrative. From condemning consumerist concerns as trivial in the face of deprivation and upholding a violent system of global disparities in wealth, the message changes to one implying that materialism is simply not necessary to lead a happy life. A burgeoning politicised critique of global inequalities is thus replaced by the fantasmatic construction of the local people as poor-but-happy, which, while still attacking consumerist ideology, carries very different implications for Lisa's perceptions of poverty.

### Return and reintegration

The next time I saw Lisa was in late October. She had moved away from home to take up the deferred university place and was beginning to settle into student life. Lisa seemed to have a new air of confidence about her and told me how the students who had taken a gap year and been travelling saw themselves as more mature and capable than their younger, less worldly counterparts. She was living with these fellow gappers, providing her with an opportunity to share her experiences with people who could understand. With the safety and security of her family gone, Lisa attempted to make a home in this new environment and to carve out a new social space for herself. She seemed happy, but it soon became apparent that returning home had been an ordeal. After having worried so much about leaving home and the separation from her parents, it was reintegration into her home society that actually presented her with the greatest challenge:

> *Lisa*: I didn't cope very well with being home from Kenya. Like um (.) like I kept getting really upset when like all of my friends were like "oh d'you wanna come shopping" and everything and I was like, like I was just a bit like oh god I've just come back from a Third World country like I don't really want to go and spend loads and loads of money. Um and then like, and then like I caved and went and did it. And after I'd done it I felt so bad about (.) like going and spending all this money after like all the poverty you'd seen and

everything. And then like I just came home and like cried and mum was like "what's wrong?" and I was like "well like it just doesn't seem right" and she was like "but you've gotta remember that you're coming back to like (.) you're coming back to the Western like culture that you live in?" She was like "it's n- not normal for you to (.) d'you know what I mean for you to like behave in the same way that you would do in Africa?" But I suppose I felt really bad about it.
(Interview 3)

Having seen the conditions that people were living in throughout Kenya and been made aware of the difference that could be made with only a small amount of money—£2 for a school uniform—Lisa's spending on products that she probably did not need gave her a feeling of guilt through having acted unethically. Yet, in this extract, Lisa frames her shopping as an act of weakness in the face of pressure and persuasion from her friends rather than as a deliberate act reflecting her own desires to consume, thus presenting herself in a more favourable light. At this point, Lisa's mother again arises as a consoling figure who tries to convince and reassure her that there is nothing wrong with her behaviour and that she should accept the norms of her home society. Lisa does not know what to do with these difficult feelings and again positions herself as lacking in agency as she goes along with her friends' wishes and seems to accept, or at least not challenge, her mother's justification for her resumed spending.

I was surprised by the extent to which Lisa had continued to be affected by her experiences of poverty in Kenya. I had mistakenly assumed that she would get back into the British way of life easily after returning home, perhaps due to the insinuations she had made about not changing her lifestyle and having previously been quite materialistic. This surprise was matched with annoyance at Lisa's mother who, although well intentioned, seemed to want to extinguish her daughter's spark of concern and burgeoning global consciousness. While I was frustrated by Lisa's seeming inability to translate her ideals into tangible changes in her consumption and politics, I felt that it was a lack of support rather than a lack of will that kept her from being able to make these changes. She was repeatedly told that it was not possible to change a culture and that one had no choice but to accept the status quo. In terms of my own return home and ethical struggle, I felt torn analytically between wanting to endow Lisa with agency (so that I too could believe that I had the power to change my life) and wanting to blame her family and friends for preventing her from changing (so that I could appeal to structural constraints to excuse my own inability to change).

Constrained by this inability to resist the lures and pressures of consumerism, Lisa tried instead to demonstrate how she had modified the way that she shopped since coming back in order to reduce the discord between her supposed ethical awakening and her consumerist actions. She takes the example of the purchase of an iPhone to show how she was now a reformed, less excessive consumer who bought according to her needs rather than desires. Faced with a broken iPod and phone after she returned from Kenya, Lisa decided to purchase an iPhone, which would provide the functions of both. She found out that the latest handset would cost her more than £200 on top of her

monthly bill so she opted for an older model that was free with her contract, constructing this as an ethical decision:

> *Lisa*:   I was like if it's free on top of my contract then I'll have it like I don't need the latest up to date thing, d'you know what I mean like. And like all my friends were like "why did you get that one when there's the new one" and I'm like "because it does the same thing?" It does the same thing and it was free. Like I'm not gonna spend two hundred and twenty quid like when there's *star*- like y- there's starving kids in *Africa*. Two hundred and twenty quid to a kid in Africa is like their whole education. … I was just like d'you know what like I need a new iP[od], I need a new phone [claps hands] bam (*laughs*) I'm gonna need to get an iPhone, but I just thought there was no point in getting the, the stupid expensive new one.
> (Interview 3)

Lisa uses the act of purchasing an iPhone to perform ethical agency. In resisting pressure from peers and advertising in not getting the latest model, Lisa demonstrates how her new perspective on materialism was translated into her behaviour as a consumer. Lisa also tries to bolster her ethical subjectivity by stating that she is not prepared to unnecessarily spend large sums of money. This decision is based on her new knowledge of how far this money would go in Kenya to help needy children, although she does not imply that she will donate money to the children instead of spending it on herself. We can see from these extracts that whereas trying to resist consumerism leaves Lisa feeling powerless and upset, embracing consumerism within a new ethos of purchasing only for perceived need and with less excessiveness provides an avenue for asserting her agency and ethical subjectivity. This resolution therefore allowed Lisa to continue to pursue her consumer desires whilst also performing ethical subjectivity.

Despite these attempts to present herself as ethically changed, Lisa also expressed some regret that she had not changed as much as she had hoped. However, she was quick to defend herself by explaining that the norms of her home society had prevented more radical change:

> *Lisa*:   You're looked upon strangely? if you, if you go "no I don't want that, there's starving kids in Africa". Like people are like alright then, like you, you carry on saving the world *kind of thing* like. [*Émilie*: Really?] D'you know what I mean like that (.) it's just not the culture here like people do spend money here that's, like our whole civilisation's based around earning money and spending money and um it's just a completely different way of life but like I would've hoped it would've changed me more but then again coming back to this you can't help but just slot back into it? And carry on. 'Cause it's the just the way things are here? Like you've gotta make money to spend money.
> (Interview 3)

Lisa seemed very concerned with how she would come across to others, worrying that she might be perceived as a do-gooder by putting her concerns for Africa before the obligation to consume. She goes on to characterise British society as grounded in a need to earn and spend money and portrays herself as powerless to resist such pervasive

cultural norms: 'you can't help but just slot back in'. This sense of impotence was repeated in my final conversation with Lisa:

> *Lisa*:    I definitely got a ridiculous like culture shock and like kick back to reality about like how much I had and everything but I think when you come back here you just, you don't really remember like that much. You just kind of like get back into what everybody else is doing and you don't really think about it? Um I would've liked to've come back and been like oh I don't need this, I don't need that like, I don't have to go out and spend this much money and (.) but I just, I don't think it's realistic to be honest when you come back here. I mean it's just like Western civilisation and just how it is, like everybody's so money orientated that it's just (*laughs*) you just kind of have to (.) get, like throw yourself back into it and, 'cause otherwise people just look at you a bit like "oh you're a bit odd".
> (Interview 4)

Here, Lisa again presents herself as lacking in agency in the face of social pressures to conform as a consumer, saying that any resistance is 'unrealistic' and worrying about how it would lead to her being perceived as 'a bit odd' by other people. This perhaps shows the role of context in determining the importance ascribed to ethical values. At the time of choosing to travel as a volunteer tourist, an alignment with the ethical injunction was essential in order to justify the travel, participate in the discourse of self-change through travel, and achieve positive self-presentation amongst her fellow travellers. However, since arriving back in the UK the importance of the ethical injunction had waned and been replaced by the consumer desires that allowed Lisa to function effectively in this society, be regarded as normal, and strengthen relationships with friends.

The role played by Lisa's friends, family and more generalised others in making sense of her return and reintegration into British society was significant. I interpret these three voices as manifestations of the ideological superego injunction, Enjoy!, that colluded in Lisa's internal dialogue to encourage her to act in accordance with her consumer desire. Lisa portrayed her friends as a source of temptation, pestering her to go shopping with them and spend money on trivial things. Her mother emerged at several points as a consolatory voice of reason when Lisa was upset. She provided reassurance that it was ok to enjoy the hospital luxuries because the larger insurance pay-out would benefit the patients Lisa had seen suffering and that it was acceptable to resume her previous lifestyle because of the prevailing social norms. As well as representing elements of her psyche, as I am arguing, these are people that Lisa knows and cares about; she is invested in the relationships that she has with them and so dismissing their opinions would have been extremely difficult. Nevertheless, Lisa positioned herself as resistant to these temptations and reasoning. In her account of reintegrating, it was the third voice—that of a more generalised Other—which seemed most powerful. This voice judged Lisa for trying to 'save the world' and told her 'you're a bit odd' for not consuming enough, for trying to betray her desire.

Lisa presented herself as progressively less able to resist her powerful ideological and relational investments in British consumer society, articulated through this set of

actual and internal dialogues with significant others. There seemed to be a diminishing in the importance of Kenya's ethical lessons as she became increasingly absorbed in her new life as a student and her memories began to fade. Student life in Britain revolves around spending, drinking and partying, so it would no doubt have been extremely difficult for Lisa to avoid this environment, especially in terms of making new friends. Additionally, by the time of our final interview, Lisa told me that she and her flatmates had fallen out. These fellow students who had also taken gap years had provided Lisa with a social space in which she could exchange stories and reminisce about her time in Kenya. With this gone, it may have been increasingly difficult to keep her memories alive and inevitably other priorities would have come to the fore. Lisa's return to the UK therefore presented a significant time for the negotiation of her agency, identity, desires and ethical obligations.

**Conclusion**

Lisa's case illustrates the transition from anticipating ethical subjectivity to its performance and gradual fading over time. Taking a longitudinal perspective provides a more comprehensive account of why resistance arises to the radical personal change that volunteer tourism supposedly provides. This process started with Lisa wanting major change in relation to her perspective on materialism before being deeply affected by her encounters of poverty in Kenya and claiming to have achieved such change. Upon returning to the UK, Lisa initially tried to resist consuming entirely, then returned to consuming with certain minor changes in place, and finally resumed her previous lifestyle and spending patterns after conceding that it was inevitable that she should stop thinking about the poverty in Africa and 'slot back in' to what everyone around her was doing. I was particularly interested in the way that this radical potential for Lisa to gain awareness of global disparities in wealth and to find a political, charitable or activist outlet for her newfound convictions and energies was lost, and why she ended up attempting to perform her anti-materialistic ethical subjectivity, paradoxically, through consumption instead of shifting from a focus on consumerism towards a broader social justice discourse of what Kersty Hobson (2002) refers to as 'sustainable societies'.[32]

The permutations in Lisa's ethical subjectivity can be understood in terms of the dynamics of desire, defence, and investment at work in her practices and experiences. Through the course of her narrative, we see that many objects were constructed with the dual properties of being simultaneously desired and defended against. For example, in the first interview Lisa constructed her possessions as a source of anxiety from which she wanted to be freed and as an object that she used to build negative representations of herself as selfish, materialistic, and possessive. However, her insistence from the start that it would not be necessary to change her lifestyle after gaining a new perspective on materialism hinted at the extent to which Lisa was invested in a Western consumer identity and still harboured desires for products and spending. During reintegration, Lisa

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[32] Hobson's (2002) concept of sustainable societies presents a broader conceptualisation of sustainability as an environmental and *social* agenda, in which the environment is conceived of as 'an integral part of a political project of social transformation' (p. 104).

found that resisting consumerism was not conducive to fitting in socially and continuing friendships. By presenting herself as lacking in agency in relation to the pressures to consume and positing an internal change, Lisa was able to continue with the lifestyle in which she was heavily invested and continue to sate her consumer desires while channelling her ethical agency through minor changes to her spending habits. This resolution therefore allowed Lisa to continue to pursue her desires while being convinced that she had been freed from the selfish and anxiety provoking preoccupation with money and 'stuff' through a changed perspective.

Similarly, the Kenyan children, who featured so heavily in Lisa's narrative, formed an object that was both troubling and idealised. In her account of the primary school, the children without school uniforms were markers of poverty and lack which Lisa found upsetting. I suggested that one interpretation of the subsequent transformation of poverty into a positive and redemptive object was as a defensive strategy that allowed her to neutralise its disturbing and threatening potential whilst also providing a way of performing ethical subjectivity. However, at the same time as constituting a potential threat by confronting Lisa with her own affluence in the face of poverty, the children were later held up as an example of the happiness and contentment that could be had in the absence of material wealth. They were portrayed as happy and carefree in their 'raggedy torn clothes', free from the anxieties associated with Western living from which Lisa wanted to escape, and in that sense an object of her admiration and desire as she too wanted to attain their peace and appreciative state of mind. This fantasy not only defends against the poverty of which the local children are also symbolic, but in positing them as appreciative and content it forges them in the image of Lisa's own desires, positing a wholeness of ethical subjectivity towards which she can only edge gradually closer and never fully attain. Thus, as an example of the functioning of the imaginary order, this fantasy allowed Lisa to misrecognise the completeness of the poor children's contentment in order to form an identification with them based on her own desire and alignment with the ethical injunction.

Lisa's case not only sheds light on the complex psychosocial processes at work in producing ethical transformations but also provides insights that can contribute to contemporary debates surrounding consumer behaviour and the 'value-action gap' that has been posited in relation to ethical consumerism and sustainability (Blake 1999; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). This refers to the observation that consumers rarely practice what they preach or that their values are at a disjunction with their actions. Renee Lertzman (2014, 2013, 2012) has argued that this 'gap', which is frequently explained through apathy, is better understood as a 'tangle' of desires, anxieties, and affects that disrupts the dichotomy between thought and behaviour and creates a more complex, psychoanalytically informed theorisation of agency. In relation to Lisa, we could observe a value-action gap between her newfound, less materialistic perspective and continued adherence to mainstream consumer practices. However, it should be clear from the preceding analysis that the reason for this is not simply that Lisa cannot be bothered to put her new values into practice; rather, her lack of change expresses relational needs to maintain essential links with friends and family, the need to maintain

an investment in her consumer identity, and defensive dynamics that put poverty to the back of her mind.

These findings support Leeds's (1999, p. 119) contention regarding service-learning that 'even if students come out of all classes with a social change perspective, it is a dubious leap of faith or logic that actual social transformation will occur as a result'. In terms of relational pressures, both McGehee and Santos (2005) and Kiely (2004) have noted the feelings of difference experienced by volunteers returning from abroad with new values and the need that they feel to hide these in order to fit back into their home societies. The minor modifications to her consumption habits that Lisa did make also echo findings from Hobson's (2001) qualitative study of environmental awareness and behaviour in the home, in which the convenience of behaviour change and its potential to fit into an existing lifestyle were found to be crucial factors. In other words, in a lifestyle dominated by consumption, Lisa made efforts to change but only within the ambit of what she was already doing—changing the *way* that she shopped—rather than thinking beyond her consumerism. Therefore, alongside the psychosocial, experiential and identity dimensions that we have been focusing on, practical factors of convenience and routine may also play their part in limiting the potential for ethical transformations to find a behavioural expression.

In conclusion, what Lisa's case demonstrates is the way that the pervasive discourse of ethical transformation through travel to a poorer country may not be sufficient to bring about sustained and politicised change in the traveller. The way that Western subjectivity is structured seems to almost completely preclude the possibility of change due to the relational and identificational investments that are enmeshed in consumerism and neoliberal practices of governmentality. It is possible that Lisa will experience a resurgence of her ethical ideals in the future, but from these data the importance of her ethical self-change could be observed as diminishing over time as she readjusted to being back in the UK, just as I experienced myself. In terms of calls for a more politicised, pedagogical emphasis within volunteer tourism programmes (Crossley 2013; Simpson 2005, 2004; Barker and Smith 1996; Raymond and Hall 2008), I believe that there is a need to appreciate the social context that volunteers are returning to in order for information dissemination and learning frameworks within the volunteer tourism site itself to be effective. For example, post-placement social networks that would provide the opportunity for volunteer tourists to reflect on their experiences in a more formal manor would be a welcome addition to the programme. Along with this suggestion, a crucial point that Lisa reminds us of is that ethical transformation is not a rational process but one structured by desires, defences and investments in identity positions. Any consideration of how more ethical and politicised forms of subjectivity can be fostered through volunteer tourism therefore needs to take into account the conflicts, dilemmas and anxieties that the prospect of such change may evoke.

# Chapter 10

# Conclusion

*It was very strange exiting the airport and being thrown into a crowd of white faces. I found it shocking in a way that I hadn't anticipated. I hadn't realised how accustomed I had become over the past month to seeing black people all around me. My chest grew tight; it was as if each pale face grabbed me, not allowing my eyes to pass a cursory glance over them. White skin looked so strange compared to the rich, earthy tones of African skin; it looked like the colour of pigs.*

*The coach ride back was smooth and uneventful, with no waving people, no roadside shacks, no signs of life other than the other traffic on the motorway and bland, forgettable scenery. I passed through a colourscape of muted greens and greys, and lamented the loss of those yellows, bright blues, perfect cloud whites, incandescent oranges and reds, chocolatey skins and vibrant patterned textiles wrapped around the women. I plugged myself into my mp3 player, allowed the emotions to well up and pass through me.*

*Being back in the flat has been a strange experience, with such a strict separation of inside and outside. In Kenyan* bandas *you feel the wind and sun flowing through their open sides as you eat; you hear the rain hammering on the palm roofs and the walls are porous to damp; you are always just one footstep from being outside. Here I must traverse the entire building to get outside and the windows and solid walls seal me in hermetically from the noise and weather that lies beyond. I can see trees and sky through the large panes of glass, but I am not a part of them.*

*–Field diary, Day 30*

Reading these reflections from the day I returned to Britain now, more than three years after writing them, I am struck by the extent to which I had been seduced by the African aesthetic. Just as many of the volunteer tourists I spoke with had contrasted Kenya's warm, welcoming communities with the reservation and suspicion of British city-dwellers, I too found that the UK seemed deficient when held up against Kenya's colour, vibrance and friendliness. This feeling did not just emerge from a visual perception of authenticity but from a deeply embodied sense of connection to nature that was afforded by the openness of the houses, to the local people through their hospitality, and from the emotional resonances that accompanied these experiences. I too had been caught in the web of culturally constituted imaginary identifications, elevating the Kenyan people and landscape to an idealised, romanticised status. At the same time, my investment in these collective modes of identification had probable biographical links.

My identity as a traveller relied on being able to enjoy the difference of foreign countries. Similarly, my desire to feel connected to the outdoors may have been influenced by associations between home and nature, bringing to mind the memories of wanting to help my mother in her garden when I was a child that the school gardening project had evoked.

Perhaps more unusual was the violent aversion that I felt towards other white people at Heathrow Airport. After an intense month of fieldwork during which I was always acutely aware of how I and the other volunteer tourists perceived and interacted with Kenyans—a month of exploring the ethical and political dimensions of our collective encounter with Otherness—I was suddenly confronted by racial and cultural sameness. At the time, I thought nothing of likening white skin to that of pigs, but I wonder now whether a more negative sentiment lay behind the analogy. The attitudes and actions of some of the volunteer tourists that I had witnessed, including cultural insensitivity, the defeatist acceptance of global wealth inequalities, and what I perceived as a lack of interest in Kenya's socio-political context, had left me feeling sceptical about volunteer tourists' potential as moral actors. This negative appraisal of those around me was undoubtedly in part symptomatic of the frustration that I felt with myself. I was frustrated by the difficulty of trying to navigate an ethical path through the many encounters with desperately poor yet proud people and beggars reaching out for small change that I did not need with their deformed limbs. I was also frustrated with the way in which my own good intentions in terms of renouncing wasteful consumerism and becoming more charitable at home quickly waned after returning to everyday life.

These personal reflections reinforce my conviction that an adequate theorisation of volunteer tourist subjectivity must include an account of tourist psychology or, to use more accurate terminology, of the *psychosocial* in tourism. How else is it possible to account for these affective and embodied experiences, the point of suture between collective practices and my unique 'arena of personal subjectivity' (Frosh et al. 2003), and the desires and anxieties that become manifest through tourism while containing within them intimate (or 'extimate') resonances of past experiences? In this thesis, I have tried to demonstrate the potential of theorising tourist subjectivity non-dualistically as an emergent property of interconnected social and psychic fields, avoiding the reductive, essentialising tendencies that make psychology off-putting for some critical researchers (Moore 2002; McCabe 2005). This approach resists the pervasive characterisation of tourists as 'rational, wholly conscious, and psychically-integrated individuals endowed with unimpeded agency' (Kingsbury 2005, p. 114), instead revealing their contradictions and unconscious investments. In particular, I have shown how a Lacanian approach theorises the psychological and unconscious as symbolically inscribed and enacted through social interactions, thus refuting the depoliticising dualism that Kingsbury identifies between an individualised mental world on the one hand and a shared socio-linguistic domain on the other.

I have also argued that a psychosocial approach has the potential to contribute to theoretical advancements in critical tourism studies. The imperative to situate tourists in the context of their everyday lives (Franklin and Crang 2001; Graburn 2002; Larsen

2008; McCabe 2002; Hui 2008; White and White 2007) is answered in Lacanian theory's ontology of imbrication across conventional disciplinary boundaries between the psychological and the social. This allows us to theorise seemingly private psychological states as 'extimate' – carrying impressions of collective discourses or fantasies, and ultimately located in the Other. From this theoretical perspective, researching tourists' most intimate thoughts and feelings becomes an exercise in unveiling the norms, ideologies and fantasies of their home society. The longitudinal, biographical approach adopted in the research complements this endeavour by providing insight into tourists' experiences of leaving and re-entering their quotidian reality. Secondly, the psychosocial methodology provides a productive avenue for considering the role of embodiment and affect in tourists' experiences, which has increasingly become a priority for researchers seeking to move away from the conventional emphasis on visuality (Abramovici 2007; Colemand and Crang 2002; Crouch 2005, 2002; Crouch and Desforges 2003; Crouch et al. 2001; Franklin and Crang 2001; Jordan and Aitchison 2008; Pritchard et al. 2007; Small and Darcy 2012; Veijola and Jokinen 1994; Wilson and Ateljevic 2008). A Lacanian account of affect as culturally and biographically embedded provides significant explanatory power regarding the emergence of tourists' feelings, adherence to certain modes of psychic functioning and the potential for change.

### Volunteer tourism imaginaries

I begin this conclusion by revisiting the most salient findings of the research and reflecting on their implications for practice within the industry and future research. The three summative themes that I explore are: *desire and ethics*, *spatialities of care*, and *poverty and transformation*. Together, these comprise a set of volunteer tourism imaginaries – 'unspoken schemas of interpretation' that are socially transmitted and which provide people with representational resources that allow them to anticipate, perceive and conceptualise tourism destinations (Salazar 2010, p. 7). Tourism imaginaries are endowed with unconscious fantasmatic elements, making it possible to read them as expressions of collective desires linked to Western and neoliberal ideologies, thereby opening them up to politicised critique. These imaginaries allow us to chart the coordinates of volunteer tourist subjectivity and desire through conscious and unconscious dimensions, collective and personal practices, thus bringing us closer to understanding the elusive 'depths and intimate contours of tourist curiosity, subjectivity, and motivation' (MacCannell 2011, p. 4). I also use this section to revisit the research questions that guided my enquiry, reflecting on my chosen methodology and volunteer tourism's potential to foster ethical change and more reciprocal power relations.

### *Desire and ethics*

Volunteer tourism is caught between two opposing forces: desire and ethics. Volunteer programmes are sold through the promise of hedonism and pleasure—just like any other form of tourism—and while their altruistic component is marketed as complementary to these forms of enjoyment, the potential for antagonism is clear. In Chapter 5, I described

the volunteer tourists' struggle to reconcile their desire for exotic authenticity in the African landscape with the ethical requirement to address the issue of poverty. Some features of the built environment in Kenya, such as the mud huts, appeared to be doubly inscribed as symbolic of authenticity and poverty. This left the volunteer tourists to negotiate their perceived role as both custodians of these relics of a primitive culture, existing in harmony with the natural environment, and bringers of socio-economic development to desperately poor communities. I argued that ultimately the pursuit of desire for an aesthetic authenticity that the West has lost on its path to modernity was stronger than the volunteer tourists' moral obligations towards the visited communities, resulting in an 'elevation of nature above development' (Butcher 2003). This double-inscription of Africa as a place harbouring both exotic, pristine beauty and horrific poverty demonstrates the continued influence of colonial discourse on contemporary tourism marketing; its dualising stereotypes keeping the tourist caught ambivalently between desire and derision, comprehension and misapprehension.

This dynamic between desire and ethics could also be used to interpret the difficulty that many of the volunteer tourists experienced when reintegrating into British society. Their narratives pointed to an expectation that the 'life-changing' travel they had just undertaken would allow them to become less materialistic and more charitable in their everyday lives and yet the lure of capitalist desire made it difficult to enact these changes. Lisa is a case in point. Having talked passionately about how affected she had been by the poverty in Kenya and how much she wanted to live more ethically, on returning to consumer society—a society in which she was deeply invested and to which she was bound through relational links—Lisa was confronted by the desire for, in her words, 'stuff'. However, this is not to suggest that desire and ethics always existed in oppositional tension. Mama's house is an example of a project where these two forces were closely aligned. Due to the volunteer tourists' investment in constructing an ethical identity through their voluntary work in the communities their desire became directed at ethical acts such as building a house for vulnerable women. This echoes Lisle's (2009) contention that dichotomies such as work/leisure or ethics/desire are unworkable because the pressure to have a good time on holiday can be as oppressive as the discourses that instruct us to act ethically and, similarly, enjoyment can be derived from participating in ethical tourism. While I agree that these dyads do not exist as stable, concrete fields of practice, I argue that understanding how each of their elements intersect, converge and diverge through ethical tourism can play an important part in advancing our understanding of tourist subjectivity.

Desire and ethics correspond with two of the ideological injunctions that Cremin (2011, 2007) outlines as libidinally invested discourses regulating Western society; the third being the enterprising injunction. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the injunction to desire or enjoy results from the reliance on consumption and capitalist modes of social engagement for the actualisation of late-modern subjectivity. The ethical injunction arises in response to these practices, offering a palliative to capitalism's often damaging social outcomes and providing an avenue for consumers to rid themselves of guilt. It is the promise that they will deliver enjoyment—*jouissance*—and relieve guilt that

constitutes the injunctions' fantasmatic dimension. These injunctions often converge in ethical consumption; the cup of Fairtrade coffee providing a way to partially sate one's desire while at the same time transferring guilt and making an ethical transaction. However, I argue that the spatial and embodied engagement of the ethical deed in volunteer tourism creates greater potential for this union to disrupt and for courses of action that fulfil either desire or ethics to diverge, as could be seen in the dilemma between preserving the authentic landscape and bringing development to Kenya's people. This tension is fundamental to the construction of volunteer tourism as a hybrid field of social action, straddling the hedonic and the altruistic, leisure and work. It is precisely because each side cannot easily be collapsed into the other, or resolved through a synergy, that volunteer tourism provides such an interesting site for the negotiation of contemporary Western subjectivity.

### *Spatialities of care*

On the surface, it would seem that volunteer tourism is symptomatic of new geographies of care and responsibility that have emerged through greater global interconnectedness and a resultant ethos of cosmopolitan empathy (Beck 2006; Massey 2004; Mitchell 2007; Mostafanezhad 2013a; Mostafanezhad and Crossley forthcoming; Popke 2007, 2006; Sin 2010; Swain 2009). However, while I do not question the sincerity of the tourists' desire to help those less fortunate than themselves, their ways of engaging in practices of care often had questionable ethical and political implications. To begin with, the primary motivation for helping as a volunteer tourist appeared to be to assuage guilt associated with travelling as a Westerner in a Third World country rather than expressing cosmopolitan empathy. Many of the volunteer tourists commented that they were primarily interested in travel, rather than volunteering, but that they would feel bad taking a holiday in such a poor place without giving something back to the community. Secondly, the volunteer tourists seemed to rely on a perception of the local people as helpless and needy in order to perform the role of the helper. This reproduced a binary between active, Western care givers and passive, local care receivers (Barnett and Land 2007; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Silk 2004; Sin 2010). Thirdly, the volunteer tourists developed a highly individualised notion of care, which altered the aim of the voluntary work from an attempt to generate the maximum benefit for communities as a whole to a pursuit of the strongest emotional connection to the recipients of their efforts.

The ways in which the volunteer tourists conceptualised and enacted care towards members of the visited communities were complex. Some Kenyans, such as Mama or the younger local children, were attributed the status of idealised 'objects of compassion' (Mostafanezhad 2013a). In Chapter 7, I argued that these local actors were perceived as vulnerable, passive, grateful beneficiaries, allowing the volunteer tourists to help in the way that they saw fit and to perform ethical agency. In their passive, light-hearted acceptance of poverty, Mama and the children also constituted a fantasmatic object—the 'happy poor'—which functioned to relieve the volunteer tourists of difficult feelings arising from their position of wealth. This construction also featured in Chapter 5, allowing the volunteer tourists to justify their suggestion that only minimal

development should be brought to Kenya because money would not make the local people happy. While I have argued above that this sentiment was rooted in the volunteer tourists' desire to experience African authenticity, it was framed in their narratives as an act of care. In stating that they did not want the Kenyans to harbour 'false hope', in Jane's words, of being able to escape poverty, the tourists presented themselves as looking out for the locals' best interests. The importance of having control over how care was offered, and to whom, was further brought to light by members of the visited communities that deviated from the volunteer tourists' expectations. The beggars, beach vendors and adolescent boys trying to sell bracelets appeared ungrateful for the help that was already being offered to them through the volunteer projects. These Kenyans not only resisted being stereotyped as passive, helpless Third World inhabitants but also disrupted the fantasy of the happy poor by expressing discontent with living in poverty.

The active role that the volunteer tourists sought in their caregiving was evidence of a spatial transition between the passive spectatorship of suffering at home and active attempts to help abroad. While caring *about* others (benevolence) was constructed as something that could be experienced at a distance through mediated channels, such as the news or charity appeals, caring *for* others (beneficence) required co-presence and proximate action (Smith 1998; Silk 2000). Prior to their departure, many of my participants framed their choice of summer activity as either going abroad and doing 'something' to help or sitting around at home doing 'nothing'. In providing care proximately, the volunteer tourists were able to gain gratitude and recognition from the local people, fulfilling a desire to be an object of the Other's desire and creating a more tangible feeling of having helped. However, a consequence of wanting to witness the gratitude of their beneficiaries was that the volunteer tourists' conceptualisation of care became highly individualised. Because it was easier to establish an emotional connection to a single person and because the projects for individuals, such as Mama's house, carried significant personal and cultural meaning, many of the tourists decided that they would be satisfied if their volunteering only helped one person. I argue that this is problematic in terms of harnessing volunteer tourism's potential for generating the greatest collective benefit for local communities.

The spatial and fantasmatic dimensions of care were also exemplified in the connections between the volunteer projects and the tourists' homes and families. The most prominent example of this was Mama's house. By tracing the parallels between accounts of helping Mama and narratives of home, it was possible to infer that the care enacted towards her was in part a reflection of the desire to care for the volunteer tourists' own mothers and families. For example, Linsey's investment in the house-building project was partly derived from the need that she felt to protect her own mother who was precariously housed at the time. Linsey's statement that she wanted to take a photograph of a house that she would build in Kenya to show to her mother was thus a powerful statement of her need to perform ethical agency both as a compassionate, ethical tourist and as a caring daughter. This imbrication of enactments of care towards those who are usually proximate and those who are usually distant, in both spatial and affective senses, complicates our reading of these practices. These data seem to suggest

that inchoate geographies of care do not simply entail feelings of empathy towards distant, suffering others as discrete from other practices of care. Rather, benevolence and beneficence for distant others become enmeshed with more everyday relationalities, simultaneously imbuing them with greater affective potency and diminishing the significance of the distant other as the locus of concern.

### *Poverty and transformation*

Volunteer tourism has been invested with the hope that it can bring about social transformation in poor parts of the world and personal transformation for those who choose to travel in this way. I argue that these two desired outcomes are intertwined and that a lack of ethical transformation on the part of volunteer tourists will ultimately impede efforts to raise visited communities out of poverty. More specifically, it has been posited that volunteer tourists will develop cross-cultural understanding (Sin 2009; Raymond and Hall 2008; Simpson 2004; Nyaupane et al. 2008) and global citizenship (Lyons et al. 2012; McGehee and Santos 2005; Heron 2011; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Diprose 2012; Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011). Crabtree (2008, p. 26) suggests that international volunteers may also move from 'a charity orientation toward more of a social justice orientation'; from a position of *giving to* others to *working with* others to achieve greater prosperity and equality. As writers such as Noy (2007, 2004a, 2004b) have shown, there is a strong rhetoric of personal transformation associated with travel and with alternative youth travel in particular. I was interested to find out whether the moralised context of volunteer tourist would engender transformations of an ethical kind and while many of the tourists claimed that they changed through their experiences a longitudinal perspective revealed the often ideological use of such claims.

In Chapter 6, I explored the potential for the volunteer tourists' development of greater cross-cultural understanding through encounters and interactions with members of the visited communities. What my analysis revealed is that while some community members were interacted with on a regular basis, others were avoided completely. For example, the volunteer tourists adored the younger children who would often approach us wanting to hold hands or play. The children constituted 'low-risk communication partners' who were unlikely to challenge the tourists' motivations and with whom imaginary identifications were formed (Caton and Santos 2008). On the other hand, community members who harassed or made financial demands on the volunteer tourists, such as the adolescent boys who tried to get hold of people's contact details or attempted to sell bracelets, were avoided due to their disruption of the fantasy of the happy poor that I have already discussed above. Accounts of cross-cultural contact, particularly in the tourism context, often fail to acknowledge the heterogeneity of communities and the varying degrees of engagement that visitors will want to have with different social groups. Even when interactions did occur, there appeared to be significant barriers to the development of cross-cultural understanding, such as language barriers, the volunteer tourists' separation from villages in secure accommodation complexes, the reluctance to become friends with members of the community and the perception of locals as a generalised, stereotyped Other.

The practical and symbolic barriers separating the volunteer tourists from the visited communities made it difficult for them to come away from the experience transformed in terms of their understanding of Kenyan society and culture. An ethical transformation fostered by witnessing poverty was more readily available and the majority of those I spoke to returned from Kenya feeling greater 'gratitude' and 'appreciation' for their lives back in the UK. However, several appeared to use this rhetoric to enable the continuity of their existing lifestyle rather than challenging or critiquing it. For example, Kate drew on the discourse of gratitude to express how much she enjoyed the luxuries of life in the West. Lisa, whose case we explored in Chapter 9, used her changed perspective on materialism to claim ethical betterment while quickly resuming a high level of spending, thus implying that it was sufficient to undergo an internal, psychological change. In this way, the process of attaining gratitude had several fantasmatic effects: it created the illusion that poverty can conceal its own lack through filling in an ethical void in the tourist subject; it created a tourist imaginary of the Third World as a space of ethical redemption; finally, it allowed for a sustained ideological commitment to consumerism. I argue that this uncritical resumption of the lifestyle that the volunteer tourists had wanted to get away from reveals their investment in and enjoyment of consumer practices. It also demonstrates the ideological function of returning travellers to 'the same' rather than challenging them to imagine a different form of subjectivity (Cremin 2007).

There is certainly potential for volunteer tourists to learn about other cultures and to develop a critical, politicised appreciation of the differences and commonalities between societies. However, as I have argued in greater detail elsewhere (Crossley 2013), we need to overcome the widely discredited assumption that cross-cultural understanding and ethical self-change will develop through contact alone (Raymond and Hall 2008; Sin 2009). It needs to be acknowledged that volunteer tourists' perceptions of visited communities reflect investments, defences and culturally shaped desires, all of which have the potential to facilitate or obstruct cross-cultural learning. The programme that I observed provided its clients with only a small amount of information on the country that they would be visiting. While important, I believe that the provision of information on destinations needs to be complemented by an ethos of politicised learning. This implies a delivery of information that invites tourists to reflect on the economic, cultural and ideological relations between their society and that of the tourism destination, rather than simply representing visited others as something that can be learnt about without any necessary reflection on their own social position (Simpson 2005, 2004; Barker and Smith 1996). Additionally, providing volunteer tourists with a supportive environment in which to share experiences and feelings with others, such as a post-placement online forum, would enable them to reflect collectively on barriers to change. While accepting that such a strategy of reflecting on desire and investments would risk failure due to the volatile, untameable nature of the unconscious (Callard 2003), it might at least go some way towards empowering volunteer tourists to make positive changes in their lives.

### *Affect, ideology and change*

This summary of volunteer tourism's imaginaries provides answers to the three research questions that were posited at the inception of this study:

- Can a psychosocial approach reveal volunteer tourism's affective dynamics?
- What ideological and power relations are produced through volunteer tourism?
- Does volunteer tourism create (lasting) ethical change in tourist subjectivity?

In relation to the first question, this research has shown that a Lacanian psychosocial approach is capable of producing a complex and nuanced account of the desire, defences, identifications and investments that condition volunteer tourism encounters. This patterning of affect might be thought of as a 'libidinal economy' of tourism discourse (Hook 2008b) and I have tried to articulate the linkages between this economy as a social system and its unique lived experience. Regarding volunteer tourism's ideological dimension, I have elucidated how the practice is regulated by ideological injunctions that command the tourist to sate its desire through consumption (Enjoy!) and to act in accordance with the ethical injunction (Cremin 2011, 2007). Furthermore, volunteer tourists are subject to practices of neoliberal governmentality that isolate the 'individual' as a self-regulating agential entity that is ethically responsible for its own development and actualization (Ren 2005; Rose 1990; Vrasti 2013; Mostafanezhad 2014). The research explored how popular culture propagates the notion that travel to Third World destinations can be used in this reflexive project of self-development in order to attain ethical subjectivity. However, the type of self-change these experiences engender is most often depoliticised, returns tourists unproblematically to their existing lifestyles, and promotes a belief that the appropriate response to global social inequality is one of sentimentalism and individual morality (McMurria 2008; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Vrasti 2013). I argued that these ideological barriers may prevent volunteer tourists from achieving lasting ethical change as a result of their travel experiences.

In terms of power relations produced through volunteer tourism, the data explored here suggest that there remains severe asymmetry between tourists and visited people despite hopes that the practice will foster greater cross-cultural understanding and an ethos of friendship and reciprocity (McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Brown and Morrison 2003; Raymond and Hall 2008; Stening 1979; Lyons and Wearing 2008a). Volunteer tourists at times displayed objectifying tendencies through their photography and the ways in which they romanticised the Kenyan people as features of an exotic, authentic culture and landscape. The need to preserve this authenticity was used to legitimise the volunteer tourists' suggestion that Kenya should not become overly developed or Westernised. Furthermore, the volunteer tourists appeared to want to curtail the local people's economic and developmental aspirations, implying that the thought of a more prosperous life would give them 'false hope'. This resistance towards attempts from the visited community members to exert agency could also be observed in relation to the binary between active, Western care givers and passive, local care receivers enacted through the volunteer work (Barnett and Land 2007; Mostafanezhad 2013b; Silk 2004;

Sin 2010). However, the inversion of this active/passive power relation occurred through encounters with local people who made financial demands on the tourists, demonstrating the local people's own agency in shaping their interactions with visitors.

### Volunteer tourism policy and practice

As a growing sector, volunteer tourism has the potential to influence positively other parts of the tourism industry in terms of promoting sustainability, cross-cultural learning and cooperation, and decommodified business principles (Wearing 2001; Wearing et al. 2005). However, as Wearing and McGehee (2013b) observe, volunteer tourism is now increasingly located at the centre rather than the periphery of the tourism industry, with many programmes run by commercial providers within what is essentially a mass tourism model. Moving into the mainstream carries with it the potential for greater influence within the industry but there is also a risk that the pressure for growth and productivity within a for-profit model of volunteer tourism will erode its ethical ethos. Looking to the future of volunteer tourism, some commentators have suggested that accreditation would be a viable way of setting standards for the industry, guaranteeing stakeholder participation, and monitoring and regulating impacts on visited communities (Wearing and McGehee 2013a, 2013b; Fee and Mdee 2011). I advocate such a move given the concern I have expressed regarding lax enforcement of codes of conduct—resulting in culturally insensitive behaviour on the part of some volunteer tourists—and the potential for commercial volunteer tourism providers to tailor their programmes according to the desire of paying clients rather than the needs of visited communities.

In addition to this need for greater regulation, I have argued for the implementation of a critical pedagogy in volunteer tourism to encourage politicised learning about the relations between tourists' home societies and those that they visit (Crossley 2013; Simpson 2005, 2004; Barker and Smith 1996; Raymond and Hall 2008). The need for such a pedagogical framework is evident from the findings of this research: the limited information provided to new arrivals in Kenya, the tendency to stereotype or romanticise visited communities, and the depoliticised interpretative schemas available for volunteer tourists to make sense of their experiences. I have argued that the delivery of such a learning strategy might include the provision of information packs, language lessons to promote greater verbal communication with local people, supported periods of collective reflection, and post-placement online forums for volunteer tourists to keep in touch and continue to think about on their experience. Future research needs to be directed at the evaluation of such methods for fostering critical learning among volunteer tourists and could also usefully address the structural components of volunteer tourism programmes, such as accommodation arrangements and the duration of stays, as social contexts that either facilitate or impede learning.

The British government continues to actively promote overseas youth volunteering as part of its domestic citizenship and service-learning agenda (Lough and Allum 2013, 2011). From a policy perspective, there is an imperative to widen participation in international volunteering for young people from less privileged social backgrounds given its current exclusivity and the advantage that the experience can provide in terms

of employability and access to higher education (Jones 2004; Heath 2007; Simpson 2005). However, more urgently, there is a need to improve the regulation of programmes offered by organisations based in the UK so as to assure that placements of mutual benefit to volunteers and visited communities are being offered. While the government's advocacy of volunteer tourism is based on the positive personal and social outcomes of well-designed and well-managed programmes, there needs to be recognition of the diversity of providers and variability in the quality of volunteer projects. Additionally, while I have strongly advocated the use of learning frameworks to enable volunteer tourists to understand their position in relation to global social inequalities, domestically there may also be opportunities for young people to reflect on social and class dynamics of the gap year. With widened access to such travel planned, a future research avenue might be to explore classed experiences of volunteer tourism.

### Methodological challenges

While I have used this thesis to put forward a strong case for a psychosocial approach to volunteer tourist subjectivity, it inevitably has its limitations. I want to conclude by reflecting on some of the research's methodological challenges, including generating psychosocial data with young people, the voices of tourism stakeholders that had to be omitted, the issue of reflexivity, and my use of Lacanian theory. By bringing these issues to the fore, I hope to further contextualise the analytic claims I have made and put forward suggestions for how psychosocial research in tourism studies can be advanced.

### *Researching young people*

Researching young travellers presented both methodological and ethical challenges, some of which I had not anticipated. While I had tried to develop a theoretical awareness of youth as transitional life stage used to enact reflexive biographical identity projects (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Henderson et al. 2006), especially through travel (Noy 2004a, 2004b; Desforges 2000), my awareness of the methodological implications of investigating young people was far less advanced. This issue was brought to my attention primarily through a number of difficult interview experiences. Having been inspired by the rich biographical narratives generated by other psychosocial researchers, I went into my own interviews hoping to elicit the same sort of responses – data that would be conducive to a psychosocial analysis. However, I was surprised that even after trying to build rapport with my participants and developing techniques to invite extended biographical narratives, many of the answers that I got during the interviews were short and lacking in detail. While there were undoubtedly many factors that contributed to this reluctance to talk in-depth about themselves, I believe that age was a strong contributor. Particularly for the younger participants, the formality of the research interview and the fact that I was older and occupied a position of authority as the researcher would have intensified an already unequal power dynamic, creating a potentially intimidating environment (Kvale 2007, 2006; Dowling 2005; Stanley and Wise 1983).

As a possible upshot of this power relation, I sensed that some participants struggled

with the interactional dynamics of the interview, deviating as it did from a normal conversation. Despite my efforts to ensure that my interviewing style was conversational and framed as a form of 'mundane interaction' (Rapley 2004), I had also been influenced by psychosocial conventions that encourage the use of silence and gentle prompting to allow the interviewee to generate narratives guided by unconscious or emotional associations (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Cartwright 2004). At times, when I was trying to give my participants the space to elaborate on their answers, I sensed nervousness and it is possible that this strategy made them feel exposed and awkward. Conversely, the photo-elicitation exercise conducted after the final interview worked extremely well. My participants seemed to momentarily forget that they were being interviewed and recorded; instead they became absorbed in recollections prompted by looking at their images from Kenya. The ritual of sharing holiday photographs would have presented the volunteer tourists with a more familiar form of social interaction in which they knew how to act (Chalfen 1998; Desforges 1998). This success of the photo-elicitation exercise suggests that incorporating more visual methods into qualitative tourism research would be conducive to creating an enriched account of volunteer tourists' experiences while also providing a way of putting young people at ease and allowing them to be discursive beyond the conventional interview setting.

### Contexts and voices

The phenomenon of volunteer tourism presented a challenging spatial and temporal context in which to conduct research. My desire to produce a theorisation that was sensitive to the relations between volunteer tourists' experiences abroad and their mundane realities (Franklin and Crang 2001; Graburn 2002; Larsen 2008; McCabe 2002; Hui 2008; White and White 2007) meant that the research had to travel – it could not be contained in any one space. By interviewing the tourists about their home lives and then joining them collectively in Kenya in order to conduct participant observation, I hoped to be able to capture enough of each social context to be able to construct a picture of the relations between each. However, as I have noted above, I often felt that I did not fully understand my participants' everyday lives. I listened to their narratives about school, work, friends and family life, but only saw snippets of these during my brief visits to their houses or home towns to conduct the interviews. I feel that the research would have been much richer had I had the opportunity to spend longer with my participants in the UK, in order to provide more of an ethnographic perspective on their social context at home *and* away, but their geographical dispersal across the country made this logistically impossible. In any case, such a strategy might have been perceived as overly intrusive by potential participants, especially given the already substantial time commitment that the research demanded.

In addition to being restricted by this underexposure to the volunteer tourists' home context, I am also aware of a limitation in terms of how I chose to present the Kenyan context and whose voices were privileged in the research. Throughout the course of this project, I have been acutely aware of the absence of Kenyan voices and those of other stakeholders, such as members of staff from the volunteer tourism provider. As I

explained in Chapter 1, my main rationale behind such a close focus on the volunteer tourists was to enable an in-depth, longitudinal analysis of their subjectivities and experiences. Given finite resources and time, I felt that it would be most productive to focus efforts on this one group of actors within the volunteer tourism encounter. This was further justified by my analytic focus on Western cultural fantasies and subjectivity. Additionally, given my position as a white Westerner, in order to include local voices in the research I would have needed a much longer period of cultural immersion in order to fully understand the Kenyan social setting. In other words, I did not want to engage only superficially or tokenistically with the visited communities in Kenya and run the risk of misrepresenting them. While it was beyond the scope of this project to include voices from the visited communities and of other tourism stakeholders, an approach that traces the affective and fantasmatic dynamics between such groups in interaction could constitute an interesting future research avenue.

### *Reflexivity*

It was important to me to produce a piece of research that was deeply reflexive and that went 'beyond the rather mechanistic operationalisation of reflexivity in qualitative social science in terms of the main, socially-given identities' (Hollway 2004, p. 8). While it would have been far easier simply to note how the interactional dynamics of the interviews and fieldwork were affected by my social identity as a young, white, middle-class woman, my use of psychoanalysis created an imperative to reflect upon and reveal my own feelings and countertransference impressions (Jervis 2009; Sprague 2005; Clarke 2002). This was important both in terms of remaining attuned to my participants and the extra-discursive, embodied and affective features of the interview, and in order to heighten my awareness of the meanings that I was, consciously or unconsciously, bringing to the research (Birkeland 2005). However, while recording my thoughts and feelings after each interview and in Kenya was relatively unproblematic, I faced difficult decisions once it came to writing up the research. It was hard to ascertain how much personal disclosure was sufficient to make the analysis work and often during the writing I felt the boundaries between my personal and professional selves dissolving.

Through the inclusion of extracts from my field diary, photographs of myself and examples of dreams and waking fantasies, I tried to give a candid account of how I had felt and acted, even when this cast me in a negative light. For example, it was rather embarrassing to describe the way that I had objectified and exoticised the Maasai tribe members and my fantasy about doing a sponsored run to raise money for one of the schools in Kenya. However, perhaps inevitably I exercised a certain degree of self-censorship; some reflections seemed too embarrassing or incriminating to share, whilst others were extremely personal and would have necessitated the disclosure of information about my family, which I did not feel comfortable doing. While at the time this seemed like an acceptable line to draw, I was conscious of the extent to which I had exposed some of my participants in the analysis – particularly those who had formed mini-case studies and, of course, Lisa. In my fervour to build a rich and complete picture of Lisa's life and experiences, I at times seemed to lose sight of my ethical obligation to

protect her anonymity. While to some extent I felt entitled to analyse material that my participants had freely disclosed in the interview in the knowledge that they would be used to write this thesis, the fact that ultimately it was *me* who decided what material would be included in the write-up heightened my awareness of the uncomfortable power dynamics operating within the research.

The discomfort that I experienced through my reflexive practice can be treated as an ethical opportunity rather than an obstacle to be overcome. Having to go through the process of considering what information I felt comfortable sharing about myself enabled me to proceed more cautiously and sensitively when it came to writing about aspects of my participants' personal lives. We can also treat this discomfort as productive in a methodological sense. Pillow (2003, p. 192) contends that mainstream reflexivity in qualitative research risks stagnating into a set of practices that become complicit in reproducing the social structures and power relations that many researchers seek to challenge. What she advocates instead is exactly the sort of reflexivity that I experienced – 'a reflexivity of discomfort' that critically interrogates the histories and relationalities upon which research relationships are predicated (cf. Hollway 2004). These reflections reinforce my belief that psychosocial research needs to continue to develop practices for being reflexive and ways in which this reflexivity can be deployed within research.

### *Lacanian theory*

My original interest in Lacanian theory emerged out of a need to articulate what I considered to be the most fundamental affective register of tourism: desire. Compared to other psychoanalytic writers, Lacan seemed to provide the most complete and nuanced theorisation of the intersubjective dynamics of desire and the inherently social nature of subjectivity. However, engaging with this rich and incredibly complex body of theory in a way that did justice to Lacan's concepts and did not revert to familiar dualisms between the psychic/social, self/Other, or fantasy/reality proved to be a significant challenge. For example, at times I found it difficult to write about participants' desire in a way that fully expressed its subjective experience as something belonging to them, as well as capturing its extimate nature and locatedness in the Other. Similarly, I wanted to elucidate fantasy as an illusion that unavoidably structures subjectivity but it was difficult to express this without inferring the existence of some form of pre-fantasmatic, apprehendable 'reality'. I also found Lacanian theory limited in its ability to help me to analyse the embodied nature of the touristic experience and in this respect it might have been productive to draw on other, complementary theoretical resources.

In terms of the analytic utility of Lacanian theory, I drew most frequently on the concepts of symbolic and imaginary identifications as a way of articulating volunteer tourism's desirous and fantasmatic dimensions. While these were the concepts that resonated most strongly with my data, I felt under pressure to use more vogue research associated with the 'new' or 'post' Lacanians that draws more on Lacan's later notions of drive, enjoyment and the real (Mellard 1998; Jagodzinski 2003; Kingsbury 2005). I did engage with enjoyment to some extent through my analysis of volunteer tourism's ideological dynamics, yet it would have been possible to construct an alternative

analysis in which these later concepts played a more pivotal role. Such an analysis would have expressed the affective dynamics of volunteer tourism in a subtly different way and may have revealed different facets of the tourists' investments and desire. It may be productive for future psychosocial research in tourism studies to explore Lacanian theory through various angles and interpretations in order to develop a theoretical language most appropriate to the context of tourist subjectivity.

**Conclusion**

This thesis has made the case for a psychosocial approach to volunteer tourist subjectivity. I have shown that it is possible to reclaim the psychological in tourism studies in a way that does not reduce the complexity of tourist experience to the inner workings of the mind nor reinforces essentialising dualisms between the social and the psychological. Utilising Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to analyse volunteer tourists' narratives has revealed how their practices are fraught with tension, contradictions, the influence of ideology and biographical investments. If we really want to understand the dynamics of tourist motivation and subjectivity then these complex arenas of practice will have to be engaged with. It is my contention that this can only be achieved through a psychosocial theorisation because of its articulation of the nexus between the social and the psychological, and the cogent account of agency, meaning and experience that ensues from this articulation. The climate is right for such critical analytic work in the field to be embraced and it is my hope that other researchers will take on-board the suggestions made within these pages in order to advance their own work and to develop our theoretical resources.

Volunteer tourism continues to increase in popularity and has the potential to influence development discourse, meanings of care in a globalised world, the distinction between work and leisure, and the ability of communities in poor parts of the world to determine their future. Those working within the industry need to be mindful of its complicity in reproducing stereotypical depictions of Third World countries derived from colonial discourse and the way in which such imagery is latched onto by volunteer tourists' desire for authenticity. There also needs to be far greater awareness of the ethical dilemmas thrown up by the apparent irreconcilability of conservation and development discourses and by encounters with community members that disrupt tourists' preconceptions and fantasies. Rather than treating these difficult moments as sources of discomfort that should be eliminated from the volunteer tourism experience, I suggest that they can challenge tourists to work through the ethical quandaries of their travel practices and to learn about the material reality and experience of others. A psychosocial account enables us to trace the ideological contours of these practices, revealing how even the most intimate feelings or desires are inscribed in the social field while at the same time sensitising us to the potency of their lived experience. The political and ethical transformation of volunteer tourism will rely upon the capacity of its actors to challenge their inscription in the social order and their adherence to the law of desire. Only when there is an attempt to transform the psychosocial will a space be opened for the formation of new subjectivities and new volunteer tourism imaginaries.

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# APPENDIX A: Participant information leaflet



**Want your experiences to be recognised?**

This is an opportunity for you to get involved in a research project that will focus on your experiences of volunteering in your gap year.

Volunteering abroad is an increasingly popular choice for young people taking a gap year. However, not much is known about why young people make this choice or about what effect it has on them.

You can help to answer these questions. You will have unique insights into how gap year volunteering affects people over time by moulding certain values, identities and ways of seeing the world.

So here's your chance to get your experiences recognised and to help shape the future of how gap year volunteering is understood and treated.

Please read this information leaflet carefully and take time to decide whether you wish to participate. Feel free to talk to other people about the research!

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Effective 1st December 2009

**Gap Year Research 2010**

Your opportunity to get involved

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**Why am I doing this research?**

Volunteering abroad is looked upon favourably by universities and employers and is a popular choice for young people taking a gap year.

However, there is a need to know more about how these gap year activities affect young people, so that one can say whether or not they should be encouraged and how volunteer placements should be structured.

**Who can take part?**

To participate in this research you must be aged between 17 – 24 years and be about to undertake a volunteer placement in a developing country.

**What would be involved?**

I am interested to see how the way you think and feel about your volunteer placement changes over time. In order to do this I will need to speak to you at several points in time:

- before you leave
- during your placement
- shortly after your placement
- a few months after your placement

These conversations will last about 1 hour, depending on how much you have to tell me!

**When and where will this happen?**

Our conversations will always be held at a time and place that is convenient for you. When you are volunteering I will come and visit you for a couple of weeks in order to speak with you again and gain more familiarity with the project you are working on.

**What will I do with the information?**

I will record our conversations and write them up into what is called a transcript, which you can have if you wish. This will allow me to read what you've said again.

I will use this information to write my PhD thesis, which will be assessed in order for me to obtain a PhD degree. I may also publish academic articles and speak at conferences about the research.

**Will everything you say be kept private?**

Our conversations will always be held in private and all files I keep of them will be stored safely. When I transcribe the conversations, I will protect your identity by changing your name and any information that would make it possible to identify you.

**What if you change your mind?**

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you are free to leave at any time without giving a reason. All you have to do is let me know.

**Who am I?**

My name is Émilie Crossley and I am a PhD researcher at Cardiff University.

I didn't take a gap year so maybe that's why the topic interests me so much! However, I love travelling, experiencing new cultures and meeting new people. Apart from studying, my interests include hiking, world cinema, and playing the flute.

I am supervised by two senior researchers in the School of Social Sciences. The research has the approval of the School Research Ethics Committee and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

**How do you take part?**

If you would be interested in taking part or have any questions about the research, feel free to contact me on Tel: **07505959183** or email: **CrossleyE@cardiff.ac.uk**

I would be happy to answer any questions and look forward to meeting you!

**APPENDIX B: Participant consent form**

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<table>
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**CONSENT FORM**

**Gap year volunteers abroad research**

</td>
<td>

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRIFYSGOL CAERDYⁿ

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

</td>
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1. I have read and understood the research information leaflet dated 1st December 2009.

2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and these have been answered satisfactorily.

3. I agree to take part in the research, which will involve being interviewed and audio-recorded.

4. I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the research at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part.

5. I understand that my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the research.

6. I understand that my words may be quoted in publications and other research outputs but my name or any information that would identify me will not be used.

_____       _____       _____
Name of participant            Signature                  Date


_____       _____       _____
Name of researcher             Signature                  Date

# APPENDIX C: Transcription conventions

The following transcription conventions, originally devised by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson and Heritage 1999), were used to transcribe the interviews in this research:

(.)      Short, untimed pause in the flow of speech

<u>text</u>      Emphasised word(s)

(*text*)      Non-speech sounds such as laughter

°text°      Word(s) spoken quietly

text?      A question or raised intonation at the end of a phrase

te-      Preceding sound is cut off