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## **Voluntourism and the Neoliberal Market**

**An investigation into the use of voluntourists as a development tool and as the primary care-givers of vulnerable children in Mexican communities**

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King's College London

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# **Voluntourism and the Neoliberal Market: An investigation into the use of voluntourists as a development tool and as the primary care-givers of vulnerable children in Mexican communities**

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**by**

**Stefanie Hannant**

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**King's College London**

**September 2014**

# Acknowledgements

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The triumph of any project is dependent upon the support, encouragement and guidance of many people, and this thesis is no exception. There are many to whom I am greatly indebted and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their instrumental involvement in the completion of the research contained within these pages.

Firstly I would like to express the greatest appreciation to the tireless work of Dr Kate Maclean whose advice, supervision and counsel has ensured the successful completion of this body of work. Her expertise in the fields of feminism, development and Latin America has proved invaluable, and her guidance, patience and sense of humour have encouraged me to persevere through times when all seemed hopeless.

I have also greatly benefited from the supervision and assistance of Dr Jamie Lorimer, whose knowledge of volunteer tourism has significantly guided the research and analysis, and this is very much appreciated. In addition, without the encouragement and guidance and generously personal support of Dr Kathy Baker, this project would never have materialised; thank you so much.

I am particularly grateful for the assistance given by the faculty staff of the Social Sciences and Humanities department of the Universidad de Guadalajara. Their generous efforts helped enormously with the fieldwork, and their discussions and insightful comments on the Jalisco district have been illuminating and valuable.

I would also like to express appreciation to all of my respondents; the volunteers, staff and the various members of the three projects and organisations donated their thoughts, opinions and time most generously; it was a pleasure working with you all, and I offer you heartfelt thanks for agreeing to be a part of the research. I would also like to express gratitude to my hardworking interpreters, without whom much of the research material could not have been captured, and whose insights, feedback and skill have been of enormous help.

In particular, I would like to thank my partner Andrew for his kindness, patience and ceaseless encouragement and faith in my abilities. In addition his technical wizardry has saved my sanity on many occasions. My family have also given me their unconditional support throughout, as always, and for which my mere expression of thanks does not seem sufficient.

Finally I would like to thank the children at each of the three projects I visited, whose homes I invaded during the fieldwork, and whose lives are deeply affected by the topic under investigation here. It is to you I dedicate this research.

# Abstract

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The volunteer tourism sector has undergone a rapid commercialisation through its induction into the neoliberal market, with sending organisations advertising volunteering placements with defined sets of marketable commodities in an attempt to capture their market share. These include individualised educational experiences, the opportunity to 'do' development through working with vulnerable children, and a vacation that combines elements of adventure and exoticism, altruism and hedonism. Mexico is the archetypal volunteer destination, and its Jalisco district provides the contextual setting for this research. Framed by literature on neoliberalism, development and care, this thesis set out to explore how voluntourists are negotiating their position as caregivers in the context of marketised voluntourism and care within the neoliberal landscape of voluntourism in Mexico. Over nine months of field work, participant observations and interviews were conducted with various local residents, volunteers and the staff members of three different orphanages and organisations. Each organisation was chosen for their diverse positioning within the shallow commercial voluntourism sector. Findings demonstrate that organisational management and operations have been affected by the increasing neoliberalisation of voluntourism, thus creating a precarious balance between commerce and philanthropic virtue. The commercial approach adopted by the organisations has depoliticised and simplified the framing of development, creating a shallow and superficial engagement with the issues surrounding poverty. This neoliberal and depoliticised approach has also highlighted the colonial underpinnings of the sector, which affects the perceptions, relationships and power dynamics between agents. It is hoped that this analysis presents a more holistic picture of voluntourism, providing some much needed empirical evidence of the influence intense commercial and social pressures are having on the imaginaries of voluntourism produced by the organisations, and in turn how this shapes the voluntourists' negotiation of their subjectivities and subsequently, how this is affecting the care environment provided to vulnerable children.

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# List of Abbreviations

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## Organisations

<b>ACHR</b>	American Convention of Human Rights
<b>BSI</b>	British Standards Institute
<b>CEF</b>	<i>Estatad de Familia</i> (State Family Council)
<b>CONAPO</b>	<i>Consejo Nacional de Población</i> (National Council of Population)
<b>CONEVAL</b>	<i>Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social</i> (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy)
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>DIF</b>	<i>Desarrollo Integral de la Familia</i> (Social Services)
<b>DRI</b>	Disability Rights International
<b>EAP</b>	Education Abroad Programme
<b>ECM</b>	Every Child Matters
<b>FONATUR</b>	<i>El Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo</i> (National Tourism Development Trust Fund)
<b>ICNL</b>	International Centre for Non-Profit Law
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>INEGI</b>	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute for Statistics and Geography)
<b>IPC</b>	International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth
<b>ISCA</b>	International Save the Children Alliance
<b>ISS</b>	International Social Services

<b>MIFAN</b>	Ministry of Family, Adolescence and Childhood
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NSPCC</b>	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
<b>PPT</b>	Pro-Poor Tourism
<b>RELAF</b>	Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar
<b>RTP</b>	Responsible Tourism Programme
<b>SECTUR</b>	<i>La Secretaría de Turismo</i> (National Tourism Ministry)
<b>SEP</b>	<i>Secretaría de Educación Pública</i> (Mexican Education Ministry)
<b>TRM</b>	Tourism Research Marketing
<b>UCAS</b>	University and College Admission Service
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VSO</b>	Voluntary Service Overseas
<b>WTO</b>	World Tourism Organisation
<b>YOG</b>	Year Out Group

## Analytical codes

Site A	
<b>OrgA</b>	Organisation A
<b>Project A</b>	Orphanage associated with Organisation A
<b>Ao</b>	UK employee of Organisation A
<b>Apm</b>	Project manager of Project A
<b>Aapm</b>	Manager of an alternative project at site A
<b>Av</b>	Volunteer at Project A. Will be numbered 1-17 (e.g. Av1, Av2, Av3)
<b>As</b>	Staff at Project A. Will be numbered 1-9 (e.g. As1, As2, As3)
<b>Al</b>	Local community member at site A. Will be numbered 1-14 (e.g. Al1, Al2, Al3)

<b>Site B</b>	
<b>OrgB</b>	Organisation B
<b>Project B</b>	Orphanage associated with Organisation B
<b>Bo</b>	UK employee of Organisation B
<b>Bpm</b>	Project manager of Project B
<b>Bapm</b>	Manager of an alternative project at site B
<b>Bv</b>	Volunteer at Project B. Will be numbered 1-13 (e.g. Bv1, Bv2, Bv3)
<b>Bs</b>	Staff at Project B. Will be numbered 1-5 (e.g. Bs1, Bs2, Bs3)
<b>Bl</b>	Local community member at site B. Will be numbered 1-14 (e.g. Bl1, Bl2, Bl3)

<b>Site C</b>	
<b>OrgC</b>	Organisation C
<b>Project C</b>	Orphanage associated with Organisation C
<b>Co</b>	UK employee of Organisation C
<b>Cpm</b>	Project manager of Project C
<b>Capm</b>	Manager of an alternative project at site C
<b>Cv</b>	Volunteer at Project C. Will be numbered 1-9 (e.g. Cv1, Cv2, Cv3)
<b>Cs</b>	Staff at Project C. Will be numbered 1-5 (e.g. Cs1, Cs2, Cs3)
<b>Cl</b>	Local community member at site C. Will be numbered 1-14 (e.g. Cl1, Cl2, Cl3)

# Chapter 1- Introduction

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## **Volunteer Tourism**

While the concept of international volunteering is not a new phenomenon (missionary work has been taking place for centuries), there has been a rapid increase in recent years in the number of individuals taking part in short-term organised volunteer programmes (Raymond and Hall, 2008). This has been paralleled with an increase in sending organisations, many of which now promote combining volunteering activities with an extended vacation within or around the destination. This emerging sector has been labelled volunteer tourism, and has now become the norm for wealthy, young westerners seeking self-development or the chance to make a difference before starting university (McGehee, 2007). This form of tourism has been defined by the industry as a “seamlessly integrated combination of voluntary service to a destination, along with the best, traditional elements of travel-arts, culture, geography and history, within that specific destination” (Volunteer Tourism Organisation, 2005). The crucial element of volunteer tourism is for the volunteers to visit the developing world and provide much needed assistance. The work can include environmental conservation, research, or social-development activities (Brown and Morrison, 2003).

It has been defined as a type of alternative, or responsible tourism in which tourists “volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might 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” (Wearing, 2001: 1). From this, volunteer tourism has been viewed as a more responsible and ethical alternative to the ills that have been highlighted in relation to mass tourism (Wearing and Grabowski, 2011). Admittedly not everyone has been willing to view volunteer tourism in such a positive light, and some authors (Guttentag, 2009; Simpson, 2004; 2005) have expressed concerns that the lack of regulation within the industry may

cause volunteer tourism to fall into the commercialised traps akin to mass tourism (Tomazos and Cooper, 2012). However, it has been demonstrated that volunteer tourism is not a homogenous phenomenon, and Callanan and Thomas (2005) have developed a conceptual framework based upon shallow and deep ecology<sup>1</sup> (Naess, 1972; Acott et al, 1998; Sylvan, 1985) illustrating that volunteer tourism is ambiguous, with a great deal of differentiation (see figure 1.1):

*Figure 1.1 A Conceptual Framework for Volunteer Tourism Projects*

	<b><i>Shallow VTP</i></b>	<b><i>Intermediate VTP</i></b>	<b><i>Deep VPT</i></b>
<i>Flexibility in duration of participants</i>	High degree of flexibility and choices for volunteers	High degree of flexibility and choices for volunteers	Time periods typically determined by the organisation rather than the volunteer
<i>Promotion of the project rather than the destination</i>	Strong promotion of the destination and additional travel opportunities	Promotes the project within the context of the destination	Strong emphasis on the project, the activities, the local community, the area and the value of the project to the area
<i>Targeting volunteers- altruism V. self interest</i>			
<i>Markers</i>	Promotes the experience and skills to be gained with specific reference to academic credit	Promotes the experience and skills to be gained with specific reference to academic credit, as well as the contribution to the local area	More focus on the value of the work to the local community and area. Promotes cultural immersion, intrinsic rewards and reciprocal relationships
<i>Skills/Qualifications of participants</i>	No/limited skills required	Skills are not required but desirable	Focus on skills, qualifications and time
<i>Active/Passive participation</i>	Passive	Moderate	Active- immersion in local area
<i>Level of contribution to locals</i>	Contribution of volunteers is limited on an individual basis but collectively can be of value to the local area. Limited information provided on local involvement in decision-making	Contribution of volunteers is moderate on an individual basis but collectively can be of value to the local area. Limited information provided on local involvement in decision-making	Contribution of volunteers is explicit with a direct impact on the local area. Clear information on how locals are involved in the decision-making process of the project

(Taken from Callanan and Thomas, 2005: 198)

<sup>1</sup> Shallow and deep ecology is an environmental philosophy that characterises the advocacy of the inherent worth of all living things, regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs. It categorises the restructuring of human societies in accordance with such ideas (Naess, 1972)



One end of the spectrum represents deep volunteer tourism which seeks volunteers with specific skill-sets, actively encourages volunteers to commit for long durations and provides intensive pre-project training. Intermediate volunteer tourism is within the middle of the spectrum, providing a medium course that combines elements from deep and shallow tourism, whilst shallow volunteer tourism is represented at the far end of the spectrum. The volunteer projects and organisations that fall into this shallow category promote the *experience* of the trip, rather than the benefits to the local community, offer flexible arrangements in relation to start dates and durations for volunteers, and do not require any specific skills, qualifications or experience, with little or no pre-project training. The project is promoted alongside (or secondary to) the destination, with details given about tourist activities and sites available (Callanan and Thomas, 2005).

Volunteer tourists can also be categorised in this manner, with shallow volunteers being more concerned with self-development, career-enhancement and leisure activities (Callanan and Thomas, 2005). These tourists are more likely to volunteer for 3 weeks or less, and are the ones this study is particularly interested in. It is these 'shallow' volunteers that demand very short term volunteer vacations, from companies that are highly commercial, offering complete volunteer/leisure holiday packages (Brown, 2005). This shallow focus has caused those within the industry to develop the term 'voluntourism', helping to make distinctions between those who offer shallow products and attract shallow tourists, and those who are more development-focussed and are committed to providing serious aid by experienced and skilled volunteers (Brown, 2005). This framework helps to illustrate how and why voluntourism development projects are argued to be simplified and depoliticised, and constitutes the basis and the context in which volunteer tourism is framed within this thesis; it is the shallow projects and tourists as defined by Callanan and Thomas (2005) that I label as voluntourism hence forth, and that the research within this thesis will focus its analysis upon.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Volunteering to care for orphans overseas in the context of voluntourism brings together a fascinating array of issues. It represents a neoliberal, decentralised approach to development in that non-governmental and private organisations are expected to provide care to the vulnerable, in a way that erstwhile would have been an expected role of the State. It involves western young people, motivated by various desires, including saving the world and boosting their CVs, to make connections with vulnerable young people in a development context, and deliver this as care work. The organisations in both the developed and developing world, the volunteers and local communities, all perceive and negotiate this situation in different ways. The aim of this thesis is to explore how the voluntourists themselves strategise their position. This will be contextualised by a critical exploration of the voluntourism industry itself, its colonial heritage, and its development in the context of decentralised, neoliberal approaches to development and the care of vulnerable children. These volunteers are negotiating myriad, cross-cutting discourses, including colonial ideas of the hero, of development and gendered ideas of care work, which they recreate in their actions and understandings of themselves as volunteers. The voluntourism industry itself is highly marketed and needs to appeal to the desires of the volunteers as well as the needs of the host projects. The interaction of these multiple and conflicting discourses, and the way these are interpreted and internalised by the voluntourists adds an important piece of the puzzle to being able to address the most crucial question of how this approach to caring for vulnerable children in a development contexts affects the children involved.

## **Research Aim**

It is for these reasons that further study in to voluntourism is so important. The principal aim of this research is to investigate voluntourists subjectivities in relation to the increasingly neoliberalised landscape of voluntourism, how this is affecting the context in which they perform their volunteer duties, and crucially, how this may be affecting the care environment they provide for vulnerable children. A focus on

voluntourist subjectivity centres how the volunteers see their position; their motives and understandings of the situation in which they find themselves. In their views, we can see the recreation of colonial tropes of 'hero' 'expert' and 'victim', as well as the tensions they themselves find between their desires to save the world, enhance their CV and the recognition of their own inadequacies. Therefore, for the reasons outlined above, this thesis wishes to answer the following primary question:

- How do voluntourists negotiate their position as care-givers in the context of marketised voluntourism and the marketisation of care within the neoliberal landscape of voluntourism in Mexico?

### **Research Objectives**

In order to answer this question, this thesis will explore literature surrounding western subjectivities in the context of development, drawing on post-colonial and feminist critiques of development, neoliberalism and care work. It will also explore voluntourism in historical context, highlighting its colonial roots, and how it has become marketised in the neoliberal era. This leads to the following sub-questions which will also guide the research:

1. How are voluntourism sending organisations and host project practices being shaped by their colonial past and neoliberal present?
2. What are the specificities of the Mexican case and what can this tell us about the context in which voluntourists are working more generally?
3. What can an exploration of voluntourist subjectivities tell us about the care environments provided by voluntourism projects and how suitable do these conditions render the voluntourists to be as the primary care-givers for vulnerable children?

## **Research Strategy**

Research into the area of voluntourism is still in its infancy, and as yet, only a select number of qualitative studies specifically identifies and gives voice to the more marginalised stakeholder communities of less-developed countries, and even fewer investigate the bearing upon the children. In order to fully address these aims and objectives, this thesis wishes to investigate how an increasingly neoliberalised voluntourism landscape is influencing voluntourist subjectivities, and how in turn, these subjectivities are shaping both the encounters voluntourists have with their hosts and the children they care for, and subsequently, how this is affecting the context in which the voluntourists work. By studying three locations within the Jalisco district, the thesis aims to further the understanding of how (and by whom) decisions are made relating to the projects, by focussing on the opinions, attitudes and behaviours of the volunteer organisations, the volunteers and the recipients. The neoliberalisation of the voluntourism sector has been documented as a negative process, but as yet there remains relatively limited empirical, academic research to determine whether this transformation has influenced the ability of participants to make a real difference in people's livelihoods, or whether organisations have created colonialist volunteer projects that are perpetuating the inequalities existing between the industrialised north, and the economically poorer south.

Research was carried out within three different voluntourism organisations, based on their different positions within the voluntourism market. Although one is a non-profit organisation, another is a for-profit company and the third is a hybrid (low-profit), all three organisations offer shallow projects and appeal to shallow tourists in accordance with Callanan and Thomas' (2005) typologies. Each organisation offers voluntourism within three different sites within the Jalisco district of Mexico, and equal time was spent at all three. Interviews and participant observation were conducted with members of the local community and voluntourists in order to ascertain how they are involved with the projects, how it is managed, the benefits they feel it brings to themselves and the wider community, and how they feel about voluntourism in general. Members of the voluntourism organisation, including management, were

interviewed so as to provide a holistic approach and the ability to cross-reference opinions and limit bias of the results. The organisations all offer a very similar programme in the form of child care, working specifically with street children and orphans, and this will be the type of project under investigation.

Child care projects have been chosen as a focus for this thesis as they are the programme of choice for the majority of volunteer tourists (Gazeley, 2001; Grayson, 2011), and also present some disturbing and alarming characteristics in relation to voluntourist participation (Richter, 2004). Research will consider what these characteristics are, how they may be shaped by the neoliberal policies and practices of the voluntourism organisations and projects, and how they are affected by the ways in which voluntourists negotiate their subjectivities. More crucially perhaps, the research also questions what consequences this may have for the children in terms of the care environment provided, especially considering reports that transitory care, such as that which voluntourism provides, can be extremely damaging to a child's emotional development, creating and perpetuating abandonment issues, a low sense of self-esteem and self-worth, as well as affecting their long-term ability to form stable and solid relationships (Bowlby, 2005).

Mexico has been chosen as the place of study as primarily, Latin America represents the fastest growing market area for child care projects (TRM, 2008), as it presents an image of a sufficiently impoverished population, whilst still remaining a relatively safe place for young travellers to visit due to hugely popular tourist resorts (Ackerberg and Prapasawudi, 2009). Mexico still faces serious challenges in relation to poverty, with many of its residents living in extreme poverty, with a majority still lacking access to water, sewer systems, electricity, or necessary infrastructure (Jones, 2004b; 2005b). The State also suffers from intense migration issues in response to widespread poverty, as many fathers have migrated to the United States, hoping to create a better life for their families, leaving the mothers to care for the children alone, many of whom find they cannot cope (Taylor et al, 2005). Widespread problems of drugs and

prostitution are also contributing to the number of orphans and street children, and this atmosphere of such dangers, problems and broken families have resulted in variety of social and emotional disadvantages for the children (Jones, 2005b; Jones and Rodgers, 2009). This is set against the neoliberal policies adopted by the Mexican government that mean social care, welfare and health provisions have been reduced and cut-back in order to minimise government spending and reduce the national deficit (Jenson, 2010).

I feel it is particularly beneficial to briefly outline here a synopsis of the Mexican care system. As with most countries, it is the government that is the main bearer of the responsibility for protecting and guaranteeing that the rights of all children are fulfilled (Save the Children, 2010). Within Mexican neoliberal policy, some elements of child protection have been privatised, meaning the State could outsource resources and responsibility for care arrangements. This has led to a great number of institutions and homes without any control or guidelines established and enforced by the State (Staab and Gerhard, 2010). Those that have followed State guidelines have found themselves taking on huge levels of responsibility but without the necessary resource levels and sufficient state sanctioned training.

There are very few State run orphanages in Mexico, although some still exist. Most institutions and homes are now funded by small charities and religious groups, with a small minority supported by large international charities (RELAF, 2010). These private and charity based centres can apply for State support and funding, although this is extremely competitive and hard to obtain. If a centre is successful in their application, they become members of the formal child support sector, and as such are liable to adhere to State guidelines, regulations, and practice, whilst also being subject to regular monitoring and evaluations (Hernandez, 2009). However, the state and their affiliate departments (*Desarrollo de la Familia*- DIF, *Estatal de Familia*- CEF and *Secretaría de Educación Pública*- SEP) have faced heavy criticism regarding their lack of resources that are assigned to implement such inspections and provide help and

assistance to their affiliated care centres. As a result, there is very little control to ensure standards are being met, and limited repercussions for non-compliance (RELAF, 2010).

The informal care sector predominantly comprises of institutions and homes that are not registered with the State, consisting of centres that have been established by small religious groups and individual community members to help provide care and assistance to the increasing number of children who find themselves without parental care (Calderón, 2012). Although these centres are often established with the best of intentions, they are criticised on the basis that they do not have sufficient resources or State sanctioned staff to provide adequate levels of care. In addition, in accordance with Mexican neoliberal policy, there are no barriers to trade, and thus the opening of these informal homes often means the children who reside there are lost to the informal system, and as such are not provided with access to health care or formal education (Calderón, 2012). It has been well recognised and argued that institutionalised care should only be used as a last resort and for short periods only due to its hugely detrimental effects (Muhamedrahimov et al, 2004; McHale, 2007; Ayon and Marcenko, 2008; Folbre, 2008; Huang et al, 2010). However, due to limited resources within State budgets, and the increasing number of informal homes, children are often left in orphanage care until they reach adolescence, meaning most (if not all) of their childhood is spent within institutionalised care. This is particularly prevalent within the informal homes as they do not have access to the familial reunification schemes as provided by the State (Folbre, 2008).

Institutional homes within Mexico have also received severe criticism for the continuous violation of child rights (UNICEF, 2005; 2007; 2010a; 2010b; RELAF, 2010). As will be discussed throughout the course of the thesis, institutional care is frequently found to violate the children's right to safety, privacy, health and education, their freedom and even their identity (UNICEF, 2004; 2007; 2010b). Neoliberal budget reductions have meant the resources are not available to enforce or restrict particular

practices, and thus, children are found to have their rights systematically violated (Magazine, 2003; Richter, 2004; Gabel, 2012). This is particularly ubiquitous within the informal sector. Within a recent study, Jalisco was highlighted to be one of the districts with the most troubling results in relation to human rights violations for children in care (UN, 2012). CEF were found to have knowledge of such violations in over 45% of its registered homes, with little or no knowledge of the situation within the State's unregistered centres (UN, 2012). It is also the unregistered homes that are more likely to receive support of voluntourism sending organisations as they have no restrictions in place as to the level of experience or qualifications the staff must have, and they are not further restricted by any additional State guidelines (Grayson, 2011). It is for these reasons that an investigation into the informal care system as it exists within voluntourism is paramount.

## **Current Literature and Theoretical Framework**

Thus far volunteer tourism has been regarded as a promising sector that can benefit both tourists and local communities, and much of the current literature demonstrates the advantages this type of tourism can produce (McGehee, 2002; Stebbins, 2004; Wearing, 2004; Brown, 2005; McGehee and Santos, 2004; Mustonen, 2005; McIntosh and Zahra, 2007; Butcher and Smith, 2010; Holmes et al, 2010; Lockstone et al, 2010). These studies have all been fairly consistent, featuring descriptive analysis of the types of tourists and their attitudes and motivations. However, an increasing number of studies have begun to adopt a critical perspective of voluntourism, identifying potential negative and detrimental impacts (Simpson, 2004; 2005; Guttentag, 2009; McGehee and Andereck, 2009; Conran, 2011; Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011; Mostafanezhad, 2012). These critical studies are still exploratory in nature and much research is still needed, especially in reference to how the increasing neoliberalisation of voluntourism may be shaping organisational and project practices, the subjectivities that voluntourists must negotiate, and subsequently, the care environment provided for the children (Richter and Norman, 2010; Baillie Smith, 2012). What follows is a brief



introduction and synopsis to the arguments of the 'big ideas' that frame this thesis and the research it undertakes.

### **Neoliberalism and Subjectivities**

With the dramatic growth in the global voluntourism industry and the debate about its increasing commercialisation, there has been a call for more research into 'actually existing neoliberalisms' and the specificities of how neoliberal policies and practices are being challenged, shaped and resisted (Duffy and Moore, 2010). Debates about the precise nature of neoliberalism are already well covered in the literature, and there has been a tendency to assume that neoliberalism is hegemonic and invested with more power than it really has (Castree, 2008), but what this thesis aims to do is investigate how the neoliberal specificities within the UK and Mexico are being reconfigured and redesigned, and to probe its complexities and messy entanglements. Neoliberal ideology holds the belief that "open, competitive and unregulated markets, liberated from State interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 350), and voluntourism has certainly followed this neoliberal pattern; what used to be a relatively informal, inexpensive and altruistic alternative to a traditional holiday has evolved into a highly expensive participation activity where long-haul journeys to exotic and remote destinations and self-development seem to be the core priorities (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008).

As a result, a high proportion of the organisations involved within the industry have become involved on a profit-making basis, viewing the sector as another form of tourism to be commercially exploited (Heald, 2003). In addition, the current positive public acceptance of voluntourism has created a larger market for existing organisations, but the attractiveness of this prosperous field has also simultaneously increased the number of private firms entering the market (Coghlan and Noakes, 2012). Consequently, this has increased the sense of competition which can cause egoism to overtake altruism in the race to ensure a larger profit-margin and market share in order to survive the intense capitalist market (Tuckman, 1998). This causes the

places, people and cultures within the developing world to be transformed into commodities and sold as tourist packages to the affluent western tourists by the profit-based, pre-packaged volunteering programmes operating within this fast-growing and competitive industry (Simpson, 2004). This commodification has also transformed development into a commodity; an important part of the volunteering experience that can be bought or sold as a leisure activity (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011).

Attracting and retaining voluntourists thus appears to be a key priority for commercialised, shallow voluntourism organisations in order for them to survive an intensifying capitalist market. Arguably, this could be because the neoliberal subject is seen as an autonomous, highly individualised consumer who seeks gratification of their desires via market opportunities (Bondi, 2005). However, this form of neoliberal subjectivity must also be understood on the basis that subjects are capable of self-governance, and thus take responsibility for their own decisions, choices and well-being (Larner, 2000). Through voluntourism, the neoliberal voluntourist subject can be explored through the ways in which the organisations market their placements and create popular imaginaries of development, poverty and Mexico, and subsequently how the voluntourists internalise this knowledge to negotiate their identities and make sense of their experiences forming a basis from which to critique the big ideas of neoliberalism, colonialism and development.

### **Development and Voluntourism**

Much of the current literature on the subject identifies a vast range of benefits provided by the volunteer tourism sector, such as the revenue it generates for host communities, the labour volunteers provide and the intercultural experience it produces (Wearing, 2001; Galley and Clifton, 2004). The development aspect is a primary objective, and some great claims are made by organisations regarding the outcomes of what their volunteers can achieve for host communities. Many organisations sell their projects to prospective volunteers by encouraging the belief that people of the developing world are *in need* of help, and volunteers can make a

real difference to the lives of their recipients. This attitude has caused the industry to mobilise its own brand of development discourse, promoting a view that development is a simple matter and is something that can be easily done, and is accessible specifically to young, enthusiastic, non-skilled volunteer tourists, who have become the public face of development (Simpson, 2004; Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004).

Dominant ideology within the voluntourism industry stipulates doing something is better than doing nothing (Tomazos and Butler, 2010). Questions surrounding the long-term strategy, appropriateness and impacts of volunteer development work are missing from the vast majority volunteer programmes. However, research is emerging which does critique these programmes on those terms, albeit tentatively, and this thesis hopes to build on this knowledge. One concern of this thesis surrounds the use of voluntourists as the primary development agent; this may establish an externalisation of development, which perpetuates the agent of change to be located *outside* the community. This can lead to unhealthy perceptions of the 'other' and to a dichotomy of 'them and us', further exacerbated by the colonial tendencies of some voluntourism projects to marginalise the local populace, by positioning the volunteers as authority figures or experts, despite their lack of knowledge (Roberts, 2004; Simpson, 2004; Kothari, 2005, Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011).

### **Colonialism, Othering and Commodification**

A number of authors make reference to the colonial tendencies of voluntourism (Ingram, 2008; Lough, 2008; Roberts, 2004; Simpson, 2004; 2005) with reference to colonial histories, and the perceived need for Western development experts. This reinforces Western superiority and the belief that those within the developing world need to be rescued. This perspective highlights the prevalence of the western discourse and how voluntourism may be reproducing the same patterns of inequality and political visions of reality that promote binary oppositions to justify imperialistic ambitions and prejudices against the 'other' (MacNeille, 2006; Rieffel and Zalud 2006). The creation of language and statements are then created based around these political

realities, and generate truths upon which knowledge is based. These truths then portray who is dominant and who is the victim, based upon pre-assigned measurements, classifications and judgements (Foucault, 1977; 1980).

This highlights issues of representation, as voluntourism relies on preconceived definitions of place and people, through which notions of place and identity are commodified (Simpson, 2004). In colonial power practices, tourism can distort cultural displays, texts and places into cultural products to meet the commercial needs and expectations of the imperialistic traveller (Cheong and Miller, 2000). Thus the representation of 'otherness' is transformed through the inherent ideals of commoditisation from a western perspective, to please the western traveller (Ansell, 2008). Imagery of the destinations and its people has the power to influence voluntourists' perspective of developing countries, causing a romanticisation of these destinations, which forms their knowledge and understanding of host populations, traditions and customs accordingly (Canton and Santos, 2009).

### **Childcare and Welfare**

It has been well documented within childcare literature that children need a safe, secure, loving environment with a high level of consistency in order to reach their optimum level of development (Aldgate, 2006). However, it is argued that the informal type of institutionalised care that voluntourism promotes is not conducive to this type of environment, and can not only impinge on the children's human rights, but also be psychologically damaging (Richter, 2008; Richter and Norman, 2010). This thesis will situate the experiences and views of voluntourists and project employees in social and psychological literature on the care environment. Theories of 'attachment', the psychological connectedness between a child and their caregiver, which allows the child to feel secure, protected and loved, helping them to establish a sense of self-worth and esteem, and to explore the world is central to this care environment (Bowlby, 2005). The attachment formed with a caregiver will also help formulate the basis of relationships with other children and adults; namely if there is an insecure

attachment, the child will have difficulty in forming relationships with others as they do not have the ability or confidence (Bowlby, 2005). Literature in this field demonstrates the effect caregiver behaviour can inflict on the children, and the lasting consequences this can have throughout their childhood, and even into adulthood (Ainsworth, 1979).

What is of particular relevance here is how the volunteers understand this attachment, how they perceive it in terms of their role as carer, their motives and expectations, and more importantly, their understanding of the needs of the child, especially considering the consumption of intimate connections with children is a key concept within voluntourism (Conran, 2011). The poignant images of children circulated within voluntourism invoke a need and a desire within voluntourists to take direct action in the care of such children (Manzo, 2008), and although this may begin with the best of intentions, it does not make the inadvertent effects of this compassion any less harmful. The devastating effects inconsistent, transitory and insensitive care can cause have already been illustrated (Ainsworth, 1978; Aldgate, 2006), yet this cycle continues to repeat itself for these children, with organisations happily sending new volunteers out each time some return home.

## **Contribution to the literature**

As voluntourism gains popularity, it is obvious that further investigation into the consequences of the activity is imperative, especially on behalf of those it aims to help. Results from this study could benefit both academic research and in practical terms, the management and operations of sending organisations, with the long term aim of improving the quality of the volunteering activity experienced by various members of the local populace and the children in care within the destinations. From an academic perspective, findings from this study can contribute to current (and future) literature in a number of ways: Firstly, many of the previous studies on voluntourism have highlighted that the phenomenon cannot be sufficiently theorised by only one

concept. Thus this study has utilised the literatures surrounding the big ideas of neoliberalism, development and colonialism in order to better frame and understand the voluntourism landscape as it exists within the Mexican and UK markets. It is hoped that through this framing, we can gain a deeper knowledge of how the industry operates in terms of organisational practices, voluntourist subjectivity and the care that is provided for vulnerable children. There is a current gap in the literature surrounding voluntourist subjectivities and how these are shaped and influenced by popular representations and perceptions of poverty, development and voluntourism. This means our understanding of why people engage in such activities, and what impact these subjectivities have upon the industry itself, the context in which the voluntourists work, and the affect upon the recipients of their assistance is limited and partial. This thesis hopes to go some way in providing this knowledge.

Furthermore, this study makes clear the distinction between the various sectors of the volunteer tourism industry, as previous literature has tended to homogenise the industry when it in fact operates in distinct ways. This study focuses upon one particular type of volunteer tourism; the shallow 2 week volunteering vacation, otherwise referred to as voluntourism. This study makes a clear distinction between those volunteers working for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), who dedicate years or months to their projects, and those who only volunteer during the length of their summer holiday and with the newer, more commercial organisations. This allows divisions within the industry to be appreciated, permitting criticisms (and praise) to be aimed in the appropriate directions and to be taken more seriously. This project compares three different types of organisation offering this voluntourism service, whereas previous studies have only focused upon one organisation, and have therefore not been able to make cross comparisons. This hopefully will allow for a deeper understanding of organisational operations and how their practices are being shaped by the neoliberal specificities that govern their marketplaces, and how in turn, their operations are impacting upon voluntourists' subjectivities, public imaginaries, and how these affect what is happening on the ground.

A vast majority of voluntourism studies have so far focused upon conservation projects, or the social development projects involving building work or teaching. Very few have investigated projects working with vulnerable children such as those in orphanages or institutional care homes. Those that do, have failed to mention what impacts temporal, transitional and inconsistent care voluntourism can have on the care environment, and the bearing this has on the children's emotional and physical well-being. If these impacts are highlighted, further research and practical application of the findings can help to improve the lives of those in the most vulnerable position, and help to expand and widen industry knowledge. On a final note, this thesis adopts a holistic approach to perspectives on voluntourism, incorporating voices from staff working at the organisations and projects, owners of local businesses within the destinations, people who live in close to the projects and of course the voluntourists. This study therefore hopes to be a platform for further research into the area of voluntourism to help obtain a wider academic perspective of the sector, as opposed to it remaining the rather one-sided story it currently is.

## **Organisation of the Study**

This study is organised into nine chapters, with the following structure;

*Chapter 2* presents the literature based examinations of the multiple arguments, ideas and theories that collide within voluntourism. I concentrate on the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal specificities that occur within the UK and Mexico, and locate voluntourism within this schema of neoliberal policies and practices. As I will argue throughout the thesis, the increasing neoliberalisation of the voluntourism sector affects all aspects of the industry, from the voluntourists themselves, the popular public imaginaries of development and poverty that are created, and also the practices of the organisations and the projects. Therefore, the arguments relating to the ideas of neoliberalism, colonialism, development and gender studies will help to critique such arising issues and impacts. This is then mobilised through the experiential evidence presented and analysed in the empirical chapters.

*Chapter 3* offers an explanation, rationale and justification of the research methodology, research strategy and design, and the sampling methods employed for the purposes of the study. It also describes the data collection methods used, the role of the researcher in terms of reflexivity and subjectivity, and the procedures used for data management and analysis. Methodological questions are ultimately a combination of theoretical positioning, practical techniques and strategic limitations. This chapter therefore discusses the complex balance between these elements that helped produce a methodology that was rigorous, appropriate and possible.

*Chapter 4* provides a contextual background for the study in terms of an overview of the different sending organisations, projects and research areas under investigation. It offers justification for why these were chosen and the relevance they pose to the topic under investigation. It is hoped that by providing this information, a deeper appreciation may be gained for the various situations, positions and specificities that are presented and analysed throughout the course of the thesis.

*Chapter 5* is the first of the discussion chapters which primarily concentrates on exploring the neoliberal spaces in which the UK voluntourism organisations operate. The chapter draws predominantly on the representations produced by the organisations in relation to the interviews conducted and their own marketing and promotional material. The chapter examines the way voluntourism organisations engage with the discourses of development and mobilise colonialist imaginaries, which are inherently internalised by the voluntourists in the negotiation of their subjectivities and how they understand their experiences and encounters.

*Chapter 6* introduces the voices of the voluntourists and the local staff, business owners and neighbours, and examines the power dynamic that exists between host and guest. This is framed through an exploration of the voluntourists' subjectivities and how these are negotiated, how identities are formed and how encounters are internalised. Central to this chapter is the idea of heroism and how this maybe a lens through which to analyse voluntourist subjectivities, encompassing arguments relating to issues of imperialism and gender. The chapter therefore focuses on issues of representation and identity, indicating how, despite some of the linguistic imagery



employed by the organisations, the ways the voluntourists understand and represent their experiences are multiple and variable.

*Chapter 7* looks predominantly at the projects in terms of their management and daily practices, bringing together the voices of the local staff, business owners and neighbours, voluntourists and organisations. In this chapter I problematise the assumption based on the worth of inclusion in an organisation's portfolio. To do this I critique the idea of the 'right kind of poor' and the image the projects must present of themselves in order to attract organisational endorsement. I investigate how issues arising in the previous two chapters, relating to the neoliberalisation of organisational practices, the imaginaries their marketing creates, and voluntourists' subjectivities and internalisation of knowledge are impacting upon the projects' daily operations, staff and volunteer relationships and the care provided to the children.

*Chapter 8* investigates the use of voluntourists as primary caregivers to vulnerable children. I analyse how children are commodified and used as a marketing tool, and how the imaginaries and perceptions this generates are impacting not only upon the voluntourists' subjectivities, but how these subjectivities are inherently shaping and affecting the care environment provided for the children. I look specifically at how the intimate relationships the volunteers are encouraged to form with the children may be impacting upon their wellbeing, and how well suited the care provided by such transitory care givers is to the welfare of vulnerable children.

*Chapter 9* is the final chapter of the thesis and presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis and findings of the study. It also highlights the limitations to the study, the contributions this thesis hopes to make to the current literature, and offers recommendations for future research and practical applications for the industry.

# Chapter 2- Voluntourism: A neoliberal landscape

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## Introduction

This is a thesis about tourism and encounters. Tourism as a global industry needs to be understood in the context of a neoliberal landscape that not only shapes its modes of operandi, but also influences the encounters tourism mobilises. The voluntourism experience takes young people not only on a physical journey, but also a journey of the self and of foreign 'others'. In doing so, it engages with a physical landscape, whilst also a theoretical one. Voluntourism brings together disparate people from disparate parts of the world, and in the same way brings together diverse discourses and practices from across neoliberalism, development, colonialism, gender and child welfare. This chapter examines the theoretical and practical context in which voluntourism operates, and aims to put forward the argument that helps to answer the question of how voluntourists negotiate their position as care givers in the context of marketised voluntourism and the marketisation of care within the neoliberal landscape of voluntourism in Mexico. It questions the ideological basis of voluntourism in terms of how voluntourists negotiate the neoliberal landscape and formulate their identities as tourists, volunteers and caregivers.

The case of Mexico is being presented here as an example of how the contextually-specific processes of neoliberalism within the UK and Mexico are being challenged, reshaped and resisted. This chapter presents the neoliberal approach the Mexican government is adopting towards tourism and social welfare, as well as how the neoliberal practices of the UK voluntourism organisations are responding, acting and being influenced by this. What is important to note is that this thesis specifically explores the care provided to children in Mexico from the informal sector; that is to say the unofficial, unregistered or private care homes, institutions and places of safety

that are often supported by voluntourism projects that receive very little or no recompense from other sources of aid (see Chapter One). There are other institutions available that are fully supported by the State, the church and international NGOs in the way of management and finances, and although these are not without their criticisms, they are not under the jurisdiction of the parameters of this research.

Arguably, the dramatic growth in the popularity of the international tourism industry is a paradigmatic example of global neoliberalism over the last two decades. Despite claims that more ethical tourisms such as volunteer tourism can offer alternatives and challenges to mainstream mass tourism, there is increasing evidence that demonstrates they have been just as central to the expansion and deepening of neoliberalism at a global scale (Duffy and Moore, 2010). Furthermore, it speaks to the ability of the tourism industry to find new niche markets, whilst it also reflects new ways in which the market has become central to development. The pervasive influence of neoliberal ideologies is evident in, first, the outsourcing and privatization of development practice, and, second, in the commodification and marketing of development activities. This can be seen through the way development has been marketised: as an activity that can be 'done' during the course of one's leisure time (Simpson, 2004; Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). This is creating apolitical, simplistic and colonial imaginaries of development and poverty that are contributing to the understandings of how people and places in Mexico are imagined, how subsequent knowledge is produced, and what meanings are ascribed to them and the voluntourist encounters created.

Furthermore, neoliberal practices have created commodities within the voluntourism package that are promoted, advertised and sold ready for global consumption, including the vulnerable children the sector proclaims to care for (Richter, 2004). Although some may argue debate over commodification may be ideological when the market provides a service the Mexican State cannot, it is important to consider the adverse affects such commodification can cause to the care environment provided for

vulnerable children. Theories of attachment, strange behaviour, and an internalisation system are utilised to explain how this is impacting upon the children, and how the voluntourists are influencing this. These practices, policies, values and imaginaries are then interpreted through the volunteers' inculcation of the need to develop a successful cosmopolitan 'self.' These are explored from the basis of neoliberal social pressures stemming from the State, education and private sectors, the colonial imaginaries and popular perceptions of development that the sending organisations promote, and the volunteers' own understandings of these pressure and imaginaries. How these understandings are framed are then interpreted through the ideas of responsibility, the hero, adventure and care that all have their roots in the gendered colonial West.

In the following I will frame how voluntourists negotiate their position as caregivers in the context of marketised voluntourism and the marketisation of care within the neoliberal landscape of voluntourism in Mexico. Therefore this thesis set outs to answer the question of how the voluntourist subject is negotiating the neoliberalised landscape of voluntourism, whilst attempting to present a portrait and critique of how neoliberalism 'actually exists' in this area.

### **Actually Existing Neoliberalism**

Despite the claims that alternative types of tourism, such as the shallow voluntourism under research here, offer a challenge to the neoliberal agenda, my analysis demonstrates that this too has not managed to escape the deepening and expansion of neoliberal practices. Neoliberalism has been described as "a mixture of neoclassical economic fundamentalism, market regulation in place of State guidance, economic redistribution in favour of capital... and international free trade principles" (Moody, 1997: 119). What is presumed from this definition is a one size fits all model of policy implementation that assumes identical results will occur following the execution of such market-oriented reforms, rather than recognising the variations that arise from

the contextually specific institutional landscapes and policy environments. It is these specialised variations that have come to be known as 'actually existing neoliberalisms' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Neoliberal programmes are rarely imposed in their pure form for they are always introduced within contexts that have been significantly moulded by earlier regulatory, institutionalised and political arrangements (Larner, 2000). Thus the notion of actually existing neoliberalism is intended to illuminate the complex and contested ways in which neoliberal strategies interact with pre-existing modes of governmentality, social-political and economic power. However, projects of neoliberalisation tend to be associated with a certain cluster of familial characteristics, and adequate conceptualisations must be attentive to the local peculiarities and the generic features of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Therefore, within the realms of this thesis, I aim to emphasise the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal strategies insofar as they have been produced within the national, regional and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policies and practices of Mexico and the voluntourism industry within the UK.

In the context of Mexican voluntourism, whereby the UK sending organisations appear to wield a disproportionate amount of power compared to the Mexican projects they provide assistance to, the benefits appear to accrue to the organisations and their volunteers rather than the local projects (see below and the subsequent empirical chapters). Strong objections to the profiteering policies of neoliberal practices have been presented (Singer and Ansari, 1992; Dieke, 1995), whilst other criticisms chastise neoliberalism for its Western-oriented financial strategies, believing they cause dire social implications for developing countries such as poverty growth, declining standards of living, social exclusion and cutbacks in social assistance programmes (Drouin, 1995; Hale, 1998). These problems are particularly salient for the projects investigated within this thesis as Mexican governments have historically made frequent reductions to the provision of social care, in accordance with neoliberal policy, in an effort to reduce national debt (Mahon, 2010). This has severely affected the levels of child care available for low income families and institutional homes,

providing justification for the use of free volunteer labour, the problems associated with which are discussed in proceeding chapters.

The importance of interrogating how neoliberalism plays out on the ground can be identified through the ways in which voluntourism has been able to effectively strategise the faith placed in market-based mechanisms in order to create a commercialised and marketable product based on the privatisation and commodification of development and the country of Mexico and its people. However, this cannot be adequately analysed without discussion surrounding the path-dependent ways neoliberal practices, norms and values have interacted with the concepts of colonialism, gender, development, subjectivity and voluntourism itself within the inherited regulatory landscapes of Mexico under examination. Through doing so, the assumption that neoliberalism is hegemonic and invested with great power is challenged and contested through an analysis of context-specific practices (Peck and Tickell, 2002). This is analysed through the ways and means the neoliberal values associated with the feminisation of care in Mexico and the UK are being challenged by the volunteers, and also through the investigation into how the sending organisations and projects are being influenced by the re-emergence of historic colonial tendencies, and contemporary commercialised practices.

A particular concern these power relations raise in Mexico is how a neoliberal agenda stemming from the UK voluntourism sending organisations is enabling them to enforce and decide policies that are predominantly beneficial to them, whilst leaving the Mexican projects in a vulnerable position (see Chapter Seven). Neoliberalism as colonialism is a common critique found in development studies, arguing that neoliberalism appears as the most recent challenge in a long tradition of imperialism through a tendency to project Western power, a wish to construct a global market order and to reconfigure class relations in favour of poverty (Harrison, 2010). This can be seen through the way Western ideals are prioritised in relation to market expectations of voluntourism, with disproportionate value being placed upon the

satisfaction of voluntourists as opposed to the projects themselves. This distortion is seemingly contradictory to the practices of Pro-Poor Tourism voluntourism claims to promote, which argues the needs of the poor should be a priority (Ashley et al, 2001; Torres and Momsen, 2004). Yet it is in accordance with neoliberal market practices that operate on the basis of mutual exchange; whereby all parties should benefit, with no direct stipulations as to how the benefits should be distributed (Preston, 1996). However, the distorted distribution of these benefits is frequently skewed in favour of the organisations, and at the expense of the Mexican projects. Concerns are therefore raised that adherence to neoliberal practices means that the market treats all relevant parties as equal, whereas a cursory glance at global history which includes centuries of colonialism and exploitation suggests that they are not (Harrison, 2010). This practice ensures that neoliberal policies favour the developed countries, and in this sense, neoliberalism can be viewed as a form of colonialism or imperialism (Leys, 2005).

Mexico and neoliberalism have a vast and colourful history, with the neoliberal approach having framed its economic development through Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), the reduction of State power and the increasing presence of multinational companies with its various industries; tourism in particular (Hay, 2007). In ideological terms, Mexico's adherence to a neoliberal agenda required a rethinking of state-society relations that manifested itself in changes to the regime of social provision: antipoverty policies were pushed to a more means-tested direction (Jenson, 2010). Limited political competition (the dominating political force held power for over seventy years) meant that budgeting for welfare provisions did not hold much incentive for those in power, as highlighted by the continual decline of social benefits even as real wages collapsed during the debt crisis in the 1980s, and how such provisions have often been manipulated for political gains (Mahon, 2010).

Several welfare programmes have since been established, such as PRONOSOL, PROGRESA and OPPORTUNADES, which have all specialised in assisting low-income families in terms of healthcare provisions, childcare and education through conditional

cash transfers (UNDP, 2011). However, these programmes have not been without their criticisms, most notably of which is how the programmes have provided the political conditions for sustaining neoliberal strategies through corporatist forms of co-optation (Dresser, 2000; Morton, 2003). The adoption of the neoliberal agenda in Mexico has meant that welfare programmes are significantly dependent upon the market response to public subsidies, meaning funds can be withdrawn at any time, and that the State is not solely responsible for deciding where funds are to be allocated, but instead is guided by financial benefactors and the forces of demand and supply (Weiss, 2001). Additionally, the programmes require prospective recipients to qualify for assistance in accordance with various criteria, such as a certain level of education and access to certain facilities (Morton, 2003). This often means that those at the bottom of the class structure are frequently overlooked in terms of assistance and are often denied access to such programmes. This is arguably because in the neoliberal market, only clients with the most favourable prospects for success are considered worthy investments (Kaplan, 2000; Bhatt and Tang, 2001; Weiss, 2001; Blackburn and Ram, 2006).

The gendered implications of these programmes have been viewed critically. Stipends combined with care commonalities reinforce traditional gender roles and add to the workload of poor women whose input into familial survival has already intensified and diversified through their encouraged reintegration into the workforce, coupled with the responsibility of maintaining single-headed households (Molyneux, 2007; Tabbush, 2009; Staab and Gerhard, 2010). Moreover, a major critique is how these strategies have failed to provide long-term strategies for women's economic security through job training and sufficient childcare provisions (Staab and Gerhard, 2010). A significant proportion of the Mexican labour force is within informal employment (the projects under research here are included in this sector), and women are overrepresented in precarious work, which has significant implication for welfare and care entitlements such as maternity leave, social security and healthcare (INEGI, 2011). As a result, women employed within the informal sector frequently do not qualify for welfare assistance from these programmes (see Chapter Seven). This has been cited as one of



the major contributing factors as to why there are so many street children with the towns and cities of Mexico, and why voluntourism has become a widely accepted and popular way to manage the crisis (Richter, 2004).

This has implications for not only the female volunteers, but also the local women working at the projects in Mexico. Women in Mexico are usually viewed through traditional gendered roles, (Ramirez-Valles, 2001), and therefore use their inclusion in the workforce to improve their sense of accomplishment. However, the type of work available to women at the projects, and indeed to women throughout much of Mexican society is within the informal sector as low-paid community-based roles (Themudo, 2011). However, working within the community can arguably have a negative effect on women's empowerment as it creates dependency on employment that is not always stable and secure. This raises particular concerns for voluntourism due to the highly seasonal and temporal nature of the industry, especially when considered in light of the neoliberal policies discussed above that govern the projects, and disproportionately favour the sending organisations. Furthermore, voluntourism has been documented to disturb local economies by negatively impacting upon local labour demand, displacing many people from the labour market (Guttentag, 2009). Therefore, the suitability of the use of inexperienced foreign volunteer labour will be measured against the use of local women, looking specifically upon the impact this has upon not only the role of women within the local communities, but also upon the care environment that is provided to the children. In addition, this will also be considered in regards to how promoted imaginaries of poverty, development and responsibility are influencing how the volunteers' perceive their role and how this is shaping the care environment provided.

### **Negotiating the Care Environment: Working with vulnerable children**

Despite the popularity of working with children in voluntourism, particularly at orphanages, very few academic studies exist documenting the effects upon the care

environment it provides to vulnerable children. A number of industry reports are available, highlighting the dangers and calling for a change in marketing strategies and the roles given to volunteers, urging against direct contact (UNICEF, 1990; 2004; 2005; 2007; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; UNAIDS, 2008; Save the Children, 2003; 2010). Orphan is a term synonymous with vulnerability and abandonment, invoking a feeling of compassion and a need for action (Anderson and Heston, 2006; Manzo, 2008). However, what is not widely documented, is that contrary to understanding, over 80% of children defined as orphans have a surviving parent (UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID, 2004; Richter, 2008). Many agencies in the North proceed from the assumption that children defined as orphans have lost both parents, whereas in fact many have been abandoned by their families (Richter and Norman, 2010). Nonetheless, these children are perceived as without family or relatives, and deprived of love, affection and attention, as well as the necessary personal stimulation needed for their development.

The poignant images circulated within the voluntourism sector invoke a need and a desire to take direct action in the care of these children (Richter and Norman, 2010). The sentimentality felt towards vulnerable children is capitalised upon by the sending organisations in the way they market the projects through the use of language and photography, and in turn, the children are transformed into commodities; they are marketed as part of the package to be experienced and consumed, as a rational yet sanitised consumption of poverty (Scheyvens, 2001). Furthermore, the way such placements are promoted by the organisations encourages the perception that these children are not being sufficiently cared for by the project staff, which creates a biased and negative perspective of the locals on the part of the voluntourists (Richter and Norman, 2010). This colonialist imaginary may then be internalised by the volunteer before they have even left the UK, meaning they are likely to have preconceptions about the host population before they arrive. This will have a significant impact on how they negotiate their role as carer and how they manage the power relations between themselves and their hosts. Therefore the significance of public imaginaries of Mexico, poverty and development upon the voluntourists' negotiation of their

identities will be explored, as well as what level of influence the volunteers' identities may have upon the care environment they provide.

Arguably the increasing number of unofficial care homes in Mexico is related to the rising popularity and demand for orphanage based voluntourism placements. Consequently, people are realising how lucrative care homes can be, especially considering how eager voluntourists are to pay for the privilege of volunteering, and the frequent neoliberal acts of gifting financial aid they impart as part of their assistance (Grayson, 2011; Baillie Smith et al, 2013). Therefore a danger exists that unscrupulous individuals will seize the opportunity to profit, exploit and abuse the children (and volunteers), and within Mexico, there are no barriers or regulations to prevent people from doing exactly this; a consequence of the free market and neoliberal trade policies in place, as well as the reductions in the social care budget (Better Care Network, 2011).

It is recognised that the early stages of childhood (1-6 years) are critical in shaping the development pattern later on in both childhood and sometimes even adulthood, and therefore experiences encountered at this stage are crucial (Laishley, 1997). It is therefore imperative that the optimum level of childcare is given at these early stages to produce the preeminent level of child development (Lewis, 1997; Horton, 2005), and campaigns by various NGOs have urged to make residential care a matter of absolute last resort (CRC, 1989; UNICEF, 1990; 2007; 2009; 2010a; 2010b). In Mexico there are approximately over 30,000 children living within recognised institutions, although this estimation could easily be tripled for the number of children residing in unofficial and unrecognised homes for undetermined periods of time (RELAF, 2010). Procedures for institutionalisation specify such measures should be only temporary, but children within these centres often reach adolescence (14 years) because there are no follow-up procedures or a way of monitoring intake and familial reunification procedures with the informal homes, as there is no budget; a further consequence of neoliberal government spending reductions (MIFAN, 2009). With consideration to the

figures above, the vast numbers of children facing these problems provide justification for more research to be conducted into voluntourism's endorsement of institutional care, especially considering the marketing of these placements to volunteers, and the inherent internalisation of such knowledge and the impact this has on the volunteers' subjectivities (Richter and Norman, 2010).

Further issues relating to institutionalised care are that children living within institutions frequently find that their rights are systematically violated (RELAF, 2010; UNICEF, 2005; 2007; 2009; 2010a; 2010b). Despite the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) being ratified by Mexico, agreements such as these are endorsed and sanctioned by countries because they know thereafter there will be no repercussions for non-compliance (Jones, 2005b). Therefore institutionalised children or those living on the street, find they are often denied their rights to non-discrimination, access to health care and education, participation, freedom and the right to an identity (preservation of history, culture, background and having identification documents). This again is a consequence to neoliberal spending cuts on Mexican social care, and how it is the most marginalised members that are the most severely affected. Alongside the above mentioned rights, residential and institutional care also denies the children their right to a childhood free from harm: residential care is a threat to the parent (caregiver) child relationship as inconsistent routines, staff turnover and large child-caregiver ratios cause frequent and harmful disruptions to attachments, which can lead to (sometimes irreversible) emotional, social, behavioural and educational problems (Berrick et al, 1997; Rutter, 2002; Richter, 2004; Dozier and Bick, 2007).

Emotional and psychological impacts are some of the most widely documented affects upon childhood development resulting from institutionalised and disrupted care. However because of their links to biological, physiological and psychological literatures, many of these impacts have been overlooked in social research, especially within tourism. However, Richter and Norman (2010) provide justification for their consideration within social research as they state such impacts can be heavily

influenced by the social care environment and the type of care the children receive. Therefore, the specificities of the nature of Mexican voluntourism will be considered against how it may affect the care environment, with particular attention on how neoliberal practices and the colonial imaginaries produced are influencing volunteers' subjectivities. There is consensus that the care offered in Mexico is insufficient but in light of insights provided from the sphere of psychology, it can be strongly argued that market led provisions will not necessarily provide the sustained consistent care required, as discussed below.

The care voluntourism provides is deemed unsuitable due to its transient nature and the general inexperience of the volunteers that participate, as this leads to substandard care for children who require specialised and expert attention (Richter and Norman, 2010). This is further exacerbated through the concept of the consumption of intimate experiences within voluntourism (Conran, 2011). These intimate connections to the children can cause permanent and damaging emotional reactions within the children, exacerbating abandonment and attachment issues (Richter and Norman, 2010). Attachment theory, originating in the work of Bowlby (1952; 1973; 1975; 1984; 2005) and developed by Ainsworth (1974; 1978; 1979; 1991) is a descriptive and explanatory framework for understanding interpersonal relationships between human beings, arising from the desire of the child to seek love, affection, security and protection through proximity to an attachment figure who is viewed as stronger and wiser. Attachment theorists consider the infant to have a need for a secure relationship with adult caregivers, without which normal social and emotional development will not occur (Bretherton, 1992). The attachments children form early on with their carers will predict patterns of exploration, social adjustment, stress and anger management, emotion regulation and learning, and will even determine the nature of their future relationships and parenting styles (Bowlby, 1952; 1973; 1975; 2005).

Therefore early and repeated disruptions to the care relationship will result in children developing disorganised and insecure attachments which will negatively affect the child's sense of self, their self-worth and their functioning emotional and social behaviour (also see Champion, 1992; Boris and Zeanah, 1999; Cassidy, 1999; George and Solomon, 1999; Dozier et al, 2000; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Carlson and Harwood, 2003; Gauthier et al, 2004; Oosterman and Shuengel, 2008; Aldgate, 2006). Many other studies substantiate these findings, claiming that children in care often experience insecurities relating to their attachment figures and this promotes insecurities to their sense of self-worth that will develop throughout their childhood (Cassidy, 1999; Lyons et al, 1993; Wotherspoon et al, 2006). Therefore, voluntourism's transient, temporal and inconsistent nature is not conducive to forming these stable attachments, especially when considering the identities voluntourists negotiate for themselves may be based around the colonial and sentimental imaginaries presented to them from the neoliberalised marketing materials of the sending organisations that posit the child as a commodity to be intimately experienced.

Four different behavioural categories that children will exhibit dependent on their reactions to disrupted caregiver relationships have been identified, see figure 2.1. These behaviours are all dependent on the care environment provided and are therefore related to how the voluntourists conduct themselves towards, and around the children. It is therefore necessary to consider how the volunteers perceive their role as caregiver and the identities they construct around it. When these identities are constructed around the notions that temporal and inexperienced care that they provide are needed and necessary (as is the case here), it may have a negative effect on the care environment, and subsequently, the wellbeing of the children. For example, children in care are very vulnerable and are prone to disorganised attachments through the consistently observed characteristics of indiscriminate friendliness and excessive need for attention, whereas children within orthodox familial environments tend to be wary towards strangers and show preferential treatment towards their primary caregivers (MacDonald, 1996).

*Figure 2.1 Typical Attachment Behaviours*

<b>Attachment Behaviour</b>	<b>Typical Child Behaviour</b>
Secure	Uses caregiver as a secure base for exploration. Protests caregiver's departure and seeks proximity and is comforted on their return, returning to exploration (Bowlby,1952; Ainsworth,1978; Dozier and Rutter, 2008)
Avoidant	Not used to sharing in play. Little or no distress on departure of carer, little or no visible response to their return, ignoring or turning away with no effort to maintain contact if picked up (Bowlby,1952; Ainsworth,1978; Dozier and Rutter, 2008)
Ambivalent/Resistant	Unable to use caregiver as a secure base, seeking proximity before separation occurs. Distressed on separation from carer displaying ambivalence, anger, or reluctance to warm to caregiver and resume play on their return. Preoccupied with caregiver's availability, seeking contact but resisting angrily when it is achieved (Bowlby,1952; Ainsworth,1978; Dozier and Rutter, 2008)
Disorganised	Behaviour on return of carer such as freezing or rocking. Lack of coherent attachment strategy shown by contradictory, disoriented behaviours such as approaching the carer but with their back turned (Bowlby,1952; Ainsworth,1978; Dozier and Rutter, 2008)

However, children in care (including those residing at the projects under research here) tend to approach all adults with the same level of sociability and affection, even if they met only moments before. These behaviours are concerning and will have a severe and detrimental impact to the children's emotional development when exacerbated by the continuous disruption to the caregiver relationship that voluntourism generates (Richter and Norman, 2010). What will be explored is how the volunteers' perceive this behaviour, and how it is rationalised in terms of their own identity and value as a carer. This rationalisation of the 'self' (as problematised in the context of discourses surrounding neoliberal subjectivities) is arguably dependent on how knowledge is produced by the organisations in terms of their promotion of the placements, and the preconceptions it induces from the volunteers. The danger lies in how such attachment and behaviour may be grossly misunderstood by inexperienced volunteers.

The availability of carers, their sensitivity and degree of acceptance of the child, have all been established to be hugely influential factors in the security of the emotional bond (Main and Solomon, 1990; Horton, 2005; Wotherspoon et al, 2006; McHale, 2007; Howes and Spieker, 2008; Slade, 2008). Sensitivity will be affected if the carer is inexperienced and does not know how to manage challenging behaviour, and inexperienced care tends to aggravate behavioural issues in children as they are not dealt with appropriately (Oosterman and Schuengel, 2008). Inexperienced carers are also more likely to exhibit negative attitudes to problem children as they will grow to dislike them rather than nurture them, which can again exacerbate challenging behaviour (O'Reilly and Bornstein, 1993; Webb, 1994; Laishley, 1997; Folbre, 2008). Volunteers have been recognised as inexperienced (Simpson, 2004; Richter and Norman, 2010) and as such are more likely to demonstrate poor levels in the care dimensions, which may impact negatively upon the children. Therefore, how volunteers interact with the children, and whether inexperience causes any of the above highlighted issues will be considered.

With regards to voluntourist behaviour in this context an 'internal working model' which recognises how the child's relationships with caregivers are organised will illustrate how this impacts on other aspects of their development, especially the development of relationships later in life (Howe, 2001). The model identifies three dimensions of care that can affect the development of attachment behaviour; *sensitivity of caregiver, acceptance or rejection, and accessibility* (Figure 2.2). The development of this working model is incredibly important as it is the means through which we understand how the child organises patterns of thinking and feeling. This is how children learn to develop their perception of self-worth, and how they are viewed by those around them (Howe, 2001).



*Figure 2.2 Aspects of Volunteer Behaviour and its Effect on Attachment*

<b>Dimensions of Care</b>	<b>Effect on Attachment</b>
Sensitivity	<p>Effects how attuned carer is to child's psychological condition and needs.</p> <p>Inexperienced or non-committed carers are poor at reading and responding to children's signals of needs and distress</p>
Degree of acceptance or rejection	<p>Effects how far the carer accepts the child whatever their mood or behaviour, and acknowledges caring will constrain lifestyle</p> <p>In experienced or non-committed carers will often resent and reject the children who are more demanding and challenging</p>
Accessibility scale	<p>Effects how available and accessible carers make themselves to the children.</p> <p>Accessible carers remain alert to child's needs and make themselves constantly available to the child</p> <p>In experienced or non-committed carers will often ignore the child, and continue to be absorbed in own needs and pursuits , only engaging with the child when it suits them</p>

(Howe,2001:p147)

Children who experience poor or low levels of the above dimensions will internalise that they are unloved, and may then behave towards others in a way that reflects their experience (Aldgate and Jones, 2006). The application of this model will therefore be used in order to ascertain how volunteers interact with the children, helping to determine the effectiveness of the care they deliver, and how this maybe impacting upon the children's well-being. This is related to how the volunteers perceive and negotiate their role, and the motives behind completing such a placement, as commitment levels have been linked to volunteer behaviour and attitudes towards their duties (Brown, 2005). It is therefore argued that the care environment is affected by the voluntourists and their negotiation of the subjectivities and imaginaries that are impressed upon them through their experience of the neoliberalised landscape of voluntourism. In order to understand the specificities that are deepening this

neoliberal marketisation of voluntourism and the practice of care, a discussion of the Mexican approach to tourism is needed. The following sections present such information, and explore the significance of public imaginaries and voluntourist subjectivities in more detail.

### **Neoliberalised Voluntourism in Mexico**

When developing countries such as Mexico promote a trade such as tourism, they effectively embrace a greater integration into the world economy. It is the terms of this integration and the direct economic and political effects that invite controversy. Mexico's commitment to neoliberal economic policies reinforced tourism as part of the State's economic development agenda, with a hope to improve Mexico's export earnings and reduce deficits in the balance of payments (Clancy, 1999). Initially, tourism planning in Mexico was a State-centred approach, with SECTUR (*La Secretaría de Turismo* – the national tourism ministry) and FONATUR (*El Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo* – the national tourism development trust fund) acting as the driving forces in conceiving, constructing, financing and investing in the major tourist resorts along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts (Clancy, 1999; Torres and Momsen, 2004). However, the State realised the most effective way to appeal to international visitors was to encourage international companies to invest, and thus tourism Trans-National Corporations (TNCs- such as Hilton, Sheraton and Marriot) were granted preferential financial treatment, with soft loans, franchises and discounted land prices offered as incentives. Subsequently, this led to TNC control over the Mexican tourism industry, particularly at the more luxurious end of the spectrum, creating a highly inequitable economic landscape in which the wealthy tourist bubble remains the targeted beneficiary of capital, infrastructure and services, whilst the workers' barrios continue to struggle with squalid conditions and poverty (Torres and Momsen, 2004).

This unbalanced landscape is evident in the areas of Mexico under research here. It is not to be argued that voluntourism is solely responsible for the issues of inequality, as

the mass tourism market still attracts the largest volume of numbers and generates higher tourist receipts (Murray, 2007; Ventana, 2008; see Chapter Four). Nonetheless, voluntourists in these areas still follow similar behavioural patterns to their mass-counterparts, and have the same standard of expectations in terms of recreational leisure facilities available (see Chapter Five). The majority of wealth generated by tourism accrues to these multinationals, entrepreneurial elites and the Mexican government, which is then translated into the political and economic power that shapes daily life and social interactions at every level and between all actors within the touristic sphere (Torres and Momsen, 2004). These asymmetrical geometries of power (McEwan, 2004) illustrate the immense power of the neoliberal forces of international tourism to reshape local realities, whilst further highlighting how neoliberal practices that rely on equitable market distribution of benefits do not always materialise in contextually-specific situations. This again demonstrates how neoliberal policies tend to favour the powerful, dominant forces (Leys, 2005), whilst also highlighting the ways neoliberal policies can be conducted and distorted within national and regional spheres, and are not limited to the international arena.

The practice of voluntourism within Mexico has undergone a process of privatisation and professionalisation; the industry outsources its development practices, whilst also commodifying the people, place and the development activities that take place. It is these market-led aspects that are producing a complex re-imagining of volunteer tourism based around predominant neoliberal ideologies, and have driven the rapid proliferation of volunteer organisations into the global mainstream (Baillie-Smith and Laurie, 2011; Wearing and Wearing, 2006). As such, competition within voluntourism is increasing, and as a result, a great proportion of organisations within the global sector are now private enterprises that collect a profit, whilst in addition, organisations which were previously non-profit are having to adopt commercial strategies in order to survive (Tomazos, 2010; Tomazos and Cooper, 2012).

The dangers of engaging within the commercialisation process should not be underestimated as there are several factors that complicate organisational behaviour specifically within volunteer tourism (Coghlan and Noakes, 2012). These include the organisations' attempts to address highly complex issues, such as social development, and the fact that volunteer tourism draws their market from highly materialistic and consumerist cultures, with the added complication that the organisations already operate within a broader commercial tourism system. For the organisations under investigation here, this poses the challenge of balancing profit-oriented and charitable goals, as the recognition of financial rewards from adopting commercial processes will place new demands on management operations, meaning they may be more likely to forego their charitable focus in order to keep up with commercial demand (Tuckman, 1998).

A further issue that has arisen from voluntourism's entrenchment within a neoliberal agenda is the commodification of the voluntourism product and experience<sup>2</sup>. A tourism commodity is formed through the packaging of experiences, geographies and cultures into products for purchase in the flow of trade. This raises particular concerns when applied to voluntourism; the people (and particularly the children) subjected to the commodification process are highly vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation and abuse (Richter, 2004). The commodities that are created by voluntourism are then marketed as sellable aspects of the voluntourism package. These commodities are what appeals to the volunteers and entices them to purchase the voluntourism product (Wearing, 2001; Stoddart and Rogerson, 2004; Egmond, 2007; Gray and Campbell, 2007; Tomazos, 2009).

The commodification of goods, items or entities that challenge the practice of exchange, such as poverty, racism, or harm to innocents is described as contested

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<sup>2</sup> Commodification has historically been linked with capitalist development and industrialisation, in that a product traditionally had a use-value for the producer, and this is transformed into an exchange-value in the market place (Marx, 1844; 1867).

commodification, and as a bi-product of the evils of the neoliberal market, embroiled within complex notions of ethics and exploitation (Radin, 1997). This is particularly significant when considered against the knowledge that the organisations under research have designed and marketed the voluntourism experience to improve the circumstances of this very problem. Furthermore the transformation of the poverty and neediness of vulnerable children into a marketable commodity and sold as part of the volunteer experience, is leading to the further exploitation of the children at the host destinations (Richter, 2004; see Chapter Eight). Arguably, this relates to the dangers of the neoliberal market, in particular its tendency to reduce everything, including human beings, to the status of commodities (Scheper-Hughes, 2002).

One major problem for the Mexican situation is that tourists are often estranged from what really lies behind the commodity: the realities of the poor and the poverty they face (Halnon, 2002). This has allowed voluntourists to interact with poverty and vulnerable children as a constructed leisurely and appealing choice for the economically privileged. What is particularly significant is that this form of tourism commodifies and aestheticises poverty and those experiencing it, much like poverty tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Selinger and Outtersen, 2009; Rolfes, 2010). This presents the tourists with an exploitative opportunity to indulge in voyeuristic tendencies, to be shocked by scenes of depravity and to feel pity for those they are observing (Rolfes, 2010). This has been argued again to relate to the application of market-based mechanisms within a neoliberal agenda, in that it relies on the transformation of places and people into desirable 'must sees' that volunteers are willing to pay to experience. In essence, the destination and people of Mexico have been repackaged to be consumed by the global tourism industry, thus illustrating that voluntourism is ensconced within a neoliberal agenda (Duffy and Moore, 2010). This will be framed through the ways in which the practices of the voluntourism organisations are shaping a colonial imagining of developing countries and how this is influencing the perceptions of the volunteers and how they negotiate their experience.

## **Public Imaginaries of Development**

Over 500 organisations now offer volunteering activities, with over half belonging to the private sector, and as a result, the progression of volunteer tourism has mirrored the commercial opportunities of other forms of tourism, with organisations providing more than just volunteering experiences: they are offering holiday packages (Tomazos, 2009). This indicates the holiday and leisure aspect is becoming more important to people wishing to participate in volunteering activities. The use of mainstream marketing methods that posit volunteering within the context of a holiday highlights how submersion within a neoliberal market has commercialised the Mexican sector and created a marketable product based on the privatisation and commodification of development (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). This is exemplified through how the voluntourism organisations frame and promote themselves, their projects, and most importantly, the concept of development. They frequently construct development in a simplistic and apolitical manner which has not only promoted development as something that can be 'done', but also legitimises the validity of young, unskilled and inexperienced Westerners as the agents and mobilisers of development (also see Simpson, 2004; 2005).

It can also be argued that within voluntourism, the perception of development has evolved in such a manner that it is assumed it can be engaged with on a simple level, without context and on a sporadic and extemporised basis (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). Arguably, commoditising development has depoliticised it for the purposes of voluntourism. This is because voluntourism in this case produces apolitical responses to political problems; there is always a focus on an outcome, such as providing a source of affection to the child rather than a solution to the cause of the problem (also see Simpson, 2004; Mostafanezhad, 2012). The 'concept' of children are argued to exacerbate this problem as they tend to invoke sympathy and compassion, rather than political action (Richter, 2004; 2008; Moore, 2008), and sentimentality neutralises the political response.

Thereby, a neoliberal agenda has allowed sending organisations the freedom to market Mexico, its projects and its population in such a way that the response provided in way of assistance is simplistic in nature, focusing upon a depoliticised outcome, rather than the social, economic and political factors at play. This could be due to the possibility that the volunteering holiday market would damage its commercial viability if it began engaging in such political and complex discussions. How the voluntourism organisations' practices and management are being shaped by an entrenchment within a neoliberal market will be analysed and discussed throughout the following empirical chapters. How the organisations promote and market the destination of Mexico and its projects will also be explored in order to understand the effect this may have on the colonial imaginaries produced, and how the volunteers may negotiate their position and identity on their placements.

However, apolitical and simplistic notions of development and poverty can also be linked to wider public imaginaries surrounding the concepts. Contemporary imaginaries of development are directly connected to public understandings of global poverty, and recent attempts to make sexy (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008) popularise (Biccum, 2007), commodify (Baillie Smith, 2008) and professionalise (Simpson, 2005; Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011) development are influencing and reshaping such imaginaries. Traditionally, the south and development have been constructed around perceptions of famine, disaster and extreme poverty, with Southern actors portrayed as passive and helpless recipients of charity, and these imaginaries have evoked emotional responses centred around charity, care and pity, rather than concerns of justice (Baillie Smith 2012). This has been critiqued for failing to contextualise poverty and development, ignoring structural causes and focusing attention upon the problems of the South rather than the implication that the North is responsible for shaping those problems (Baillie Smith, 2012).

This is an issue voluntourism in Mexico is facing; adherence to neoliberal policy has caused sending organisations to simplify and depoliticise development, commodifying

the participation in such an activity, and the response voluntourists provide. The promotion of young, unskilled and inexperienced UK volunteers as external development agents, and indeed the marketing material presented to such candidates, implies that they can solve the issues at hand, whereas the local populace cannot. This is linked to issues of capacity and mobility of the local populace, something which commercial voluntourism organisations do not seem to give much consideration to. Issues of capacity and mobility are often discussed within development discourse through the realms of capacity building and institutional strengthening as a way to help strengthen the ability of people to improve their standards of living (Merino and Carmenado, 2012). This is particularly relevant to voluntourism as it is frequently promoted through its ability to build capacity, strengthen mobility and improve the lives of others (Wearing, 2001; Brown, 2005; McGehee and Santos, 2005; Lyons and Wearing, 2008).

Although explicit reference may not be made to these practices within shallow voluntourism, they are still relevant when accounting for how projects are promoted and marketed, and how they are included into an organisation's portfolio. Most capacity building interventions concentrate on tangible aspects (finances, resources etc.), and if these prerequisites are not in place within an organisation or project, the ability to build and strengthen will be severely diminished, with very little realistically achieved and sustained (Kaplan, 2000). Organisations without these prerequisite resources have enormous difficulty in making productive use of the help they are given, and interventions could result in funding inefficient and lax management practices that have limited outreach and unsustainable operations (Linnell, 2008). Therefore, how the organisations assess potential projects, and the decision making process behind project acquisition will be analysed to explore whether simplistic notions of development are affecting organisational operations to this extent, and to analyse how neoliberal policy may be influencing these organisational practices.



Populations within developing countries are frequently represented throughout development as happy and seen to be engaging in positive action, alongside volunteers and aid workers from the North (Nash, 2008). Although this may change imaginaries of the South in terms of local mobility, it can simultaneously strengthen the importance of Western interventions in the creation of this happiness, whilst still obscuring the exploitative relationships and challenges that occur within neoliberal environments (Smith, 2004; Manzo, 2008; Wilson, 2011). The notion of responsibility within voluntourism is constructed around the view that the developed world is responsible for the misfortunes of the developing world, thus ascribing responsibility to the privileged:

“This contemporary sense of global concern is the product of imagined geographies founded on the webs of materials connection that link the lives of privileged Westerners to materially deprived others in different parts of the world.” (Lester, 2002: 277)

The field of tourism has now developed a moral conscious and an ardent responsibility to help those within the destinations visited (Butcher, 2003), and this is problematised through the so called responsibility of the ‘white man’s burden’<sup>3</sup> and the colonial and imperial connotations involved in such knowledge (Easterly, 2006). In contemporary society the language of this obligation has changed, depicting a move away from racism, with development and foreign aid becoming the goal, rather than domination and colonisation. However, a paternalistic and coercive strain has remained, and colonial nuances are embedded with the concept of development and responsibility: the world’s poor do not need saving, they are their own best asset, but in arrogance, the West believe they know best, sometimes thwarting the poor’s own efforts in an attempt to alleviate the guilt of colonial malpractice (Easterly, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> Kipling’s (1899) poem *The White Man’s Burden* initially appears to be a rhetoric demand for white men to colonise and govern other nations for the sake of progression, and as such has become emblematic of Western discourse (Judd, 1997). Within modern interpretations, the poem has received much attention (Judd, 1997; Snodgrass, 2002; Zwick, 2005; Brantlinger, 2007), with the philanthropic interpretation surmising that the rich have a moral obligation to help the poor develop and improve themselves (Easterly, 2006). This burden has arguably emerged from the West’s self-pleasing fantasy that they can save the rest in an attempt to assuage the guilt of a colonial past (Rist, 1997; Easterly, 2006)

The concept of responsibility of the voluntourist is imbued with the wish to make a difference and give back to society, influenced heavily by the moral exhortations promoted by corporate marketing materials, the media, NGO campaigns and the State (Sin, 2010). However, ascribing responsibility to the privileged tourists is fraught with colonialism, imperialism and degradation. The formation of these responsible relationships implies inequality on the part of the poor, as the privileged naturally assumes the position of power. This suggests responsibility is not without political implications and tensions. The humanitarian approach of international volunteering belies an agenda of western domination and colonialism, as it reproduces the same patterns of inequality and poverty, and reinforces the dominant position of the North through the adoption of the neoliberal policies followed by the voluntourism organisations and the Mexican tourism authorities (Sin, 2010). Despite many of the volunteers beginning with good intentions, the power and unequal relations between host and guest is inevitable. Colonial histories and contemporary re-imaginaries are influencing the host/guest relationship, and in turn, these relationships may be shaped by the identities the volunteers forge for themselves.

It is said that knowledge is never innocent but is profoundly connected with operations of power (Said, 1978). Colonialism is central to this, with Western discourse having created a political vision of reality whose structure promoted binary oppositions to justify Eurocentric imperialistic ambitions and their prejudices against the unfamiliar other (Said, 1978). These ambitions are still used to legitimise development interventions; voluntourism in particular as its humanitarian and developmentalist missions are still reproducing the same patterns of inequality and poverty and reinforcing the superiority of the West (Said 1978; Easterly, 2006; Palacios, 2010). An analysis of how the organisations market the projects will therefore be undertaken in order to explore how this may be affecting the imaginaries produced and how the volunteers are internalising this knowledge to negotiate their perceived roles and identities.

Orientalism (Said, 1978) has been extremely important in demonstrating how the power of the West to represent other places was instrumental in reinforcing a sense of difference between the West and non-West, which also translated into a sense of superiority and justification of various political interventions (many of which are still in operation today) that underpin imperialism in the name of development. However, orientalism has been criticised for ignoring the self-representation of the colonised, instead focussing on the imposition of colonial power, and by doing so, promoting a static model of colonial relations in which the power is all focused on the coloniser, rather than acknowledging the resistances to it (see Ahamad, 1992; Vaughan, 1994). These critiques notwithstanding, orientalism has been central to the subsequent arguments surrounding the depictions of the foreign and exotic other.

The importance of the 'exotic' in voluntourism activities is directly related to orientalism and postcolonial theory. Colonial imagery has the potential to influence voluntourists' perspective of developing countries and cause them to romanticise these destinations, and form their knowledge and understanding of local people, traditions and customs accordingly (Ansell, 2008). This could perpetuate a dichotomy of 'them' and 'us', highlighting the differences between the voluntourists and their hosts, as opposed to acknowledging the similarities. This is further exacerbated by conceptualisations of poverty. Such imaginaries could construct poverty as an absolute and as something suffered by the foreign and exotic other. Poverty would then be allowed to become a definer of difference, rather than an experience shared by people marginalised by resource distribution. Therefore, it shall be investigated as to whether shallow voluntourism is reproducing a colonial disposition with the 'poor but happy' tale, implying a trivialisation of poverty and that somehow, people do not really mind living in poverty, finding pleasures in their romanticised traditional practices.

Further evidence of the colonial roots of voluntourism can be found in the concept of need, and how the framing of such a concept may cause places such as Mexico to be defined in such terms (Simpson, 2004). This may create the perception that local

projects are passive and incapable of helping themselves; reminiscent of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Arguably this indicates the voluntourism industry aligns itself within modernist and westernisation development models, encouraging the third world to follow the West's example. This underpins the maintenance of the power and privilege of the coloniser, and how subsequently, colonialism may cause alienation, inferiority complexes and the destruction of self-esteem on the part of the various members of the local populace (Fanon, 1952; 1961) whilst also providing the voluntourists with a distorted sense of their self-worth.

These representations of poverty and need framed by such romanticised images of the poor-but-happy local, not only strengthens ideas of power of Northern interventions in creating happiness, but also frames the notion of luck through the volunteers' own privileged positions (Simpson 2004). Popular images of developing nations utilised throughout development and voluntourism are often simplified and distorted as they are the product of how their geographies are imaged and understood by those in the West (King, 2003). This raises questions surrounding why the subaltern are condemned to be represented in such a distorted manner, and whether they can be truly represented (Spivak, 1988). Development is arguably then given a colonial and neoliberal perspective of power relations as dominant Eurocentric institutions promote spatial imaginations of people and places to provide truths. These truths then form the basis on which voluntourists formulate their imaginaries of development, Mexico and its populace, and how they make sense of their role, their surroundings and situation. Such imaginaries, in which acts of charity are frequently privileged, tend to focus on the fortune and affluence of the Western-self compared to the poverty of the other. This can put the entire control of aid into the hands of the rich, leaving it as nothing more than a moral duty to the poor. These tensions sit at the heart of the volunteers' attempts to define a subjectivity relating to their biography, experience and engagement with development (Baillie Smith et al, 2013).

## **Voluntourist Subjectivities**

Advertising images narrate different lifestyle choices and highlight the ethical aspects of adopting one way or another in which to conduct one's life, and as neoliberal subjects, one is always in continuous training, learning and assessment in order to improve oneself (Bondi, 2005). Therefore an exploration of subjectivities will allow for a deeper understanding of how volunteers define themselves and others, and negotiate their own identities, positions and roles based upon the popular imaginaries of development and Mexico. In addition, exploring subjectivities will also allow further appreciation for how through State, education and private sector endorsement and sponsorship of voluntourism, the sector has become a societal rite of passage, synonymous with ideas of help, gratitude and personal development. All of the above frame the views of, and are reiterated by, the voluntourists who have inculcated these values.

Rose (1999) explains that at any one time humans are subject to a variety of distinct practices of subjectification in different places, spaces and practices that govern. In addition, subjectification can be simultaneously individualising and collectivising and identities are always collective and relational, as one often participates in a collective set of identifications, whilst situated within alternative identities (Rose, 1999). What is particularly noteworthy is that the model of human subjectivity associated with neoliberal governmentality does not inevitably generate subjects solely oriented to the narcissistic gratification of individual desires via market-induced opportunities influenced by a top-down governed imposition, but rather that it fosters a sort of neoliberal freedom that enables people to make choices and take responsibility for their lives (Rose, 1999; Lerner, 2000; Bondi, 2005). Neoliberal subjectivity is explicitly linked with notions of freedom, in that ethics of freedom has become the principle of our conceptions of how we should be ruled, how our practices should be organised and how we understand ourselves and our situations (Rose, 1999). Within neoliberal society, people are understood as the subjects of freedom; freedom is understood as the capacity to understand and realise one's own endeavours, and to determine the course of one's own life through the acts of choice (Rose, 1999).

The marginalised, or those with limited choice, are presented with an allocation of agencies in the form of charities and volunteering organisations, which simultaneously have opened up new possibilities for the enactment of the moral aspirations of the more privileged citizen (Larner, 2000). Equipped with the politics of rights and empowerment, volunteers are recreating ideas of neoliberal citizenship, where one is not to remain isolated and selfish, but must accept the responsibility to help procure the improvement of those who need assistance in improving themselves. Therefore, the neoliberal subject is addressed as a moral individual with bonds of obligation and responsibility relating to new practices of identity formation through lifestyle choices; how and where we shop and travel, what we buy all have the power to transform the purchaser into a certain kind of individual living a certain kind of life, and we as autonomous individuals can shape our identities through modes of consumption and engagement in the neoliberal free market.

In discourse surrounding voluntourism, development has become acquiescent to a focus on the Western volunteer and their personal development. Through the adherence to a neoliberal framework and a connection with colonial histories of exploration and adventure, the professionalisation of volunteer tourism and development has meant the global south has become a training-ground which volunteers can buy access to in order to enhance a CV or perform existing subjectivities (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). Subsequently, specific skills needed in the local projects may be being superseded by the needs of the volunteers and their desires for their personal development. This reiterates the importance of recognising how neoliberalism can deplete and restrain activism and how “professionalised subjects inhabit and sometimes subvert the opportunities neoliberalisation opens up” (Bondi and Laurie, 2005: 395).

The issues of experts, expertise and knowledge are becoming more pronounced through the framing of development as a professionalised industry, yet they are decreasing in value due to the associations of where they are coming from, i.e. the

non-specialised publics (Jenkins, 2005). Thus what counts as professional expertise is no longer founded upon the in-depth and individualised knowledge of places and people, but instead is located in technical information, or worse, the colonial and imperial association of the experts' nationality (Kothari, 2005). This creates unequal relationships between the voluntourist and the recipient project staff, but also reinforces and legitimises the volunteers' valorisation, especially when considered in relation to the formation of their identities and subjectivities.

However, despite the power of campaign and marketing strategies of NGOs or volunteering organisations, the production of public imaginaries of development and poverty does not take place in a vacuum (Baillie Smith, 2012). Although there is a growing literature based upon popular representations and perceptions, this has not been matched by research exploring the complex ways these shape people's subjectivities; meaning that understandings of how, when and why people engage in development are partial (Baillie Smith, 2012). What is being made clear is that processes of engagement are shaped by and work against powerful and changing social, familial or professional relationships and dynamics, as well as through factors such as class, gender, race and locality, thus illustrating the shaping of subjectivities to be a complex, multiple and opened ended process (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004; Nash, 2008; Henson et al, 2010; Kothari and Wilkinson, 2010; van Heerde and Hudson, 2010; Baillie Smith, 2012). This is exemplified in the voluntourism cases studied here through the increasing pressures the volunteers feel in the need to become global citizens.

Through its augmented presence within the public domain, international volunteering has become a widely endorsed activity by the State, education institutions and the private sector alike, each pertaining to the preference and increased employability assigned to those with this experience on their CV (see Baillie Smith, 2012; Easterly, 2006). This has cemented its values within an increasingly corporate focus, driving its integration into formal educational and employment structures within the neoliberal

marketplace, making it a vital requirement for success, facilitating one's natural progression to employment. Therefore, how voluntourists are encouraged to think about global relationships and histories regarding their own roles whilst on placement, and how much legitimacy and authority may be ascribed to such roles will be explored throughout the course of this thesis.

Colonial interventions into historic and contemporary development discourses can provide a key foundation for greater attention to Western subjectivities in relation to development and voluntourism, providing a space to further engage with the multiple and complex negotiations of subjectivity in relation to popular imaginaries of development. The conceptual power of colonialism reveals the persistent process of 'othering' and the re-inscribing of colonial imaginaries in the North through a framework of helplessness and poverty, rather than inequality and injustice (Andreotti, 2007). Certainly, the way Mexico and its social-political and economic situations are framed through the marketing techniques of the sending organisations are testament to this: the homogenised representations of the local people are determined by the production of recognisable imagery utilised by the sending organisations and mass media, to summarise entire nations and to appeal to touristic nature of the volunteer (also see Simpson, 2004). The dangers of utilising this colonial imagery is reflected in the process through which the volunteers make sense of their surroundings and encounters, and how it cannot be assumed that contact with the 'other' will lead to reflexive and critical understanding and engagement (Richards, 2004; Raymond and Hall, 2008; Canton and Santos, 2009).

This suggests some issues of concern relating to the cross-cultural learning and understanding voluntourism promotes, signifying first-hand experience does not necessarily mean learning and appreciation (Griffin, 2004; Richards, 2004; Sin, 2006). Even if the volunteer thinks they have broadened their mind through the experience, they may instead just be rationalising (and even romanticising) poverty (Simpson, 2004). This exposes the colonial logic in which the coloniser would never be able to



internalise the complete culture of the colonised, despite how long and hard they tried, as they would never quite be the same (Fanon 1961). Therefore it cannot be assumed that contact with the other will lead to long-term international understanding and respect as although these superficial experiences of voluntourism can increase cultural tolerance, more deeply embedded attitudes are less likely to be affected (also see Quinby, 2002; McLeod, 2008; Raymond and Hall, 2008). This is further supported by Griffin who argues that “the assumption that seeing equates to knowing means stereotypes in the mind of the observer could perhaps be strengthened rather than challenged” (2004: 70).

This suggests serious consideration is needed regarding the responsibility one feels to the distant stranger (see Silk, 1998: 2000: 2004: Raghuram et al 2009; McEwan and Goodman, 2011), the social relations formed when fostering transnational connections and imaginaries, and the negotiation of subjectivities through encounters with the aid industry and its subsidiaries, such as voluntourism. Here, care can be framed in the ethics of encounters; a set of practices that shape geography beyond familiar sites of care provision (Conradson, 2003). As such, our increasing sense of connection and empathetic engagement with those distant from ourselves is a reflection of the quality of global life, and a proactive interest in the well-being of others (Conradson, 2003).

Such encounters provide a lens through which the volunteers begin to shape and negotiate their identities. Inherently, these encounters with others can be analysed through the arguments surrounding geography of care and the practices that shape the geography beyond the familiar sites of care provision. As such, our increasing sense of connection and empathetic engagement with those distant from ourselves is a reflection of neoliberal subjectivities and the recognition of ourselves as autonomous individuals with a proactive interest in the well-being of others (Conradson, 2003). In light of the arguments attesting to the West’s responsibility to the South born out of guilt for colonial past, critical engagement with postcolonial thinking will reveal not only

“the intimacies and generosities within existing practices of care and responsibility, but also expose their political contestations and the pain and the absences that underpin global relationships touched by histories of colonialism, exploitation and inequality” (Raghuram et al, 2009: 6).

These contested relationalities allow for critical thinking surrounding the concept of responsibility; the taking account of, but simultaneously being accountable to people in different places. This implies that the lines of responsibility are rather ambiguous in terms of considering the limits to responsibility, who really benefits from delivering the care, and whether caring ever become an irresponsible act. The mutuality of relationships between the colonised and colonisers has always been denied, exacerbated by the authoritative arrival of the anomalous figure of the stranger, repeatedly sent as a solution to their problems (Bhabha, 1995), and this practice is reflected in the way voluntourists are sent to assist the needs of the Mexican projects. However, despite the necessary colonial critique, geographies of responsibility and care in voluntourism demonstrate how people in different parts of the world feel responsible to each other. It highlights their desire and ability to care for one another due to a change in the relations we have within an increasingly interconnected world, regarding “relational politics of place” (Massey, 2004; 2005; also see Smith, 2002; Lawson, 2007; Popke, 2007; Raghuram et al, 2009). Through geographical care and responsibility everyone feels as though they are able to do something to help, and practical action is a key factor in allowing individuals to develop their neoliberal subjectivity by taking responsibility from their own privilege and make a difference (McEwan and Goodman, 2011).

### ***Heroism, Risk and Adventure as a way of Exploring Neoliberal Subjectivity and Identity Formation***

Responsibility is central to an understanding of voluntourism (Goodwin and Francis, 2003; Hall and Brown, 2006; Schrader, 2006; Goodwin, 2009) and is linked to Easterly's (2006) notion of the white man's burden as discussed above: the development of a moral conscious in relation to the voluntourists' negotiation of their cosmopolitan self, seen through an ardent responsibility to help those in need. However, the formation

of this type of responsibility implies inequality, and belies an agenda of western domination and colonialism as it reinforces the dominant position of the West and imposes a sense of powerlessness and victimisation upon those in the South (Rushdie, 2006). Evidence of this can be seen through the idea of heroism, as a hero is a character of strength who behaves with honour and selflessness in protecting and defending the weak, implying not only a need for a sense of difference, but also that wealth, power and privilege must be balanced by a duty to those without (Beezer, 1993; Campbell, 1997; Allison, 2010; Tomazos and Butler, 2010). The comparison between the volunteer and the hero was originally employed by Tomazos and Butler (2010) who give a celebratory account of the voluntourists' journey, and their struggle with the unfamiliar other and the inherent obstacles that must be overcome through their philanthropic mission. Although this comparison may indeed provide an interesting perspective of the volunteers' experience, highlighting how they may be negotiating their subjectivities and framing their roles and encounters, it is an oversimplified and uncritical account, and one that does not consider crucial arguments surrounding imperialism, gender and the concept of adventure and risk.

People travelling from the western world to places within the developing world carry a mental luggage of grand narratives which seem real to them, but have been influenced by a number of historical, social and cultural factors (Urbain, 1989) which is a direct reflection of the voluntourists' negotiation of the 'self'. One reason for this is that risk and adventure narratives are used as identity claims: danger must play a large part in the narrative (Elsrud, 2001). Adventure is defined as "a heroic and perilous journey, followed by a crucial struggle that creates a victory and an end to conflict, making possible the identification of a hero" (Dawson, 1994: 32). The modern adventure allows for any undertaking felt to be dangerous, risky or hazardous and exciting. This is because the essence of the adventure resides in risk that allows for an experience to be exciting and novel (Dawson, 1996). For an adventure to truly be rewarding and worthwhile, there must be difference; in order for adventures to be heroic, they must contain more than novelty, pointing to the importance of a comparable "other" upon which the adventure narrative is built (Beezer, 1993; Elsrud, 2001). The identification

with the hero therefore allows the voluntourist to be provided with an idealised self-image, created through their defeat of a quest or challenge that has resulted in their personal growth. This highlights the importance of considering the colonial imaginaries and the popular perception of development within voluntourism, as this need for difference and heroism will influence how the voluntourists traverse the encounters and engagements they experience whilst on placement and how they manage the power relations this creates.

The historical importance of the hero and adventure in particular to Britain, can be related back to its national development and acquisition of its Empire, giving its British cultural significance explicitly militant, colonialist and imperial connotations (Dawson, 1994). The hero is argued to be an idealised figure whose actions render them superior to the others they encounter, relating to the qualities of enterprise and cleverness they needed to possess in order to succeed in the goals of domination and development during colonial rule (Dawson, 1994). Rushdie's (2006) interrogation of the Western notion of heroism claims that the concept cannot work in a space imbued with the politics of imperialism: it is a re-ordering of lives as one sees fit. Heroism within a colonial society posits a sense of impotence upon those the hero is trying to save (the colonial other), implying a sort of victimisation and imposing a dynamic of powerlessness at the heart of colonial construction (Rushdie, 2006). This is supported by McClintock (1995) who recognises the colonial nuances permeating heroic narratives and interestingly highlights the parallels between the coloniser and the masculine, and the colonised feminine.

This gendered perspective provides an interesting contrast to the volunteers' identities; they predominantly tend to be female within the childcare facet of voluntourism, and the feminisation of the role of carer is well documented (Lerner and Galambos, 1985; Daly and Lewis, 1998; Finch and Groves, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Ungerson, 1990; Richardson, 1995) particularly when considering the role of women in Mexico (Themudo, 2011). This is because women have been socialised to believe that

caring for children is innate and their talent for child care originates from traditional feminine characteristics. However, these assumptions and stereotypes are now being challenged (Jenkins, 2009), which is interesting considering voluntourists are choosing to revert back to these traditionally gendered roles. Yet the identity of the hero is still associated with masculinity, danger, risk and adventure. Risk defines hegemonic masculinity, reflecting a gendered value system that identifies with masculine characteristics used to distinguish heroic behaviour (Maclean, 2012). This, is reinforced by the feminine characteristic of risk-aversion, with women generally believed be more adverse to risk than their male counterparts (Maclean, 2012). Therefore what is counted as risk is related to male activities, despite the risks that are involved in everyday life, risks women have always been a part of. This is particularly intriguing when considering how voluntourists are negotiating this particular aspect of their identity formation with regards to how they manage to synthesise the masculine and feminine.

## **Summary**

Through the argument presented here, a case has been put forward that demonstrates how literatures surrounding neoliberalism, colonialism, feminism, development and childcare can be brought together to answer the question of how voluntourists negotiate their role as carers within the marketised landscape of voluntourism, and through the neoliberal specificities of Mexico. Moreover, it has hopefully highlighted how marketised voluntourism recreates public imaginaries of colonialism, development and poverty, and subsequently how this is not only affecting how volunteers may frame perceived identities, but also the care environment they provide for vulnerable children. Hence the importance of understanding volunteer subjectivities is clear to see: it provides a grounded way to explore the voluntourists' inculcation of the need to develop a successful cosmopolitan 'self' and subsequently how this may influence their role as carer, their perception of themselves, and how they come to understand their hosts and the relationships that transpire. This all takes place within the neoliberal landscape of a highly competitive neoliberal voluntourism market within the UK, which promotes a highly simplistic, commoditised and colonial

perspective of poverty and development. The neoliberal policies of Mexico that favour TNCs within its tourism industry, and its reductions to welfare provisions, consequently create a highly complex terrain for the volunteers to negotiate and locate themselves within. As follows, these arguments highlight how the big ideas of neoliberalism, development, colonialism and feminism can be critiqued through the exploration of voluntourist subjectivities to discover how organisational and local project practices are being shaped by colonial pasts and the neoliberal present, how this may affect the context in which the voluntourists are working and how the care environment is influenced not only by the above, but also the way in which voluntourists are negotiating their identities. The methodological approach and techniques used in order to collect and analyse the empirical material that substantiates these arguments are presented and critiqued in the following chapter.

# Chapter 3- Methodology

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*“As I’m stood in the hot, dusty street, next to a pile of putrefying rubbish, I realise that my well-formed plan is crumbling around me... Where does this leave me and the research- what am I going to do next? I realise that it is back to the drawing board, this part of my research needs a brand new strategy...” (13<sup>th</sup> September 2011, research diary extract).*

## **Introduction**

This is the erratic, human aspect of doing fieldwork, and one that can easily get lost in written methodologies; we all want to prove that our research plan was well-thought through and a success. However, despite the countless hours dedicated to researching and planning an appropriate methodology, a seamless and flawless reality is not always possible. Consequently, in writing my methodology, I want to integrate both the theory and experience of research, and to remember that these informed one another in the process of knowledge production. Indeed, research is a process that evolves and develops; it hears others and changes as it goes along. In asking questions, I discovered ways that answers could be produced and in hearing answers, I thought of new questions to ask, and perhaps new ways to ask them. The endless process of thinking, asking and answering is a circular, at times illogical and draining activity. The unexpected frequently occurs, good planning is sometimes forgotten, and the art of thinking on your feet is a necessity. It is this process of combining theory and a peopled reality that I hope to discuss and give justice to.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the methodologies and approaches to be used in order to conduct the research for this thesis, which is based on the case study method aiming to investigate how voluntourists negotiate their position as carers in the context of marketised voluntourism and care within the neoliberal landscape of Mexico. The fieldwork was carried out over a nine month period in Mexico with interviews and participant observation undertaken at three different sites, as well as at

home in the UK. This is also in addition to the two months I spent as a volunteer at one of the sites in 2008, which provided an invaluable insight into the daily operations and management of volunteer projects in Mexico. This chapter is divided into sections. The first section will provide an explanation, discussion and justification of the research approach I adopted, locating the principles of knowledge production framing this. The second section offers a more pragmatic view with a discussion of the different methods used to gather the primary research, including consideration of their implementation and adaptation, along with an explanation of the foreseen limitations of the work. The final section of the chapter deals with issues relating to the analysis techniques I employed and the issues involved in writing.

## **Methodological Approach**

A methodology attends to the way that knowledge production is to be conducted, and what theoretical framework is to be applied to that production. It has been made clear throughout this thesis that the main research aim is to discover how the voluntourists are negotiating their position as caregivers in the context of marketised voluntourism and care within the neoliberal landscape of Mexican voluntourism. In order to effectively investigate this topic, a qualitative approach has been adopted as it allows emphasis to be placed on the *understanding* of attitudes, behaviours and actions as opposed to just measuring or monitoring them (Morse, 1997). Qualitative research is a broad term, and in general refers to a study process that investigates a social human problem whereby the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting, and builds a whole and complex representation with a rich description and explanation as well as a careful examination of informants' words and views (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is widely accepted that the attraction of qualitative research stems from its ability to allow researchers to get closer to lived experiences, and to explore beliefs and behaviours in terms of those under investigation. Through the intensive methods and analysis involved in such an approach, the researcher is able to derive a more nuanced understanding of the meanings of social behaviours and interactions, as well as developing a greater appreciation for the contextualised



rationalities that influence such behaviour (Hoggart et al, 2002). It was hoped therefore that by employing this method and living within the local communities, a deeper appreciation of how the local recipients and voluntourists may view the voluntourism projects and how its impacts and benefits would be received. By also working within the volunteer project, it was hoped a greater understanding of how the programmes are run would be obtained, and a rapport would be easier to establish with the volunteers and staff members.

However, critics of the approach commonly raise issues of researcher bias, subjectivity, contamination, validity, reliability and generalisability of the research findings (Herbert, 2000). Whilst these criticisms are valid, an appropriate counteraction is therefore not to seek generalisable information, but to attempt to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions to which one particular society subscribes (Decrop, 1998). This is what this thesis aims to achieve. It is not the intention of this project to homogenise volunteers, host communities, or to imply that all voluntourism agencies operate in the same way and have the same agendas. Instead, it is hoped that by examining a small number of projects and communities, an *insight* can be gained into the nature and impacts of contemporary voluntourism on its recipient communities in Mexico.

Within this qualitative approach, this thesis adopts a grounded methodology as this recognises respondents to be knowledgeable, situated representatives through whom researchers can learn a great deal about how their world is seen and lived through real places, communities and situations. Its immersive inductive methods allow for worldviews and ways of life to become apparent, as it seeks to understand the world through the eyes of its participants (Hoggart et al, 2002). The aim is not to deceive or exploit, but to empathise with respondents and to gain an understanding of their lives through a genuine trusting relationship, developing an empathetic approach (Crang, 2005). A reflexive approach allows researchers to engage with respondents in their everyday life, rather than an artificial setting (Cloeke et al, 2004). It is felt therefore, that

this is the best way to research how the voluntourists are negotiating their identities and notions of the 'cosmopolitan-self', and how this may be affecting the context in which they work. This thesis aims to recount this information centrally from the viewpoint of the voluntourists, but also from the perspective of people living within the recipient communities.

Challenges of this approach for novice researchers (such as myself) include the ability to recognise, develop, complement and sometimes even 'unlearn' existing habits, attitudes, emotions and practises, which can be a difficult and daunting task (Van Maanen, 1995). Further issues relate to researcher positionality and reflexivity. A researcher's personal interpretation of things around them is inevitable and will always affect the position from which they write (Evans, 1998). This highlights the difficulties in trying to speak for others, especially for those who have very different social situations and backgrounds, such as the case with this thesis. This echoes the arguments put forward by Spivak (1988) who questions whether the subaltern can ever speak for his/herself or whether they are fated to be represented in an often distorted manner.

As well as the methodological styles to qualitative research, there also are several philosophical perspectives relating to how qualitative research can be approached, and there are debates and contestations surrounding each of them. This project shares an objective with that of Schwandt (1994) who believes interpretative research should provide a deeper insight into the complex world from the point of view of those who live it. Interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed in terms of filtration through constructs such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings. Thus the researcher becomes the vehicle by which this reality is revealed, and their interpretations play a key role in this kind of study, bringing subjectivity to the fore, supported by quality arguments and related theory, rather than statistical exactness (Garcia & Quek, 1997). In terms of methodology, interpretive research does not predefine dependent or independent variables, nor does it set out to test hypotheses,

but aims to produce an understanding of the social milieu of the phenomenon and the process whereby the phenomenon influences and is influenced by its social environment (Walsham, 1995).

It is therefore important for researchers to make explicit their ontological and epistemological assumptions, as their basic beliefs and worldviews will influence their theoretical perspective (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In relation to this project, the ontological assumption is that social reality is locally and specifically constructed by actors through their actions and interactions, and therefore, social reality can only be based on people's definition of it. Interpretative researchers do not believe the world is purely objective, and instead view the world as bound by a particular time and specific context (Neuman, 1997). Thus from an epistemological perspective, an understanding of the social reality to be investigated by this thesis will be shaped by the language, norms and practices of the people living and experiencing it.

### **Positionality and Reflexivity**

The issue of researcher positionality is a key issue for qualitative research as it profoundly affects all aspects of research that involve interaction with other people. This is especially the case with research such as this, which investigates the lives of other people from different nationalities, class and culture. My own personal characteristics (a white-British, middleclass, educated woman) will have a major influence on the information generated, and the subsequent interpretations and analysis (Robson, 1998). Qualitative research is particularly self-conscious about the process of interpretation, and therefore pushes researchers to be explicit about their interpretations and the politics therein (Robson, 1998). This highlights that the dilemma of interpretation is unavoidable, and therefore to compensate for these problems and practicalities, it is crucial for this thesis to be reflexive. Reflexivity can show how the personal is the political, and that concerns, motivations and emotions entrenched within the researcher's life experiences can play an important role in directing their research (Desforges, 2000).

Different researchers will therefore approach the same situation differently and will thereby construct different interpretations and even though reflexivity is necessary, no matter how other-oriented a project may intend to be, it will typically have taken shape through the personal baggage associated with the researcher (Rose, 1997; Wolfinger, 2002). Research has always previously expected researchers to situate themselves outside of the research in order to view issues objectively, however this impossible task is no longer expected as the researcher is inextricably bound within their own cultural identity and a set of power relations, and as such they cannot enter and pass through the field as a completely neutral person (Haraway, 1988; Howard, 1998). Therefore field observations will pass through my own prejudices, values and ideals (and indeed those of the researched), and in order to minimise the impacts of such, a high level of self-reflexivity is needed from myself.

Such a process of reflection can appear endless and throw into question the entire production of knowledge. However, reflexivity is not and should not be an attempt to rise above or step outside of social positioning. Rather, it is a challenge to acknowledge the partial view through which knowledge is produced. In acknowledging the partiality of my own view, it is important to note that I myself was a voluntourist in Mexico with experiences not too dissimilar from those encountered here. I volunteered as a naive student, fresh from completing my A levels, ready for an adventure and wanting to do something worthwhile with my newfound freedom. However, once I arrived at the childcare project, I was shocked by what I saw and what was expected of me, and these encounters and experiences have framed my further education and my research interests. In addition to this experience as a voluntourist, my first and second encounters with research involved conducting my undergraduate and Master's dissertations on voluntourism, and although these studies were in some ways very different to this thesis, they still remain an inspiration behind this piece of research. As a consequence, I bring a certain perspective to the thesis, which is indeed motivated by the sometimes negative and confusing experiences I encountered. It is these experiences that have inspired me to attempt to produce a better and more detailed understanding of voluntourism; more specifically, to explore its deepening

entrenchment into a neoliberalised arena, and how voluntourists are negotiating their identities and roles as volunteers, tourists and carers in such a landscape, and how this may be affecting the care environment provided to vulnerable children.

A further challenge I found in relation to my position was achieving critical distance, especially when it came to the children. I found it particularly difficult when establishing relationships not to become too involved or attached with the children, and indeed allowing attachments to form with me. Although interactions with the children were unavoidable during the course of my visits, I struggled to maintain a balance between my role as a researcher who was highly aware of the dangers of such attachments, without appearing as an impassive and emotionless stranger towards those who require specialist care and attention. Conversely, the relationships I formed with the voluntourists were close, especially as many of them shared the same social categories as I myself occupy. This also helped facilitate the in depth discussions of the research issues, the content of which has formed the bulk of the material presented throughout this thesis. These relationships were complicated, though also legitimised through my dual role as researcher and volunteer. However, this similarity and closeness should not be confused with making this a home-based study, as not only have I endeavoured to include the voices of the project staff and community members, but I also aim to understand how people who are not 'I' understand and interact with each other.

Furthermore, the researcher embodies the idea that what is known by the researched, what may be obvious and natural to them, may not be so for others. This was certainly evidenced within my own research through the way the voluntourists came to reflect on their own knowledges through the process of the research. My relationships within the realms of the communities and project staff were fundamentally more distanced than those constructed around the volunteers, although friendships were still formed. This was in part due to the language barrier, whereby my position as an identifiably foreign stranger was more pronounced. These complicated dynamics illustrate the

messiness of fieldwork and of negotiating other people's (and indeed one's own) positions, roles and relationships. This proved integral to the study, with many interesting conversations generated as a result of discussing and deliberating my own reflections, and those of my research participants, of such identity negotiations.

## **Research Methods**

### **Case Study**

Due to the nature of qualitative study, a case study methodology is commonly employed, as the research is directed towards specific cases in real-life settings. Hence, rather than studying a phenomenon in general, a specific example is chosen within a particular place and time, which allows issues to be investigated in depth and from a variety of perspectives (Hoggart et al, 2002). Case studies are a multi-perspective technique of analyses, meaning that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them (Tellis, 1997). Therefore I believe that a case study is an appropriate technique for exploratory research such as this, as it can help to understand a particular problem or situation in great depth, and provide situational analyses, ready for further research and investigation (Noor, 2008).

However, critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings, as they are set by situational, geographical and contextual boundaries (Winchester, 2000). It is argued that the intense exposure case studies create can bias the findings, and it is often dismissed as being only useful as an exploratory tool (Stake, 1995). Nonetheless, exploratory tools are sometimes needed within new areas of research, and utilising case study research permits the researcher to select a few examples of the phenomenon to be studied, and then intensively investigate the characteristics of those examples (Yin, 1994). By closely examining a relatively small number of cases, and comparing and contrasting them, I hope to learn about significant and specific

features of Mexican voluntourism and how it varies under different circumstances. As explained previously, this thesis will make no claims to generalise extensively from its results, but of course wishes to provide reliable results that may have some resonance within the global sphere of voluntourism.

Therefore, this thesis investigated three different voluntourism organisations that provide projects within a specified area of Mexico. This research aimed to show how the voluntourism organisations' practices are being shaped by colonial histories and the neoliberal present in which they operate. The three different organisations were chosen from the shallow end of the volunteer spectrum (Callanan and Thomas, 2005). It was hoped that by researching three projects rather than one, differences in the recreation or encapsulation of the broader issues of development, and the responses to the neoliberal specificities of the UK and Mexican markets could be analysed. Various aspects of all three projects have been investigated, including how the project was selected for inclusion into the respective organisation's portfolio, the efficiency of the program, the level of involvement, participation (and/or social exclusion) of the local community, the levels of empowerment and capacity building being offered to and experienced by various members of the local communities, power relationalities, and the effectiveness/appropriateness of the use of volunteers as external development agents. Information on the organisations and their subsequent programs are provided in Figure 3.1 below (for a more detailed description, see Chapter Four).

*Figure 3.1 Projects and the Organisations*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>No. of children</b>	<b>No. of Staff</b>	<b>No. of volunteers</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<b>Project</b>		(at the time)		(at the time)		
A	Puerto Vallarta	55	9	45	2001	Volunteers, foreign religious charities, local businesses,
B	La Floresta, Guadalajara	30	5	17	2007	Volunteers, Local church, local businesses
C	Tonalá, Guadalajara	24	10	29	2003	Volunteers, local businesses local church, religious charities
<b>Organisation</b>			(UK base)			
A	UK	-	35	-	1997	Non-profit
B	UK	-	29	-	2006	Low-profit
C	UK	-	81	-	2001	For-profit

### **Sample Groups**

For qualitative research, a sample is not necessarily intended to be statistically representative, as it is the characteristics that are of interest, and it is precisely this feature that makes them well suited to small-medium sized in-depth studies (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). A purposive approach was adopted, whereby the respondents were selected based upon their known characteristics which were relevant to the research. For members of the local community, these characteristics included their geographical proximity to the project, their involvement within it or link to it, any direct impact they have experienced as a result of the project, any experience they have had with child care or child poverty, and any encounters with the children, volunteers or the sending organisations that might have occurred. With regards to the volunteers and staff, the research subjects were already pre-determined by those who were currently working at the projects and for the organisations.



Through the purposive approach, specific techniques of snowballing, gate-keeping and convenience methods were utilised. Snowballing occurs where new respondents are generated through existing ones and is extremely useful in cases where access to relevant sample populations is challenging (as was the case here) as participants can introduce and recommend new people the researcher may not have been able to contact (Silverman, 2000; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). However, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) forewarn that using this method increases the risk of compromised information due to bias and limited diversity. Therefore in order to try and mitigate this risk to some extent, I requested that any new participant recommendations possessed some prerequisite characteristics, with the prescription that dissimilarities in views and experiences would be most welcome.

I also requested that the recommending of family and close friends was to be avoided unless necessary and/or appropriate. This appeared to work reasonably well as the information collected was from a fairly varied source pool, and there has certainly been some diversity and anomalies found within the analysis. Additionally, rather than relying solely on snowballing, other methods were also used such as gate-keeping, which is the assistance of someone to aid access to communities, making introductions, assisting with integration etc., and flow populations which seek to recruit respondents in places that they would reasonably be expected to gather. Although these methods also have their criticisms, mainly linked to bias and the reduction of diversity, when used to supplement each other, they can help to complement the strengths and alleviate the weaknesses of one another (Mason, 2002).

In setting out to put these principles to practice, I found the research experience far from the clear cut explanations and advice of the theorists. In relation to my sample groups, in practice, the biggest issue was that my investment in the research was much greater than that of my participants. This translated into a resistance to a sustained involvement in the research. It was decided that a focus of this research, in addition to

the voluntourists and the organisations, was to be the experiences and opinions of the various members of the local communities, and therefore I wanted them to constitute a large portion of the respondent population. It was hoped that at least thirty people from each of the three communities (including staff, business owners, people that lived nearby) and at least 20 volunteers from each project would agree to take part in the research process; unfortunately this was not exactly the case (see Figure 3.2). The reasons for this rejection were numerous; people simply did not have the time or inclination, they had a limited knowledge of the project, they were too shy, and some had concerns about the repercussions of involvement. However, what I wish to highlight here is that this rejection also illuminated my own ‘normalisation’ of the research process, and it prompted me to reflect on the methodological assumptions that had guided my research design. I had presumed on the level of participation my research would generate, and also overestimated the level of community involvement with the projects.

*Figure 3.2 Sample Sizes*

	Site A	Site B	Site C
<b>Number of Local people</b>	11	9	9
<b>Number of Staff</b>	6	5	5
<b>Number of volunteers</b>	17	13	9
<b>Number of Employees at UK organisation</b>	1	1	1

At Site C, the resistance I encountered was more challenging and problematic, with access to the orphanage being the main concern. However, as I still had another two months until the end of my fieldwork, I had to rethink and re-strategise. As the research was so well progressed, I was reluctant to start anew, so I considered various deviations in my approach, and discussed them with those involved. Eventually we agreed upon a different way to access to participants that would accommodate the manager’s wishes, but still allow the research to continue outside the parameters of the project.

## Interviews

The interview is the most frequently used qualitative technique, as it allows the researcher to produce a rich and varied data set within an informal setting, allowing for a more thorough examination of experiences, feelings and opinions, which are best communicated through detailed examples and rich narratives (Kitchen and Tate, 2000; Silverman, 2000). Furthermore, interviews are also argued to facilitate an explanation of events and experiences in their complexity, including potential contradictions that can lead to an insight beyond the researcher's initial expectations. Hence the purpose of the interview is to give an authentic insight in peoples' experiences, and to gain access to the *meanings* which people attribute to their experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

As this thesis is aimed at understanding the positions adopted by different social groups on voluntourism, it was hoped that interviews would offer a methodological strategy by which these aims can be realised. However, it is recognised that the interview does have limitations as to what it can offer, and no assumptions will be made in terms of this research that the voices heard will not have been subjected to my own editorial and authorial concerns, although care has been taken to avoid this as much as possible. Whilst the principle of an interview is, simply put, to ask questions, how such questions are asked and answered is far from straightforward. Creswell (2009) explains the significance of the questions within interviews, highlighting they must be clear, concise and simple, as well as specifically tailored to help with the facilitation of richer and deeper research. Furthermore, additional elements such as location, body language, facial expressions and pro-active decision-making abilities must also be considered.

There are various classifications of interviews, ranging from the closed-questioned structured interview through to the informal conversation interview, depending on the type of information being sought (Flick, 2002). The differences between the categories essentially concern the degree to which the interviewer controls the conversation and

the degree of standardisation in the questions being asked. For the purpose of this thesis, the standardised, scientific approach to the structured interview was discarded as it was believed this strategy allowed for little flexibility in relation to individuals or circumstances (hence removing individuality), and would perhaps also impair the natural flow of conversation and the richness of the information being provided.

Therefore, the semi-structured approach was adopted. I wanted open-ended, conversational questions to reflect my desire to produce qualitative research that presents an examination of interpretation; that is an examination of voluntourists' interpretations of themselves in terms of the knowledge they are presented with in relation to the places they visit and the encounters they have. Topics to be covered were identified and listed prior to each individual interview according to who was being interviewed. In practice, I found this worked well; it transpired that most respondents were asked similar questions (as topics to be covered were often the same) but this way, the interview was specifically and individually tailored in accordance to the respondent, and questions were altered to adapt to the specific individuals or circumstances, which in turn allowed for greater freedom to explore specific avenues of enquiry, and also allowed for gaps within the information to be anticipated and closed.

It was acknowledged that with interviews, the exchange of knowledge occurs through the interaction of linguistic expression (i.e. the forming, asking and answering of questions), through the understanding and (mis)interpretation of meaning and intent, and through societal positioning, which inherently makes the process highly subjective (Foddy, 2001). There are also issues relating to interviewer bias introduced through question phrasing and prompting, although great care was taken to avoid this as much as possible throughout the research. This is a frequent criticism of interviews, as researchers are constantly shaping interviewees' responses, and therefore, the responses are likely to embody the preconceived ideas of the researcher (Hoggart et al, 2002). Although this shaping is inescapable for all research methods, it is especially

visible in qualitative methods due to the prolonged interaction between researcher and participants. Therefore subjectivity is inevitable to all humanised research projects, but this visibility is not problematic itself, as long as it is openly acknowledged and compensated for, which is what this thesis hopes to do.

Interviews also require a high level of interpersonal skills, such as putting interviewees at ease, asking questions in an interesting manner (to prevent the respondent from giving yes/no answers) ability to listen to responses and act accordingly, and recording responses without upsetting conversational flow (Darlington and Scott, 2002). These issues were given considerable thought, and I decided that each interview was to be recorded (with the respondent's consent) to allow for maximum concentration on what was being said. The recorder was unobtrusively placed, so as to detract attention and limit nervousness of the respondent, as advised by Darlington and Scott (2002). Notes were also made during the course of the interview, but these were limited to additional and contextual information, such as body language, facial expressions, ambiance etc. to help with subsequent interpretations and analysis. Each interview was transcribed as soon after each interview as possible, and as soon as a private location was found (usually once back at my accommodation). Within the interview situation, it is also important to establish and maintain a rapport with the interviewee, so that a trusting relationship can develop (Silverman, 2004). Without these skills, the information produced may be under-developed or lacking in depth as the respondent may be unwilling to impart the information. I worked hard to establish a rapport with the people I interviewed, and although I found this process challenging (not least due to the language barrier), it was also rewarding and in terms of the richness of the material the interviews provided, it proved itself to be successful.

The interviewer must also possess the ability to critically examine their own positionality and the power relations between themselves and their participants, and to consider how these may influence the research process. They must rigorously question their interpretations to ensure analysis is not being used to conveniently

reinforce existing values (Dunn, 2000). Relations between the researcher and the researched are rarely, if ever, equal, and therefore it is highly critical that the researcher should remain aware of the unequal power dynamic that co-exists with the socio-economic inequalities in place (Robson, 1998). It has generally been assumed that power lies with the interviewer, but with inexperienced interviewers (as is the case with myself) the process of the interview can shift the balance of power. Thought and care was given at all times in relation to the power dynamic within the interview, as well as the inherent interviewer bias: to be aware of it, acknowledge it and to try and compensate for it with reflexive analysis. This was why each interview was conducted in a place of the respondent's choosing as it was important for them to choose a space they felt comfortable within.

The power-relations through the interviews seemed to vary from person to person. Some people for example (mainly male interviewees, although certainly not exclusively) seemed completely unfazed during the interview, and answered the questions with a comfortable level of ease, passion and even sometimes apathy. Generally, the conversations maintained a good flow, and when there was a break, it seemed to have more bearing on *interviewer* inexperience rather than the respondent's unease. This may be due to the fact that the interviewing process was delayed for as long as possible, so as to spend as much time in the community as possible getting to know as many people as possible. With the interviewees that seemed nervous and apprehensive about relaying information, extra care was always taken to ensure the respondent was put at ease, assurances were given to their anonymity, and things were taken at a slower pace, with easier questions being added at the beginning to build their confidence. Furthermore, lengthier questions were broken down, so as not to overwhelm and confuse. Although uneasiness was not always eradicated, the outcome of the interviews and the quality and validity of the qualitative evidence they produced did not appear to be affected too negatively.

Conversely, power-relations changed when interviewing the management of the organisations, with the power shifting favourably towards them. Their experience and position seemed to naturally give them more control over access to knowledge, interview content and how the interview was conducted. Woods (1998) explained this situation may be exacerbated by an inexperienced interviewer, which certainly seemed to be the case in this instance. At times the more experienced interviewee attempted to steer the topic away from certain areas, avoided answering certain questions, and began *asking* the questions, or just asserted their authority if pressed for an answer that perhaps proved uncomfortable to give. This was something I struggled with, but I found the more interviews I conducted, the more experienced I became, and it became much easier to negotiate the situation and steer the conversation back to topic. However, it is recognised that perhaps a more experienced interviewer would have been more prepared and practiced, and would have handled the situation more effectively.

### **Interpreters**

A final issue with conducting interviews arises with the use of interpreters.

Unfortunately, with respect to this thesis, as the interviews were being conducted in a Spanish speaking country, an interpreter was essential if interviews were to be conducted with members of the local community. Although many members of the researched communities did speak English, it was vital that respondents were not to be dismissed based on my own failure to fully understand the Spanish language.

Therefore, a translator was required in order to provide all with an opportunity to have their opinions heard. There is great debate surrounding the use of interpreters within interview processes as it is recognised that interpreters can remove the researcher from the respondent in some measure and this can weaken the strength of the whole approach (Howard, 1998). The researcher is left to interpret meaning from the translation given by the interpreter, who may not always be aware of the sensitivities involved in such dialogue (Temple, 2002).

This raises questions surrounding the use of free or literal translations, the use of which may either render the text unreadable, or risks loss of meaning (Birbili, 2000). This was an issue I was particularly conscious of, as despite learning Spanish for two years prior to the fieldwork, I was fully aware that my vocabulary and comprehension skills were not adequate enough to conduct the interviews on my own. These issues were therefore explained to the translators, and it was discussed that they should give the literal translations where possible, and when it was not, this was to be highlighted during the course of the interview so more could be asked of the respondent so as not to lose information in the free translation. In addition, I feel it prudent to note that even if my Spanish was fluent, or my respondents spoke fluent English, there is still the possibility of loss of meaning in translation, as I make the conversions from English to Spanish in my head, and vice versa for my respondents (Maclean, 2007).

Jobbins (2004) also has particularly strong views on interpreters, asserting that the potential influence a translator may have on the research cannot be overstated. This is due to the translator becoming the medium of interaction and dialogue, their tone of voice, body language, choice of words and manner all becoming deeply influential, and this can be extremely problematic when attempting to develop a rapport with the respondent. As the interviews would have been impossible without the aid of an interpreter, these criticisms were given serious thought and consideration. The interpreter at Site A was chosen specifically because she was well-known to the community, as well as being an established acquaintance of mine. As contact had been made several years ago when I was a voluntourist, she was aware of the nature of the work, had certain sympathies with it, and was also experienced in the art of interviewing, having obtained a degree several months prior. The two interpreters used in Guadalajara were also chosen because they were familiar to the nature of the research, having undertaken some campaigning in children's right and community development. Contact with them was established several months prior to the fieldwork so as to become acquainted with them and introduce them to the research. It was explained to all three interpreters that their translations, tone, body language,



attitude and manner was likely to be extremely influential, and discussions and conversations were had regarding how best to proceed.

Although their influence on the research is not to be dismissed, it is not believed all of it was negative. In fact, their presence was extremely beneficial as not only did they provide their invaluable translating skills, but they were also able to provide local insight; for example, they offered warnings and advice about potentially difficult interviewees, local customs and nuances, and personal safety regarding local areas. They also helped establish a rapport with many of the respondents, as they already knew some of them, and were able to provide me with introductions and advice on the tailoring of questions to the individual's situation. Their presence also allowed for the provision of note-taking, as well as for me to observe the behaviour and reactions of the respondents throughout the interview process, which would have been undoubtedly difficult without them. Temple (2002) believes that translators can be a useful source of quality control, as monitoring their responses to interviewee's claims can be a valuable indicator of veracity, especially if the translator is local. This aids issues surrounding the conceptual equivalence of comparability of meaning; the translators can provide the cultural context and explain the local feelings/values/assumptions associated with various terms (Temple, 2002). However, the researcher must be aware of and consider the possible prejudices of the translator and how this may affect the process (Murray and Wynne, 2001). To help overcome these issues, we spoke at length after each interview to discuss what had been said. These discussions were then used as a process to discover what prejudices each interpreter may have had in relation to what had been said, and who may have said it.

## **Observations**

Methodologically, one of my key concerns in the research process was to establish an appropriate relationship with the research participants. This involved considering issues of power and interest, specifically in the context of how the process would engage with people. Furthermore, the impetus for my research had grown out of

personal experiences within voluntourism, and I therefore wanted to be consistent with these roots. As a consequence of these concerns, I spent a considerable amount of time conducting participant observations with both the project staff and voluntourists. I wanted to learn about interactions; how the volunteers, staff, and the children, all reacted to each other. I observed behaviours, attitudes, reactions, conversations, as well as the daily tasks that constituted how the project was operated, and how care was provided and how duties were performed. Importantly, what was also observed was the contributory factors that influenced said behaviours and attitudes; the events that proceeded people behaving/reacting/responding in a certain way.

In general, this an inductive method of generating edifying results, relating to observing conversations and overt behaviours in an attempt to learn the meanings behind and attached to actions. It assumes peoples' behaviour is purposeful and expressive of deeper values and beliefs (Patton, 2002). This material then formed the basis of the interviews, as well as providing corroboration and contradiction for the interview material. This helped to counter the issue of the socially desirable response commonly found with the interview process, as respondents often give the researcher the answer that posits them in the best light, or what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Patton, 2002). However, successful participant observation is demanding, and in practice it proved to be even more complicated and challenging than the theory suggests. It is not a fast method, and it can take a great deal of time to become socialised into certain groups in order to experience a full range of their activities; thus making it a labour intensive method.

During the participant observation periods, a timescale of approximately 12 weeks was spent at each of the locations, during which time I sought accommodation within the local community, in the hope of developing more meaningful relationships. The first two to three weeks within each community was spent focussing foremost on getting to know the area and becoming involved in community and project life before starting to

predominantly focus on collecting research material. I attended local meetings, social gatherings and events, as well as visiting local business and influential community members. This was challenging given the obvious language barrier, but my gatekeepers/interpreters were invaluable at making introductions and aiding my involvement. It is recognised that to conduct a qualitative study, longer periods of time should be spent in the field, as it obviously takes time to establish trusting relationships with members of the local community (Robson, 1998), however due to my monetary and time limitations, this was not possible. In order to counter this, I spent six days a week at the projects or within the community to try and gain as deep an understanding as possible. Upon reflection, I recognise that this may not have been necessary: I was continuously exhausted, especially when trying to balance my analysis work and socialisation with the volunteers. However, seeing as other people were there every day, I decided I would not be interfering and making too much of a nuisance of myself, and the richness of the material I collected seems to make this challenging time worthwhile.

In addition, secondary research was started several months prior to the fieldwork, collecting basic information on the communities to be studied, including demographic characteristics (where possible), as well as relevant documentary material in the form of photos, letters and diaries of people who have already been to the locations to help gain an insight into the study populations of the study. This was hoped to not only save some time getting to know the communities when out in the field, but also to complement the perspectives collected through the community interviews and participant observation, as familiarity with such sources can give an early insight into previous practices, issues and events. It also highlighted some sensitive topics and potential research problems and local peculiarities. However, despite this preparation, it is still acknowledged that as a researcher it is to be expected that at best, I could only be described as a marginal member of the community, especially due to the time limitations of this study. Therefore, despite the intensity of my participant observation, it cannot be assumed that the information collected will reveal the reality of those studied. This can be aggravated by two further doubts surrounding the participant

observation method: whether deeper meanings can actually be attributed to overt acts, and the effects of the presence of the researcher on the observed (Patton, 2002).

A dilemma facing all researchers is the decision regarding whether their role in the field should be overt, by explaining their research role to participants, or to undertake the research in a covert manner by concealing their purpose. Both approaches are fraught with political, ethical and moral dilemmas, but most researchers argue that they should always be open about their research (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). This is the position this study has adopted, and all participants were made aware of the research being conducted. However, as Parr (1998) highlights, it is not always possible, safe or desirable to divulge the whole purpose to everyone involved in the study. Relaying too much information into a social situation can introduce unwanted bias by influencing the people's behaviour. Therefore, respondents were given the maximum amount of information about the research they needed in order to be an informed participant.

Further methodological doubts of participant observation relate to issues of bias in observational techniques. Schensul et al (1999) argue that when observations are carried out, they are done so from the *selective position* of the researcher, which along with personal feelings and experiences will affect the interpretation of unfolding events. As such, researchers will display *selective attention* and *selective encoding*, whereby personal judgements of an event may cause observations to be categorised according to the researcher's perspective, as opposed to where or how a respondent may categorise it. Risks of incomplete or inaccurate recordings are also increased with time and the dangers of *selective memory* (Schensul et al, 1999). Personal positionality is a major influence over these limitations, and one must also consider that the accounts given by the respondents are partial, not only because informants will only reveal some of themselves, but also because of the personal values, interpretations and cultural conditions that the researcher will allocate to them (Schensul et al, 1999). These considerations were taken into account during the analysis of the research, both at the collection stage and the analysis stages (in the field and at home).

For the purpose of this study, field notes were kept in a research diary, recording what was observed, heard, and physically felt. However, inferences and personal observations, reflections, hunches and emotional reactions to observations were recorded separately so to limit further researcher bias. As observational notes will be of greater value the more detailed they are, Robson's (1998) method of using descriptive and narrative accounts was adopted. This meant I quickly jotted down notes in the field, and then as soon as possible, I expanded the descriptive account to explain the event being observed and the theory behind it. I then extended the narrative account to go beyond the descriptive, and to detail opinions of the observations and to hypothesise *why*. Theory needs to shape the recorded observations in order to give them meaning, and Cook (1997) argues that researchers must constantly question their theoretical ideas that underpin their interpretations to ensure other meanings cannot also be associated with observations. Therefore, regular analysis of the research diary was conducted in order to help compensate for personal bias, and above mentioned limitations, but also to help with the recognition of common patterns and connections, and to help with the more detailed and triangulated analysis once back from the field. In addition, this also helped with the interview process, highlighting areas that needed further clarification etc..

## **Data Analysis**

There is debate surrounding the analysis techniques of qualitative research (Patterson, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Silverman (1993) notes that despite the differences in emphasis, the various approaches to qualitative analysis all seek to make sense of the evidence through categorisation and connection. As such, it has been decided that for the purpose of this thesis, a universal approach, as identified by Dey (1993) will be adopted. Within this approach, different aspects of other various approaches are combined, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the information. This technique permits me to follow guidelines, by undertaking an iterative process of breaking down the information into *descriptions*, and *classifications*, and seeing how the two concepts *interconnect*.

Description is central to any study, as it permeates all levels of enquiry, and concerns the portrayal of the findings in a form that is easily interpreted. The *description* is thick in nature, providing a more comprehensive and thorough description, including information concerning the situational context, intentions, meanings and process in which the situation is embedded (Dey, 1993). Therefore, I initially formulated a description of the situational context, providing detailed accounts of the social settings, context, time frame and the spatial arena within which behaviours, actions and events occurred. This information is important as it provides a detailed account in which to situate the analysis, as the spatial, social and temporal context can significantly affect the results generated (Dey, 1993). Not only does this technique therefore allow influential factors to be taken into account, but also allows for comparisons to be generated under different circumstances (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). The intentions and meanings provided the contextual information to the analysis; however, this proved to be difficult to record and often required some level of my own interpretation. Within the interviews, respondents sometimes identified their own meaning, but in relation to participant observations, a more complex thought process was needed to identify the interpretations that allowed for the examination of the consequences of action and subsequent alterations in thought or behaviour. I found the field notes to be a particularly useful tool for this process.

Classification is a move beyond description to try and interpret and make sense of the evidence. By undertaking interpretative analysis, the information can be understood more fully and can be made more meaningful to others (Dey, 1993). Therefore, the material was broken up into constituent parts and placed into similar categories and classes, and through this process, I was able to identify the important and salient factors, enabling me to draw out commonalities and divergences. Classifying it in such a manner allowed for more effective comparisons to be made between cases, instances, perspectives and situations. This was completed through implicit classification to help make sense of the information, and systematic classifications to help understand the thoughts and actions of other people. Whereas classification is concerned with identifying coherent classes of findings, connection is concerned with

the identification and understanding of the relationships and associations between different classes (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). However, this consisted of more than just identifying the similarity or difference between categories; instead the emphasis was placed on the *interactions* between classes. A common method for doing so, and the method I adopted, was to search for recurring patterns and themes, which I achieved by identifying whether individuals/instances with a particular characteristic also possessed other common features.

My next step was to figure out why this may be the case, and in order to do this, Dey (1993) suggests *interrogating* the evidence as a useful way of building the picture, and to help draw on evidence and theory from others. Therefore, I adopted an inductive approach to interrogating the findings, based on categories and ideas presented by interviewees, as well as a deductive approach, based on the ideas presented by the interview questions and current academic literature (Crang, 2005). Extracts from interviews were also used to illustrate links within the research and subsequent analysis to highlight typical examples or exceptions to central themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). Verbatim quotes were selected based on how well they communicated a central idea, as well as an attempt to include multiple voices (Charmaz, 2001). The use of verbatim quotes is an important tool for voicing the concerns of the participants, especially in studies such as this one, where this is a focal aim of the research. Speaking for others is always a political issue that involves the use of language to construct self and other (Temple and Young, 2004). There are also the issues surrounding the practicalities of whether true voices can actually be heard due to researcher positionality and subjectivity (Butler, 2001). These arguments were given serious consideration, and it was decided that direct quotations would represent to the reader the most accurate embodiment of what the respondent was trying to convey.

The final stage in the analysis was the corroboration of evidence from a number of the difference sources. As the process of qualitative analysis relies on the ability of the

researcher to make informed and impartial judgements, it is obviously vulnerable to abuse, and this relates back to issues of validity and reliability (Silverman, 1993). If the information generated from different sources (i.e. the different interviews and field notes) is cross-checked, or triangulated, the possibility for misinterpretation is limited. Corroboration is aimed at trying to avoid too much subjectivity from the judgements and interpretations made by the researcher, and can help lateral thinking (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). The two ways this was completed followed Dey's (1993) advice; the first was to think of other possible conclusions, theories and meanings of the analysed material, to ensure that I had considered alternative outcomes. Secondly, the quality of the information was triangulated and cross-checked with that generated from other sources, such as academic literature and industry reports from a variety of fields to help corroborate interpretations and findings, and to explain any anomalies. I also made use of diagrams, charts, photographs and maps to help with the interpretation and explanation of the research collected.

## **Summary**

This chapter has considered the ways in which research has been conducted and its inherent results produced. I have discussed the human aspect of research, and how the practicalities of fieldwork do not always match the theory. Fieldwork is the space whereby ideals meet realities, and where my agendas met those of the participants. It is also the space where clean cut theory encounters messiness, and the complications of people's realities. As a consequence to these realities, my methods underwent certain levels of adaptation. My approach to this research project was an evolution of my original plan, whereby in the initial planning stages I had intended to include greater numbers of the host population, to find my pre-prepared host projects willing and accommodating, and to base my study around their thoughts and opinions. However, within the first few weeks, it became apparent that my vested interest in my research was much stronger than those of my intended recipients, and I had overestimated the community outreach of each project. This called for a reassessment of the research focus, and so I began to study interactions and encounters between



voluntourists and their hosts, and investigate how the negotiation of the volunteers neoliberal subjectivities are shaping these relationships, as well as the work that takes place on the ground.

Collecting and producing material in the field was difficult for a number of reasons, nevertheless, I found the technical methods I employed to conduct the research to be effective at producing relevant, rich and in depth results. Having previously been a voluntourist myself in Mexico, I was aware the perspectives and opinions on voluntourism are complex and not homogenous, and the ways people frame their experiences are multiple and convoluted. I therefore knew that in order to understand them, some in depth, labour-intensive, qualitative methods were required. The interviews and participant observations I conducted as part of this technical strategy were themselves challenging for a variety of reasons, and their realities were a far cry from the theories and principles I had so far practiced and researched, but were nonetheless rewarding and have produced rich and varied material for analysis.

This analysis is discussed in the preceding empirical chapters which explore the neoliberalisation of voluntourism, and how the voluntourists negotiate their position as care givers in such a marketised landscape. Questions will focus upon how the sending organisations are by shaped by colonial histories and a neoliberal present and what the specificities of the Mexican case study can tell us about the context in which the voluntourists are working and framing their encounters. I also examine what voluntourist subjectivities can tell us about the care environments provided by voluntourism projects, and how suitable these conditions render the volunteers to be as primary care givers for vulnerable children. The following chapter supports the methodology and the subsequent empirical chapters by providing information relating to the background information of the research sites, and the organisations and projects under investigation, thus providing situational context for the findings.

# Chapter 4- Case Study in Context

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## Introduction

Over a period of nine months research was conducted within the Jalisco district, situated on the west coast of Mexico (highlighted in figure 4.1) on how voluntourists are negotiating marketised care and development within the neoliberalised landscape of voluntourism. The following chapter will present background information on the local areas, the orphanages, the sending organisations and the volunteers involved to provide a context for subsequent interpretation and discussion.

*Figure 4.1 Jalisco, Mexico*



(Mexconnect, 2013)

## Poverty in Jalisco

Approximately 49 million Mexicans are living in poverty, and approximately one in five are living in extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2007). Although Jalisco is ranked third of Mexico's 32 federal districts from an affluence perspective, it is home to areas of serious economical and material deprivation (INEGI, 2011). Its economic growth has

been rapid, thanks to a burgeoning industrial sector and its popularity with tourists, but without equality. There are now 2.7 million people living in either extreme or moderate poverty in Jalisco, equivalent to 36.5 percent of the district's population. Currently enduring record levels of unemployment, with a high of 5.8 percent, 784,000 citizens of Jalisco are currently without full-time work (CONEVAL, 2011). This is causing the area to experience levels of poverty that are having devastating consequences; Jalisco has one of the highest levels of migration to the US, leaving behind broken, and sometimes destitute families (CONEVAL, 2011).

In desperate situations, women are faced with the devastating prospect of sacrificing a child to save the family from destitution (Esquivel, 2011). Such decisions are not taken lightly, and the distress that accompanies such a choice is acute (Narayan, 2001). The mothers believe their abandoned child will have a better chance of survival on their own, in the hope that someone will take them in, rather than staying with the family and face starvation. In alternative situations, children are living with domestic abuse and violence, as the parents release their poverty-related frustrations (Jones et al, 2007). It is these circumstances that lead to children either running away from home, or being abandoned by family members who cannot afford to keep them (UNICEF, 2010a).

## **Orphans in Jalisco**

Financial constraints are often the most cited reasons for the causality of orphanhood, and although poverty and inequality are reputedly the main causes for children losing their parents, it must be understood that there is no linear relationship between poor children and those without parental care; the link is much more complex (RELAF, 2010). Problems such as domestic violence, abuse, addiction, the breakdown of traditional family units and migration all contribute to the likelihood of parental loss. Unfortunately, as highlighted by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC, 2011), Mexico lacks reliable data and information on the numbers of orphaned

and abandoned children, as the children are often unregistered, so figures are extremely hard to estimate.

For the relative few orphans who do find assistance, it is often through being taken into residential care. The term residential care is used to define “a group living arrangement for children in a designated facility in which full-time care is provided on a shift-basis by adults who would not be regarded as traditional carers within wider society” (Richter, 2004: 4). This implies an organised and deliberate structure to the living arrangements for the children, and a professional, rather than parental, relationship between the adults and the children (ISCA, 2003). Residential and institutional care does not always mean large-scale orphanages, but also encompasses smaller scale children’s homes and places of safety (Meintjies et al, 2007).

With the growing number of orphaned and abandoned children in Jalisco, these types of care homes are becoming more commonplace (RELAF, 2010). Some of these establishments are registered with the State, some are charities such as Project A which is a Civil Association<sup>4</sup> (a Mexican charity), some are private, such as Project C, whereas those such as Project B and the others discussed Chapter Seven, are operated independently and informally. Although many of these homes genuinely aim to provide support and care for children in need, they are often unaware that they can be undermining existing community methods of caring for children, prompting parents to put children into care in the hope they will receive benefits they would not at home (Save the Children, 2010). While this may be the case, this causes unnecessary separation and creates a host of alternative problems distinct to institutionalised care (Richter, 2004). These are discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>4</sup> Since the time of writing, Project A has lost its official charity status, and is no longer operating as a registered care facility, but rather as an informal care home.

## Puerto Vallarta

Figure 4.2 Map of Jalisco



(Mexconnect, 2013)

Figure 4.3 Puerto Vallarta



(Mexconnect, 2013)

Puerto Vallarta (PV) is the home of Project A, and is Jalisco's second biggest city. It was the main site of FONATUR and SECTUR's tourism master plan for the area, and in 1980 the Sheraton, Holiday Inn, Hilton and other branded hotels moved into the area (the

Hotel Zone), making Puerto Vallarta a hotspot for American tourists (Murray, 2007). The development of the *Malecón* (the promenade in Downtown Vallarta) with its bars and restaurants have made PV a favourite of spring-breakers, and it has thus earned a hedonistic reputation. This is also a key marketing feature of the area, and appeals to those wanting to combine altruistic volunteering with the hedonistic pleasures of a beach holiday; this is why it was chosen as primary research site. However, despite the obvious colonial presence of American influence in terms of architecture and foreign conglomerates (photographs 4.1-4.8) lining the Malecón, the realities of life in Jalisco are only a few minutes' walk away, with luxury hotels finding themselves juxtaposed between their enclave of extravagance and scenes of abject poverty (Ventana, 2008). The growth of PV's beach resort was so overwhelming that it consumed labour from the surrounding countryside, and this led to the emergence of satellite low-income settlements, *colonias*, around the coastal resorts. Problems arose with the high cost of living within coastal resorts, and workers began to find themselves in terrible living conditions, and unable to pay for public services, accommodation or food (Berger, 2006b).

*Photo 4.1 Puerto Vallarta Bay*



(OrgA, 2011b)

*Photo 4.2 Puerto Vallarta Bay*



(OrgA, 2011b)



*Photo 4.3 View of the cathedral*



(OrgA, 2011b)

*Photo 4.4 Tourist shopping street*



(Researcher's Own, 2011)

*Photo 4.5 Tourist shopping street*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.6 Macdonald's on the Malecón*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.7 The Malecón*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.8 The Malecón*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

Photos 4.1 to 4.8 (see appendix 3 for more photographs of all sites and projects) show the beauty of the beach resort, the tourist areas and the luxury hotels. In sharp contrast to the glamorous, attractive and exciting Malecón strip, local housing are breeze-block buildings, many without formal windows, or reliable access to hot water and electricity (photos 4.9-4.11).

*Photo 4.9 Residential Area*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.10 Residential Area*



(Researcher's Own, 2011)

*Photo 4.11 Residential Area*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

Little has been done to alleviate this problem, with further development of the Malecón and tourist resorts being a priority (Guzman, 2010). Unfortunately, with tourism jobs in PV being deemed inferior by the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social* (CONEVAL- National Council for the Evaluation of Social



Development Policy), by way of their low pay and seasonality, coupled with the high cost of living in a coastal tourist resort (CONEVAL, 2011), people are finding it hard to work their way out of the substandard living conditions they have found themselves within. Many families have been priced out of their homes and land, many cannot afford food and clothing, and families have been forced to make hard choices, especially as there is limited welfare or social support available to them (Berger, 2006b; Mahon, 2010).

Within the *Zona Romantica*, there is a recognised problem with street children, but as explained by a local government official, information, data and statistics are near impossible to collect due to the complexity and cost of the problem. Children were often left on busy roads, in notorious dumping spots, or outside homes, verifying that families purposefully leave their children in the hope they will receive help (Narayan, 2001). Indeed, with the help of voluntourism's escalating presence in the area, more children are receiving help and support from institutional care homes and places of safety. The increasing presence of volunteers within PV has had a varied affect on the local communities, and these will be highlighted and discussed in the following chapters.

## **Project A**

Project A is situated within Benito Juarez, an impoverished area of PV, (see the green star in Figure 4.3 and see Figure 4.4). Photos 4.12-4.17 show the local area and community where the orphanage is situated<sup>5</sup>. Appendix 3 provides more photographs of the local area (see photos 1-12). It was established in 2001 with the initial funding coming from a variety of sources, including local supermarkets, shops, hotels and the local church. According to the manager and various staff members, funding was also secured from American children charities to help with daily operational costs. Donations from wealthy Americans living in the local area are additional financial resources, as well as the financial and labour contributions from the voluntourists. The

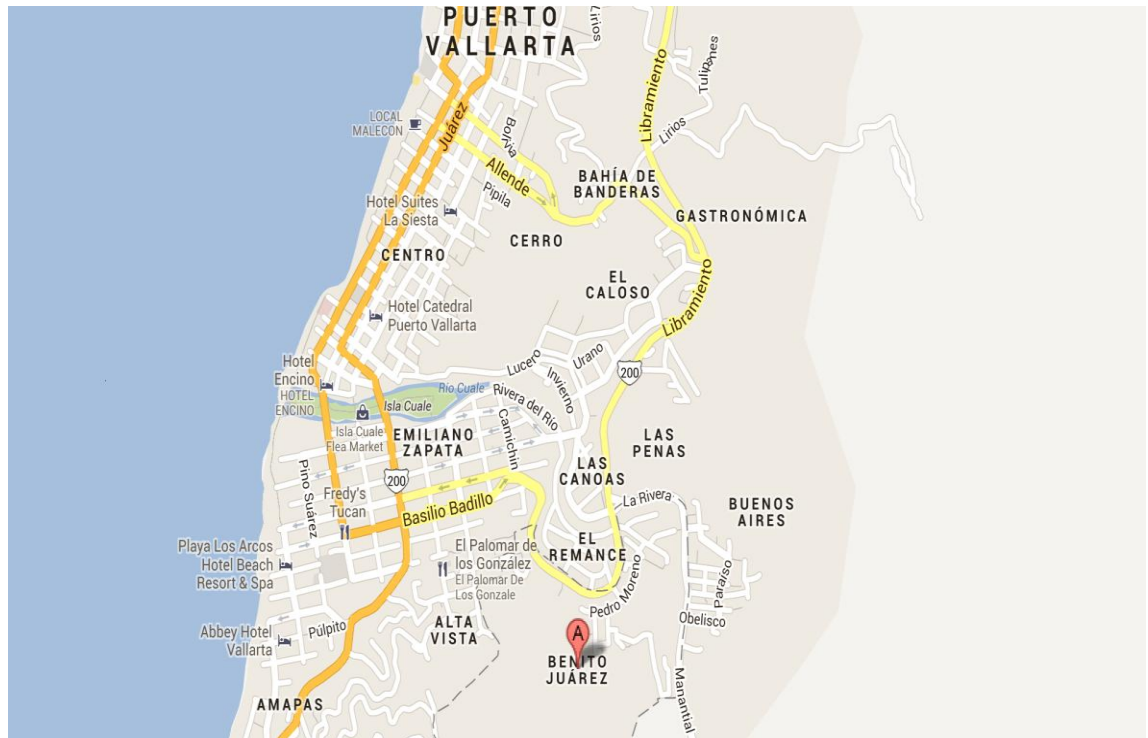
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<sup>5</sup>Photographs of the Orphanage have not been included so as to protect their anonymity.

orphanage building is owned by the local church and management is helped by two nuns, who live on site and are responsible for the children's spiritual welfare, with housekeeping tasks also falling under their jurisdiction. At the time of the field research, the manager of the orphanage was a lady who had been proactive in the establishment of the facility, and she was responsible for the daily operations, the children's welfare and financial resources and management. However, this situation has now changed, and the manager is no longer associated with any part of the orphanage. This did leave the orphanage in acute financial hardship, but now under new management, the orphanage is beginning to recover.

Working at the orphanage alongside the management team are a number of regular staff. Two are American expatriates living in PV, who donate their time to running the kitchen, ensuring that the children are fed with regular and the most nutritious meals possible. Recent additions to the team are six staff nannies, who were employed in 2009 and are responsible for the supervision of the children. The senior nanny is a lady in her fifties, with children and grandchildren, who comes from a middle class family, and works to fill her spare time. The remaining five nannies are young women aged between 16-23 who have no previous experience and qualifications (some did not finish school), and who all come from low-income backgrounds. They were employed with a promise to provide them with professional training and experience, but yet at the time of writing, these opportunities have not yet been afforded to them, due to a lack of financial resources, and the recent upheaval of a change in management.

*Figure 4.4 Location of Project A*



(Mexconnect, 2013)

*Photo 4.12 Project A Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.13 Project A Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.14 Project A Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.15 Project A Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.16 Project A Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.17 Project A Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

## **The Children**

The orphanage is home to approximately fifty-five children (although this number varies throughout the year) aged 7 months to 14 years, and sadly most of the children will find the orphanage to be their permanent home. The children's backgrounds differ slightly; some were born in prison, some abandoned, whilst others either ran away or were removed forcibly from their homes due to abuse and neglect. Most of the children are not adoptable, as according to Mexican law children must be signed to the State by both parents, and both sets of grandparents, and due to the nature of the children's arrival at the facility, this is not always possible (DIF, 2012).

The orphanage is also home to a number of physically and mentally disabled children, and despite best efforts to accommodate these children, there are no specialist care facilities available. Therefore, life for these children is often restricted, hard and non-stimulating. Although the majority of the children will leave the orphanage at 14 when they are no longer considered dependents, according to Mexican social care guidelines, the future for these disabled children is uncertain. According to staff members, some may be accommodated in an adult facility, others may be accepted by family members, but some may find themselves simply without somewhere to go. Unfortunately this is a common story for all children leaving the orphanage, as until 2009, two half-way houses were provided for those leaving the facility, allowing them some time to adjust to life outside institutional care, and to help them find alternative housing and employment. A decision was then made to convert the half-way houses into accommodation for volunteers, and so this service is no longer available to the children.

However, until the age of 14, the children stay at the orphanage for as long as necessary which appears to be for most of their adolescence. The accommodation consists of five bedrooms; a nursery for babies and children under five, a room for girls and boys aged 6-9 and then a room for girls, and a separate one for boys aged 10-14. There is also a kitchen/dining area, a playroom, two bathrooms and a study area for lessons and homework. The outside area includes a small play-set (swings, slide and climbing frame), as well as a large paved courtyard. The building and grounds are generally well maintained, although some of the facilities are basic, in need of repair and pose some health and safety issues.

### **Organisation A**

Established in 1997, OrgA facilitates opportunities for independent individuals to volunteer with small organisations and charities overseas. They claim they are independent, and are not owned by a large holding holiday firm, governing their management and looking for large profits. This allows them to keep their prices low,

and encourages money to be directed towards the projects and charities themselves. They specialise in social development projects such as working with children and community building, but they also do offer conservation projects, and advertise that medical placements are available on special request. Their projects are located globally, with the main destinations being Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia (OrgA, 2012).

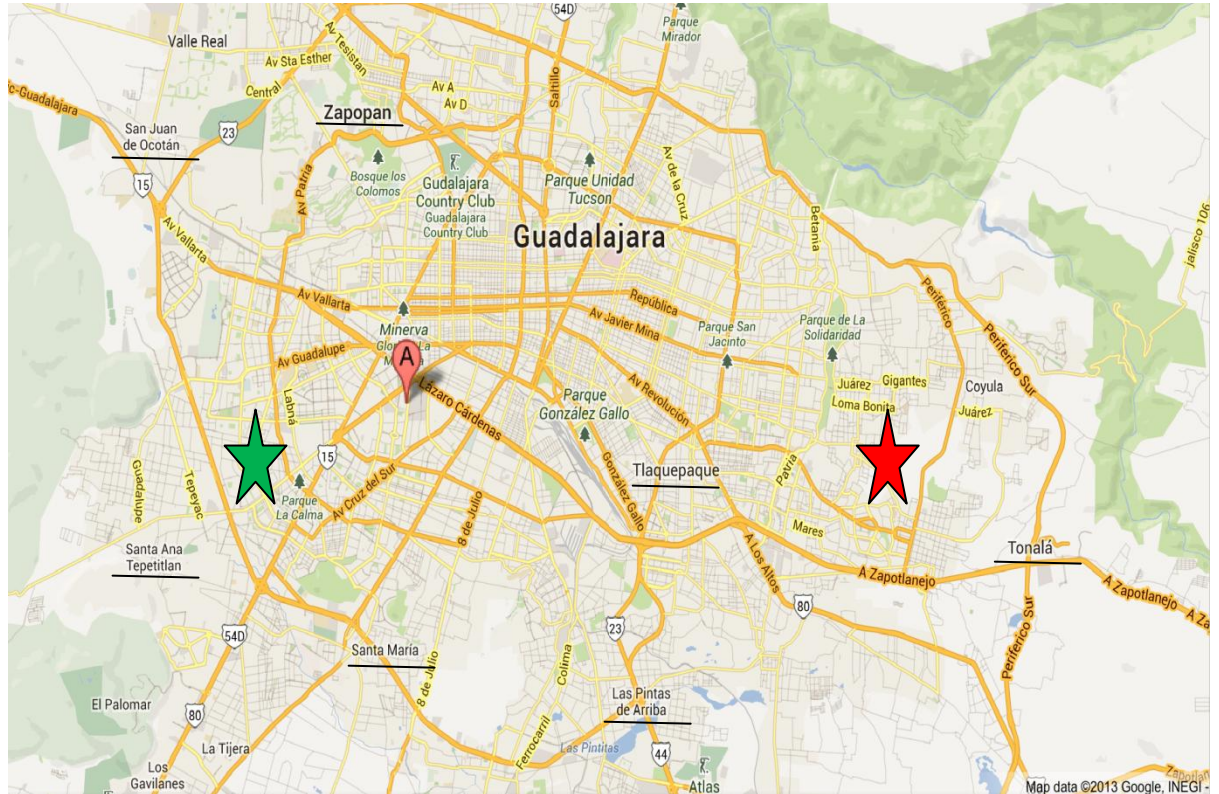
For an initial registration fee, OrgA guarantees all applicants a place on their chosen project, subject to availability. The remaining price of the placement is set by the projects and paid directly to them. By agreeing to volunteer with them, OrgA claim that the participant is not purchasing a package holiday, but is committing to being a self-motivated volunteer. This status incurs responsibilities on behalf of the participant, and although a contact person is usually available for emergencies, volunteers do need to accept responsibility for their immediate concerns whilst on their placement (OrgA, 2012).

OrgA discovered the orphanage during an internet search, and after making telephone enquiries to its associated American charities, subsequently made initial contact with Project A and offered to supply it with volunteers. When the offer was accepted, a representative was sent to Project A to carry out some checks, which took two days, and the first group of volunteers were sent out two months later. The arrangement is that the organisation provides the volunteers and the orphanage provides their accommodation. OrgA accepts all applicants without the need for interviews, stating that their aim is to be as flexible as possible to participants, and therefore no experience, skills or qualifications are required for their projects, nor are criminal background checks necessary.



## Guadalajara

Figure 4.5 Guadalajara



(Mexconnect, 2013)

Guadalajara is Mexico's second largest city and is an important financial and cultural hub. It is one of the most visited cities in Mexico, with cultural tourism being the main motivation (Clancy, 1999). This is due not only to its diversity of historic architecture and museums, but also to the fact that Guadalajara is the home of some internationally-renowned events in the spheres of literature, art and music, which suggests a relaxed prosperity. In many respects, it is considered the quintessential Mexican destination as it is the home of tequila, mariachi and ranchera music, and *Charros* (Mexican cowboys). These attractions, coupled with the green open spaces of the city and its close proximity to the picturesque lakes of Chapala, have ensured Guadalajara's ceaseless tourism success, attracting thousands of voluntourists each year, which is the primary reason it was picked as a research site. Photos 4.18-4.21 show the beauty of Guadalajara's tourist centre.

*Photo 4.18 Guadalajara Plaza-de-  
armas*



(OrgC, 2011b)

*Photo 4.19 The Historic Centre*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.20 The cathedral*



(OrgC, 2011b)

*Photo 4.21 Shopping street*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

The success of Guadalajara's industrial sector (steel, plastic and rubber) has created a socio-economic status of '*nuevos ricos*' whom have helped to redevelop and re-invigorate tired and neglected parts of the city. However, there are also large pockets of poverty, with sprawling slums on the city's periphery. One third of Mexico's poor live in cities, with problems developing at crisis levels from increasing and unplanned urbanisation, leading to a severe lack of water, sanitation issues, unemployment, and insufficient housing, health-care and public transportation (CONAPO, 2008). The metropolitan zones of Guadalajara are home to 1.6 million people, 50% of whom are below the age of 25, and one in four are below the age of 15, and over 23% of the overall population live in conditions of poverty (INEGI, 2011). The areas highlighted by the stars on Figure 4.5 are where projects B and C are located.



## La Floresta, Tapatío

La Floresta is an impoverished *barrio* in Guadalajara and is the site of Project B (green star in Figure 4.5). Initially it began life as a temporary slum established by poor migrant workers coming to Guadalajara to capitalise upon the flourishing industrial sector. Homes have now been made more permanent by the use of bricks and cement blocks, but many still do not have reliable access to electricity and running water (CONEVAL, 2011; INEGI, 2011).

*Photo 4.22 Project B Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.23 Project B Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.24 Project B Location*



(Researcher's, 2011)

*Photo 4.25 Project B Location*



(Researcher's, 2011)

*Photo 4.26 Project B Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.27 Project B Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.28 Project B Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.29 Project B Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

As can be seen in photos 4.22-4.29, the buildings are crammed and haphazardly situated, with no obvious architectural style, built with economy and for purpose. There are no official roads or pavements, just dirt tracks through a winding maze of houses (see appendix 3, photos 13-20). The level of unemployment is high, and gangs and drug traffickers are notorious in this area. With no real employment opportunities, young boys are often seduced by criminal activity, and the girls with prostitution. The number of abandoned children within the barrios are also increasing, as not only are families are struggling to support their children, but unwanted pregnancies are a routine consequence of the high levels of prostitution (CONEVAL, 2011). These

orphaned children are now a familiar sight within La Floresta, often seen picking through bins and rubbish left out on the streets, and huddled together in passageways.

### **Project B**

The home was established in 2007 in order to provide a safe place for the abandoned children in La Floresta to live, by a local man and wife who were saddened by the situation of these children. They are active members of the local parish, and are closely associated with the local church. They were unable to have children of their own, so instead have dedicated their time and efforts into looking after those who have been abandoned. They have sold their own property to buy land in La Floresta and build the orphanage. Financial aid has been a continuous struggle for this orphanage, with the couple campaigning to encourage donations from wealthy businessmen and families, as well as American charities. The orphanage has been associated with OrgB for four years, and they, and the visiting volunteers are now the home's main source of financial income.

As well as managing the finance, the couple also run daily operations within the home, as well as providing supervisory support for the children. They also retain five permanent members of staff, and these five ladies are all aged between 38-56, some of whom have their own children. They mainly come from the local or neighbouring areas and use the volunteering experience to help their local communities, or provide substance and meaning to their day. The staff members have no qualifications in child care.

### **The Children**

The orphanage is located towards the north-east edge of La Floresta, near to the junction of a main road and a dump site. Although a seemingly odd choice of location, it was specifically picked for the site's notoriety as the place where street children congregate. This allows children to easily discover the orphanage, and for the owners

to hand out flyers advertising their facilities. As the children have not been placed in the orphanage by the State, the children are free to come and go as they please, and some use it as a drop in centre; a place to get a hot meal, have a shower, or escape the pressures of the streets. However, some children use the orphanage as their permanent home, and the owners try to encourage as many as possible to do this. Interestingly, it is the children who have been adopted by the orphanage at a young age who are more likely to reside there, whilst others who have lived on the streets for longer are more likely to day-board. The orphanage is home to approximately thirty permanent children. The children here are aged between 18 months to 14 years. Again, at age 14, the children are deemed as adults, and are free to find employment and their own housing. Although the children are encouraged by the orphanage to stay, the majority leave once they come of age. Within the home, the children are fed at least twice a day (more if funds allow) and have the facilities to bath, shower and clean their clothes. For the permanent residents, they also have a safe place to sleep.

The orphanage is itself basic in structure and the facilities it offers; it is the most impoverished project as part of this study<sup>6</sup>. There is a sturdy front door with a peep hole, and the children have to be signed in and out as a precaution. There is a pretty grassed outdoor play area with a swing set, slide and climbing frame. An assortment of donated children's toys are also available. To the right of the garden is an undercover desk area, where the children take their lessons. The main building is on the left of the garden and hosts an undercover kitchen and dining area, a laundry room, and an enclosed lounge area with sofas, chairs and a TV. Around a corner is an outside shower and toilet area where the majority of children have their daily showers. Once the children reach puberty, they are permitted to use the adult's bathroom located upstairs. Next to this are the two dormitories; one for boys and one for girls. The owner's bedroom is also upstairs.

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<sup>6</sup> See Footnote 5

## **Organisation B**

OrgB were established in 2006 and offer a fully supported short-term volunteer program specialising in conservation and child care projects. Their placements include a stay with an English speaking local family, a local coordinator who orientates you with the local area and amenities, accompanies you to projects, and assists with problems and questions that may arise. They are available to volunteers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Although, OrgB do not label themselves as non-profit, they are quick to assure volunteers that their prices are set to cover costs with minimal profit margins, and the money paid goes to the appropriate places i.e. the local families providing accommodation. Volunteers pay a registration and an additional weekly fee (relating to the length of their stay) to the organisation, and this pays for their food, accommodation and the local support. Additional monies can be paid for organised trips. Any donations to the projects must be paid directly to them by volunteers.

The coordinator is an experienced local, who has worked arranging placements for various organisations for the last twelve years. His local knowledge and contact networks allow him to source local families to accommodate the volunteers and to organise other aspects of their stay. One of which is to accompany volunteers to Project B. His presence allows OrgB to support Project B, despite it being in an impoverished area. An employee of OrgB explained they would not normally be able to support such a project in concern for volunteers' safety, but his presence acts as a security measure, making their support possible. The coordinator discovered Project B four years ago, and asked if they would like his organisation's support. With their acceptance, the arrangement is the organisation will supply the volunteers, with the orphanage agreeing restricted access to any other volunteer organisation. OrgB accepts all applicants, subject to availability, with no necessity of prior knowledge, skills, experience or language abilities. Background checks are also not required.



## Tonalá

Tonalá is relatively middle-class district of Guadalajara and is located south-east of the city centre (see Figure 4.5). The area is clean and attractive, with tree lined streets and wide paved roads. The homes are comfortable, and set back from the roads, with front lawns and fences, as can be seen in photos 4.30-4.33 (see appendix 3, photos 21-25 for more of the local area). Residents here work in a variety of sectors, including baking, industrial, healthcare and education (INEGI, 2011).

*Photo 4.30 Project C Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.31 Project C Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.32 Project C Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

*Photo 4.33 Project C Location*



(Researcher's own, 2011)

There are plenty of green spaces within Tonalá, making it a popular place to raise a family. However, the increasing invasion of commercial establishments (offices and

company headquarters) within the area are causing the wealthier families to move away, and house prices are beginning to fall which has had a detrimental social and economic impact on the area (CONEVAL, 2011; see appendix 3, photos 26-28). Still, Tonalá is a respectable barrio, and one that has a relatively low crime rate (except for petty vandalism).

### **Project C**

Project C is located in the heart of Tonalá, in an attractive modern building<sup>7</sup>. It was established in 2003 by a local faith-based NGO primarily as a disabled children's centre, to provide relief to families. However, now the project operates as an orphanage for abandoned children and those with disabilities who no longer have familial support. It is run and owned by a local church group, with the local Pastor taking primary responsibility for the running of the home. Working alongside him are ten permanent members of staff, seven of which are paid, and three voluntary. All are members of the local parish. Those who are employed include a receptionist/personal assistant to the Pastor, an assistant manager, four carers and a specialist-needs carer. This is the only project that has a specialist carer in charge of child welfare. The three volunteers at the orphanage all assist with the management of the kitchen, housekeeping and child care. These workers are all females, aged between 40-57, with children and grandchildren of their own.

The project is funded by donations from the church and local parish, as well as local businesses and businessmen. However, the financial contributions from the volunteers and their free labour are now a major resource for the orphanage. In addition, some families pay for their disabled children to stay at this care facility, and although the funding received from these families is the home's main financial source, the monetary donations received only cover the costs for the individual child.

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<sup>7</sup> See Footnote 5

## **The Children**

Project C is the home to twenty-four children who have been either orphaned, abandoned or placed into care by their families. These children are mainly local to the Tonalá area and are aged between 15 months and 14 years. Once these children come of age, they must leave the orphanage to find employment and their own accommodation. In addition, there are also fifteen children who suffer from cerebral palsy residing within the orphanage. These are children whose families can no longer care for them, with some families paying for their children to remain in care, whilst others have been abandoned. They are aged between 3-19 years. Due to their disability, the older children have been afforded places within the home until a space becomes available within an adult care facility.

The orphanage is the most spacious and affluent project under research. Its rooms are large and open, which is primarily due to the need of ease of access for the wheelchairs. There is a large kitchen and two separate dining areas; one for the disabled children and another for the others. Again the bathrooms are segregated due to the accessibility needs for some of the children. There are also separate bedrooms for boys and girls, with the young ones in one room and the older ones in another. There are also three bedrooms for the disabled children, due to the specialist requirements needed for the beds. The orphanage also has three lounge areas; one for the older children, one for the younger ones, and a specialist room for the disabled children.

## **Organisation C**

OrgC has been established since 2001 and has offices in New York, Toronto with headquarters here in the UK. They are the largest and most commercial company under research, with over 500 staff members abroad and an additional 150 based within the UK. The company initially began with two part time staff sending university students to Eastern Europe to teach English, but due to the expanding numbers of people wishing to take part in such experiences, OrgC has transformed itself into one of



the most commercially and financially successful companies offering flexible short-term volunteering projects within the spheres of social development, conservation, education and healthcare. Many of their projects involve working with vulnerable children.

The package that OrgC offers includes accommodation, insurance, food, support away and at home, a donation to the chosen project and a choice of organised excursions. Volunteers are accommodated all together in a volunteer house within the local area. The price the volunteers pay is the most expensive out of the three organisations, and there is also an additional registration fee (see appendix 4). Again, all applicants are accepted for the project of their choice (subject to availability) irrespective of knowledge, skills and experience. No language requirements are necessary, nor are background checks. OrgC pride themselves on the overseas support they offer their volunteers, with each destination having a Country Director and a staffed office. The orphanage was originally approached by OrgC after some local enquiries were made into potential projects by the local staff members. No checks were completed on the project, other than a brief inspection of the buildings, and volunteers were sent out within weeks. As part of the agreement, the orphanage is not permitted to enlist volunteers from any other rival companies.

### **The Empirical Chapters: A brief introduction**

Mexico is well recognised as a key destination for voluntourists, and the carefully chosen areas within the Jalisco district provide an ideal context for this research. Through the people who took part in this research project, the next four chapters of this thesis will analyse, dissect, examine and consider what they have to say, culminating in a snapshot into the realities of life on ground within a voluntourism project. Each chapter explores a particular theme that has emerged through the analysis of the data, and is discussed with the critique and evaluation of the existing relevant literature as a guide. In short, what these chapters are aiming to do is to highlight to the reader the dangers involved in the processes of the neoliberal

evolution of voluntourism, and the consequences of allowing a market-led and capitalistic development of an altruistic sector to go unmonitored and unchecked. The discussions that follow are based upon in-depth interviews and months of participant observation in order to gain a snapshot into daily project life in Mexico. These chapters hope to inform, illuminate and enlighten the reader as to the challenges facing the voluntourism sector, and also more importantly, the severe problems being imposed upon those to whom the sector has pledged its help.

# Chapter 5- The Neoliberal Landscape of Marketised Voluntourism

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## **Introduction**

There is an increasing recognition within the industry and academia that volunteer tourism has undergone a neoliberalisation, a process which has transformed the activity and propelled it into the mainstream domain (Coren and Gray, 2012; Cremin, 2007; Tomazos, 2010; Wymer et al, 2010). Thus, what was a relatively informal, inexpensive and altruistic alternative to conventional holidays, has seemingly evolved into a highly expensive participation activity with long-haul journeys to exotic and remote locations (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008). This new neoliberalised brand of volunteering has attracted much attention within its new mainstream arena from not only those with an academic interest, but also those within the media, the private sector, education and even Parliament (Cameron, 2007; Hogg, 2001; Simpson, 2005; YOG, 2003). As a consequence, increasing numbers of young people are participating in voluntourism, many of whom have no experience and no prior knowledge of the country and people they are visiting, but do have a lot of money to spend. As a result, a high proportion of the organisations involved within the industry have become involved on a profit-making basis, viewing the sector as another form of tourism to be commercially capitalised upon (Heald, 2003). Although some argue that this is neither improper nor immoral (Jones, 2005b), it does raise questions surrounding how the voluntourism sending organisations are being shaped by this neoliberalised landscape, and indeed what influence this has on the practices of the host projects.

However, as volunteer tourism has grown, the industry has become increasingly segmented, with the voluntourism model becoming quite distinct from traditional models as exemplified by the Voluntary Service Organisation (VSO) or the Peace Corps. Therefore, as the links between volunteering and tourism have intensified, some

volunteering organisations have been eager to disassociate themselves from the affiliation, on the grounds of deterioration in quality volunteering being offered from this new alliance (VSO, 2007b). This disassociation suggests that there are some issues involved with what has been described as shallow volunteer tourism (Callanan and Thomas, 2005) and this is what this chapter aims to explore. By investigating three different types of organisation across the shallow spectrum, evidence will be presented relating to how the companies are managed, how they manage their respective projects, what affect this is having on the ground, whilst considering the impacts of the wider processes of neoliberalisation and the neoliberal specificities of the UK/Mexican case study.

Therefore, this chapter aims to investigate how the integration of voluntourism into a neoliberalised landscape has affected the practices of the sending organisations in terms of the power relations present within its political-economic structure, how various elements of the voluntourism package are being commercialised and commodified, and how colonial histories are constructing the destination, activities and even the children as the exotic 'other'. The chapter will also analyse how neoliberal practices are influencing commercial marketing and the subsequent production of public imaginaries surrounding the framing of development, and how this may be influencing the context in which the voluntourists work. The discussion is presented from the perspective of the voluntourists, the organisations and from various members of the local communities in order to give a more holistic picture. It will begin with a discussion of the political-economic structure of voluntourism, with an analysis of the commercialisation process, and organisational management to follow. An examination of the language of voluntourism and the professionalisation process is provided in the last two sections based upon the empirical evidence collected and an analysis of the promotional material of the organisations.

## **The Neoliberal Specificities and Subjectivities of Voluntourism**

When a country such as Mexico opens its doors to tourism, especially if it is used as a development strategy, it becomes enmeshed in a global system over which it has very little control. As the voluntourism industry is a product of metropolitan capitalist enterprise, an understanding of the underlying mechanisms present in the volunteer tourism industry is necessary. This requires an analysis of how the industry manifests itself, with regard to industry practices, commercial structures, and in particular the power, dominance and influence of neoliberal modes of governmentality. Looking back fifteen years, only a select number of companies would offer a volunteer placement for less than a month, now, over 500 organisations offer this service with over half belonging to the private sector (Ackerberg and Prapasawudi, 2009). The three organisations chosen for research originate from this burgeoning private sector, and encapsulate three different tiers currently operating within the shallow spectrum; heavily commercial (OrgC), a non-profit (OrgA) and a new hybrid; low-profit (OrgB). Chapter Four provides an overview of the organisations.

At the top of voluntourism's power and commercial structure is the market and the external influencing forces, such as the economic, social and political systems of the countries in which it operates; in this case, Mexico, the host destination, and England, the nationality of the voluntourists and where the sending organisations reside. Modes of governmentality, along with the market and its external forces are able to wield a huge influence over the organisations who manage and market the volunteering placements, and indeed over those who purchase the placements. These external forces signify and represent the dominant ideologies and discourses present within the UK and Mexico and hence influence how different agents (e.g. the volunteers, organisations, host populations etc.) within the system operate, think and behave (Mostafanezhad, 2012). What was apparent in Mexico was the absence of trade barriers, owing in part to the neoliberal outsourcing of Mexico's tourism industry; the Mexican government openly welcome foreign investment, and limit restrictions on how such investments operate and are managed (Torres and Momsen, 2004). This means that the voluntourism organisations are free to enter Mexico and conduct their

practices in a manner of their own choosing. This has generally lead to the organisations deciding upon and enforcing practices that are predominantly beneficial to them, which is arguably a natural, standard practice of a neoliberal market (Harrison, 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002). These practices and their inherent impacts upon the projects are discussed in Chapter Seven.

This inference of Western imperialism is reinforced through the values and practices of the UK market. What is illuminated through the evidence supplied from the staff of the voluntourism organisations and an analysis of their marketing materials is that there are increasing pressures from an intensely competitive market, whereby demand for shallow voluntourism projects is high, and organisations are having to find new ways to attract and retain volunteers. This means the satisfaction and gratification of voluntourists are disproportionately prioritised over that of the host projects, with the way in which projects are framed and marketed becoming increasingly commercialised. The increasing demand for shallow voluntourism placements can be explained through the way in which international volunteering is framed with UK society. Endorsement from the State, the private and educational sectors have propelled international volunteering into the mainstream market, with the public wishing to find new ways to integrate such experiences into their increasingly busy and pressurised lifestyles (Tomazos, 2010; Coren and Grey, 2012). People within the UK are now realising voluntourism's potential for CV enhancement, work experience, and as a way to negotiate their identities and their personal development (Simpson, 2005; Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). These personal benefits, combined with the opportunity of an exotic holiday, make voluntourism an incredibly appealing activity.

Therefore, the market appears to influences key changes to relationships within the wider society; it goes beyond its role of the mechanism through which pre-determined demands are supplied, and exists as a system of values and standards that represent the personal competition and struggle between individuals (Philo and Miller, 2001). This signifies how the market influences the voluntourists; within the UK's

contemporary neoliberal society, the pressure and expectations placed upon young people to be successful and get ahead have encouraged competition and the need to distinguish oneself from one's peers. Emphasis is placed upon not only academic qualifications, but also upon personal experience and characteristics, and this has caused the voluntourists to become bi-products of the neoliberal marketplace. Therefore, not only does the market influence power over the sending organisations, controlling the flow of demand and supply, but also it manipulates the volunteers themselves, by controlling and exerting authority over certain political and social pressures, influencing how they perceive and think about themselves and their volunteering placement. Through this, the market has privatised and commercialised how the volunteers understand the development discourse within Mexico.

Consequently, these influences exerted upon voluntourists from the market have caused the volunteers to ultimately change how volunteer placements are perceived not only by themselves, but also the wider public. These public imaginaries emanating from the voluntourism organisations, are framing how the projects, local people and the discourses surrounding development and poverty are being understood, framed and internalised by the volunteers. The sending organisations seem to exhibit large amounts of power and control, exerting phenomenal influence over how the projects are marketed and how the projects operate. Thus their commercial advantages, including bargaining power and influence, allow them to dominate the smaller operations, which the projects in the host countries inevitably are (Britton, 1982). It could also be argued that the volunteers are exerting influence over the market, causing it to further adapt and respond to the changes in perception of volunteer tourism and transforming the cycle of supply and demand. This supports the argument that power is a normalising discourse, in that power is normatively believed to prioritise privilege and size (Hollinshead, 1999). However, when relationships are scrutinised, flows of power are often multi-directional, as often "one cannot influence another without being influenced themselves" (Hollinshead, 1999: 21). Therefore it can be seen that power circulates within the collective, and it may be accessed from different points within the specific circulatory regime, i.e. the voluntourism sector.

## Commercialisation and Commodification

A particular challenge facing shallow voluntourism is the neoliberal process of commercialisation. The Collins Dictionary (2008: 219) defines commercialisation as “the act of making something more profitable, productive, useful and widely available in the name of commerce”. Alternatively, the Oxford Dictionary (2008: 227) defines the process as one that “exploits or spoils for the purpose of gaining profit”. Although these two definitions are similar, they have very different connotations; the former suggesting that commercialisation is a way of increasing productivity, and the latter implying it is a way of spoiling a product. These divergent perspectives offer two different ways of viewing the commercialisation of voluntourism. Some believe due to the commercialisation process, the voluntourism sector is in danger of losing the characteristics that differentiate it from other types of tourism, such as strong links with sustainable tourism and pro-poor tourism strategies (Ellis, 2003; Simpson, 2004; 2005; Guttentag, 2009). Thus the problem lies predominantly in that many of the sending organisations now offer much more than an opportunity to volunteer, they offer *holiday experiences* (Tomazos, 2009: 18; VSO, 2007b; UNICEF, 2007).

Owing to this market shift, the experience of voluntourism has been transformed into a commodity through a three-part process; 1a- *Rent based value of the Projects*: The voluntourism organizations ‘own’ the projects they are selling to the volunteer. Due to the financial incentives they offer, projects now belong on an organisation’s portfolio, often with the clause that they cannot ‘belong’ to any other. 1b- *Rent based value of Volunteers*: In addition, the amount charged to the volunteers for the privilege of attending a placement is determined by how tourists or tourism entrepreneurs value the touristic features or economic opportunities of this destination. If the project is a popular one, in a popular destination, it will be more expensive. 2- *Tourist capital development*: The mode of value creation is produced by investments in fixed capital employed to create tourist commodities such as goods, services or experiences which tourist will purchase. This form of commodification can be the food and lodging provided on the placement, excursions or artificial tourist experiences. 3- *The generation of touristic representations*: This includes any symbols or texts which are



purchased/consumed by tourists for their informative, interpretive, or symbolic content. Unlike material properties which accrue rents, or tourist capital which produces goods, services, or experiences, touristic representations embody knowledge or symbols with limited costs for their reproduction or for the consumption by multiple tourists. They may be embedded in or tied to the consumption of other commodities (goods, services, or experiences) which must be purchased discretely. This can be produced through the brochure the companies will send out prior to departure, which will include information about the destination, its people, and culture. It also includes the pictures and images of the destination and its people used within the brochures or websites.

The organisations' pricing system has also become more commercialised; all three organisations use a revenue management pricing system, with their more popular projects costing more to attend, whilst the less popular ones are cheaper (see price lists in appendix 4). This neoliberal market-based practice means the organisations can not only make more money from the popular destinations, but the reduced prices will also encourage more volunteers to travel to the less-popular destinations, allowing for the maximisation of profits. This allows the organisations to be more competitive as they can manage their revenues based on competition, supply and demand, distance and cost. This appears to adhere to the application of the profit maximisation model, whereby organised philanthropy (such as voluntourism is argued to be) is designed, and appropriated for financial gain (Tomazos and Cooper, 2012).

Therefore voluntourism appears to be adopting a mass-tourism model of operandi, with market forces shaping voluntourism into another holiday market with the balance shifting from assistance to profit. Even OrgA, who explicitly label themselves as non-profit have adopted revenue management pricing. Although they explain that prices for each placement are set by the projects themselves, OrgA still provide advice as to how much each project is worth, with projects located at popular destinations (near holiday resorts and beaches, such as Mexico) costing significantly more than those in

remote locations (OrgA, 2012). Therefore, non-profits are arguably adopting commercial practices in order to adapt to competitive markets within a highly commercialised and consumer-driven culture (Tuckman, 1998; Coghlan and Noakes, 2012). This in turn demonstrates how neoliberal influences are shaping contemporary practices of voluntourism organisations, and how such practices are influencing the public imaginaries of volunteer destinations, whereby the pricing system commodifies the destinations, helping to frame them as popular and “cool” places to volunteer.

In terms of the projects, contracts are negotiated that allow them to receive free labour and financial contributions, in exchange for their loyalty to the volunteer organisation. Projects are prohibited from joining another organisation’s portfolio, and this can cause dependent behaviour, as a project manager explains;

*“no, we only have volunteers from [OrgB], we are not allowed others... This means [OrgB] is our only provider, which worries us slightly because if they stop coming, then we have nothing- no money and no volunteers. We rely on [OrgB] quite a lot... Not sure we would cope without their help...”* (Bpm, 2011)

These dependent relationships are unfortunately not allowing the projects the capacity and ability to sustain themselves and grow their own support networks; they have become too focused upon the resources that voluntourism provides. This implies that voluntourism is beginning to display the unfavourable characteristics associated with mass tourism and how the global expansion of capitalism has drawn many local organisations into unfavourable economic relations with the more industrialised corporations (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). These vulnerable relationships are exacerbated by development being transformed into a commodity; signifying how voluntourism’s role in development is an example of continued privatisation and neoliberalisation. Development has now become a lucrative business, with thousands of enthusiastic Westerners eager to participate in development activities. Through this, voluntourism then intensifies and extends the neoliberal agenda through the privatisation and commodification of development and global justice Duffy and Moore (2010).

## Vulnerable Relationships and Commercialisation

Another element that is being affected by neoliberal processes and commercialisation is the affiliation between the sending organisations and the projects on their portfolio. The organisations have the power to withdraw from their contractual agreements with projects freely and without notice, and therefore the projects are keen to do all they can to ensure this does not happen. Consequently, the projects have become entwined in vulnerable relationships with the organisations and volunteers, the significance of which is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. This was illuminated in the way OrgA allows voluntourists to directly influence how donations are spent at Project A, illustrated by a volunteer's insistence of purchasing a new swingset, rather than new beds<sup>8</sup>. As the orphanage is dependent upon the money the organisation brings in terms of donations and free labour, it feels it must oblige;

*"...because we need them [the sending organisation] so much to bring us the volunteers who we need, I feel like I must do as they [the sending organisation] recommend, otherwise they may leave us, and we cannot afford that..." (Apm, 2011)*

This lack of control felt by projects, and their reliance on the organisations for capital injections has reinforced their dependency and vulnerability. This dependency has prevented the orphanage from providing the specialist care needed for the children and the employment of qualified carers (see Chapter Seven). When questioned, OrgA explained they do liaise with project managers on what donations should be used for, but sometimes they

*"have had to make difficult decisions over meeting both organisational and project needs with the budgets that we have. Sometimes compromises must be made... sometimes this is more pleasing for the volunteers, sometimes the*

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<sup>8</sup> It was witnessed during the fieldwork at project A that one volunteer had fundraised some money prior to her trip in the hope that it would supply a new swingset for the children's outside play area. This was decided with the best of intentions, based upon her understanding that the children rarely leave the orphanage. However, the orphanage wished to purchase some new beds for the children. The volunteer disagreed with this decision, and a heated negotiation took place, with the volunteer becoming very upset and phoning OrgA for advice. OrgA then advised the project that the volunteer was entitled to make requests as to how her money is spent, resulting in the orphanage agreeing to purchase a swingset. However, once it was in place, the children rarely had the chance to play on it, as it was made of metal and became so hot in the sun it would burn them.

*orphanage, it is not always win-win but we do try to do the best thing for everyone” (Ao, 2011).*

Although admirable sentiments, this comment appears to suggest a neoliberal paradox; how can the needs of the local community be met when they conflict with the needs of commerce? Although the needs of the business must be prioritised if it is to survive, it highlights the neoliberal process of market decisions being made for the common interest. However, one must question who decides what this interest is, and in particular, whose needs it truly serves when it makes recipients more dependent and vulnerable. This suggests that within the neoliberal voluntourism market, it is the organisations that make and enforce decisions, which in reality, predominantly seem to serve their own needs. This highlights how colonial and imperialistic tendencies are influencing contemporary neoliberal practices within voluntourism, and how global relations are still mirroring historical associations of vulnerability and dependency (Frank, 1969; Todaro, 1997; Corbridge 1995; Preston, 1996)

However, it must be noted that the recipients of voluntourism are not simply submissive and subservient, but have come to modify and transform the practices enforced by the organisations to meet their own agendas as a way to regain some control. By assuming development as their selling point, the communities achieve a position in the global inequality order by being the representatives of underdevelopment;

*“...we know it is fashionable now for people to come and volunteer in Mexico, and so it is important that we show to them that we need their help. We play up to that a little bit to attract more volunteers and get more money.” (Apm, 2011).*

*“We know volunteers like us to be poor, so we try and emphasise that. It is important for them to keep coming here, so we must give them what they like. And that we can also make more money...” (Cpm, 2011)*

By taking control of their projected image, the projects have managed to covertly restructure the hierarchy of inequality and have given themselves a little more power

over the aid they receive, whilst also allowing them to actively participate in the construction of the volunteer encounter. This shows how hosts can gain agency and power by adapting to the situation (Cheong and Miller, 2000). However, there is a price to be paid for this power play; by accomplishing their inclusion through the adoption and strategic embodiment of underdevelopment, projects can “become trapped in essentialised notions of themselves as underdeveloped” (Baptista, 2010: 10).

This could be interpreted as a method of community empowerment, in that it offers the projects an aspect of control; by highlighting and exaggerating their selling point, they can help to influence the numbers of tourists they receive. However, the local communities are not the only ones to profit from their underdevelopment, and therefore one can also interpret this empowerment process as increment to their dependency status, meaning potential commodification and subordination to market logic and the multinationals that dominate the market (Baptista, 2010). This exemplifies how voluntourism is reinforcing traditions of imperialism through the projection of Western power, and how neoliberalism, and by default voluntourism, can be viewed a form of colonialism (Leys, 2005). In addition, this also demonstrates how the neoliberal practices of commodification and commercialisation of development can produce a complex set of power relations between the local communities and the organisations. In turn, it is the neoliberal commodification of the elements of voluntourism that are shaping how placements are perceived and understood by the volunteers, and how this crystallises the public imaginaries of the voluntourism experience.

### **The Commodification of Experience**

Experience is a key element of voluntourism and a fundamental component of the sector’s commodification. It is the part that is up for sale and is open to manipulation. Pine and Gilmore define an experience as when “a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates

a memorable event” (1998: 98), and explain that in contemporary consumer culture, experiences are desired in addition to regular products and services. Consequently, the volunteer organisations are responding by deliberately designing, promoting and staging voluntourism experiences whilst commanding a fee. They actively promote a holiday experience as part of the volunteering package, and thus the experience becomes a commodity.

*“...we can offer you an amazing opportunity to change the world- and your life!... As part of your experience, you will travel to exotic destinations... and as expected, you will have plenty of chances to explore and investigate your surroundings...” (OrgA, 2011a)*

*“...we put fun back into volunteering! Excursions and trips come as standard with your package, so you get to see and experience everything your destination has to offer, and the best part is- you get to give something back!” (OrgC, 2011a)*

These quotes demonstrate the emphasis placed on the *holiday* aspect of the volunteer experience. It is now not enough to offer serious and committed volunteering opportunities; it is *expected* for vacation-fun to be as standard within the package. This focus on leisure offers a possible explanation for why increasing numbers of young people are engaging with development; it offers the opportunity to combine altruism with a fun holiday. People are now able to integrate such activities within their summer vacation, without sacrificing precious holiday time. However, such a focus on leisure has the danger of detracting from the humanitarian focus of volunteering (Ackerberg and Prapasawadi, 2009), and refers to the tourist capital development valuation which is primarily based upon the commodification of the elements contained within the voluntourism package on offer. These include not only the accommodation and excursions which are apparent in any tourism package, but also the development activities and the volunteer experiences which are particular to voluntourism. This stage of the commodification process is intrinsically linked to the marketing process and the public imaginary that is inherently created.

The commodification of development has framed it as a leisure activity and hence an elemental part of the voluntourism experience. This public imaginary of combined tourism and development practices allows for the materialisation of the notion of underdevelopment (Simpson, 2004), permitting it to be sold on the market and used by the sending organisations as a legitimate competitive force. Through the projects' capitalisation on their underdeveloped-status, the children placed at the heart of the experience have been further marginalised by their commodification as objects of compassion. The majority of volunteers often want to work with children, believing they are able to make a bigger difference on the life of a child, rather than an adult (Mostafanezhad, 2012). The volunteers under research here, are testament to this, all explaining how they

*"...always wanted to work with children. They are so sweet and innocent in this whole situation. They just need someone to take care of them and love them and hug them."* (Bv1, 2011)

Consequently, organisations are keen to promote the children of these projects as the main cause of need, and the primary reason for the voluntourists to visit the project. This commodification of the child has instigated their use as the object of humanitarianism in the promotion and marketing of voluntourism through their consequential identification as the 'quintessential other' against which the volunteers can construct their images, perspectives and preconceptions. This promoted imaginary of the children helps to frame voluntourists' perceptions of orphans, life in Mexico, and how the voluntourists themselves will negotiate their identities and roles within the volunteering scenario. It also highlights how sentimentality and compassion are neutralising a political response (see Chapter Nine for a more detailed discussion).

## **The Marketing of Voluntourism**

Marketing has become an extremely important strategy in persuading volunteers to choose one organisation over another. It allows perspective volunteers to associate the organisation with particular styles, tastes, visions and imagery which helping to

attract the right tourist to the right organisation (Wymer et al, 2010). Although marketing is inherently a commercial activity, I argue that it is the *way* voluntourism organisations are marketing themselves and their placements that is affecting not only the context in which the voluntourists will frame and manage their duties, but also how they understand and internalise those around them and the daily realities in which they live. This aspect of commodification has allowed voluntourism to become framed by its image and advertising, especially the travel, experiences and leisure opportunities it presents as a package for exchange in a neoliberal market. As Hutnyk explains,

“rather than working towards social transformation, alternative travel and charity work have become enmeshed within the processes of commercialisation and seem to tinker on the edges of capitalist expansion into new market niches” (1996: 137)

As a result, it is now difficult to determine to what degree the marketing of voluntourism is influencing the selection process of participants and to what extent the organisations are creating and shaping demand.

The focus on market capture, competitiveness and meeting clients’ expectations suggests that the neoliberal practices of the mass-tourism model of packaging, promoting and segmenting is now used in voluntourism (Ellis, 2003). Through purposefully designed websites, sending organisations are portraying volunteers as the archetype of a new tourist, one who has “*compassion and empathy for the disadvantaged and the needy*” (OrgC, 2011). However, with the commercialisation of voluntourism, and the heavy promotion of a touristic-experience being a key part of the trip, it can be argued that the altruism that once permeated the industry is now being engulfed by *holiday* mentality. On its website, OrgA advertises Mexico as a tropical paradise destination explaining to volunteers that

*“Volunteering in Puerto Vallarta is unique in providing volunteers with extremely worthwhile work in a stunning location within one of Mexico’s most beautiful and friendly towns. You can even walk to some of Mexico’s finest*



*beaches from the volunteer house! The location offers so much to see and do; watersports from breath-taking beaches, jungle trekking, visiting Aztec and Mayan cities and Spanish colonial architecture, the Copper Canyon railway and bustling markets selling local handicrafts. And of course there is always the cheap tequila!" (OrgA, 2011)*

OrgB also advertises Mexico placements by saying;

*"Mexico is a wonderfully colourful and vibrant country, rich in culture, music and culinary delights! Your home in Mexico will be the beautiful colonial city of Guadalajara. There will be plenty of opportunities to spend time in some visiting the Mayan temples situated deep in the tropical rainforests, or experiencing the Mariachi, Salsa and Merengue beats radiating from every home, shop and café in this beautiful city." (OrgB, 2011)*

OrgC is as wonderfully descriptive of Mexico, stating;

*"Mexico's appeal lies in its mountains and volcanoes, desert landscapes and glorious beaches, fascinating ancient ruins, modern air-conditioned shopping centres, and colonial-era towns. Your main base will be Guadalajara which boasts a thriving music scene with many good live bands and a wide selection of places to eat, drink and dance. Time your trip right and you can also join in the famous fiestas, or witness the whole country come to a halt to celebrate the Day of the Dead. Whatever your tastes and interests, Mexico has something for you." (OrgC, 2011)*

All three of these statements sell Mexico as a tourism destination, rather than focusing on the value of volunteer work to the local communities. Note that none of the advertisements mention *people*, who arguably are the primary focus of social development. When reviewing the websites and promotional material, there is no detailed description of Mexico's political history, or any engagement with any literature to explain Mexico's poverty or global economic positioning. All volunteers are left with are romanticised images of a beautiful but impoverished land, that is in need of their help, with the added bonus that it would make a great holiday destination. This illustrates that Mexico and the concept of development are primarily constructed through the traditional prisms of exoticism and poverty, highlighting a

particular colonialist construction of understandings that fail to contextualise and ignore the structural causes, instead, evoking ideas of pity and charity.

From a marketing perspective, it is certainly understandable to engage in the production of stereotypes and difference as depictions of the exotic are more likely to turn heads. However, there is power in how we think and talk about people and places, and there is a danger that not everyone travelling to Mexico will critically analyse what they have seen. Such contemporary public imaginaries of poverty, development and Mexico are intimately connected to public understandings of and actions upon such issues (Nash, 2004; Kothari and Wilkinson, 2010). This is problematic as these descriptions are helping to reinforce stereotypes that privilege dominant groups and emphasise power relations between ethnic/cultural groups. Stereotyped images are often used to justify the exploration, exploitation and development of the racial and cultural other (Said, 1978), and the representation of Mexico by the three organisations do little to inform volunteers of the complexity of Mexico's political-economic situation and culture, which is imperative if one is to fully understand and challenge contemporary global inequalities. Colonialist patterns are ensconced within the representational dynamics of tourism operators; socially transformative missions (such as voluntourism) and essentialised caricatures are emerging and go unchallenged (Canton and Santos, 2009). This seems to be because within voluntourism, such representations are cloaked in a romanticised aura of altruism.

The images posted on organisations' websites and contained within their promotional literature also perpetuate the essentialised and idealised notions of Mexico. Images are key in tourists' decision-making processes regarding destinations, and these decisions are usually based on the symbolic elements of the destination (as conveyed through visual imagery) rather than the actual features (Sirakaya and Sonmez, 2000). The organisations have relied on evocative and recognisable imagery to invoke the Western imagination, using homogenised descriptions of places, people and culture based on dualisms and essentialised concepts of the other (Simpson, 2004). Frequently

seen are pictures of young Westerners enjoying their surroundings, albeit on a beach, or trekking through jungles or up mountains, or working on their placements, helping the grateful and smiling local communities. Bright, simple colours feature heavily in depicting local scenery and culture. Community members always appear to be smiling, friendly and welcoming, as depicted in the images below;

*Photo 5.1 Leisure Time*



(OrgA, 2011a- title taken from source)

*Photo 5.2 Leisure Time*



(OrgA, 2011b- title taken from source)

*Photo 5.3 Puerto Vallarta*



(OrgA, 2011b- title taken from source)

*Photo 5.4 Puerto Vallarta*



(OrgA, 2011a- title taken from source)

*Photo 5.5 The Locals*



(OrgB, 2011b- title taken from source)

*Photo 5.6 The Locals*



(OrgC, 2011b- title taken from source)

*Photo 5.7 Welcome to Puerto Vallarta Photo 5.8 Mexico*



(OrgA, 2011b- title taken from source)



(OrgC, 2011b- title taken from source)

The use of these stereotypical images is ensconced in colonial discourse. The promotional materials derive from the existing dominant western values and are formed by the cultural and economic relationships that exist between the developed and the developing world, and do not necessarily depict a true representation of the country they are advertising. Thus tourism imagery reveals more about power relations than it does about the destination it promotes; the images reinforce particular ways of seeing the world and restrict and channel countries and its inhabitants into stereotypes. Popular images of the third world are often simplified and distorted as the dominant Eurocentric institutions promote spatial imaginations of people and places to provide truths (Simmons, 2004). These truths then formulate public imaginaries of Mexico and poverty; of what the voluntourists can expect to find and encounter, and how they may begin to understand what they see and experience (Baillie Smith, 2012).

The images (Photos 5.1 to 5.8), coupled with the romanticised descriptive language discussed above depict a sense of the exotic and mysterious. When asked about the images they use, employees of the organisations justified them by explaining it is a common marketing tool to use *“easily identifiable images for tourists, it helps them to imagine a country, and better still, imagine themselves there”* (Bo, 2011). They all

rejected the notion that their language or images were reinforcing stereotype by explaining

*“we are very keen to promote cross-cultural understanding and community development, and we believe this is what our promotional literature shows.... We also want to show our volunteers how rewarding the experience can be and how much their work is valued, and we really think these pictures do just that.”*  
(Co, 2011)

Nevertheless, the term exotic still appears to be utilised in the promotion of Mexico as a tourist destination in a manner that reinforces western ideas of a romanticised other. It is argued that tourism depends on preconceived definitions of place and people, and that they are commodified in the process of creating these definitions (Desforges, 2000). Subsequently, indigenous people may find themselves in a sort of “tourised confinement of enslaving external conceptions” (Desforges, 2000: 931). In colonial power-based practice, tourism can distort cultural displays, texts and places into cultural products to meet the commercial needs and expectations of the imperialistic traveller, such as the happy and grateful recipient (as in Photos 5.5-5.8) Thus the representation of otherness is transformed, this time by the inherent ideals of commoditisation from the western perspective, to please and placate potential volunteers (King, 2003). Whilst this imaginary of the happy and welcoming local populace may be creating a more positive narrative in contrast to that of helpless victims that can dominant development ideology, it does strengthen the idea of the power of western voluntourist interventions in creating happiness (Baillie Smith, 2008; 2012; Manzo, 2008;). Additionally, these imaginaries are racialised and still obscure the exploitative relationships that neoliberalised voluntourism is creating.

## **Organisational Management**

As seen from above, neoliberal processes apparent in Mexican voluntourism are affecting how the organisations are promoting and marketing the projects, and how this is creating a particular public imaginary of a stereotyped and racialised Mexico that reflects a colonial dominance of western power. Neoliberal practices apparent

within the free market and of the social pressures placed upon young people to become cosmopolitan citizens, have also influenced the type of product the organisation offers; commodifying elements into a package to be sold and purchased, whilst also influencing how the organisations are managed and operated. Within the following section, issues of colonialism and development are discussed within the contexts of project acquisition, accountability and feedback to further explore how neoliberal practices are affecting organisational management.

### **Project Acquisition**

International development charities such as VSO recognise that substantial amounts of micro-level research are needed in order to assess a community's wants and needs and therefore spend significant periods of time within the field, working with local communities, learning from what *they* feel is needed. From there, projects are either supported or established with considerable community involvement, and a focus is placed upon sustainability and local empowerment (VSO, 2007a). However, this is not to say VSO and their methods are without criticism (see Schulz, 2008). Commercial voluntourism organisations do not devote nearly as much time to the process of selecting projects. Minimal time (if any) is spent in the field, and very little research is conducted into the requirements of the local community. According to the organisations researched, in order to establish a new project, market research is conducted on areas that volunteers would be interested in visiting, primarily consisting of an internet search and a questionnaire sent out through their databases. The organisations explained that once a destination has been established, an internet search is conducted to establish whether there are any existing projects in the area. If so, an employee is sent on a brief research trip, lasting a few days to assess the project. In contrast, OrgB and OrgC both employ somebody at the destination to become a coordinator of the projects, and part of their role is to source new projects to add to and diversify the organisation's portfolio.

The standards the projects must meet have to ensure the volunteers' safety, interest and enjoyment, whilst also having ease of access. This therefore means some projects are discarded on the basis that the areas are too remote, unsafe for tourists, or do not offer the basic facilities. It is often these projects that are in the most need of help. This seems to indicate that the development the voluntourists will do whilst on placement has to conform to Western ideals and standards. Not only is this a rather colonialist and Eurocentric perspective, but also suggests a great deal about the level of development taking place; if a project is beyond the means of a group of volunteers to help, it will not be included in the organisation's portfolio. Therefore, the development work taking place is simplified: it looks to work around poverty, rather than transform it. Assessments are made based on the comfort and enjoyment levels of the volunteers, rather than the impact it may have on the projects. It is not to be suggested that the safety and welfare of volunteers is not important, but this does highlight how development is framed within the context of voluntourism: it comprises of simplistic, consumable and 'do-able' notions, and is not necessarily based on need (Simpson, 2004; also see Chapter Eight).

Shallow voluntourism organisations operate with a business plan in mind, and they measure the success of a project based on its popularity and longevity rather than improving local empowerment, a notion that contrasts with the ideology of sustainable and pro-poor development (Harrison, 2008). The organisations argued that it does not make financial sense to repeatedly close projects and start new ones from scratch. This highlights that the local communities' development may not be the main priority for more commercial companies, with capitalist competition becoming of greater significance. Although this approach may make these organisations more financially successful, one must question as to whether this is the best approach for local communities. When interviewed, residents at each of the three project sites generally felt that the only way the community had significantly benefited was through the economic growth caused through increased tourist spending. Project staff members were frequently disappointed by the voluntourists involvement, feeling they have not made things easier;



*“...they [the sending organisation] had told us that things would change once they got here. Things would be easier and the children would have more. But this does not happen; we are busier here as we have to help the volunteers with things they do not know. So many of them come and leave, that is all I seem to do. My life has not got easier...” (As1, 2011)*

Therefore, the volunteers' presence does not seem to have made life any better for project staff members, raising questions surrounding how effective the volunteers work is and who really benefits from the experience. It is argued that voluntourism should be mutually beneficial, with the organisations bearing responsibility to the host communities in terms of understanding their development needs and to provide the necessary labour (Raymond, 2008; Ong et al, 2011). However in reality, benefits are heavily skewed towards the volunteers, at the expense of the host community. This again is reflective of the colonial tendencies of voluntourism to project western power and how neoliberal practices of commercialisation and capitalism are favouring the needs of the voluntourists, providing evidence to suggest the neoliberal market practices of mutual exchange are frequently distorted.

The superficial engagement of development work by organisations highlights the key impetus behind their placements; to provide a profitable tourism product that caters to and benefits the tourists, with the assistance they provide to their hosts being somewhat of an addendum. However, it may be questioned as to what extent a commercially-viable tourism organisation can realistically engage with critical development, particularly of a politicised nature, and whether voluntourism is really a pro-poor form of tourism (Toner, 2003; Mdee and Emmott, 2008). It could therefore be argued that voluntourism organisations may be forced to market themselves in ways which seem to be promoting colonialist attitudes, which in actuality, simply reflect the popular public perceptions of development and developing countries, and subsequently, they promote such imaginaries to whom these stereotypes may appeal. A depoliticised and cosmetic public imaginary of development and Mexico is arguably what appeals to a mass market as it makes development more accessible and easier to



engage with, especially in the context of Britain's promoted responsibility in the fight against global poverty (Simpson, 2004; Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011).

### **Accountability**

Each of the organisations have very limited presence in the field, and the lack of communication and knowledge regarding daily operations is concerning and reflects how organisations are influenced by neoliberal and commercial practices. Invisibility is one of the most critical flaws in development aid, as it stems from the lack of accountability felt by development agencies (Easterly, 2006). The ability of the voluntourism organisations to distance themselves from problems due to geographical distances, removes them of responsibility, as opposed to engaging themselves with the connectivity required for care and development work (Silk, 1998; Noxolo et al, 2008). This has implications for the care that is being received, raising questions surrounding the limitations of responsibility; how does it differ in terms of places, spaces and for people, and who is benefiting from the delivery of this care.

Accountability is fundamental for preventing abuse of power, and for ensuring that power is directed towards the achievement of public interest with a service that is effective and efficient (Elliot, 1997). Therefore it can be interpreted as a form of control used to restrain those with the most power, holding them responsible for their actions (Spenceley, 2008). The lack of accountability can lead to the misuse of resources and power, as was witnessed with OrgA. It is not suggested that OrgA is at fault, instead the point is that due to the lack of accountability, a situation was allowed to arise that has left the orphanage in financial hardship, as a staff member explains;

*"...at least for the foreseeable future, we will have to stop taking in new children, some who are already here may have to find homes elsewhere, which could be devastating to the progress we have made with them. Also the disabled children... well they cost us more money... what will happen to them as there is now no funds [sic] to pay for anything. We have no money, and without volunteers coming in, we will continue to have no money. All our good is being undone... we may even have to close..." (As1, 2011)*

What must be noted here is that the lack of accountability has allowed this project to operate within a neoliberal framework that permits development to be run as a legitimate business. This project was a livelihood, in which an investment was made, and when the investment was no longer viable, it was recouped. Therefore the socio-political and economic frameworks that Mexican voluntourism operates within have provided the opportunity for this to occur. This unfortunate situation substantiates the argument that a lack of accountability in neoliberal markets can lead to malpractice, especially within charitable institutions where personal investments may have been made and there are limited channels for monitoring and evaluation (Uphoff and Buck, 2006).

As evidenced above, the idea that markets are ideal vehicles for accountability as they are a neutral mechanism that not only allows individuals to seek each other out in terms of their needs and wants, but also equitably distribute power and resources (Oxhorn, 1999), is not necessarily the case within Mexican voluntourism. Instead rather than the market allowing those with limited power to hold service providers accountable, it permits the powerful to distance themselves from the problem. This lack of accountability seems to originate from the increasing commercial pressures emanating from the neoliberal market and highlights the ideological dangers involved in the power structures apparent within the ownership and control of the agencies of care. In addition, the lack of regulatory framework within the UK and Mexico to monitor volunteer organisations and the care they provide, seem to be exacerbating the issue of accountability, as responsibility cannot be enforced. Accountability is also an issue that is imperative to sustainable development, and capacity building in particular: its implementation measures and facilitates improved performance and efficiency, whereas a lack of accountability allows for the proliferation of corruption (UNDP, 2008).

OrgB and OrgC are also no exception to this lack of accountability as their staff are rarely seen at the projects, and often have limited knowledge of how the projects

operate. Instead the project coordinators' primary concern is safety and wellbeing of the volunteers', as there is plenty of accountability to be had from this perspective, due to the level of power volunteers' (and their families) possess. This again displays how much power resides with the organisations and volunteers and how neoliberal practices are projecting western dominance and control. Accountability is therefore needed in order to make development agencies more effective, but it can be argued to be a luxury of the rich and powerful (Easterly, 2006). The neoliberal market has allowed voluntourism organisations to become invisible within the field, whilst simultaneously growing in power, and this is a grim combination with regard to accountability.

### ***Feedback***

The quest for accountability is futile if there is a lack of feedback, and of course feedback is only valuable if there is someone who is listening (Easterly, 2006). Feedback and evaluations were generally unheard of in all three organisations, as they claimed they did not require such information. When questioned as to why, the organisations all confirmed that it was due to monetary restrictions. They claimed extensive evaluations are too costly and time consuming, using resources that were restricted and limited. Any monitoring or evaluation that the organisations expressed interest in was based around the safety, enjoyment and security of their volunteers. However, volunteers were not actively encouraged to give feedback to the organisations, unless it was a positive testimonial of their experiences that could be published on the websites. None of the organisations actively encouraged feedback from their host partners. Therefore, very limited information is being sent to organisations informing them about the progress of the projects, volunteers' performances and the evaluations regarding everyday operations.

The only project who conducted any kind of feedback was Project B, whereby through informal methods of communication the project co-ordinator relayed information back to the company. Although this line of communication was an improvement, project

staff still felt extremely uncomfortable discussing major issues and raising too many problems. It is therefore not completely clear whether the feedback OrgB are receiving is actually substantial or just superficial. All three organisations promote their dedication to their host communities throughout all their promotional literature, but with this evidence in mind, questions do arise surrounding the organisations' level of commitment to the work they do in host communities. The limited communication between sending organisations, host partners and volunteers means that the expectations of all parties cannot be met and this will lead to (and inevitably has) a disappointing and ineffectual experience, with little value to those involved. This again highlights that the ideology of development adopted by shallow voluntourism companies is simplistic and essentialised, rather than providing innovative policy responses based upon deep understandings of the social, economic and political specificities of Mexico (Simpson, 2004; Guttentag, 2009; VSO, 2007b). Such considerations are argued to be incompatible with the commercial viability of the shallow commercial organisations (Toner, 2003).

### **The Language of Marketing**

A further issue relating to shallow voluntourism organisations and the neoliberal practices they are adopting was the dissatisfaction volunteers felt when the placement did not match up to their expectations. Several volunteers from all three organisations felt disappointment owing to the fact they thought;

*"...I thought I would be doing more....I don't feel like I'm doing anything!" (Av1, 2011)*

*"...I thought it would be more involved than this, I don't feel like I'm volunteering at all!" (Av5, 2011)*

*"...I thought I would be more needed than I am..." (Bv4, 2011)*

*"...I don't really feel like I'm benefiting anyone here" (Cv2, 2011)*

When asked why they felt this way, and how they came to formulate their expectations, the volunteers explained it was due to the way the placements were marketed by the sending organisations. They stated that the organisations had

indicated the volunteers were desperately needed and the experience would be rewarding and challenging, and they felt their placements lived up to neither of these statements. When reading through the promotional material supplied by the sending organisations, there is an obvious emphasis placed on the usefulness and value of volunteers. OrgA stresses that;

*“Volunteering with us will change your life! Do some of the most crucial work you will ever do!” (OrgA, 2011a)*

When looking at the project in particular, they insist that;

*“Volunteers are desperately needed to work in this very busy orphanage..... staff are in desperate need of help, so hurry and volunteer here!” (OrgA, 2011a)*

Similarly, OrgB assure its volunteers that;

*“Our projects have been carefully selected so you are genuinely needed and greatly valued within your community to allow you the opportunity to give something back.” (OrgB, 2011a)*

and regarding the specific project, it promises that;

*“Working in an orphanage is probably one of the toughest and most rewarding things that you can do and by working here you will be making a difference to children’s lives” (OrgB, 2011a)*

OrgC also guarantees to provide volunteers with an equally worthwhile experience;

*“you will know that by participating in one of our projects, you will be helping to make a real difference to the people you are working with” (OrgC, 2011a)*

and when promoting the specific project, the organisation assures that;

*“The children’s centre needs volunteers to provide assistance... and by doing so you can be guaranteed a challenging yet worthwhile experience” (OrgC, 2011a)*

This emphasis on the concept of need is treated in a highly uncritical way, and is part of the industry’s over-simplification of development; there is no significant explanation of what this need is, why there is this need, and how one could significantly help as a volunteer. This argument is not to trivialise the genuine requirements of many communities where these organisations operate, only to analyse the framing of such

needs. The above statements made by the organisations perpetuate a simplistic ideal of development that legitimises unskilled international labour as a development solution. A particular type of development activity is promoted as a solution, and emphasis is always on the end result, i.e. *“teach the children”* (OrgC, 2011b). Promotional literature never mentions the difficulties involved in achieving results, especially as they frequently advertise that *“you don’t need to speak Spanish...”* (OrgC, 2011a), instead insinuating that essential skills can be substituted for appropriate levels of compassion. That the volunteers will make an impact is not questioned, but is stated as a fact *“...you will be making a difference...”* (OrgB, 2011a).

The neoliberal ideologies present within voluntourism have encouraged the organisations to market development as a leisure activity, something to be undertaken whilst on holiday

*“...on Mexico’s Pacific coast offers you a beautiful holiday-like setting to your placement... highlights include swimming with dolphins...”* (OrgA, 2011a)

*“Enjoy volunteering in a stunning beach resort town”* (OrgA, 2011a)

This perception implies that engaging with the world’s problems can be a time-out from everyday life, which means the volunteers’ experience is disconnected from their own routines and way of life. By selling the concept of development in the form of these two-week packages, it is assumed that sending these unskilled volunteers out to the destinations will automatically benefit the recipients (Raymond, 2008). From this it can be seen how the promotional material of the commercial sending organisations can influence expectations and experiences, and create a simplified and depoliticised public imaginary of development and poverty. The shallow voluntourism organisations are therefore argued to be guilty of glamorising their projects which leads to unrealistic expectations, as seen by the statements of the volunteers given above.

There is a vagueness that pervades the entire sector and this is reflected in the organisations' approach to the theory and practice of development work. It highlights a paradox in that despite eagerly promoting the doing of development, the language of international development is rarely used. Searching through the promotional material of the three organisations, many allusions are made to development, but the only time a direct reference is made is when they are referring to the personal development of the volunteers. Instead, a language of making a difference, doing something worthwhile or changing the lives of others predominates. This avoidance of development language allows the organisations to evade any questioning of their agenda, and permits them to mobilise the ideology that doing something is better than doing nothing and every little helps (Simpson, 2004). However, the development agenda *is* there, disguised under notions of disadvantaged communities, changing lives or giving something back. Within this is the imperialistic assumption that the local population cannot help themselves, and they require the assistance of non-skilled Western volunteers to solve their problems. This seems to presume a Westernisation is needed as part of the development process; a colonialist perspective that highlights the importance of Western intervention. This projection of Western significance also highlights the exploitative and dominative relationships that are occurring between the organisations and the projects within this increasingly neoliberalised landscape. Furthermore, it allows the voluntourists to internalise these simplified imaginaries of development and poverty, permitting them to believe in their own self-worth whilst disengaging them from the realities of the situation (Smith, 2004; Manzo, 2008; Wilson, 2011).

As well as development, the language used in the promotional literature by the three organisations also frequently engages with the concept of poverty.

“...people who live in extreme poverty...” (OrgA, 2011b)

“...the scenes of poverty you can expect to see may be shocking... but remember you are there to help those who face this every day....” (OrgB, 2011b)

“...behind the beauty, there is a desperate poverty...” (OrgC, 2011b)

With these bleak notions in mind, voluntourists can frequently be found on a peculiar quest to observe and interact with poverty. Many of the volunteers commented that they wanted to be “*at the really poor projects, so I can see what real life is like for these people*” (Cv3, 2011). Not only does this imply that the volunteer believes that life is characterised by poverty and misery for the people of Mexico, but has also immediately differentiated themselves from the local inhabitants by the use of the term “these people”. Automatically this emphasises difference, which can lead to feelings of shock and voyeuristic tendencies, rather than feelings of empathy (Scheyvens, 2001). This is linked to the recent debate surrounding the ethics of poverty tourism (see appendix 1), as voluntourism and poverty tourism have the potential to be voyeuristic and insensitive if mismanaged (Scheyvens, 2001). Therefore one must consider how these forms of tourism are approached, who controls them and how they are marketed and promoted, as these issues will determine the public imaginary that is created, and how in turn, this knowledge will be internalised and negotiated by the voluntourists.

This is reflected in the marketing language used by the shallow organisations, as it prevents volunteers from truly understanding the phenomenon of poverty, encouraging them to gaze upon it passively, rather than challenging how or why it exists. The marketing literature seems to construct poverty as an absolute, and as something suffered by the other. Poverty is then converted into a definer of difference between the developed and the developing worlds, and in turn this frames within the volunteers’ minds a dichotomy of ‘them and us’. This is hugely contrasting to the cross-cultural understanding advocates of voluntourism claims it promotes (Wearing, 2001; Jones, 2005a; McGehee and Norman, 2002). This disparity can be further highlighted by the poor-but-happy rhetoric produced by the marketing literature, and then adopted by the volunteers;



*“...You may find people in poverty but you will also find a unique sense of happiness in its people...” (OrgC, 2011a)*

*“...the children are so poor, I find it hard to cope with..... but they’re not as sad about it as I am, they are actually just really happy playing with their broken toys or not having clothes of their own- they seem to love sharing them!” (Av3, 2011)*

These statements imply not only a trivialisation of poverty, but also a romanticisation in which the denial of material wealth leads to an increased emotional one (Simpson, 2004). In actuality, the volunteer’s statement is dubious as the children always complained about their broken toys and not being able to wear a certain item of clothing because someone else was wearing it. An interesting point is the basis upon which she makes her assertions, for she couldn’t have asked or spoken to the children about this matter, as she could not speak Spanish. Inherently then, the volunteer is left with an incorrect assumption, supported by her first-hand experience, and has therefore confirmed what she thinks she knows, rather than challenge it. In many cases, volunteer tourists’ previously formulated perceptions of poverty may be reinforced by their experiences if they are not encouraged to question the broader processes behind such issues. This can then lead to assumptions that host communities accept their poverty.

Such criticisms are based on the argument that it cannot be assumed that merely facilitating contact with the other, will lead to long-term international understanding and respect, as although the superficial experiences of voluntourism can increase cultural tolerance, more deeply embedded attitudes are less likely to be affected (Richards, 2004; Raymond and Hall, 2008). Indeed, “the assumption that seeing equates to knowing means stereotypes in the mind of the observer could perhaps be strengthened rather than challenged” (Griffin, 2004: 70). This highlights again how significant and influential public imaginaries of development and poverty can be; how the organisations promote such concepts will shape how the voluntourists come to

internalise and negotiate the information presented to them, which influences the forming of their own ideas, expectations and judgements (Baillie Smith, 2012).

These experiences of radically different conditions are leading voluntourists to reflect on their own lives and recognise their own good fortunes.

*“...it’s made me realise how lucky I am...”* (Av6, 2011)

*“...it’s made me appreciate what I have...”* (Bv2, 2011)

*“...I’m now more grateful for my privileged lifestyle...”* (Cv5, 2011)

This limited reflexive and critical engagement voluntourists have with their experiences allows them to rely on the idea of luck to explain the inequalities they encountered, rather than the structures and systems in which we all operate (Quinby, 2002). Commercial sending organisations promote this idea of privilege, either using this language themselves, or allowing its use in the testimonials of previous volunteers;

*“... you are blessed enough to be in a position to help those less fortunate...”*  
(OrgB, 2011b)

*“...it has been really eye-opening, the best time of my life! I can return home knowing that I’ve done something worthwhile, and can now fully appreciate how lucky I am. I will never take any for granted again!”* (Volunteer testimonial on OrgC, 2011a)

If the voluntourism industry continuously neglects to engage in the structural relationships affecting the communities of the developing world they will retain their myopic concentration on the individual (Simpson, 2004), thus suggesting that voluntourism does not always generate a genuine awareness of the issues facing host communities (Raymond and Hall, 2008). Therefore the presumption that travel and brief encounters with others are sufficient to produce the cross-cultural understanding voluntourism so proudly asserts it delivers must be questioned, especially considering

how important neoliberal practices of commercial profiteering are to the shallow voluntourism organisations.

## **Professionalisation**

The increasing neoliberalisation and commercialisation of the industry has augmented its presence within the public-domain, bringing it to the attention of the State, employers and educationalists, many of whom have voiced their support for youth participation in voluntourism (UK Parliament, 2001; Universities UK, 2001) This has cemented its values within an increasingly neoliberal focus, driving its integration into formal educational and employment structures and institutions. With an increasing presence within the neoliberal market, voluntourism has developed a set of definable and marketable commodities, and these have concentrated on offering individualised educational experiences, designed to enhance access to social spaces and employment. This intersection of professionalism and the neoliberal market has intensified the penetration of market control over the personal, political and emotional condition of oneself (Bondi, 2005). In turn, a careerist and professional persona has been created for the participants, expelling the altruism of the original missionary approach, metamorphosing into an extra-curricular activity to be undertaken by ambitious (yet compassionate) future professionals.

This professionalisation has caused a shift in the industry from the traditional collective idealism and altruism to the infinitely more sellable values of individual growth and career development. Some voluntourism organisations even offer a City and Guilds qualification as part of their package (Simpson, 2005), which bears testimony to the industry's evolving corporate compatibility and professionalisation. This application of corporate values has given legitimacy to the sector, but yet this professional gaze is proving to be relatively myopic. The uncritical adoption of the position of expert, and within it the practices of experimentation, frame the encounters between hosts and volunteers within powerful inequalities. Without critical reflection and with the

authoritative power gained through first-hand experience, this 'known' world becomes a powerful reality, created and cemented through the public imaginaries of development and Mexico purported by the voluntourism organisations.

The neoliberalised industry that has evolved around the once informal volunteering practice has now created procedures to formalise, popularise and regulate (Simpson, 2005). Elemental to these procedures are a set of marketable values that are required by institutions, desired by parents and coveted by participants that refer to the commodities of personal development, leadership and team-working skills and broad horizons (OrgB, 2011a). For example, OrgC advertises to its perspective clients that

*"Voluntary work with [OrgC] is excellent for your CV and university applications. It gives you greater life experience, develops your personal skills and shows your initiative to try something new- traits that appeal to employers and universities."* (OrgC,2011b)

Written within their promise to their volunteers, OrgC promotes the corporate opportunities of CV enhancement through the acquisition of new skills whilst helping a disadvantaged community, which highlights how these key commodities are being presented as necessities for success in corporate and social spaces. OrgB is no different, promoting their programmes as *"the greatest education for those who wish to succeed in life"* (2011b). That voluntourism has become part of a formal education, rather than distinct from it, now means it is a vital requirement for success, facilitating one's natural progression to employment. This has been fundamental to the professionalisation process. Figureheads from the State, such as Jack Straw, and education, such as Tony Higgins, the Chief Executive of the University and College Admission Service (UCAS), have all made public statements, testifying to the benefits of volunteer tourism and encouraging participation;

*"...[volunteering]... can help address the pressing need to improve skills of graduates entering the workplace. Universities generally like to take students who have completed such projects because they are generally more mature and are a step ahead of the rest."* (Higgins, 2001)

Even David Cameron has expressed his interest in the topic of volunteering. He stated, in relation to his experience of a Conservative Party voluntourism trip to Rwanda in 2007, that

*“at a time of climate change, global trade and migration, the rich cannot escape the consequences of global poverty and instability... and this calls for concerted and practical action”* (Cameron, 2007).

Not only does his statement relate directly to the debate surrounding the white man's burden, it also displays the colonial tendencies that signify the importance of Western intervention (Young, 2001; Easterly, 2006). The Shadow International Development Spokesman Andrew Mitchell explained that the venture aimed to give the Conservative Party *“a worthwhile first-hand experience of development issues and to learn about the challenges that developing countries face”* (Mitchell, 2007), which again displays the advantages accruing to volunteers, rather than emphasising how host communities are benefiting. In addition, the Department For International Development (DFID) launched a £10million volunteering fund to enable less-advantaged young people from the UK to spend time volunteering in a developing country and become *“champions of development”*. DFID believe it is important to offer people from all socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity of this experience as it has become so vital for educational and professional development within contemporary society (DFID, 2008). Not only does this seem to privilege and prioritise the role of Western intervention in achieving development and personal growth, but it also presents an uncomfortable connection to colonial and imperial histories whereby the developing world is a platform for the realisation of UK policy needs (Baillie-Smith and Laurie 2011; Biccum, 2007). This highlights how international volunteering has been brought into politics and policy processes, and how this State-led focus on inclusion has seemingly replaced the traditional focus of knowledge and skills transfer normally associated with international volunteering work (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). This State involvement has transformed imaginaries of traditional volunteering ideals of development to those accounted with professional, policy and State objectives (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011).

Through official statements such as those above expressing their support for voluntourism, the focus is clearly on the individualised advantages, which thereby endorse the development of active, self-regulating and competitive neoliberal subjects (Bondi, 2005). Although this may be desirable for the State and perspective employers, it does raise questions surrounding the social responsibility aspect of voluntourism that seems to have been neglected in all the corporate hype. OrgC's (2011b) testimony that volunteer tourism is "*a form of social action that will produce a generation of more knowledgeable and responsible citizens*" may appear to address the issue, but instead implies that social responsibility is an issue for the future rather than one that needs immediate address. Focus is still placed upon the participants of the organisations' programmes, rather than the recipient communities. It seems host communities are only worthy of mention when sending organisations are describing how needed the volunteers are in the particular location.

Programmes from all three organisations are premised on the usefulness of volunteers, presenting situations whereby the volunteer can offer help, advice, support and generally be needed. For example, OrgB promises that

*"...projects are carefully selected to ensure you will be of genuine value to an indigenous community and to give something back."* (OrgB,2011)

This seems to create situations in which the volunteer provides some external expert assistance. The voluntourist is then placed in the position of expert, thought to possess superior knowledge, through their placement in roles such as carers or teachers, identities; positions not available to them at home due to their lack of experience and relevant qualifications. Their expertise is implicitly assumed, despite the fact that all three of the organisations who eagerly promote placements that involve caring for very young and vulnerable children emphasise that "*experience and qualifications are not necessary*" (OrgC, 2011a).

This freedom from qualifications is an enticing part of such programmes, making them more accessible and allowing volunteers to experiment with potential career identities. When questioned about why these organisations felt that experience and qualifications were unnecessary, the contact at each organisation explained positions were not “*skill-specific*” (Bo, 2011) and “*on the job learning would be more than enough*” (Ao, 2011) or that “*they were not needed in the host country*” (Co, 2011). They did not feel that the sending of unskilled volunteers to fulfil these roles would harm the recipient communities, and felt they were more likely to suffer if the number of volunteers reduced, as they inevitably would if qualifications became a prerequisite. OrgC added that it also allowed them to market placements based on the opportunities available for professional and CV enhancement, as for many the projects are the initial stepping stone into gaining experience within their chosen field.

Voluntourists, within this position of power, are then encouraged to experiment with their new identity on a vulnerable group of people, and without accountability or consequence. This highlights how shallow, neoliberalised voluntourism has become a vehicle for young Westerners to experiment and negotiate their identities as subjects of an imperial nation (Mathers, 2010; Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). This uncritical adoption of the volunteer as expert and its practices of experimentation shapes the relationship between host and guest and traps them in powerful inequalities, demonstrating the colonialist tendencies of shallow voluntourism and the problems involved with simplistic and depoliticised imaginaries of development (Barkham, 2006). It is these relationships and imaginaries that form the knowledge and perceptions that frame voluntourists’ understanding of their encounters and experiences (Nash, 2008; Henson et al, 2010). Without critical reflection, this knowledge produced in first-hand travel experiences, becomes a powerful and known reality. Therefore, voluntourism can be argued to be shaping contemporary development practices and imaginaries through its increasing commercialisation and professionalisation. Through this, preconceptions of those in need are reinforced through the myopic and individualised focus upon the volunteers. It seems as though through the provision of short term, commercialised volunteering placements, the

needs of the individual volunteer and their personal and professional development have superseded the needs of their intended recipients (Baillie-Smith and Laurie, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The new path that voluntourism is taking is creating a more professionalised and commercialised sector embedded with neoliberal practices and ideologies, and this is having a degenerative effect on the values and operations of the shallow organisations, intensifying the colonial characteristics ingrained within them. Coupled with the integration into the neoliberal market, shallow voluntourism organisations have found a marketable range of commodities to sell to potential volunteers. These have included personal development, educational and CV enhancement opportunities, and the chance to make a difference. The success of such marketing has earned voluntourism vocal support from a variety of actors, including State and education representatives. However, voluntourism has created simplistic and racialised public imaginaries of Mexico and development work in order to attract their market, rather than critically and reflexively engage with such imagery and perceptions. This has perpetuated colonial and imperialistic tendencies and generated power imbalances, whilst producing depoliticised, essentialised and unrealistic notions of development work. Inherently, this has shaped not only the public imaginaries created by the organisations of such concepts, but also how Mexico is promoted as a destination. These imaginaries and the neoliberalised professionalisation process have also influenced how voluntourists are negotiating their subjectivities and how knowledge is internalised and understood by them.

The rapid proliferation of commercial organisations into the shallow sector has meant intense competition for market share, and this has been reflected in organisational values and practices. This can be seen in not only how the sector is structured, but also how the organisations themselves are managed and marketed, how they choose their



projects, and what they can offer the volunteer. So far the development work undertaken by voluntourists has been unregulated and unmonitored, and been allowed to follow whichever path the dominant western organisations wish it to, potentially at the expense of its host communities. This has led to a colonialist propensity for volunteers to be placed in the role of expert despite a distinct lack of experience and skills. As a consequence, slowly but certainly very clearly, local populations are being undermined by poorly managed and organised placements and the unskilled, somewhat naive and inexperienced volunteers. This is highly contradictory to the concepts of making a difference and fulfilling a need the sector has so successfully marketed to its audiences.

Therefore, what has been argued is that the institutional landscape the voluntourists must negotiate, is one that is replete with ideas of how people are and should behave, and has been heavily influenced the re-emergence of colonial tendencies and contemporary commercial practices. The asymmetrical geometries of power apparent within the neoliberal practices discussed, illustrate the ability of voluntourism to shape local realities and the voluntourists' inculcation of their cosmopolitan-selves, whilst also highlighting how the practices that rely on equitable market distribution of benefits do not always materialise on contextually-specific situations.

# Chapter 6- The Hero Complex

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*Take up the white man's burden  
Send forth the best ye breed  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve the poor man's needs*  
(Kipling, 1899)

## Introduction

Voluntourism represents a collision of agendas. Personal development collides with social change, the commercialism of tourism crashes against the altruism of volunteering, and values associated with a neoliberal agenda encounter experiments within youth identity. The convergence of these different discourses presents the heavily gendered, colonial and neoliberal terrain in which voluntourism exists. Voluntourists must learn to negotiate this complex terrain as part of their experience, and the following chapter aims to explore how such negotiations take place. The process of identity formation is a key avenue of exploration, as how the voluntourists internalise, frame and understand various social pressures and public imaginaries, will inevitably affect how they perceive and react to their encounters and experiences. Central to this analysis is how voluntourism engages with simplified and depoliticised notions of development, and this chapter investigates how this provides a foundation for the development of a moral conscious, seen through an ardent responsibility to help those in need, and an identification with the idealised self-image of the hero.

We now live in a world of responsibilities, and moral exhortations appear to be everywhere, telling us to be more socially responsible, more environmentally friendly and more caring to the less privileged (Sin, 2010). An increasingly common way of playing out our responsibilities is through the contemporary practice of voluntourism, with its strong overtones of social justice, development and local empowerment. Here, the notion of responsibility is often constructed around the concept that the

developed world is responsible to the developing world, accordingly placing Western actors as the kind and generous carers, and the Southern actors as the passive and grateful recipients (Palacios, 2010; Raghuram et al, 2009). Indeed this seems to echo the concept of the white man's burden, whereby the West feel responsible to alleviate the poverty suffered in the South to ease the pangs of guilt from an imperial history and privileged upbringing (Easterly, 2006). However, this type of responsibility implies inequality and belies an agenda of western domination and colonialism through reinforcing the position of the West, imposing a sense of powerlessness and victimization upon those in the South (Rushdie, 2006). Nonetheless, voluntourism imaginaries have encouraged voluntourists to frame their role and responsibilities in such a way that allows them to identify with the trope of the hero.

The idea of the hero has been applied by previous work to help evaluate the voluntourists' experience, and used as a conceptual basis to explore how volunteers perceive their voluntourism experience (Berger, 2006a; Tomazos and Butler, 2010). However the irony or criticism relating to issues of gender and colonialism in using this approach, has not been fully explored. The hero is predominantly a Western construct, imbued with colonial and imperial discourse, relating to saving the world. This colonial-esque hero in the voluntourism context heavily suggests that young and inexperienced Westerners are needed to save the orphaned children in Mexico; something the 'local people' are ascribed as incapable of doing. Therefore the colonial and imperial aspects of the voluntourist hero will be analysed and unpicked throughout this chapter. The concept of the hero is infused with masculine ideals, and traditionally rejects feminine principles. This is particularly significant to voluntourism as the voluntourists were predominantly female, engaging in the feminine activity of care-giving, both of which are notions typically rejected by heroic behaviour (Dawson, 1994; Featherstone, 1992; Maclean, 2010; 2012). Feminist theory will therefore be employed to deconstruct the concept of the hero and heroic behaviour, analysing whether volunteers are adopting masculine characteristics in order to become the hero, or whether the masculinity of the concept has been challenged and is becoming more feminine.

This chapter therefore aims to critically assess the label of the hero within voluntourism, utilising this designation as a way of analysing how the voluntourists are negotiating their identities and their inculcation of the cosmopolitan self. Furthermore, the trope of the hero helps to explore how the volunteers' frame and understand the knowledge they are presented with, and how this may shape the context in which they work and form relationships. Theories based around the concepts of neoliberal subjectivities, heroism, responsibility, power, colonialism and feminism will provide the analysis, and help support and structure arguments. The chapter is structured into four sections, each one analysing the four main stages within the Hero's Journey according to Tomazos and Butler (2010) and Campbell (1968); the hero, a call to adventure, the hero's challenge and the hero's reward. It is hoped this structure allows for a more detailed and intricate analysis of how the idea of heroism is helping the voluntourists to negotiate such a heavily gendered, colonial and neoliberal landscape.

## **The Hero**

The term hero was originally coined in English in 1387 from a Greek word literally meaning protector or defender, and within Greek mythology depicted someone who, in the face of danger and adversity, displayed courage and the will for self-sacrifice (Allison, 2010). Throughout history, the hero has always proved to be an alluring figure, providing a character for the reader to admire and identify with. They were given honor, idolized and respected. Freud (1932) identified that within our dreams, we all want to be heroes: we all want to make a difference to impact a situation or foster change. This is certainly supported by the volunteers who continually spoke about "*wanting to help*" and "*make a difference*", so much so it almost became a catchphrase. Within contemporary society, the opportunity to become a hero is increasing as its definition begins to change and evolve. Previously a hero was a character who voluntarily sacrificed themselves in the process of fighting monsters, and saving lives, whereas nowadays a hero can be a sports or pop star, a political figure or even a magnate in the business world, so why not a voluntourist? Tomazos and Butler (2010) ask this very question, arguing that voluntourists voluntarily engage in an activity that is in service to others, whilst risking their personal comfort and

safety in doing so, and do it without any expectation of material gain.

### **Feminine Vs Masculine**

What can also be seen from hero-based literature is that it is a predominantly masculine concept; the hero has always been a man. The hero's journey is portrayed as a masculine one, fraught with danger, adventure and risk, and therefore one needed masculine characteristics to overcome such adversities (Campbell, 1968). Risk defines a hegemonic masculinity, reflecting a gendered value system that identifies with masculine characteristics used to distinguish heroic behaviour, reinforced by the view that feminine characteristics of risk-aversion, caring and sympathy are signs of weakness (Rojas, 1999; Maclean, 2012). When a woman featured in heroic tales she was often portrayed as either the temptress: a figure of seduction and allure, trying to detain the hero from his mission, or as the damsel in distress and in need of saving (Campbell, 1969). This is emphasised by the Wordsworth Dictionary's definition of a male and female adventurer (adventuress), which states:

“**adventurer** one who engages in hazardous enterprises: a participant in exciting experiences: a soldier of fortune:- *fem.* **adventuress** (chiefly in a bad sense)” (1994: 12- emphasis in original)

This clear differentiation between male and female registers the historic limited opportunities for women to become involved in adventures and heroic behaviour, due to their close association with sexual forms of behaviour, excitement and disreputability within a dominant male culture.

This portrayal of women as either weak or sinful has reflected women's status within society, throughout history, whereby women were believed to be the weaker sex, and have been stereotyped into a subservient role, dominated by their male counterparts (Noble, 1994). These views within our patriarchal society are now being challenged, with women accruing more power and defying their preconceived roles (Chakravarty, 2007). This poses an interesting notion to voluntourism heroes whereby the vast majority of volunteers are women (Jones, 2004a). Females made up approximately

94% of the volunteer respondents for this research, with males only being present at one project (A). If heroes are predominantly men, what does this mean for the female hero of the voluntourism narrative?

The female volunteers displayed no stronger signs of weakness than their male counterparts, nor were they sinful in the way described by Campbell (1968), thus demonstrating that the roles open to females within the heroic tale appears to be expanding and developing. Women are no longer are satisfied with only being *part* of the story, they want to *be* the story, with one young volunteer explaining;

*"I wanted to have my own adventure, be the one going out doing these things, rather than watching them, or listening to them happen to other people. I wanted my own chance to be good and do something amazing."* (Bv8, 2011)

Arguably, women no longer want to be "the handmaidens of the dominant male culture" and thus feel the need to reject the feminine, as defined as passive, non-productive and safe, in favour of the masculine in order to become successful in the patriarchal culture within Western society (Murdock, 1990: 2; Noble, 1990; 1994; Pearson and Pope, 1981; Stasia, 2011). The majority of the volunteers alluded to this need, telling themselves to "*man-up*" and prove themselves to be strong and independent, with one volunteer explaining:

*"now I'm older, I feel I needed to do something that would prove to everyone that I am strong and I don't need to rely on anyone else to get by. I don't want to be seen as this weak little girl anymore... I want to get on in the world and I think this is a really good way of proving to everyone that I can do things, hard things, and come out a success."* (Av10, 2011)

Here this 20-year old volunteer is stating a desire to follow the masculine hero's journey, whilst showing her support for feminist theory: she is using this experience as a way of rejecting the feminine notions of weakness, and proving her ownership of the masculine characteristics of strength and independence in order to appear successful to those around her. Her negotiation of the 'self' in this manner has clearly been

influenced from the social pressures she feels relating to her gender and social identity back home within the UK.

However, despite this desire to reject the feminine, volunteers are actively undertaking the traditionally feminine role of childcarer. The volunteers assumed a number of duties including washing, bathing, feeding, feeding and teaching whilst caring for the children, all of which are traditional female responsibilities as the primary care-giver (Lerner and Galambos, 1985). The feminisation of the care-giving industry is well documented (Gilligan, 1982; Finch and Groves, 1983; Ungerson, 1990; Daly and Lewis, 1998), so does this mean that the volunteers have established a balance between connecting with the masculine (the hero), whilst connecting with the feminine (the carer)? A unity between greatness (heroism/masculinity) and love (feminist values) is argued to be possible through the development of more empowered and sociable persons or group who take pleasure in affecting and being affected by the world (Bologh, 1990). These characteristics are present within the voluntourists, therefore supporting the notion that whilst the hero is viewed as a predominantly masculine concept, female voluntourists are developing their own kind of heroism, and redefining the masculine characteristics previously associated with the role. Consideration must also be given to the possibility of this due to the positioning of the local people as a colonial, feminine 'other'.

### **A Colonial Construct**

The concept of the hero presents many celebrated heroic tales following the stories of white European men having woven themselves into the Western conscience. This inscription of white European dominance can be seen through the historical narrative of the hero and adventure particular to Britain and the acquisition of its Empire (Dawson, 1994), giving its British cultural significance explicitly militant, colonialist and imperial connotations. The heroic links with adventure relates to the historical foundation of colonial explorations in which "risk and adventure are entwined for progress" (Elsrud, 2001: 603). This has particular significance for voluntourism, whose objectives originate from development work, aiding those struggling with poverty.

Although the volunteers did not actually refer to themselves as heroes, they frequently alluded to the concept through the description of their heroic behaviour, through the use of terms such as “*helping*”, “*quest*”, “*saving*” “*adventure*” and “*risk*”. Thus voluntourism can be seen as a manifestation of the yearning for heroism. The volunteers all expressed a desire to make a difference to the lives of the children, wishing to “*save them from the horrific life that lies ahead of them*” (Cv3, 2011). This perception of the children’s future highlights, not only a racialised view of the socio-economic situation of Mexico, but also the colonialist perception that they need to be saved, and the necessity in Western intervention in order to provide the saving.

Racialised and stereotypical images such as this frame the children’s situations with negativity and victimisation, failing to consider the opportunities the children may find themselves (Jones, 2004b). The above quote also highlights the imperialistic and colonial nuances framed within the hero concept, and how the volunteers perceive their actions. Colonial thinking of care and responsibility reveals political contestations that underpin global relations touched by histories of colonialism, inequality, and exploitation (Lawson, 2007). Furthermore, the colonial nuances permeating heroic narratives interestingly highlight the parallels between the coloniser and the masculine, and the colonised feminine, which depicts the local people as a colonial feminine ‘other’ (McClintock, 1995). However within voluntourism, it is predominantly females who are seen as the agents of progression through their role as carer, thus linking them primarily to the role of the *coloniser*. This makes for an interesting role reversal, and provides further justification for the argument that female voluntourists are challenging traditional identities of the hero.

Within voluntourism, care is posited as a normative good based on an unproblematic assumption of need and heroic behaviour, promoted through the marketing materials of the organisations (see previous chapter) which invoke a colonial asymmetrical orientation toward the Other. All volunteers were keen to share their tales of overcoming adversity (albeit the same conditions local people face every day) to



continue “*protecting the children*” (Av12, 2011), illustrating that they were willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater wellbeing of their charges. They frequently used words such as “*noble*”, “*selfless*”, “*brave*” and “*honorable*” to describe the work they were doing. However, these descriptions seem to highlight a somewhat imperialistic perspective, and furthermore, demonstrate the way the volunteers negotiate their identities and internalise their encounters with, and the framing of, the colonial other.

The volunteers’ tendency to allude to their heroic behaviour supports the argument that the hero is a projection of oneself: people identify with the hero as a symbolic representation of the person who is experiencing the story (Chatterji, 1986).

Volunteers frequently spoke of how they were “*protecting the children from the evil managers*” (Av13, 2011) and how “*lives were being changed*” (Cv4, 2011) by the work they were doing. One volunteer from Project A even went so far as to comment;

*“I’m so grateful I decided to come out and do this, despite what’s happened and what I’ve been through [the extreme heat and humidity, poor living conditions and sickness]. I felt like I wanted to make a difference, and that’s what I’ve done. I feel like I’ve changed... well, lives I guess, and made an impact with what we’ve done, which is more than what most people back home can say...”*  
(Av2, 2011)

This illustrates the desire for action from the North is not always triggered by a sense of commonality and affinity, but instead by a desire to help the unfortunates, which reinforces a sense of cultural difference and superiority (Smith, 2002). Thus it can be seen that within voluntourism care-giving can be a source of pleasure and fulfilment, but it is a practice located within global inequalities and imbued with colonial nuances.

None of the volunteers interviewed referred to their heroism with a critical or ironic inflection, and many postcolonial writers warn of the dangers owing to a lack of critical awareness of one’s actions (Bhabbha, 1985; Fanon, 1961; King, 2003; Loomba, 2005a; 2005b Spivak, 1990). It has been argued that tourism, even within the new moral form has become a sort of “leisure imperialism and represents the hedonistic face of

colonialism” due to the tourists first world superiority (Simmons, 2004: 134). For these reasons, the fact that voluntourists use the third world as the situational context for their story of heroes, villains and adventure is questionable, based on not only the consequences it poses to the precarious power relationships involved, but also due to the imperialistic connotations involved in utilising Mexico as a platform in which to negotiate identities and personal development.

### **A Responsibility to Save the World: A hero’s call**

Contemporary social pressures placed upon volunteers as neoliberal subjects to become global citizens influence how the voluntourists are encouraged to think about global histories and relationships, and their role within this. The care and responsibility the voluntourists feel to the distant stranger is a reflection of neoliberal subjectivities and the recognition of themselves as autonomous individuals with a proactive interest in the wellbeing of others. The voluntourists were especially conscious of a responsibility they felt to help those less fortunate, and were eager to participate in a form of tourism that would facilitate this. Therefore, within the contemporary tourism market, a more socially responsible consumer has emerged, demanding a holiday that fulfils a social need to be more ethical, moral and responsible (Goodwin, 2007). This section analyses the concepts of responsibility, adventure and difference in relation to how the trope of the hero within voluntourism is a means by which voluntourists make sense of their subjectivities and negotiate their role as volunteers.

The notion of responsibility within tourism is often shaped and constructed around the view that the developed world should be responsible for the misfortunes of the developing world. Lester states that

“This contemporary sense of global concern is the product of imaged geographies founded on the webs of materials connection that link the lives of privileged Westerners to materially deprived others in different parts of the world.” (2002: 277)

Therefore, from the perspective of the volunteers, they feel responsible for the children that live in Mexico. The opinion of Av8 highlights how the volunteers feel regarding their sense of responsibility;

*“Since I’ve learnt about the inequalities of the world and that it’s our fault that it’s like that, I’ve wanted to come and help those less fortunate than me. Volunteering is a really cool way of doing it as you get to spend time with the kids you’re helping which offers great job satisfaction!... Now is the time to do it- whilst I’m still young, free and able ...don’t we have a responsibility to do this now?” (Av8, 2011)*

In this statement, you can hear the passion with which the volunteer feels her responsibilities to the “less fortunate” by explaining her placement in terms of a worthwhile job and an obligation of the educated “young, free and able”. Her sense of duty to perform this task is not unique, with many of the volunteers expressing similar feelings;

*“...I just think we should donate some of our time and money to helping these children... I’m so selfish at home, taking my things for granted, we need to break this habit and start helping those who need it” (Av14, 2011)*

*“...I know I’m really lucky, with all the stuff I have at home, so I just want to help those who don’t have what I do. I feel like it’s the least I can do...” (Bv4, 2011)*

*“...I just feel guilty about all the things I have, when there are those who don’t have anything- like the children here. I just feel as though it’s my duty to help them...” (Cv4, 2011)*

These statements highlight how the volunteers’ privileged backgrounds have shaped their sense of moral obligation to help those less fortunate, encouraging them to recreate ideas of neoliberal citizenship (Rose, 1999; Lerner, 2000). Interestingly, the projects’ perceived sense of need has been promoted by the sending organisations through the use of imagery and emotive text (see Chapter Five), and not necessarily through a thorough understanding of the global political, social and economic structures and the specific situation of Mexico. This therefore demonstrates the issues surrounding the simplistic and apolitical imaginaries created of Mexico and

development; they posit the voluntourists' heroic quest from a colonialist and uninformed perspective, ascribing responsibility to the preserve of the relatively powerful acting on behalf of the relatively powerless. This approach to development stands in contrast to one in which change is seen as a dialogic process, with those labelled as the victims engaging and sharing in the responsibility for structural transformation (Young, 2003).

However, it is argued that the voluntourists' sense of duty is heroic:

“the participants decided to achieve their quest by assisting at a children's refuge, and therefore this suggests something quite heroic and altruistic about them that makes them more receptive to a call to serve others” (Tomazos and Butler, 2010: 373).

Without acknowledging the imperialistic challenges of such a label, Tomazos and Butler seem to be perpetuating the notion that it is acceptable for voluntourists to be classified as heroes and as they feel a sense of responsibility to help the poor. This view, which is reflected across the voluntourism industry, appears to legitimise the foundational idea of Western intervention, assuming that the poor cannot help themselves, which tends to frame the voluntourist-as-a-hero as an idealised figure, whose actions tend to render them superior to the other characters and the environment in which their narrative is set. This not only influences their perception of their own self-worth, but also how the voluntourists may negotiate their inculcation of the neoliberal subjectivities.

Colonialism is inherently symptomatic of conventional heroism within the meeting of two different societies; i.e. England, the developed society, and Mexico, the developing society (Chowdhury, 1998). The imperialistic attempts of the volunteers to aid and reorder lives as *they* see fit (rather than involving local perspectives) highlights the problems associated with the outsourcing of development; the tendency of inexperienced volunteers to act as they know and think they should, rather than what

they have learnt through critical engagement with the structures surrounding poverty (Rushdie, 2006). Within voluntourism, development is not only privatised and externalised, but packaged and sold as a marketable commodity (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011; also see Chapter Five). The irony of this situation has not been lost: colonialism helping to alleviate the effects of colonialism, or in other words, “the West’s self-pleasing fantasy that we were the chosen ones to save the Rest... despite our hand in creating the situations they need saving from” (Easterly, 2006: 20).

### **Adventure and Risk**

Within UK contemporary society, notions of adventure and risk are an important part of gaining recognition for heroic acts, and as a means of distinguishing oneself from one’s peers. This is because heroic experiences can be used to gain high amounts of social capital and an esteemed position within a patriarchal society who link such notions with becoming successful neoliberal subjects (Laing and Crouch, 2011). The label of hero, lends itself very easily to the voluntourist, as the hero’s journey is not just a pattern manifested in myth, but one that is based in everyday experience. The hero is one who dares to go beyond the limits of their everyday lives and undertakes a quest fraught with danger and challenges, whilst simultaneously, allowing themselves to fulfil their human potential (Campbell, 1988). This is reflected in how the voluntourists understand the voluntourism experience, which is based on elements of risk, trials and personal development;

*“...I was just bored with my routine... I wanted to get away from it all, you know, like have an adventure...” (Av1, 2011)*

*“I felt like I need a new challenge, and I wanted it to be something worthwhile doing” (Av3, 2011)*

*“...no-ones ever done anything like this in my family, so I was really scared, but I felt like I needed to push myself, to do something out of the ordinary, something meaningful...” (Bv2, 2011)*

*“...I knew this would be a good way of getting some new experiences... a great adventure in my life...” (Cv3, 2011)*

These statements imply that the volunteers undertook their voluntourism placements as they felt their routines were either boring or were no longer reflecting who they were, and so actively sought change in order to negotiate new or improved identities. Everyday life is associated with the mundane, routine and repetition, and is regarded as the sphere of maintenance and pre-institutional activities predominantly performed by women:

“The everyday world is one which the hero departs from, leaving behind the sphere of care and maintenance (that of women)... a basic contrast then, is that the heroic life is the sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk, whereas everyday life is the sphere of women, reproduction and care.”  
(Featherstone, 1992: 165)

This not only highlights the gendered associations with heroism and risk, but also explains why so many of the volunteers felt the need to escape everyday life; to break away from traditional societal roles and contemporary pressures, and do something exciting whilst negotiating new identities.

The volunteers therefore viewed their experience as an adventure and a break from the mundane; a mission to do something worthwhile, signifying that through their own identification with the hero, they can make a positive transformation in the lives of others less fortunate than themselves, and those whom they know very little about. This is demonstrative of the imperialistic tendencies imbued within the structures of voluntourism projects (Simpson, 2004; Teo and Long, 2006). It is the significance of adventure that gives the volunteers their sense of a quest in relation to their experience. Without any risk or danger, the volunteering adventure will not prove to be so much of a challenge and will not give the volunteers the same rewards. In fact, it is precisely the sense of danger that makes Mexico such an appealing destination;

*“...Mexico is cool: it has that element of danger, like what you hear about on the news with gangs and riots and stuff...”* (Av8, 2011)

*“...when people heard I was going to Mexico they were like, whoa man, are you sure? People were worried because it has this dangerous reputation, but that’s kind of why I chose it...”* (Cv4, 2011)

*“...but that’s why I picked Mexico, I didn’t want to go somewhere that was all nice and quiet and safe; I wanted a bit of danger. Its more exciting that way, you feel like you’ve accomplished more...” (Cv6, 2011)*

In addition, these statements show that the risk element is highly important to volunteer experiences, as it not only provides a fun factor, but also it enhances the feeling of accomplishment and achievement for the volunteer. These comments are made by female volunteers (all aged between 19-21), and the masculine overtones of the language they use further illustrates their adoption of the masculine in order to undertake risk and adventure. Risk and adventure narratives are used as identity claims, the braver the traveller, the more admired and respected they are (Elsrud, 2001), as adventurous identities can enhance social and cultural capital, which can help when making new friends or applying for new jobs (Desforges, 2000). Not only is this demonstrative of how voluntourism is utilised as a platform for identity formation and the voluntourists’ negotiation of the self, but also how it has become more professionalised through its association as a prerequisite to success within the corporate world (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011; Baillie Smith, 2012).

For female voluntourists, the element of risk and adventure can be especially important for enhancing their social capital (Connell, 1995). This is because the adventure story is imbued with masculine overtones, so women feel they will be more accepted in the UK’s patriarchal society which celebrates these kinds of accomplishments. For example, one volunteer explained that she has

*“...always been seen as a girly girl. No-one took me seriously, and no-one would ever thought me capable of doing this. I wanted to come away and do this to show everyone back home that I am brave, and I’m not so much the princess they thought I was...” (Cv1, 2011)*

Her statement was not unique. Plenty of the female volunteers wanted to use the experience as an opportunity to prove themselves to others at home. They believed the risk and danger elements were vital in order to demonstrate their courage, heroism and strength of character. This also supports the notion that in order for

females to become successful in neoliberal society, they must negotiate a more masculine identity, and adopt its associated characteristics (Murdock, 1990).

For some, the adventure part of their story is so important, the risks involved within tourists' travels are nothing more than social constructs, used as a device to tell a story (Dake, 1992). This certainly seemed to be the case with the respondents of Project A, who saw danger and risk everywhere (e.g. walking alone on the streets, waiting for and riding the bus) despite being located in a popular tourist resort. Interestingly, the danger was only apparent when they were doing something that related directly to their volunteering work; they saw no danger however, in their leisure activities. This seems to suggest that the risk factor is important to voluntourists as it helps enhance the hero identity connected with their volunteering work. Although these situations are perceived as risky, they were as routinely organised as possible for the local residents, who did these things every day. The construction of risk (whether it be real or perceived) therefore seems to be linked to preconceived imaginaries the volunteers have of their destination.

Therefore, it could be argued that risk starts as soon as the volunteer is somewhere new, and this could be exploited in the voluntourists' negotiation of their heroic and more masculine identities. This is explained by the fact that people travelling from the Western world to places within the developing world carry a mental luggage of grand narratives which seem real to them, but have been influenced by a number of historical, social and cultural factors (Elsrud, 2001). Equipped with the politics of rights and empowerment, the voluntourists are therefore recreating ideas of neoliberal citizenship where one is not to remain isolated and selfish, but to accept responsibility to procure the improvement of those who need assistance (Rose, 1999).

Unfortunately, the assistance the voluntourists provide is based upon simplistic imaginaries, defined by difference, allowing for the colonial tendencies imbued within risk to become the basis upon which voluntourists can negotiate their own personal development as idealised, caring global citizens.



## The Importance of Difference

As explained above, for an adventure to truly be rewarding and worthwhile, there must be difference; a comparable 'other' upon which the sense of danger and risk can be based (Beezer, 1993). A number of respondents point to the importance of the 'other' in their travels: the difference in the place, people and culture was overwhelming for many of them. For these volunteers (for whom it was their first time in a developing country) it was a bit of a culture shock:

*"...I've never been to a third world country before, god it's so different! When I compare my life at home to this....god, it's just crazy" (Av12, 2011)*

*"...You see the poor on the telly and stuff, but it doesn't prepare you for actually being out here..." (Bv1, 2011)*

*"...things are just so different here; it's like a whole other world!" (Cv7, 2011)*

The difference was something they found it hard to overcome. These judgements cause the volunteers to view the host community as the distant, colonial other, a term fraught with judgement and stereotype, as the following volunteers expressed:

*"...I don't really understand them, and I don't think they understand us- we're just too different..." (Cv6, 2011)*

*"...there's a saying we all [volunteers] use for when things go wrong- 'hey, it's Mexico!'" (Cv4, 2011)*

*"...I haven't really made friends with the nannies or anything, I've just kind of kept with the volunteers as we are all a bit more like-minded..." (Bv3, 2011)*

*"...I mean [the staff] just don't understand what it's like at home for us, you feel horrible moaning to them about your crap, when I mean, look at what they have going on... that's why it's good to have the other volunteers, they understand what you mean... you can talk to them without worrying cos they get it" (Bv7, 2011)*

*"...it's just so different here; the people, the culture, the way they do things... most of the time I just don't get it- it's just a completely different way of life." (Av12, 2011)*

The stereotypes and division highlighted by the volunteers are immersed in an image of Mexico that accentuates the *dissimilarities* between hosts and guests, rather than the similarities. By not engaging critically with what they see, the voluntourists are in danger of reinforcing preconceived stereotypes of Mexico, and are allowing poverty to become a definer of difference. Shock and voyeurism frequently lead to judgements, and this is not conducive to the cross-cultural understanding that voluntourism actively promotes (Scheyvens, 2001). This creates a public imaginary of Mexico that frames it within the context of poverty and victimisation, and this has influenced how the voluntourists internalise and understand the experiences they are presented with. However, this difference seemed to highlight the value of risk to the volunteers, claiming it adds to the “*sense of danger*” (Cv4, 2011). This provides further evidence of how the volunteers are rejecting the feminine characteristics of risk-aversion to engage in the gendered construction risk-taking behaviour associated with masculine heroic behaviour (Maclean, 2012).

Voluntourists want to volunteer in Mexico because they feel compassion for the situation of the orphaned children and want to give back to society. To do so uncritically, is due to the lack of understanding surrounding the legacy of imperialism and its role in international development in Mexico. This again is linked to how Mexico and the concepts of poverty and development are promoted by the voluntourism organisations. For example Cv9 knew that she wanted to volunteer in

*“a third world country because I wanted to make the most difference with my time and money. I picked Mexico in particular because of the problems they have with orphaned children.” (2011)*

The majority of volunteers felt this way, explaining that they wanted to go where they can “*really make a difference*”, and believed Mexico was the place to do this. This particular statement also highlights the lack of understanding surrounding the term ‘third world’, in which the economic problems of the ‘third world’ continue to be

understood primarily as technical or policy problems, which can be overcome by the right mix of advice, investment, aid and liberal reforms, rather than historic-political ones (Berger, 1994). Furthermore, the term also suggests a hierarchy not neatly restricted to the ranking of developmental progress, but to an imperialistic inferiorisation of ethnicities (Tomlinson, 2003).

This level of understanding was further highlighted during a mental mapping exercise undertaken by the volunteers. Mexico was identified as an ideal place to volunteer as it posed *“just the right amount of risk”*, with the added comfort of it being a *“popular tourist destination”*, as well as it being a *“country in need”*:

*“Mexico seemed like the perfect choice; a good element of danger (what with all the drug problems and killings and stuff), linked with the safety of some popular tourist spots, like where the American kids go for their spring break.”*  
(Bv2, 2011)

This statement again illustrates the dangers of preconceived homogenous stereotypes which are linked to the public imaginaries of Mexico created and promoted by the organisations. These imaginaries seem to reiterate stereotypes to the voluntourists who internalise this knowledge as truth, with limited critical engagement. Furthermore, this statement also suggests that a paradoxical tension exists between risk and excitement, as without risk there can be no adventure, but yet excessive risk may cause the excitement of the experience to give way to anxiety. Therefore the perfect adventure offers the volunteers a world in which they can encounter the maximum amount of risk, without being confronted with an overpowering sense of insecurity and danger, thus impeding their heroic narrative.

Mexico was often described as *“wild and crazy”*, both in terms of its physical geography, and its people and culture. The popular saying among volunteers

(especially those at Project A) *“hey- it’s Mexico”* seemed to allow the volunteers to behave in any way they wanted to, because they genuinely thought that

*“...it’s Mexico- anything goes! You can do whatever you like here and no-one gives a shit!”* (Av4, 2011).

This seemed to add to the risk-factor, with the volunteers admitting to doing things they would never do at home, again lending support to the notion that female volunteers are engaging in risk-taking behaviour and are consequently adopting the inherent masculine qualities. However, this perception of *“no-one gives a shit”* led to the volunteers thinking that the Mexicans are a homogenous group, all with the same characteristics;

*“I don’t know what to make of them... the men are horrible, sleazing all over the place-it’s gross, thinking they can do or say whatever they like to us just because we’re tourists! I certainly don’t like being on my own around them... And the women aren’t very friendly...”* (Av15, 2011)

*“...they just don’t seem to give a crap about anything- they just do whatever they want! It makes me feel slightly nervous... you never know what they’re going to do.”* (Cv7, 2011)

*“I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could throw them!”* (Cv8, 2011)

This homogenised perspective presents Mexico as a land of sleazy and unfriendly deviants, with voluntourists viewing the locals as a homogenised group. This emphasises how important difference is to the hero narrative: through establishing this stereotyped image of the colonial other, the volunteer is building their hero narrative. Moreover, these comments not only contain a somewhat distasteful myth surrounding the locals, but also do not contain any hints of actual risk, instead creating a perception of it through the suggestion of the possible savagery of the locals, as if they were dangerous by simply existing.

As neoliberal subjects, voluntourists have to negotiate various social pressures which influence how they define themselves and others, and how they negotiate their own identities and roles in accordance with their personal development as neoliberal global

citizens. However, the simplistic and depoliticised imaginaries presented to the voluntourists do not encourage critical reflection on the realities of Mexican life, and this has distorted their perceptions and understandings, creating an inflated sense of self-worth in relation to their position as volunteers. Furthermore, utilising the highly gendered hero narrative as a means of identity negotiation has led to colonial and imperialistic perspectives of the local other, and the creation of homogenised and racialised stereotypes, further exacerbated through the importance of difference associated with the notions of risk and adventure. Not only does this undermine the cross-cultural learning and understanding voluntourism ostensibly promotes, but also highlights that first-hand experience does not necessarily mean learning and appreciation (Griffin, 2004; Richards, 2004).

### **Relationships and the Right to Power: The hero's challenge**

According to the hero's journey, having accepted the call of adventure and responsibility, the hero is transported into the world of the unknown (Campbell, 1968: 23; Tomazos and Butler, 2010). The majority of volunteers had no prior knowledge of Mexico, its people, culture or language, or even previous childcare experience. For many of the volunteers, this unfamiliarity heightens the sense of adventure, and makes them feel even more heroic:

*"...I knew nothing about Mexico before I came..." (Av2, 2011)*

*"...I don't speak Spanish.... hardly any of the girls do..." (Av5, 2011)*

*"...apparently it's the Mexican way" (Bv1, 2011)*

*"...but no, it's what makes it more exciting, the not knowing part. If I knew all about it, why would I come?" (Bv2, 2011)*

*"...I love the unknown! It makes it more empowering, knowing that you have coped with all of this and learnt it all..." (Bv6, 2011)*

*"...the best thing to do is just throw yourself in at the deep end- you learn so much more that way, and then, like, you get more out of it..." (Cv5, 2011)*

The experience of the unknown relates to the testing of the hero's strength of character and commitment to their quest, with the more trials faced, the more heroic they become (Campbell, 1968). However, although this love of the unknown may enhance the experience for the volunteers, one must question the benefits it brings to the recipient projects. The colonial practice of sending young, naive and inexperienced Westerners out to do work that could be undertaken by local residents, makes issues of division and difference become all the more relevant. Despite the hero's journey speaking of the integration with the strange and exotic natives, the volunteers openly admit that this is rarely the case. Locals may be observed from afar, but the volunteers tended to keep to safe enclaves, thus sustaining the division between volunteer and host. Indeed, the unfamiliar tasks the volunteers are asked to perform, and working in a strange environment adds to the heroism of their quest. They "*struggle on, coping with whatever the staff can throw at them*" and "*rely on each other for support*" (Bv9, 2011), treating the unknown and the staff as though they are trials to be overcome.

This perspective tends to place the staff as a villainous character, a force of darkness to be battle and defeated, which is a key part of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1968; 1997; Tomazos and Butler, 2010). This helps to prove the hero's worth and aids personal development: without someone (or thing) to defeat, the hero cannot progress to the next stage of their journey. Throughout the interview process, volunteers repeatedly spoke of project staff as iniquitous, and referred to a warring between them:

*"Oh god the nannies were horrible! They showed those poor babies no love..."*  
(Av6, 2011)

*"...the nannies had no clue what they were doing, we [volunteers] argued with them constantly over the best way to do this and that..."* (Av10, 2011)

*"...[the staff] weren't very nice at all... I saw them get really frustrated with one child and they were really rough with him... I just had to go over and say something..."* (Bv3, 2011)

*"...they just don't seem to have any compassion for the kids... I tell you it is a good job we're [the volunteers] here, otherwise [the children] would get no affection at all..." (Bv7, 2011)*

*"... they wanted to keep the babies awake all day, which isn't right, so I argued with them about that.... and then they were putting the wrong nappies on the wrong children so we had an argument about that... and then there was the argument about the lack of water, the list is endless!" (Cv4, 2011)*

This distrust of the nannies' abilities and knowledge caused a lot of disharmony in the work place, instigating conflict between the volunteers and the staff; an atmosphere which was not particularly conducive to achieving the harmonious cross-cultural exchange so eagerly advocated by voluntourism (Wearing et al, 2005). Essentially, the conflict equates to a struggle of power between the "hero" and the "villain" as they were both simultaneously trying to exert their authority and knowledge, whilst rebelling against each other. The managers of the projects (who were often absent from the homes as their work took them elsewhere) frequently left the volunteers in charge, due to their preconceptions that people from the UK (even those who were young, had no previous experience and spoke little or no Spanish) had a more superior knowledge base, than those who had been doing the job for years;

*"I know they are good schools in England... they could teach us... We could really benefit from them and knowing what they know" (Apm, 2011)*

*"It is important for staff to learn new things and volunteers can teach them that..." (Bpm, 2011)*

*"...they can help make us better..." (Cpm, 2011)*

The lack of support from their employers left the staff feeling

*"...useless..." (As2, 2011)*

*"...not good enough- like I can't do my job" (As4, 2011)*

*"...not wanted, and slightly inferior" (Bs3, 2011)*

*"...like [the volunteers] are better than me, like I am stupid, but I am not!" (Cs1, 2011)*

This disregard of staffs' knowledge and skills left them feeling unappreciated which only exacerbated the conflict between the staff and the volunteers. The placing of volunteers as the expert is not a new concept to voluntourism, but it is one that has been largely neglected (see Cheong and Miller, 2000; Kothari, 2005). This demonstrates how deeply colonial nuances are entrenched within the role of the hero; the role of expert/hero credits the volunteer with knowledge and power. It is argued that sending someone from another country (with or without training) to assume the role of a development expert is imperialistic and nonsensical as they may not have the knowledge to know what will work and be appropriate in that foreign context (Kothari, 2005; Easterly, 2006). Therefore it must be questioned as to whether it can be considered heroic if the outcomes make the recipients feel inferior and inadequate.

Nonetheless, the projects are insistent that they need the support of volunteers to sustain them. This dependency upon the voluntourist puts them in a position of power, where they feel they are an essential and indispensable part of the mission (Sin, 2010). The position of power and sense of dependency seems to intensify the volunteers' view of their heroic behaviour;

*"...I really feel like I'm helping as I have been placed in charge of overseeing the morning showers..." (Av2, 2011)*

*"... [the manager] told me yesterday that they want me taking over [staff member's] class as she wants me to show her how to teach the older girls..." (Av7, 2011)*

*"...well I've never taught anything before, but I've been put in charge of teaching English! ...what an amazing opportunity, I really feel like I'm doing something worthwhile and helping these children..." (Bv7, 2011)*

The volunteers never seemed aware of the irony or the imperialistic tendencies of these situations, which again highlights the dangers of voluntourism being unreflexive and uncritical of the engagement between volunteers and their hosts. If it was encouraged for volunteers to reflect back on their experiences, perhaps their tendency



to stereotype would be reduced and the discourse surrounding the value of the volunteers may be re-assessed.

The project staff believe that to posit the voluntourists as heroes is an exaggeration of their value. They argue that positive opinions of voluntourists only occur because the project managers do not observe the volunteers in the workplace, only seeing the final end result, with no idea how it was achieved;

*"...they do not see what happens here every day, and what we [staff] have to deal with... their [volunteers] demands and tempers and think they know everything, they are right, we are wrong... you try to explain, but they don't listen... we have to clean up the mess..." (As1, 2011)*

*"...they [volunteers] don't know what to do... they can't even speak to children... hear them repeating the same word over and over to child as it the only word they know in Spanish. How is it helping?" (As6, 2011)*

*"...we do all the work; there is more to us than they think. They complain we sit and talk all day...but they do not know. They just stand around not knowing what to do, or just play... this is not hard work, but still they want our thanks and praise... they do not know hard work..." (Bs4, 2011)*

This demonstrates that staff are rejecting the label of hero for the volunteers, which shows that they are not simply passive recipients and they are resisting to situations they are not happy with.

Nonetheless, the frustration that project staff feel is only exacerbated by the project management who seem to value the voluntourists over the staff. Managers feel it is important to show their gratitude and appreciation to the voluntourists in order to keep them happy and content. They feel the volunteers are *"crucial to the success of the project"* as they bring in much *"needed financial support"*, inject *"fresh ideas"*, keeping the atmosphere *"fun and light-hearted"* (Bpm, 2011).

*"...I am so grateful to these wonderful volunteers who spend lots of money to come here and help at my project. They keep us going and make my children smile. I am so grateful to them." (Apm, 2011)*

*"...I don't know why they want to spend their time and money helping us, but I'm so glad they do. We couldn't be here if it wasn't for them." (Bpm, 2011)*

It was observed that appreciation of the voluntourists was sometimes conducted at the expense of the fulltime staff. Whereas fulltime staff work long hours for six days a week for a very low (or non-existent) wage, volunteers are free to come and go as they please, spending as little or as much time at the projects as they like. As the volunteers are there of their own free will, managers are reluctant to place restrictions or expectations upon the voluntourists in apprehension of *"ruining their experience"* (Cpm, 2011) in fear of them not donating or returning. They were aware that voluntourists have come out to Mexico for a holiday (*"why else would they spend money to come to this place when they can volunteer at home?"* Bpm, 2011), and thus liked to offer days off to volunteers if they expressed an interest in a local excursion, encouraging them to have fun, even if this meant missing a few shifts at the project. It was then left to the staff to cover the shortage. This makes things very difficult for staff who are forced to cope with daily challenges to the staffing schedule. Not only does this make it difficult for them to take time off, but also impacts on the care the children receive:

*"...had to cancel the children's walk today as only three volunteers were here....supposed to be eleven..." (As3, 2011)*

*"...they all decided to show up today... just too many... fighting over children to play with... the children were lost and confused and didn't know what was going on... some are very shy and it scared them..." (As6, 2011)*

This highlights how susceptible the project was to the impulses of the volunteers and how much they have come to rely upon them. This dependency upon the volunteers places the orphanage in a vulnerable position, allowing themselves to be at the mercy of whether volunteers were going to turn up for their shifts, and illustrates the difficulties and challenges in labelling the volunteer as a hero.

Despite this, the managers continued to praise the volunteers for all their hard work, and treated them like heroes. Although the staff recognised why managers behave this way, they also felt that it does nothing to encourage the effectiveness of volunteers, and instead perpetuates the deserving mind-set of the hardworking hero;

*"...it makes them worse, not better or happy..."* (Bs1, 2011)

*"...makes them feel even more important..."* (Bs4, 2011)

*"...only working for four days a week for small hours, they do not need more time off, but they feel they do... [manager] makes it worse... not making them better workers... makes their ego worse..."* (Cs4, 2011)

During conversations with the voluntourists, as well as observations, it was apparent that they adopted a deserving attitude, frequently expressing that they have *"earned this night out"* or *"day at the beach is justifiably in order"* and even *"I'm not giving up my weekend for anything- I've worked too bloody hard this week!"*. This encouraged the voluntourists to treat the experience as a holiday (which to some it was) rather than a working volunteering experience. Additionally, the volunteers also attempted to alter the host environment to make it more comfortable (e.g. insisting much needed money be spent on new pillows and sheets for them) which led to further tensions between the staff.

Admittedly it is a difficult situation as although the voluntourists are essentially volunteers, they are actually *paying* to be there, and are thus *paying to work*, rather than *working for pay*. This places them, and their hosts, in a unique situation whereby the management feel volunteers should be treated differently and given some flexibility to compensate for their time and financial donations. In addition, the dependency and colonial tendencies apparent within this treatment, added with the label of hero, highlights the complexities in such situations. Furthermore, it was noted that the voluntourists felt the need for constant recognition for their work, needing praise, thanks and gratitude for every task they perform. The volunteers seemed to feel unappreciated quickly, which then led to resentment of the staff, further

exacerbating the conflict. In an attempt to counteract this, Project A held a “Volunteer Appreciation Day” once every couple of weeks in order to demonstrate to the volunteers that they are highly valued.<sup>9</sup>

This seems to contrast with the assertion that a true hero needs only internal validation, and requires no outward recognition and gratitude for their actions (Campbell, 1978), whilst also in contrast to their prevalent belief that they are making a difference. Despite these contradictions, volunteers felt they needed recognised credit due to insecurities surrounding their competency in performing their roles, as the majority of volunteers realised how unprepared they were once they were in situ. Interestingly, the male volunteers did not seem feel this need for recognition and approval as strongly as the females, explaining that

*“...I’m sure someone would tell me if I’m doing things wrong... so long as I’m happy with my efforts.” (Av1, 2011)*

Conversely the young women felt that they needed more validation than this;

*“...I just want to know I’m doing a good job. I’m used to getting feedback to show how good I’m doing, you know, like grades and stuff, and I like that, it lets me know that I can do what I’m doing... but here... well you never know.” (Av7, 2011)*

Perhaps this is due to the female volunteers feeling they needed an extra source of validation to show they are able to perform well in the masculine role of the hero, whilst in addition, are capable of fulfilling the traditional female role of a carer. This is believed to be an innate instinct of women (Noble, 1994), but is a position many of the volunteers have no experience in. Murdock (1990) supports this, claiming that women are frequently undervalued and underestimated, which heightens their need for validation and recognition.

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<sup>9</sup> This included a ‘tea-party’ at the orphanage, organised by management, in which lunch was prepared for the volunteers and children, with everyone sitting down together. The children made posters and thank you cards to present to the volunteers. The volunteers did not seem to notice how contrived and staged the day felt, despite the open hostility some of the staff displayed in response to having to participate in such an event.

The identification with the hero again highlights how the concept is linked to notions of power and colonialism; the labelling of the voluntourists as experts recreates colonial relationships imbued with inequality and exploitation, particularly in relation to the local staff. Although the voluntourists do not intentionally recreate such relationships, the imaginaries they are presented with, and their uncritical acceptance of them circuitously reiterates such interactions. The projects themselves must also take some responsibility, as such nepotism exacerbates the problems relating to classifying the voluntourists as experts, which not only inflates their perceived value, but also provides the voluntourists with further justification of their designation as heroes. Therefore it can be seen how the preferential treatment of the voluntourists influences the negotiation of their identities as volunteers and model global citizens, and highlights how historical and contemporary predispositions of colonialism are influencing the context in which the voluntourists are working.

### **The Hero's Reward**

Once the hero has overcome their challenges, their quest is complete, and they are rewarded for their accomplishments (Campbell, 1968; Tomazos and Butler, 2010). All volunteers interviewed agreed with the concept of receiving rewards for their service, and for many, that which was most rewarding was sense that they had done something worthwhile and had improved the lives of those in need. They explained that making a difference and seeing how grateful the recipients were was the most valuable part of their trip;

*"...oh definitely, it's so rewarding knowing that you've made a difference with your time, and to see the good you have done is the best bit!" (Av4, 2011)*

*"...the feeling that you got when the children smiled or hugged you was just so rewarding, just the best feeling ever!" (Bv3, 2011)*

*"...I just feel good knowing I've made a difference in these lives, that's such a big deal... it's the biggest gift they could have given me." (Cv6, 2011)*

For the voluntourists, these rewards are transcendent and long-lasting, believing the whole experience has positively influenced their personal development. This is stage reflects that of apotheosis, whereby the hero achieves the saviour status, and must return home (Campbell, 1968). Once back home, the hero feels victorious in their quest, content within themselves and in their experience. Voluntourists will proudly share their experience with family, friends and colleagues, who will affirm their status as the awe-inspiring, conquering hero, thus demonstrating there are more instrumental rewards regarding the social and cultural capital, than those that can just be placed on a CV or UCAS form;

*"...I can't wait to get home and tell my family about all of this, and all that I've done- they're going to be so proud of me!" (Av12, 2011)*

*"...my friends are going to be so jealous of what I've done here; I'm well excited about getting home to tell them!" (Bv7, 2011)*

*"...they [volunteer's family] will never believe that I've managed to do this, I can't wait to tell them all about it!" (Cv3, 2011)*

Heroic acts as defined by Western standards can be celebrated long after homecoming, through the retelling of the heroic tale to family and friends (Elsrud, 2001). This is an important part of gaining recognition and validation of their actions, and due to the popular public perception of voluntourism, this will enhance the hero-identity and increase the volunteers' social and cultural capital.

In order to complete their journey, the voluntourist must integrate their new wisdom with everyday life. This allows them to draw on the poverty and hardship experienced by others, and encourages them to appreciate their own situation (Tomazos and Butler, 2010). This may well seem harmless and innocuous enough (Sin, 2010), but this appears to be more of a rationalisation of poverty, than a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The limited critical engagement volunteers admit they have with local community members means that voluntourists are therefore more likely to confirm, rather than challenge, what they already know about poverty and the social injustices

behind it. As argued in the previous chapter, this suggests that voluntourism does not always generate a genuine awareness of the issues facing host communities (Raymond and Hall, 2008). If the volunteers use this new found knowledge to internalise their judgements of the host communities, they could be reinforcing stereotypes and preconceived perceptions, rather than a critical reflection of the realities.

Staff were aware that the voluntourists were the ones most likely to benefit from the volunteering experience, and thought it to be unfair not only to the children, whose care tended to be affected by the volunteers' presence, but also to themselves, as they believed the volunteers were supposed to provide aid and relief;

*"...they are supposed to be helping us, not the other way around..." (As3, 2011)*

*"...it is not fair they say they are here to help, but they are the ones to get the help..." (Bs3, 2011)*

*"...we help them get their experience and have a nice time, but what do we get in return apart from a lot more work... and a headache? I thought they were coming here to help us...?" (Cs2, 2011)*

This demonstrates that despite the emphasis on need and the subsequent imaginaries created through the marketing of the projects, according to their hosts, the presence of the volunteers seem to have very little positive effect. If this is the case, it raises questions surrounding what true benefits a volunteer can really bestow upon a host community, and whether the rewards the volunteers feel at the end of their quest are superficial and empty.

After completing their placement, some of the volunteers did accept that they had not 'saved the world' as they had hoped and had received more benefits than they had administered. Nonetheless, volunteers were reluctant to say that they were of no help at all, arguing that although they may not have made a long term difference, they had made many small short-term ones, and as one volunteer explained *"it is the collective efforts of volunteers who make the long-term changes and differences, not the*

*individual*” (Bv5, 2011). In addition, it is argued that heroes such as Perseus, only saved one person rather than the world, thus supplying validation to the heroic microcosm of the volunteers’ adventures;

*“...the volunteers should be considered heroic, in while they did not save the world, they certainly improved the lot, and added colour to the lives of a group of children in a small refuge.”* (Tomazos and Butler, 2010: 377)

This is arguably a point that can be made about most social movements, as it is rare for an individual to make a significant difference. Nonetheless, it places a high valuation upon the volunteers and is reflective of the colonial tendencies of the discourse of Western superiority. Still, when questioned whether volunteers thought their small short-term differences made up for the problems the staff had listed, most admitted they had not thought of these potential downfalls, and simply believed they were helping;

*“... god, I had no idea about any of this...”* (Av11, 2011)

*“...Really? God, I guess... I mean I never really thought about it like that before...?”* (Bv6, 2011)

*“...I guess I see where they’re coming from, but you know, this never even occurred to me before...”* (Cv5, 2011)

This demonstrates that voluntourists want to come away to ‘do development’ but frequently have no true understanding of what it means, how to go about doing it, and the consequences of their actions. Complex and critical thought surrounding the issues of development and country-specific socio-political and economic structures are rarely encouraged through the neoliberalised practices of voluntourism. The neoliberal approach imbued within voluntourism rarely provides the opportunity for the voluntourists to engage in reflexive thinking, simply providing the information it is thought that volunteers want to hear. This is problematic as it can lead to the creation and perpetuation of imperialistic and colonial imaginaries, as even unintentionally, volunteers can exacerbate existing inequalities. Even if the volunteer comes away thinking they have broadened their mind through the experience, they may not be truly aware of what is happening, and instead, they may just be rationalising and



romanticising poverty (Simpson, 2004). Thus it can be seen how the heroic narrative can be used to analyse how voluntourists negotiate their identities and make sense of their experiences and encounters. The social pressures placed upon the voluntourists encourages them to seek recognition for and the enhancement of their individuality and personal development of their neoliberal global citizen status. However, the colonial discourses present within the trope of the hero can reiterate imperialistic and racialised assumptions of the 'other', and can exacerbate issues of power. Nonetheless, encounters with Mexico and the negotiation of the highly gendered associations with care does allow the voluntourists, particularly the women, to challenge preconceived ideas relating to the masculine connotations imbued within the concept of heroism.

### **Conclusion: The voluntourist subject as a hero?**

This chapter has examined how voluntourists are negotiating their identities and positions as care-givers in the context of neoliberalised voluntourism. It has looked specifically at how apparent colonial tendencies are shaping the context in which such negotiations are played out, and how this is influencing the framing of encounters with the local. Neoliberal subjectivities have been analysed through the trope of the hero. According to the evidence presented above, voluntourism lends itself to an analysis framed by the application of the western-construct of heroism. This has been illustrated through the way the volunteers understand their role to be imbued with heroic symbolism, imagery and the way they describe their experiences. The voluntourists have appeared to (inadvertently) utilise the trope of the hero as a way to negotiate their identity and their role as carer, and thus it provides a useful frame in which to analyse how the voluntourists negotiate their subjectivities.

However, the idea of the voluntourist-hero has also highlighted the colonial nuances that underpin this neoliberalised, shallow sector of the industry. The evidence demonstrated above emphasises the heavily gendered construction of the label of hero, highlighted through the masculine colonial nuances used to distinguish heroic

behaviour, a title that has generally been bestowed upon men (Featherstone, 1992; Maclean, 2012). Women are no longer satisfied with being the “handmaidens of dominant male culture” (Murdock, 1990: 2) and are wanting to construct their own identities, challenging the traditional perceptions that claim a woman’s place is at home, not out having adventures (Elsrud, 2001). The embracing of masculine values to become a hero, coupled with the adoption of the traditional female role as a carer have allowed volunteers to challenge the constructions of the concept, and are changing the perception of who and what constitutes a hero.

However, despite this changing perception, the colonial and imperialistic nuances associated with heroic behaviour and voluntourism have not been altered. Voluntourism has been posited as a normative good, based on an unproblematic assumption of need, as promoted by the sending organisations, which invokes an asymmetrical orientation toward the colonial other. The belief that voluntourists demonstrate heroic behaviour appears to perpetuate the high valuation placed upon their work, which reflects the discourse of Western superiority and the need for volunteer interventions. This undermines the resourcefulness of the local people and their ability to help themselves, in turn, exacerbating the hero complex of the volunteers and justifying their worth. This is because the hero is a colonial figure whose actions tend to render them superior to the other characters engaged in their heroic narrative (Dawson, 1994). In turn, this highlights the dangers associated with sourcing external help for development, and the responsibility for social change being adopted by the volunteers, whereas instead a dialogic engagement with the process of change, may enhance the fundamental elements of mutuality and affinity (Bhabba, 1995; Young, 2003). However, perhaps with the increasing inclusion of feminine characteristics, such as empathy and sociability into the hero concept and subsequent heroic behaviour, this mutual and dialogic process may become more of a reality.

# Chapter 7- The Right Kind of Poor

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## **Introduction**

The neoliberalisation of voluntourism, and in particular shallow voluntourism, has had a significant effect on the way the voluntourism organisations operate and market the projects they offer, creating simplified and depoliticised imaginaries of need, poverty and development. Ideals of making a difference are paramount in appealing to the compassionate volunteer, and attracting them to part with their money in order to help those most in need. This in turn affects how local projects are portrayed, as their appearance, image and level of need are vital elements in attracting voluntourists and encouraging them to donate their time and money. Due to their inclusion into the neoliberal marketplace, local projects are now finding themselves having to compete with one another in order to retain the volunteers they have become so dependent upon. In order to do this, projects must strike a delicate balance between appearing so poor that they seem unsafe and unappealing, or too rich that they seem unworthy of volunteers' time and money. This representation of 'the right kind of poor' image within the sector has now become a necessity the projects must conform to if they wish to remain on the organisations' portfolio.

This chapter investigates how voluntourism organisations and host projects are being shaped by contemporary neoliberal and colonial practices. It explores the specificities of the Mexican case study and how this influences the context in which the voluntourists are working, and how voluntourists are negotiating the public imaginaries created within the marketised landscape of voluntourism and care. This chapter aims to explain why this right kind of poor image has evolved, and what impacts maintaining this image have on the projects themselves, their employees and the children within their care.

The chapter begins by investigating how and why the expectations of the volunteers are a key priority for the organisations and what affect this is having on their associated projects. This is discussed within the context of the commercial pressures on organisations and projects, in the context of the voluntourist experience, which itself is driven by priorities and proclivities which have their roots in colonialism and simplistic ideas of development. The argument here is that commercial pressure to maximise the number of volunteers and to appeal to their aims and tastes, is in fundamental contradiction with voluntourism's development aims. The need to attract volunteers has led to projects attenuating their own development in order to appear 'poor enough' to need volunteers, the exclusion of other projects on dubious development grounds, and the dismissal of local workers.

In order to establish this, this chapter examines the situation of some overlooked projects in terms of their unsuitability for inclusion, with particular reference to theories of sustainable development and capacity building. The following section analyses the problems of inclusion within a portfolio and why projects are so keen for volunteers' help when it has been suggested that their labour has little worth in relation to the depoliticised notions of development it induces. The two penultimate sections analyse the issues surrounding the withdrawal of organisational support from the projects and how the projects are trying to prevent this in relation to sustainable development and capacity building. In addition, the consequences for local women working in the orphanage are considered.

### **Prioritising Volunteer Expectations**

The marketing campaigns of the three organisations raises questions surrounding how they can provide worthwhile development work despite their transformation into *businesses* that must fight to gain and retain their share of the market and compete for profit. From the evidence provided in the previous chapters, it can be seen that the organisations have a challenging task in trying to align the needs of their volunteers with the requirements of the local communities and their projects. Interestingly, the

sending organisations do not see this union of altruism and business acumen as inimical; rather they see it as an innovative example of how to survive within a competitive neoliberal market;

*“it is the most appropriate means by which business and industry can seek profit through the empowerment of people and the enrichment of their lives”* (OrgC, 2011).

Chapter Five demonstrated how the neoliberalisation of voluntourism has affected the dynamic of the industry, changing the way the sending organisations market, manage and operate the business. Through these neoliberal practices, the level of influence the volunteers exert has increased, with the organisations now shaping their product to volunteer expectations. This is not an unusual business practice, as

*“Organisations are not self-sufficient and prosper through the interaction with others. The more needs of others are taken into consideration, the larger the overlap between prosperity and virtue.”* (Young, 2003: 5)

However, what appears to be problematic within voluntourism is that the needs of the *paying* customer (the volunteers) seem to dominate the non-paying customer (the projects). Arguably the pursuit of profits leads to a more responsible business because their concern is to satisfy the needs of others (Young, 2003). However, there is a clear imbalance in the consumer power wielded by voluntourists and host country organisations respectively. Neoliberal markets with their ideals to promote competition and the equitable deliverance and distribution of wealth and power through self-regulation and common interest (Preston, 1996; Coghlan and Noakes, 2012), may therefore be accommodating the tastes of their customers to the direct detriment of voluntourism’s development goals (Hutnyk, 1996; Weiss, 2001; Magazine, 2003; Dolhinow, 2005).

For example, in Puerto Vallarta, where Project A is located, there are at least another half a dozen care projects operating in the area. However, none of those are considered creditable enough to become part of OrgA’s portfolio. When questioned as

to why this was, a staff member of OrgA explained that the projects were found to be “*too basic*” for them to send volunteers to, as there would be “*nothing the volunteers could gain*” and the experience might not be “*enjoyable enough*”. They further justified that the organisation had a responsibility to their volunteers to provide them with “*safe, clean and decent working environments*”, where they “*will be of value to the staff and children*”, and they simply found these other projects did not match up to this criteria. In fact, OrgA was not even aware of many of these other projects, which again illuminates the lack of research conducted on the area. This also highlights a colonial perspective upon how much value is placed upon Western ideals in terms of what is to be expected of a project, rather than a focus on the local situation, suggesting that voluntourism prioritises the needs and expectations of the voluntourists over those of the host projects (Roberts, 2004).

This seems contradictory to the promoted values of the organisation in wanting to help meet the needs of the local community. It is implied that they are only willing to provide assistance if benefits can be received in return, by themselves and the volunteers. This could be justified through its accordance with the practices of neoliberal market and values of sustainability (Preston, 1996; Weiss, 2001; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck et al, 2009; Palmer, 2011). Nonetheless, voluntourism is promoted as a Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) strategy, with its aims to help develop poorer areas with limited alternative resources available (Torres and Momsen, 2004). However, evidence from OrgA suggests that the poorest areas may be systematically excluded (Chok et al, 2007).

### **The Unobserved Projects: Issues of capacity building**

One of the problems arising from this domination of volunteer needs and expectations is the level of influence it has over the type of project to be chosen. Combined with a lack of micro-level research exhibited by the organisations (see Chapter Five), certain organisations are being systematically excluded from voluntourist programmes as well

as State and local business support (Mansilla and Rubio 2010), not because they are too weak to be able to absorb the assistance, but rather because they do not cater to the tastes of the volunteers. Thus the children they care for were not receiving the same quality of care as those at projects who do receive voluntourism and local support: children are frequently not being sent to school, as the projects do not have the funds to send them, they sleep in a much poorer conditions, often having to share dirty mattresses on the floor with other children, and their food was also of a much lower standard in relation to nutrition, aesthetics and taste. Not only were these conditions observed through site visits to such projects during the course of the fieldwork, but are also widely recognised by those who argue that informal care often lacks the resources to fully support the resident children, and as they are unregistered, are not subject to national standards and inspections (RELAF, 2006; Richter and Norman, 2008; Roby, 2011).

These informal care homes are predominantly established by members of the local community, usually associated with the Parish church. It was attested by many local residents that they themselves do not often involve themselves with charity work, as they neither have the time or the money to spare, having many of their own familial burdens. They explained that it is often those who are particularly religious (or those perhaps with extra disposable income and time) that will participate in such endeavours as they feel an extra societal responsibility.

*“it is not that we do not care, but just we have enough to worry about with our own families...” (AI6, 2011a)*

*“there are not enough hours in the day- my own family keeps me busy enough!” (AI7, 2011a)*

*“that is the place of the church and God- he speaks to those he wishes to be helpers- those who have the time and the desire to do his work” (CI2, 2011a)*

This coincides of course with the Church’s charitable missions (UNICEF, 2010b) and seems to be especially pertinent in Mexico where several reports dictate that the State does not have to structural resources to care for the growing number of orphaned or

abandoned children (ISS and UNICEF, 2004; UNDP, 2006b; Mahon, 2010; UNICEF, 2010b). It also highlights the role of faith and religion within acts of charity; a moral obligation to help the poor, and how it can be seen as an important foundational element of development (see Baillie Smith et al, 2013 for a detailed discussion on religion, faith and development).

Early childhood is one of the most neglected areas of public policy within Mexico, especially as DIF does not have the outreach capability to extend its care networks, particularly when the affected population is so large and continuing to grow and the State has made neoliberal cutbacks to welfare provisions in order to reduce the national deficit (Mahon, 2010; Roby, 2011). Thus, it is common to find many informal orphanages or care homes in local Mexican parishes, the vast majority of which are informal and unregulated. The establishment of these care homes seemed to be of little consequence to the local residents, providing the children were kept out of sight and trouble.

*"...I keep forgetting that it is there- it's only when I see the voluntourists I am reminded... but it is good that it keeps the trouble off the streets" (A11, 2011a)*

*"...it has no matter to me, it is just another part of the neighbourhood, plus it keeps the trouble at bay- not so many children around the streets" (B13, 2011a)*

These attitudes towards street children reflects not only the embarrassment at the social failure to provide for these vulnerable members of society (Jones, 2004b), but also legitimises and supports their removal from sight, and the community's indifference as to where and how this is done. However, many highlight the dangers involved in any type of informal care that is unregulated, even those organised by religious organisations or networks (Roby, 2011; UNICEF, 2004; 2010b; Cantwell, 2007; RELAF, 2010).

This exclusion of the poorest projects from organisational endorsement can be justified through a legitimate practice within development, based around the concept



of capacity building and institutional strengthening. In accordance with capacity building, projects will need to have certain resources in place before they are considered to be of suitable strength to withstand development (Kaplan, 2000). If the project does not have the initial prerequisite conditions, it would not be beneficial to provide aid as the project may be unequipped to manage it, and may therefore never reach its full potential (Boice, 2005). This perhaps could partly explain why OrgA felt the poorer projects mentioned above were inappropriate for inclusion within their portfolio. However, regarding their comments in relation to volunteer enjoyment and value, OrgA may also be considering commercial priorities relating to the adherence to the assumed tastes and expectations of volunteers, which leads to belief that commerce, rather than development is driving their decision making process. Colonial nuances are also present in the way the Western values are given a priority over the host recipients, thus perpetuating the value of Western ideals, knowledge and expectations (Simmons, 2004).

OrgA's refusal to include poorer projects within their portfolio supports the idea that commercial voluntourism's business and development aims are in tension (Toner, 2003), diminishing their ability to actually strengthen and build capacity (Yachkaschi, 2010). The epithet 'shallow' in relation to these commercial organisations is hence justified (Callanan and Thomas, 2005). In addition, prioritising the privileged over the needs of the local projects suggests a colonialist approach to the development the organisations promote, and encourages the perception that engaging with the world's problems and inequalities can be an extemporized activity (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011).

This tension between commercial and development aims also raises questions surrounding the perspective organisations impose when assessing a project's potential for endorsement. It is not clear how organisations assess their potential partner projects, and it has been suggested that there is a danger with more shallow and commercial organisations that assessments will be made on a generalised model designed by the organisation, with all projects being compared to one another, rather

than accurate individual assessments based on observations in the field (Kaplan, 2000). This could mean that the assessments made by the organisations are designed for mass delivery, as these would be easier to manage, quantify and control, thus making the projects themselves easier to promote and sell (Yachkaschi, 2010). It has further been alleged that projects who have been overlooked for endorsement, might have been accepted given a more thorough and individualised assessment.

It is established that capacity building measures such as development workers and volunteers, have most benefit for the 'entrepreneurial poor'; those with access to the resources and structures necessary to build capacity and increase strength, whilst also having the drive to foster growth and social cohesion (Blackburn and Ram, 2006). Arguably, those in charge of the endorsed projects of A, B and C could fall into this category, as these projects have access to the resources and management structures identified as necessary for capacity building and project strengthening (Kaplan, 2000). Through strengthening the projects with the necessary requirements already in place, the benefits will permeate society, through the creation of jobs and improvements to facilities and infrastructure with the help of the neoliberal market (Watson, 2010). This, however, is an ideological stance that has more faith in market mechanisms than is borne out by the evidence. The local complexities, and crucially here the dynamics, structures and processes of the voluntourist encounter, are key in shaping the outcomes of capacity building interventions, with the evidencing suggesting that most marginalised in society frequently remain unaffected by entrepreneurial structures.

Observing the projects deemed insufficiently developed to take part in the voluntourism programme serves to highlight the very real needs of street children and the insufficiencies in dealing with them. For example a man and his wife run a home for street children from their family home and work to ensure the children have somewhere safe to sleep and something to eat. They receive no help from the State as they do not have the facilities or the resources in place to either apply, or be accepted for funding, and members of the community have highlighted that they are reluctant

to get involved, although a few may occasionally make donations of food or clothing. He is aware of the work OrgA do at Project A, and wishes he could receive such regular help from the volunteers. However, he recognises this may never be the case because

*"... Volunteers do not like to come here. I get sent volunteers sometime from [Project A's manager] if she haves [sic] too many, but they never come back. We are not in the nice part of town, I know. And the many buses to take here make a difficult journey which is not nice in hot weather for volunteers. I cannot offer volunteer houses like [project A's manager] and I know they do not want to sleep here! The children are difficult too, but I would like their help very much. I cannot get support from many places, and I must go and beg for money to help feed the children. But if volunteers come here, they could help, and the children might be able to go to school and get better jobs." (Aapm, 2011)*

The manager from Project A has on occasion, sent willing volunteers down to provide assistance, but this is a rare occurrence, as volunteers are usually reluctant to go. It appears that volunteers share the views the organisation anticipates them to have; a consumerist and somewhat colonial desire for higher standards of facilities and conditions. But it is also clear that the assistance that can be provided by untrained volunteers is not sufficient to cope with needs in this kind of institution, despite the manager's view that they could be a help.

*"...I didn't like going there.... no-one spoke English so I didn't know what I was supposed to do... the area seemed really dangerous and the children were really horrible! I know it's because they don't know any better because no-one's taught them, but I just really dreaded going there... plus I didn't know what the hell to do, so I didn't feel like I was helping anyone. I mean, if I don't enjoy it and the kids don't enjoy it, what's the point in going there? I could do more good elsewhere, like back at [project A]... even though I might be less needed there, at least I know what I'm doing." (Av2, 2011)*

*"... oh my god it was like a nightmare come true! ... just turned up at this shack, and like I thought 'is this it?'... I just thought 'oh god help me' ... I mean it was really sad to see how they lived, although I guess anything's an improvement over a dumpster, but still, I just didn't know what to do there, and the children made your time there miserable... I felt so out of place and awkward and just... useless, so I never went back..." (Av3, 2011)*

These were the only two volunteers who visited the other project, and both only spent one shift there, instead preferring to return to the “safe” option of Project A, even though problems were highlighted relating to this project. They stated the area, children, and the conditions as justification for their reasons for not returning. The contrast between the living conditions of the two projects is quite stark, and the reasoning behind why this matters to the volunteers raises questions relating to the lack of training and experience and the critical engagement with development and poverty that should be required in order to participate in voluntourism.

The comment “*anything’s better than a dumpster*” also reveals a further issue surrounding the inexperience of volunteers; how unprepared they were for the poverty shock inherently demonstrates how little volunteers know about the area, or even Mexico itself prior to volunteering. This reflects upon how the imaginaries created by the sending organisations are perpetuating simplistic, unrealistic perceptions and expectations on the part of the voluntourists, rather than preparing them for the realities they will face. Allowing volunteers to travel to poor destinations with no prior knowledge, education or experience of poverty will only reinforce particular perceptions, rather than allowing the volunteer to change them (Simpson, 2004; Duffy, 2006). With the volunteers at Project A recoiling from the abject poverty they see, their prejudices are more likely to be reinforced, rather than confronted and challenged. As discussed in Chapter Six, the stereotypical images the volunteers have of Mexico and the people they encountered were imbued with the notions of difference and the colonial other, frequently positing the local people as a homogenised group. By not critically engaging with what they see and experience, the voluntourists allow poverty to become a definer of difference, whereby shock and voyeurism become the primary feelings that lead to judgements (Scheyvens, 2001).

Sadly, this scenario was not unique to OrgA. OrgB and OrgC both operate within Guadalajara and its surrounding areas, which made for an even more extensive

collection of projects in dire need of assistance. When questioned about these projects, OrgC stated that

*"...the areas they are in are rather unsavoury, and we have a duty to our volunteers to ensure their safety, we cannot in good faith just send them off to anywhere... there is no structure to these projects and we cannot guarantee how beneficial it would be to anyone to have volunteers working there..." (Co, 2011)*

With regards to OrgB, their project co-ordinator for Project B frequently felt the strain in wanting to help projects in need but not included within OrgB's portfolio, but simultaneously needing to adhere to the views of the company. He described the difficulty in balancing the communities' needs with those of the volunteers:

*"... they come out here for a good time, and I am responsible for making this happen you know... but then I hear them say they don't like certain projects because they don't like the areas because they are too poor, or they are scared about the extra travel. But it's like, I am wanting them to visit these projects because they are so poor. But they like going to the ones that have kind of nice buildings, in the nice areas they can feel safe in, and like, I do understand that, cool, but this kind of defeats why they come out in the first place, no? Too many times I have been told by [OrgB's director] that, 'no man, we can't send them here as they won't be happy', so I have to find other projects that are less poor...it makes no sense to me..." (Bpm, 2011)*

The frustration felt by the coordinator is also replicated by the managers of projects deemed too poor to receive help by OrgB, explaining that they desperately need help to improve living conditions of the children, as they receive limited financial aid from elsewhere. Volunteers gave similar responses to those with OrgA, as to why they did not want to volunteer at these other projects, claiming they *"felt uncomfortable there"*, *"didn't enjoy it"* and *"felt unsafe"* and as though *"they weren't really doing anything"* because no-one told them what to do.

Again, this non-inclusion can be justified by the argument that suggests unregistered care homes can provide substandard levels of care, and may even be prone to exploitative and abusive practice and thus should not be endorsed (Grayson, 2011),

however this rationalisation was not mentioned by the organisations for way of explanation. Nor did the organisations refer to reasons of capacity building as a way to validate non-inclusion. This suggests that commerce rather than development are their decisions, and that the organisations are only able to engage in simplistic levels of development due to their commercial obligations, and these poorer projects would need deeper levels of commitment that would not be commercially viable (Toner, 2003; Tuckman, 1998).

In addition, the organisations do have a responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of their volunteers, and so cannot promote an area if they feel it is unsafe. This raises questions surrounding how safety is perceived and assessed by the sending organisations. When questioned, an employee of OrgC explained that they use a Home-Base Model, as recommended by the Education Abroad Programme (EAP- see appendix 5) to assess safety measures. This specifies that projects should be located in safe middle-class neighbourhoods and all associated facilities should adhere to hotel/hostel fire safety. This would immediately rule out supporting the poorer projects as none of the ones researched meet either of these standards. Although neither OrgA nor OrgB use this model, they do admit that they judge their projects on the basis of the British Standards Institute (BSI, 2007) safety standards (see appendix 6). OrgB only allows their volunteers to visit a more impoverished area because they are accompanied by the co-ordinator.

This highlights the colonial and imperialistic issues involved in Western intervention in development, whereby only those deemed worthy by the opinion of an external and foreign authority shall receive aid. These external opinions then judge situations based upon limited local knowledge and Western standards (Kothari, 2005). This means the voluntourism projects assessed by non-expert practitioners (although this itself is a contested label) may be vulnerable to self-delusion and prejudice when it comes to what they are seeing, due to their non-politicised and non-specialised knowledge base (Hintjens, 1999). When their advice is then used to inform policy decisions, the

interventions they have devised are in danger of worsening the position for the most poor and vulnerable community members.

## **The Problems of Inclusion**

The managers of poorer projects seemed to believe that volunteers would be the answer to a lot of their problems, when evidence suggests it could in fact create another set of challenges. This seems to be what is happening in Tonalá: from speaking to some of the managers of these overlooked projects they fear that continued disregard may mean that they will have to close down, as they do not get the support from anywhere else. They explain that

*“It’s not that Mexican people do not care about children, but many cannot afford to care for their families, so cannot care for any more. I get what I can through begging, but that is not enough to do forever. Food is sometimes donated, which I am grateful, but that does not keep the roof over our heads... If I had to close my home, I do not know what would happen to the children... life on the streets is terrible. They will probably die very young... Volunteers coming could change this... they would bring us more money and help... but they do not come.” (Capm, 2011)*

Explanations from the managers at the poorer projects imply they believe additional labour from Western volunteers is greatly needed, as they could bring more to the children (such as English lessons, cultural contact, knowledge etc.) than local workers. This belief is imbued with colonial nuances; the idea that strange, young, naive and inexperienced carers would be more beneficial for the children simply because they are from the West, rather than people who are from a similar and familiar cultural background. The entrenchment of the Western discourse means that legitimacy is associated with Western alliances and connections (Young, 2001; Brown and Jagananada, 2007), and therefore, more so than the need of Western labour, it appears the true value of volunteers to the projects is the source of funding they offer and the legitimacy they provide. The adoption of a project by an organisation authenticates it, which is seen as a major selling point, as their legitimacy has been

validated by a professional (Western) opinion, making it appear genuine and more attractive to volunteers (Cousins et al, 2009). In turn, the volunteers' presence furthers the project's authenticity, attracting more volunteers and hence more funding, which again highlights the colonial tones imbued within this assumption.

With regards to the organisations, they explained that by working with their particular approved projects, they can have "*more success in ensuring the children a better future*". This statement from an employee at OrgC implies that if the organisations believe they will have more 'success' with the children in their endorsed projects, they feel that the children in the other projects are too poor to help, and beyond their reach. Success is then clearly perceived through a Westernised commercial perspective of attracting more volunteers and money, rather than through a community development-based focus. This is because in a neoliberal market, organisations become focused upon the tangible and observable aspects of success, such as an increase in profits or the increased number of recruited volunteers (Easterly, 2006): the organisations cannot see improvements to the projects, so become less and less concerned about them. Therefore, children may be being excluded on the grounds that their stories may not be a good advertisement for the work of the organisation. This highlights the issues associated with the promotion of a simplistic imaginary of development, as it is the projects that require the simpler solutions that attract the organisations, as their results are realised much quicker (Simpson, 2004; Easterly, 2006). This indicates that projects, if they wish to be potential volunteer placements, can be too poor to help.

### **Withdrawing Project Support**

Conversely, projects at the other end of the scale are facing challenges too. It appears that projects can be labelled as too successful to receive help from volunteers and their sending organisations. By this, it is meant that these projects were once endorsed by an organisation, but grew to be too rich or successful to be deemed in need: the



projects reached a certain level of achievement, but once that was reached, the organisations felt that the projects no longer were in need of their help and moved on. Although arguably this should be the goal of development projects, the organisations appeared to withdraw their support even though the projects were still extremely vulnerable. This does not comply with the principles of the sustainable social development the organisations wish to promote, which maintain that the longevity and sustainability of community projects must be a key priority in all kinds of development, and the withdrawal of support must be a mutually agreed and gradually measured process (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008). When the projects were questioned as to the reasons behind the organisations' retractions, they claimed that it was because the organisation said the volunteers no longer felt needed, and as a result, they did not feel as though they were making the difference they had originally set out to accomplish:

*"...they [the volunteers] complained all the time that they were not needed anymore, because now I had staff helping, or there were lots of them [volunteers] or because the children had too many good things. But this was not true; I needed them very much, in the kitchen, with the cleaning and with the children. It was just they didn't ask what to do and I tried to tell them, but I am very busy too, and not always there, so they just stand there..." (Aapm2, 2011)*

Again this demonstrates the power the volunteers have in terms of project selection and retention: they must feel happy and content in their placement or else they will stop coming. This supports the promotion of simplistic development because it is easier to achieve success, and for the volunteers to feel as though they have achieved something (Simpson, 2004).

However, in the case for this particular project, their success meant that the volunteers did not feel useful, and so subsequently stopped going to the placement. Consequently the organisation terminated the partnership as it was no longer profitable and attracting enough volunteers. However, this was not the official justification the organisation gave for termination;

*"We felt we had come to the end of the road with that particular project. We held a successful placement there for several years, but we had done all we could for them, and it was time to move our resources elsewhere to give another project the same opportunities." (Ao, 2011)*

Literature on the issue of support-withdrawal is rather vague, with ambiguous statements made, referring to "suitable levels of strength and solvency" (Mowforth and Munt, 2003: 21) and "strong and well prepared", "resilience" (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008: 48 and 51) and "strategies in place" (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002: 243) which all suggest timing is based upon an organisation's judgement. Although there cannot be strict guidelines, as all projects would require individual assessments, this is rather disconcerting in relation to shallow voluntourism, especially considering the power residing with the organisations and their ability to withdraw support at any time. Although OrgA made assurances that they did ensure the project was able to self-sustain, there is no evidence to suggest this was the case, especially as the consequences for the project were severe. Conversely, it must be noted that despite every form of insurance, some projects will remain highly dependent and face failure when support is withdrawn (IFAD, 2009).

Perhaps this could explain why without the continuing support of the voluntourism organisation, the project could not remain open. The manager explained that whilst the volunteers were supporting the project many improvements had been made, including building renovations to the orphanage and the employment of extra staff. The orphanage was also donated a computer by one of the volunteers and shown how to use the internet as a resource for obtaining extra donations. However, when the support left, these improvements soon became obsolete; no-one was able to educate staff members on the computer and soon it became unusable, the funding was no longer available for regular building maintenance and it began to fall into poor condition. In addition the organisation and its managers became financially dependent on the regular financial contributions being made to the orphanage by the volunteers. At first, the manager did not feel this was too much of a problem, but when it started

to dissipate, the care home fell into financial hardship. The Mexican State do not award money easily due to the strain on their resources (ICNL, 2013), and when the manager could not obtain State aid, he explained he had no choice but to make his staff redundant, stop taking new children in, and eventually was forced to close down. He did his best to re-home as many of the children as he could, but explained that this resulted with several of the older ones (aged 11-14) returning to the streets.

Sustainability and capacity building are development buzzwords (Cornwall, 1997), and these terms are heavily implied in the promotional vocabulary of the three studied voluntourism organisations who promise to consider these values seriously when deciding on which projects they choose to endorse, and how they work within them. However, under closer scrutiny, what may appear to be sustainable and capacity building principles, are practices imbued with a strong commercial motivation. This represents the 'softer' side of neoliberalism and highlights how the structures, dynamics and processes of voluntourism are shaping the outcomes of capacity building interventions. Particularly pertinent are the local complexities in Mexico, within the context of the commercial pressures felt by the organisations and host projects, which are driven by voluntourist proclivities which have their roots in colonialism and simplistic ideas of development. The argument therefore is that adherence to the commercial pressure to maximise the number of voluntourists is in fundamental contradiction with voluntourism's development aims.

The whole point of building on capacity means to strengthen skills, knowledge, competencies and abilities to enable people to do things for themselves, and the sustainability should ensure that they are able to continue doing so once the help has left (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). As explained, this is not what happened for this project; OrgA withdrew its support whilst the project was still in a vulnerable position, and not yet self-sustaining. Although this may contrast to the advocates who believe voluntourism may lead to a greater connection to sustainable development, "through the time, talent and treasure of voluntourists" (Moscardo, 2008: 8; Tomazos, 2009;

2010; Tomazos and Butler, 2010; Wearing, 2001), the evidence seems to reinforce the argument that voluntourists have no place in development (Simpson, 2004; VSO, 2007b); with the issues surrounding sustainability and poverty (among others) being too complex for voluntourists' depoliticised engagement, with any deeper involvement appearing to be incompatible with the sending organisations commercial values.

Unfortunately, the story with OrgC is just as familiar, whereby a project was previously endorsed by the organisation until it was deemed too successful to need any further assistance. A staff member who used to work at the care home explained that like the abandoned project in Puerto Vallarta, the owner was able to take on extra staff, expand and renovate the building to make it more child-friendly due to the financial support from the volunteers. However, the time soon came when the volunteer numbers began to decline as they had begun to feel unneeded, which put a huge economic strain on the project as it had become financially dependent on volunteer contributions. It was explained that despite the owner doing all she could to keep the care home going, she eventually had to close it down.

When Organisation C were questioned as to why they terminated the partnership with the care home they stated that

*"...we regret that we had to part ways with the project, but at the time it had established itself as self-sustaining project and we felt our resources were better needed elsewhere..."* (Co, 2011)

When questioned upon the closure of the project, a contact at OrgC admitted they were aware of the situation, and felt it was "*regrettable circumstances*", but were adamant that it was not because of their decision to leave. They also admitted that part of their decision for termination was based on the declining numbers of volunteers visiting the placement, and felt this was because the volunteers were no longer needed, and felt redundant at the project. Although it cannot be known whether the volunteers' feelings of redundancy were justified, it certainly seems

commercial reasoning bought an end to the partnership, despite the project being so financially dependent. It may be argued that many development interventions, especially within commercial organisations, are often imbued with inequalities and judgements that are based on deep-seated values, beliefs and practices that are born from Western discourse and neoliberal systems (Tandon, 2010). Although this could be attributed to OrgC following legitimate institutional strengthening and capacity building practices (Merino and Carmenado, 2012), it raises questions surrounding whether the organisation's values and interests inform their methods and policies, and whether these are reinforcing the very issues they are seeking to address.

### **The Reduction of Services and Facilities**

The situation for the projects that are currently endorsed by organisations can be argued to be equally precarious. A concern that was apparent at all three endorsed projects was the portrayal of the right image: one that is poor enough to appeal to volunteers, but not too poor to deter them. Conversely the projects are also careful not to appear too successful either, in concern for the organisations' withdrawal of support when the volunteers no longer feel needed. Presenting the appropriate image was a particular concern for Project A, whose manager, rather than be relieved the project was doing so well, was anxious that the project maybe appearing too successful, as growing numbers of volunteers were complaining about there being too many of them at particular times of the year, and consequently there not being enough work to do. The manager defended the volunteer intake by explaining that she tries to take as many volunteers on as possible whenever they want to come, because there are always significant periods of the year when no volunteers visit at all, and these short-fall periods must be compensated for. When the volunteers were questioned about this, they all agreed on no longer feeling needed, reporting that

*"...there just seems to be so many of us here now. I don't know why they allow this many of us here at once. I've heard some girls are even sleeping on sofas and tables until their places are sorted out. That's just greed to me. Plus, you know, it kind of leaves us feeling like we're not needed- there's so much hanging*

*around, not doing anything. There's too many volunteers for kids. It's not what I thought it would be like.” (Av3, 2011)*

*“...yeah so I'm surprised that we are needed here so 'desperately', as [OrgA] described, cos there's loads of us here- sometimes you have nothing to do... and I was shocked at how nice it was here. I wasn't expecting it to be so nice- I mean the kids have a garden, they all have nice clean clothes and the building is lovely- they all have their own bed, and for some reason I thought they'd be all sharing beds... it does make you wonder...” (Av7, 2011)*

These comments highlight how important the volunteers' perceptions of the projects are: the fact that Project A has a nice building and adequate facilities, is leading the volunteers to think that their help is not needed. Although it may be natural to question these things when the volunteers' ideas and perceptions of poverty are often romanticised and non-politicised, it is surprising that they should think they are no longer needed when the level of dependency faced by the orphanage upon volunteer support is quite apparent. This provides further evidence in relation to the argument that the simplistic and depoliticised imaginaries of Mexico and development are preventing the voluntourists from engaging with political and social realities, meaning the volunteers are estranged from the actualities of poverty.

As a result of the success of the project, and the complaints by the volunteers regarding the appearance of the orphanage and not feeling needed, the manager felt pressured into taking certain measures to increase the impoverished image of the orphanage in order to prevent her project from being pulled from OrgA's portfolio. These measures so far have included; reducing the level of help and support offered to older children, deciding that the children can no longer own their own things, forcing the children to share bedrooms and reducing building maintenance;

Children over the age of 14 are legally deemed adults by the State in terms of care (DIF, 2009), and therefore, no additional help is given to care homes to support them. Project A had always offered half-way houses to those children over the care-age

ceiling, but the project has now made the decision to close the homes, as they were seen as a luxury. Volunteers and OrgA also thought these houses meant the project was receiving enough money that their financial contributions may be better donated elsewhere. These homes are now owned privately by the project owner and are used for extra housing for the volunteers. This measure of closing the houses to the children and opening them to accommodate voluntourists has had detrimental consequences for the children and the surrounding community as these children are not fully prepared for adult life, having had very little education, and very limited care. Children who have lived in orphanages often lack life-skills and frequently find they are unable to be an active participant in life outside the orphanage, making them more susceptible to fall prey to cycles of poverty and crime (Beegle et al, 2005).

For example, a staff member explained that within a year of the houses closing, two young boys have been killed through drug-related crime, and a young previous resident had brought her new baby to the orphanage as she was unable to care for her. This is evidence of the poverty trap the children find themselves within when confronted with life on the streets with limited prospects (Chavas and Villarreal, 2006). Although the poverty trap is a contested issue (Graham and Temple, 2004; Kray and Raddatz, 2005; Easterly, 2006; Hoff and Sen, 2006), the children do seem to face a cycle that is proving hard to break with the limited opportunities they are presented, and a strong argument can be made for the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Sen, 2003; Moran, 2003a; 2003b). However, an alternative view to life on the streets for young people suggests it can in fact offer them more opportunities when compared to the confinements of abusive domestic or institutionalised environments (Jones, 2004b).

The volunteers were also unhappy to discover that some of their accommodation was once used for this purpose, but the owner claimed that although the decision was regrettable, it was a decision she felt had to be made for the future of the project. However, most of the volunteers remained unaware that their home for the

placement was once used for this function, and additionally, no-one thus far has made any formal complaint about it. That the availability of extra space for volunteers took priority over providing extra support to the children is further evidence that commerce is the primary force within this voluntourism situation, rather than it being development lead. The contact at OrgA claimed they had no knowledge of this situation, but added that volunteer accommodation is the responsibility of the project managers. Although OrgA reason that this is the responsibility of the project manager, and financial decisions are not their concern, this contradicts their involvement and input regarding donation allocation (see Chapter Five). Therefore this highlights the lack of accountability attributed to the organisations and how this dissolves them of any responsibility or actions they may wish to disassociate themselves from (Uphoff and Buck, 2006).

It was also explained that the children cannot own personal belongings such as clothes, shoes, toys and books. Even toiletry and personal care items such as toothbrushes and hairbrushes must be shared. It is believed that this communal-use-only rule would help to make the children appear poorer and present a more impoverished image. In addition to this reasoning, the rule is also enforced to prevent arguments and jealousy between the children surrounding use and ownership; if everything is shared, there can be no questions over ownership rights. This has worked to some extent; the volunteers certainly felt more sympathy and compassion for the children and hence made more donations, and additionally there were fewer arguments between the children. However, this seemed to encourage a lack of respect amongst the children for property and ownership. The children frequently took belongings and valuables (such as cameras and bags) from volunteers because they had little understanding of the concept of ownership, and they demonstrated carelessness and disrespect in their attitude and handling of anything they were given (or took). Respect and care for personal or other's belonging is a life-skill that is frequently not taught to children in care, and this behaviour is demonstrative of a lack in the teaching of such lessons (Silverman, 2008). Although this may seem trivial, the behaviour can frequently



develop into theft and crime (Silverman, 2008). This is not suggesting that all the children will grow thinking this is acceptable, but it is cause for consideration.

In addition, personal belongings are often very important for children in care as it gives them a sense of familiarity and belonging (Koplewicz and Cloitre, 2006). Children who come into care and have their belongings removed from their possession frequently feel resentful, and this can exacerbate their trauma, leading to exhibiting disrespectful and careless behaviour with other's personal items (Koplewicz and Cloitre, 2006). Therefore, if the communal rule was enforced for the volunteers' benefit and to further impoverish the image of the orphanage, it demonstrates that harmful practices are adopted to satisfy voluntourists' expectations, which is not conducive to the practice of do no harm promoted throughout sustainable development (Gordon, 2006), or the volunteers' wish to make a positive difference.

Furthermore, despite the space being available to reduce the number of children to a room, the children are required to share bedrooms, with mixed dormitories being enforced until around the ages of 11, depending on space. This is well into the ages of puberty for some children, and their right to privacy is being encroached upon. Staff members explain that it is believed that more beds to a room signifies cramped living conditions, which further emanates the image of need. This again works in inducing sympathy with the volunteers, as they were all surprised that the children did not share beds, and were most concerned to see older boys and girls still sharing close and cramped dormitories. Although the manager of the project justifies this situation due to staff shortages through the night, and to encourage bonding between the children and limit loneliness, privacy is every child's right UN (2010). The detrimental effects of the lack of privacy, include impairment to the children's development and well-being as it is undignified and degrading (Richter, 2008; Emond, 2010; UNICEF, 2010a).

In relation to the building, apparently the comments made above by Av7 regarding its affluent appearance were not the first, with staff members explaining this was a common perception of volunteers. This therefore led the manager to believe that allowing the building to appear more dilapidated, would increase the image of need and impoverishment. She hoped this would appeal to the volunteers and encourage more to come and return, and make further donations. One staff member even explained that the “fix-the-playroom” fund had been running for three and a half years, despite having collected enough donations within fourteen months. The disrepair of the building also extends to the bathrooms and the external walls facing into the garden where the children play. This can be argued to be extremely harmful to the children’s health and well-being, as not only is the conditions of the bathrooms unhygienic, but the playground and courtyard are full of building materials that are a serious health hazard and have been there for a number of years. These decisions to make the project appear more impoverished signify not only the desperation of the project to retain and encourage volunteer support, but also a manipulation on the part of the project to delude volunteers into giving them more money. This provides an indication as to how the local projects are resisting and challenging the power structures, and are attempting to regain some control over their impoverished situation through their manipulation of their underdeveloped image.

Project C is also attempting to present itself as the right kind of poor, and endeavouring to produce a more impoverished image. A member of staff explained that some of their low achieving children have been removed from school and are taught in the orphanage, and are now predominantly taught by the volunteers, who generally do not speak Spanish. These children have been disadvantaged in order to appear poorer, and to make the volunteers feel as though they are doing something truly beneficial and of value. These children (once removed from school) were originally taught in the orphanage by the permanent staff who, although also unqualified, at least spoke the same language and were therefore able to communicate properly. This is detrimental to the children’s welfare and education as it has been demonstrated that schooling is linked to a reduction in poverty, although this

is of course dependent upon the quality of the education received (Harper et al, 2003; Jones, 2005b). Despite the CRC's insistence that formal education is compulsory, there are no legal repercussions for non-compliance (White, 2002; Jones, 2005b), which is perhaps why the projects feel able to reduce the access to these rights for children in order to increase the perception of need for the benefit of the volunteers.

Thus it appears to be the children and the local community who are required to endure the consequences of the project's dependency on volunteer numbers. Little consideration seems to have been given in relation to what would happen to the children's education if the volunteers stopped coming. Furthermore, early childhood education is a human right that should be made available to every child, regardless of their socio-economic background, and thus children should not be taken out of school unless it is imperative (UN, 2000; ECM, 2003; UNICEF, 2010a). Therefore this situation is not beneficial to the children within the care of Project C when they are denied their right to an education. When questioned, OrgC deny knowledge of these kinds of impoverishing activities, and reject the notion that they are in some way responsible;

*"No, we are not responsible. Of course we are not. The suggestion is ludicrous. We do not impose any kind of restriction or regulation on how the projects handle their affairs. They make their own decisions. If they feel they must do this, that is a real shame, but it definitely has nothing to do with us." (Co, 2011)*

Arguably OrgC are not to blame, despite perhaps exacerbating the situation. They have not forced the Project C to make these decisions (as is the same with OrgA and Project A), but instead the projects have felt compelled to make these changes due to commercial market pressures which have been imposed from the organisations, which is a response to the market pressures placed upon *them*.

Therefore, it is the changes in the neoliberal market that are causing the projects themselves to have to compete for volunteer numbers (Tomazos, 2010). With the organisations offering more and more projects in order to diversify their portfolio and

attract volunteer numbers, the projects have to compete amongst themselves to attract the volunteers to their doors. This means finding new ways of appealing to the voluntourist, the most effective way of which is to appeal to the volunteers' compassion and sense of wanting to make a difference, by enhancing their image of need. Through the increased commodification and exploitation of this recognised commodity, the projects are able to establish some power and control, influencing the volunteers' decision over where to go and who to help. The global expansion of the neoliberal marketplace has drawn many local organisations into unfavourable economic relations, with many driven into adverse and vulnerable positions, trying to escape the exact situation they find themselves in (Peet and Hartwick, 2009).

However, the host recipients are attempting to regain some control over the situation; by capitalising on their lack of development they can utilise this profitable commodity and maximise their income potential (Baptista, 2010). However, by doing so, they are placing themselves further into dependency with volunteer support, making themselves more vulnerable to the dynamics of volunteer influence, whilst also impacting upon the lives of those who work for them, and the children placed in their care. Problems with dependency means that the project is in danger of becoming trapped in cycles of reliance and dependence, making them more vulnerable in the long term, and may face having to make further tough decisions in order to retain the volunteer support (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008). This is not conducive to strengthening the project and building its capacity to enable it to overcome the problems of dependence and the struggle of poverty (Kaplan, 2000). Therefore it could be suggested that the organisations are not engaged with capacity building for developments sake, but instead to appeal to the compassion and sympathy of volunteers, thus encouraging commercial productivity. Conversely, projects are demonstrating some signs of increasing their own capacity in their attempts to regain some control of the situation and adapt to the market (Kaplan, 2000; Merino and Carmenado, 2012; UNDP, 2008). However, the outcomes of these attempts are perhaps not what these advocates had in mind.

## **Project Redundancies: The impact on local women**

A further measure Projects A and C have taken in order make themselves appear more impoverished is the redundancy of several permanent members of staff. They have justified this by explaining that having regular employees receiving pay signifies too much success in the eyes of the volunteers and the organisations. The volunteers repeated on several occasions that the presence of so many staff signified that they (and their financial donations) were not really needed. Arguably, given the evidence, the volunteers' labour is not particularly needed, however, their financial contributions and the legitimacy they provide *are* heavily relied upon, and this is why the projects set so much precedence by what the volunteers say and how they feel. A supervisor at Project C commented that

*"...letting the staff go from work was a hard decision but [project co-ordinator] felt this was best for the project for the long term. We are very grateful for the help the voluntarios give to us. We all appreciate them here."* (Cs2, 2011)

She further went on to explain that the volunteers give the project money, whereas the staff cost money, which justifies the reason for the redundancies and the reduction in staffing hours. Considering the tempestuous relationships between the staff and the volunteers, it is hard to believe that the volunteers are appreciated by everyone, especially considering some people have lost their jobs to the volunteers' free labour. Arguably this is not the organisations' fault; they have ensured their distance enough to remove their responsibility and accountability of the actions of the project, who are responding to commercial market pressures. This is however what the organisations are promoting, advertising and selling as development. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that meaningful capacity development and empowerment is not what is taking place here, rather a simplistic and superficial form is being conducted, covering an agenda of commerce, business acumen attempting to keep pace with a dynamic neoliberal market. This reinforces the argument that shallow voluntourism organisations are not compatible with development, as their commercial requirements, practices and needs are not compatible with the complexities and

critical engagement needed for development (Kaplan, 2000; Tuckman, 1998; Toner, 2003).

In terms of local empowerment, the reduction in the work force has had disadvantageous effects, especially for women. Women within the area are frequently overlooked for jobs, as a local woman (who works at the university) explained, it is believed they should remain at home caring for the family. Women in Mexico are usually viewed through traditional gendered roles, and therefore use their inclusion in the workforce to improve their sense of accomplishment, and as a break from their routine within the confines of the family (Ramirez-Valles, 2001). They also use employment as a way to increase their cultural capital with other likeminded women, thus presenting an opportunity for them to be seen as individuals who can negotiate their personal motives and situations (Ramirez-Valles, 1999). This type of work offers the women more opportunities for social inclusion, as well as flexible benefits (such as part-time hours and on-site childcare facilities) to allow the merging of work and family life, which is particularly significant given a lot of the staff came from female-headed households. Working in this capacity additionally offers women the chance to participate in the labour market and contribute to the rise in per capita income (Themudo, 2011).

Thus for women to lose this employment is hugely damaging for their right to work, their self-esteem and their ability to improve their family situations. The position of women in society can make them more vulnerable to the negative effects of development, as they are more marginalised and often have to work harder for less money than their male counterparts (Baker, 2006). However, the dependency on this type of work means that once women adopt the responsibility tied to the structures and benefits of their role, the women come to rely on them for their family's survival, which implicates how devastating their redundancy can be. Therefore working within the community can have negative effects on women's empowerment as it creates dependency on employment that is not always stable and secure (Jenkins, 2009).

The women who worked at the orphanage explained that they were happy with their jobs, despite the long hours and poor pay, as not only did it give them the opportunity to contribute to their household income, but the job also presented them with better working conditions than other jobs that may be available to them in the tourism sector. For example, one previous employee explained that

*“...it [the job] was good because I could bring my children with me. This allowed me to work. My husband is out all day, and so there is no-one to look after the children, only me. No other job will let me do this, so now I don’t work. (AI4, 2011)*

When questioned about how this has affected her, she says that

*“It means I can’t afford to buy the same amount of food at the supermarket. And the children can’t always have new clothes when they need them. [one of her children] needs new shoes for school, but at the moment he has to wear his brother’s old ones, but they are too small for him and they are in a really bad condition, so now he has bad feet. Do you know how terrible it feels not to be able to buy your children new shoes? I feel like a bad mother.” (AI4, 2011)*

The loss of jobs to these women is therefore not just detrimental to the wellbeing of the children at the orphanage, but also to the welfare of their own families and their own self-esteem. This demonstrates how damaging the reliance on volunteer support can be. Dependency is a precarious concept for development as it places the already vulnerable within a *more* vulnerable position, leaving them exposed to economic difficulties (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008), which certainly seems to be the case here.

Project B is a relatively new project, and it is the most impoverished-looking project of the primary three investigated, so there are still many improvements to be made before the volunteers begin to feel unneeded. However, from speaking to staff, provisions have already been put into place to stop the project from stagnating in terms of volunteer numbers, and they too are trying to refrain from employing too many local staff through fear of taking duties away from the volunteers. As explained above, this does little to empower the local community, considering it is a highly

impoverished area with a great deal of the populace already out of work (INEGI, 2011). In addition, community members are a vital resource when it comes to caring for vulnerable children, as not only will they provide more stable and secure care, but also add a sense of familiarity to children, in that they are both likely to come from the same area, and have similar cultural backgrounds, and of course both speak the same language (Richter, 2004). These are important aspects to children coming into care; familiarity is crucial to vulnerable children as it brings a sense of comfort to a potentially frightening and overwhelming situation (Richter, 2004). Furthermore, the reduction of local workforce in favour of unskilled and inexperienced volunteers is demonstrative of the colonial tendencies apparent within voluntourism, highlighting the increased value and worth upon Western labour. This appears to be contradictory to their steps in trying to reduce their dependency (Mowforth and Munt, 2003), and is not conducive with the image the organisations' are promoting; the selling of placements as solutions to dependency and poverty.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how the voluntourism organisations and host projects are being shaped by contemporary neoliberal and colonial practices. It discussed the specificities of the Mexican case study and how this is influencing the context in which the voluntourists are working, and how voluntourists are negotiating the public imaginaries created within the marketised landscape of voluntourism and care in Mexico. This helped to explain why the image of the right kind of poor image has evolved, and what impacts maintaining this image have on the projects themselves, their employees and the children within their care. From the evidence presented above, it is apparent that in order to retain volunteer support, projects are forced to walk a thin line between appearing too poor to help and appearing too rich to need help. Therefore a need to portray just the right level of need and destitution to allow volunteers to feel as though their help is really needed, has become a commercialised survival necessity. This has been discussed in relation to the commercial pressures on the organisations and host projects in the context of shallow voluntourism, which is



driven by the priorities and proclivities of the voluntourists, which are based upon notions of colonialism and simplistic ideas of development.

The emergence of the right kind of poor discourse has bought with it some rather adverse consequences. The increasing commercial pressures faced by the organisations have encouraged them to place more emphasis on the more tangible and observable successes of their work, causing them to choose projects for inclusion on their portfolio where results are easily obtainable (Easterly, 2006). However, the projects that appear too poor to help are finding themselves overlooked in their requirement for aid because the level of work needed to provide help and solutions to their difficulties is beyond the means of the volunteers and their sending organisations. This of course could be justified by the legitimate conditions needed for capacity building and institutional strengthening (Kaplan, 2000; UNDP, 2008). However, according to the evidence, it appears that commerce seems to be the driving force behind the actions of the organisations and the projects, rather than development itself. This highlights the ways Mexican voluntourism has reacted and strategised its faith within market based mechanisms, according it more credence than is borne out by the evidence. The local complexities, dynamics and structures of the shallow voluntourism industry are thereby shaping the outcomes of capacity building interventions in a way that suggests that it is not viable for commercial companies to engage critically with development as it is not compatible with their commercial viability (Toner, 2003).

Conversely, those projects at the opposing end of the scale are also facing serious consequences, as once they reach a certain stage of success, the volunteers begin to think their help is no longer needed, and so stop visiting the project. This means it becomes less popular, it stops generating revenue for the sending organisation, and so it is removed from their portfolio. The consequences of this have been shown to be severe, with projects having to close down, leaving people without jobs, and children without anywhere to live. This highlights how dependent the projects are on the

financial support of volunteers, and verifies the dangers of dependency on tourism as a development tool, and the vulnerabilities of projects placed within a dependent situation (Telfer and Sharpley; 2008). The lack of regulation and accountability is also a major contributor to the vulnerability of the projects, as this allows the organisations to remove themselves from situations they do not wish to be associated with (Easterly, 2006). Therefore it is to be argued that commercial pressure to maximise the number of volunteers and to appeal to their aims and tastes, is in fundamental contradiction with voluntourism's development aims.

The organisations' need to attract voluntourists have caused projects to manipulate their own development, the exclusion of other projects on dubious development grounds, the dismissal and loss of empowerment for local workers, as well as harmful impacts upon the children's development and well-being. Therefore has been demonstrated is how the neoliberal agenda is enabling the voluntourism organisations to enforce and decide upon policies that are predominantly beneficial to them, but leave the host projects in a vulnerable condition. These asymmetrical geometries of power illustrate the ability of voluntourism to shape local realities and how practices that rely upon equitable market distribution of benefits do not always materialise in contextually-specific situations.

# Chapter 8- Orphan Tourism

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*“Orphans have an economic valence that is proving irresistible... orphanhood is now a globally circulated commodity”*

*(Meintjies and Giese, 2006: 425)*

## Introduction

This thesis has discussed volunteers’ understanding of their role and the way they negotiate the global, neoliberal and, it is argued here, colonial terrain of voluntourism. The way that voluntourism effects discourses of poverty, and cycles of dependence caused by the tensions between voluntourism’s development and commercial aims has also been explored. This chapter begins to consider the people who, many would agree, should be at the centre of debates on voluntourism but are in too many cases conspicuous in their absence – the children themselves.

Internationally circulated, poignant images of orphans or abandoned children portray children as innately vulnerable, helpless, forsaken and in desperate need of care. Such images as presented by NGOs, the media and tourism operators, invoke a need among those primarily in the Western world to become directly involved in their care. At this interface of Western sentimentality and global discourse is the growing trend of ‘orphan tourism’, fashioned from the experiences promoted by the phenomenon of voluntourism. Organisations advertise volunteering projects within orphanages to compassionate Westerners as a way they can make a difference to children in need, whilst simultaneously have experiences that are “rewarding and life-changing” (OrgB, 2011). This trend in voluntourism is born from the best intentions, but such actions are based on confounded understandings of the pervasiveness of orphaned children and the realities and vulnerabilities of the children in residential care.

Opponents of voluntourism believe it does not prioritise the well-being of the children. Arguably, the structural context in which the projects find themselves does

not permit the children to be placed at the centre of operations: for the orphanages, money is in limited supply, and the sending organisations are forced to compete with one another in a fiercely competitive market. In addition, regulatory bodies for the industry or for the orphanages do not yet exist, so there is no independent evaluation or monitoring. In this chapter, in order to explore and better understand how children are affected by this profitable trend in philanthropic tourism, the theoretical concepts of attachment theory, strange theory, the geographies and ethics of care are used to analyse and contextualise the empirical evidence presented below to develop a framework for understanding the impact of voluntourism on children.

There are many reasons for the lack of voluntourism research which manages to put the children at the centre of the debate, including the practical and ethical limits imposed upon the present research. However, what this chapter can offer is a theoretically informed discussion of the voluntourism industry and its neoliberal and colonial internal tensions, which draws on theories of child development grounded in the three project case studies. The chapter begins by investigating the commodification and exploitation of the children through the commercialised marketing procedures involved within voluntourism. This is followed by a discussion of the problems involved with the care voluntourists provide, highlighting the difficulties involved with an inexperienced and transitory care pattern, barriers to education and communication and the specialist needs requirements. The final section looks at the emotional and physiological consequences of such care, with special attention to unstable attachments and associated behaviours and the increased vulnerability and lack of privacy experienced by the children. Cumulatively, this chapter therefore addresses the questions surrounding how suited voluntourists are to the role of primary care-givers for vulnerable children, given their effect upon the care environment.

## **Commodification and Exploitation**

Within the voluntourism sphere, the term 'orphan' emphasises vulnerability, helplessness and neglect, evoking feelings of sympathy, compassion and sentimentality. Significantly, it has also induced the need for adult intervention (Edstrom et al, 2008). Voluntourism has been the most predominant form of this eager and enthusiastic aid, and the last three chapters have demonstrated how financially and commercially viable these philanthropic tourism endeavours have become. However, what has not yet been made evident is how this increasingly commercialised and neoliberalised aid is affecting the children at its centre. With over 30,000 Mexican children living in registered institutional care (although this number could be tripled for the number residing in unofficial homes), Mexico has the highest number of institutionalised children in the whole of Latin America (MIFAN, 2009; RELAF, 2010). This coupled with beautiful coastline, exotic charm and a wild reputation has made Mexico an irresistible destination for voluntourists interested in helping and caring for orphans.

With the influx of financial donations and their free labour, orphanages within the Jalisco District of South West Mexico have been zealously fighting to get volunteers through their doors, mostly with the help of voluntourism organisations by way of advertising and recruitment. These organisations use poignant images of children to create imaginaries that illustrate how worthwhile the orphanage experience can be. Photographs 8.1-8.4 taken from the organisations' websites highlight the way Mexican children are used as a marketing tool, in order to appeal to the volunteers' compassion and sentimentality. Here, the children are portrayed as adorable innocents. These close-up, tightly cropped images of beautiful, large-eyed children looking directly into the lens transforms the suffering of Mexican children into objects that are an aesthetically pleasing and desirable commodity, exemplifying how the photograph has the ability to beautify even the most grotesque situations (Sontag, 2002; Manzo, 2008).

*Photograph 8.1 Children as Marketing Tools*



(OrgA , 2011b)

*Photograph 8.2 Children as Marketing Tools*



(OrgA, 2011b)

*Photograph 8.3 Children as Marketing Tools*



(OrgC, 2011b)

*Photograph 8.4 Children as Marketing Tools*



(OrgC, 2011b)



*Photograph 8.5 Volunteer and Child Relationship*



(OrgB, 2011b)

*Photograph 8.6 Volunteer and Child Relationship*



(OrgA, 2011a)

*Photograph 8.7 Volunteer and Child Relationship*



(OrgA, 2011)

*Photograph 8.8 Volunteer and Child Relationship*



(OrgA, 2011)

Photographs 8.5-8.8 also highlight the ability of photographs to make real the relationship between the volunteer and the child. Familiar poses are continuously repeated: the happy volunteer together with the poor-but-happy orphan. These

narratives seem to depict a moment of relief for the children and the contentedness of the volunteer. This highlights interesting parallels between the iconography of childhood and the iconography of colonialism. Whereas the associations between childhood and universal human rights are recent, the tropes of innocence, dependence and protection have a long lineage in development theory and colonial ideology (Manzo, 2008). These modes of representation therefore illustrate the discursive relationship between the developed subject (the volunteer), and the non-developed subject (the child), and situated within this is an implicit parent-child metaphor (Manzo, 2008). Arguably, such images allow potential volunteers to shape expectations of their experience, and how they perform in their role. Such images of anonymous and autonomous children without recourse to indigenous support, or images of children posed with volunteers can encourage the impression of their vulnerability, whilst also magnifying the significance and importance of external aid. This can lead to a simplistic and romanticised view of the voluntourism experience, and discourages the volunteers from reflecting critically on their behaviour and the realities of the children's situation. This depicts how voluntourism depends on preconceived definitions, which commodifies notions of place and identity (Desforges, 2000).

Volunteers are told they are needed for short periods of time for the express purpose of seeking personal fulfilment through intimate encounters with "*destitute and disadvantaged children*" (OrgC, 2011a). However, no mention is made regarding the consequences of the repeated formation and dissolution of such bonds, which is likely to be highly emotionally damaging to young children (Bowlby, 1952). Instead, these ideas are utilised to promote the orphanages as an *experiential* tourist destination, whilst dualistic images of helplessness and sweetness are employed to objectify the children and commodify their neediness in order to fulfil this rescue fantasy.

*"...they just look so cute and vulnerable, I just desperately want to help them"*  
(Av3, 2011)

*"...I really want to do all I can to help these adorable children"* (Bv5, 2011)



*“...you can just see it in their eyes, they just want to be loved... All I want to do is hug them and tell them everything is going to be ok...” (Cv2, 2011)*

*“When I see them, I just have an overwhelming urge to tell them that they are loved... I even think about running away with them, saving them from this place and the life ahead of them...” (Cv9, 2011)*

These voluntourist quotes suggest the reasons they choose to visit destinations of relative material deprivation is to exercise a sense of duty to help others, and to do something meaningful. Use of the phrases *“desperately want to help”*, *“want to do all I can”* and *“saving them”* illustrates an ardent obligation of the volunteers to help. However, although this is admirable, the increased demand for the orphanage experience stems from the commercialisation of compassion, whereby marketers skilfully transform the poverty and need of the orphaned children into an experience to be cherished (Heron, 2007; Moore, 2008). The orphanages are marketed as places to have “fun”, whereby *“playing, interacting and teaching the children can be hugely pleasurable and enjoyable experience”* (Ao, 2011), one *“you will cherish forever”* (Co, 2011). The innovative skills of creative marketing therefore capitalise on the sentimentality of affluent Westerners through the commodification of the poorness, vulnerability and charisma of the Mexican child into a desirable product for Western consumption. By marketing the projects in such a way, the orphanages and children themselves are being reduced to tourist attractions through a rational yet sanitised consumption of poverty (Scheyvens, 2001).

By convincing volunteers of their own potential worth and the rewarding experience, the organisations are able to evoke the notion of the compassionate self, and push aside all selfish and ethical concerns (Salazar, 2004). The implication that caring and kind hearted people will choose this type of holiday and thoroughly enjoy it is a significant enticement on the part of the marketing literature, and this relies heavily on inducing sympathy on behalf of the commoditised orphan. For example, the organisations promote their orphanage projects as

*“... the children are desperately in need of your love and support... a hugely rewarding experience...” (Bo, 2011)*

*“...seriously need your help...teach the children how to laugh and sing... it will be an experience you will cherish forever...” (Co, 2011)*

*“...the orphanage needs caring and compassionate volunteers to provide much needed assistance. All you need is a love for children...” (Ao, 2011)*

Voluntourism seems to operate in a distinct ethical framework, separate from the paradigmatic framework one subscribes to at home, allowing voluntourists to justify such practices because of the geographical separation. Certainly, previous tourism literature has highlighted tourists *behave* differently whilst at the destination (Cooper et al, 2001; Hultsman, 1995; Plog, 1974; Cohen 1972; Page et al, 2001), so why would they not *think* differently? Arguably, the problem lies in the confusion of the egoistical enjoyment of helping others in need, with ethical and moral values:

*“By distancing their own moral and educative values from their behaviour... these people employ one of those easy self-deceptions whereby their own culture, which would find egoism shocking, retains a subjectivity despite its lofty sentiments and shamelessly seeks to cloak its own pleasures with objective justifications” (Simmel, 1997: 220)*

Indeed, when questioned on this matter, volunteers often protested that although the “*process*” and the “*powers at work*” might be immoral, their actions were not, instead only filled with good intentions and a willingness to help. It could be argued that voluntourists have fallen victim to a self-deception that mistakes their own desires for ethical ideals, as the values one adopts when travelling somewhere different are dependent on prevailing social circumstances and different geographical locations (Simmel, 1997; Mahrouse, 2011). Therefore, this may go some way to explain why voluntourists believe that “*it’s just different in Mexico. They have a different way of doing things, different perspectives, different laws...*” (Bv7, 2011). Nonetheless, these processes of commercialisation and exploitation have thus far been allowed to continue, unchecked and unregulated. This highlights how through

specialised marketing and the creation of rescue fantasies of caring Westerners, voluntourism has been influenced by the re-emergence of historic colonial tendencies and contemporary commercialised practices. These discourses have inherently influenced how voluntourists will internalise and negotiate their role as carers.

### **Problematic Care**

The levels of care the children receive whilst under the supervision of volunteers is one of the most urgent criticisms of voluntourism. There are four main problem areas: the inexperience of the volunteers, the transitory nature of the care, the language barrier, and the lack of specialist care. The lack of qualifications, knowledge, skills and familiarity with childcare situations were the main reasons behind these difficulties, with the volunteers frequently finding themselves overwhelmed and struggling with their role. The non-compliance with national and international childcare standards on the part of the organisations and the orphanages is also a point of concern, and a contributing factor to why voluntourism child care in Mexico is perceived to encompass so many child care issues.

### **Inexperienced Carers**

As mentioned previously, the volunteers taking part within the orphanage projects were largely inexperienced; only ten of the eighty-eight volunteers observed had any significant childcare experience. This left the rest of the volunteers unprepared for the tasks ahead of them. As many have already explained, vulnerable children can exhibit (in some cases extreme) behavioural problems, and this requires experienced carers who know how to manage such situations (Goldfarb, 1979; O'Reilly and Bornstein, 1993; Webb, 1994; Laishley, 1997; Folbre, 2008; Oostermann and Schuengel, 2008). For example, in Project A, many of the older children (aged 10-14) would resort to physical violence against the volunteers when faced with something they did not want to do, like take a shower. The younger children (aged 3-9) would throw tantrums, often screaming and crying until they were hoarse and sick, with

some even physically harming themselves. In the case of the volunteers who have never experienced such situations, they did not know how to cope:

*"I just didn't know how to deal with them properly. I'm not trained in this sort of thing- and I haven't had any kind of support or help... I just kind of felt helpless..." (Av5, 2011)*

This volunteer was not alone in her feelings. Over 90% of the volunteers interviewed, even those with previous experience, claimed they felt unprepared for their role, and did not know what to do when these situations arose. This is a serious deficiency in care as

*"often those who have no experience with such children will not know how to handle them, and could end up making the situation worse by not providing the attention, care and consideration the children need, and reprimanding them unnecessarily." (Oostermann and Schuengel, 2008: 236)*

This is because the level of experience the carers have affect their performance and ability to cope with their responsibilities (O'Reilly and Bornstein, 1993). Those feeling unprepared and inexperienced often felt *"helpless"* and *"angry"*, leading them to ignore the children with behavioural problems as they didn't feel able to handle them:

*"...I just tried to distance myself from them a little bit. I mean, I watched how some of the other volunteers dealt with them and tried to copy that, but I never got it quite right... so I just concentrated on the ones I did get on with. (Av5, 2011)*

*"It was very difficult at first... It wasn't like I didn't try, but they just never tried back, so I gave up in the end and left them to it." (Cv3, 2011)*

Interestingly, the volunteers with the most experience (four volunteers were teachers, one was a nanny, one a social worker and one a mother) seemed to be the most committed, whilst those who were inexperienced and felt overwhelmed, were found to be less so, and spent more time on leisure activities outside of the orphanage. Their inability to cope left them feeling like they did not want to be there, which explains why they distanced themselves from the role. This illustrates how a

volunteer's attitude towards their placement may influence their ability and performance, as priorities and motivations will affect commitment and work ethics (Brown, 2005).

Children experiencing negligence from inexperienced carers are likely to continue with bad behaviour to either rebel against the carer, or as a method for receiving any sort of attention (Webb, 1994). All three organisations deny the requirement for previous experience as the project is

*“non-specialist, so no qualifications or previous experience are needed... all of the roles are simple enough for common sense to be enough, and things can be picked up as they go along” (Ao, 2011)*

OrgB also stipulates that experience and qualifications are *“not a requirement in childcare in Mexico”* (2011b). Although this is strictly true, and many Mexican carers do not have official qualifications, it is stipulated within the Mexican Library of Congress (2010) and the UN General Assembly (2010) that

*“all individuals engaged in the provision of care for children should be assessed on the basis of their professional and ethical fitness... for the sake of the child's well-being” (UN, 2010: 10)*

This is a failure for the children on behalf of all three parties: the orphanage is responsible for the carers it employs, the organisations should be aware of and uphold guidelines, and the volunteers should recognise vulnerable children require stable, experienced and qualified carers.

In addition, this is a distinct feminisation of the work of caregiving, indicating that it is the soft option, as there are no qualifications required, and things can be picked up as they go along. This implies that as females are expected to be inherently relational, caring and maternal, working with children should be a naturally instinct, and thus, no previous experience is necessary (English, 2006). This created a feeling of failure

among the female voluntourists when they felt unable to cope with the difficult situations they faced:

*"...I feel like a disappointment... I feel as though I should be able to do this..."*  
(Av5, 2011)

*"...I think really I've let them [the children] down because I'm just not very good at this..."* (Cv3, 2011)

This arguably left them feeling disempowered, and could perhaps explain why many of them wanted to spend more time elsewhere. Furthermore, this feminisation of the work is allowing care standards to fall below the international recommended standards, by justifying the lack of experience/qualifications required for the role with the inherent maternal instincts of the female volunteers.

### **Transitory Care**

Voluntourists generally only donate two to three weeks to a project, and when they leave, more arrive to replace them. From a business perspective, this makes perfect sense: the organisations and projects never run out of money, and the projects have a continuous supply of willing and free labour. However, this means that the children are subjected to a continuous revolving door of carers, and this is presented as a highly detrimental situation for the children's well-being and development (Main and Solomon, 1990; Rutter, 1997; Richter, 2004; Richter and Norman, 2008; Horton, 2005; Horton, 2011). There are many damaging effects upon the children's emotional and physiological well-being, which are discussed in the subsequent section, but also, and as equally damaging, are the effects upon the child's education and discipline (Ijzendoorn et al, 2002).

Continuity in care is crucial for a child's optimum development (Gauthier et al, 2004). Children need set rules and behavioural standards, and if carers constantly change these boundaries, the children will become confused, and this may lead to behavioural problems, and poor emotional development (McHale, 2007). Volunteers

from all three projects, however, highlighted the difficulty in maintaining consistent levels of care:

*"...you didn't know how previous carers had been, and what they allowed the children to do..." (Av1, 2011)*

*"...you didn't want to be disciplining the children for something they've always been allowed to do before- that's just confusing. But no-one explained any ground rules..." (Av7, 2011)*

*"...you just don't know what to say no to... the children don't take any notice, even if you do say no, so I just presume all other volunteers have just let them do what they want..." (Bv3, 2011)*

*"...nobody told us about any rules the kids must stick to, so you just have to judge it for yourself, use your common sense and hope others have and will continue to do the same, but I bet they won't..." (Cv6, 2011)*

The volunteers felt the ground rules were not communicated effectively enough to them, whereas the staff dispute this, claiming that the volunteers ignored these rules as they did not want to risk ruining their bond with the children by administering discipline. Project A in particular found this to be a big problem. Staff reported children being allowed to break volunteers' cameras as the volunteers were reluctant to exert authority. Acts of physical violence were also witnessed without remand, as was rough play, verbally abusive and riotous behaviour. The volunteers were questioned about this, and their explanation was that;

*"...you get so little time with the children, you really don't want to be seen as the bad guy by keep telling them no or telling them off..." (Av2, 2011)*

*"...I just want them to like me, and I feel that if I tell them off all the time, they won't..." (Av5, 2011)*

*"...I don't want to spend all my time telling them off, I want to spend my time making them happy and having fun... I want them to remember me as fun, not a grouch..." (Av10, 2011)*

Although understandable, this connection they were so desperate to establish with the children is potentially more detrimental than unpopular carers (Ijzendoorn et al,

2002). Perhaps the reason for the lack of discipline is age and inexperience (the average age of the voluntourists was twenty), supported by the fact that the older and more experienced volunteers were more successful in their attempted to engage in discipline. In addition, this also suggests that the volunteers were not ready for the level of responsibility that was placed upon them. This stems from the feminised and simplistic imaginary created by the organisations that portray childcare as a fun, easy option which anyone can participate in, without critical reflection upon the needs warranted by the children.

Furthermore, the male volunteers (of which there were only four) seemed even more reluctant to administer discipline, despite assumptions to the contrary that led them to be in high demand and highly valued volunteers. The staff believed male volunteers were able to control and command obedience from the children more effectively than the females, due to their more dominant physical stature and presence. However, the men were reluctant to use this to their advantage

*"...I just feel very uncomfortable as a large lad to be using my size to tower over these kids and shout at them. It just doesn't feel right. Not if it's not your kid..." (Av13, 2011)*

*"...I don't know... just a big man shouting at the children seems a bit... OTT. I mean they are only children, trying to have fun. I don't like telling them off. It just seems more appropriate for the girls to do it- they're much kinder and better at it than me. I'd be worried I'd lose my temper too much." (Av9, 2011)*

These quotes given by these two male volunteers (aged 22) highlight some interesting issues surrounding the gender of care. Although the feminisation of care is discussed in Chapter Seven, it is interesting to note that these findings seem to suggest that despite the advancements that have been made over the past few decades transitioning to a desire for equality and flexible gender-roles in child care (both parental and institutional), women are still seen as the ultimate caregiver.



The importance of continuity of care is important as

“young children find it most confusing when carers are coming and going and levels in care dissolve, they have no set levels of expectations and boundaries, and its most crucial for a child to be taught those a young age, otherwise they will continue to suffer with behavioural problems, which can have a critical influence on their emotional development.” (Forshaw, 2009: 102)

Arguably, the break in consistent care will do far more lasting damage to the overall long term development of the children, causing them to exhibit negative and disrespectful attitudes towards their peers, future partners, and even future volunteers (Carlson and Harwood, 2003; Abdulla et al, 2007). This certainly seemed to be the case at all the projects, and through bad behaviour, the children became less endearing to the volunteers and their peers. This affected the level of attention the child received, which seemed to impact negatively upon their emotional well-being. Nonetheless, the volunteers frequently left feeling as though they have made a positive contribution to the plight of vulnerable children, a perspective exacerbated through the imaginaries surrounding the value of voluntourist intervention.

### **Education and Language Barriers**

Education is also an issue, being that some of the children do not attend school; this is for a variety of reasons (such as a lack of required resources), the most concerning of which is to help attract more volunteers, as discussed previously. Moreover, the children’s education within the orphanage is also diminished by its transient and inconsistent nature, with voluntourists often repeating the same classes.

Furthermore, the children are not educated in the life skills that usually come from living in a family environment. These elemental skills involve cooking, cleaning, interacting appropriately with adults, managing a budget etc., and are recognised as essential skills for young adults to live independently (UNICEF, 2010a; 2010b).

Consequently, institutionalised children often find they are unable to be an active participant in life outside the orphanage, making them more susceptible to fall prey to cycles of poverty and crime (Beegle et al, 2005).

This is further exacerbated by the lack of language and communication skills on the part of the volunteers. Only a handful of volunteers (around 1 in 15) were able to speak Spanish at any length, with the rest of the volunteers resorting to crudely pronounced and structured phrases and gestures, or talking in English, which usually had no effect at all. Although surprising that the volunteers initially believed they could effectively care for vulnerable children without being able to verbally communicate with them, this belief can be explained by the promotional material of the organisations that expressed the ability to speak Spanish was not an essential requirement:

*“...you don't need to speak Spanish! In fact better if you don't! These children want to hear you speaking English all the time and are eager to learn whether by singing pop songs, reading or drawing pictures together” (OrgA, 2011a)*

This illustrates the power of influence the imaginaries created by the organisations can have, and how they can directly shape the care environment. Childcare guidelines of the UN (2010) specify that carers must be able to communicate effectively with children in order to provide valuable and worthwhile care. That this advice is being ignored implies that the organisations are more interested in their adherence to the neoliberalised commercial pressures placed upon them to attract a wider market-share. Organisations are therefore unwilling to alienate potential volunteers from joining their programmes by enforcing a language requirement.

Although it is not intended to underestimate the genuine good intentions of voluntourists, their behaviour and willingness to place their faith in these organisations seems to suggest a self-deception which allows them to mistake their own desires for ethical ideals (Fennell, 2006). However as one volunteer explained

*“...lots of us have never looked after children before, so we honestly didn't know and thought it'd be ok [the language barrier] but we are fast learners and it didn't take us long to work out that really, you do need to speak Spanish. And some of us have tried hard to put that right- we've joined a class. And I know we won't learn a language in a week, but we have learnt a few useful*

*phrases, and have already noticed an improvement in the children's response to us..." (Av11, 2011)*

Indeed the actions of these volunteers are commendable, and their contemporaries at Project B have even written to the organisation to explain that language skills should be a requirement. However, both organisations are yet to remove their advertising statement as they still do not feel these roles are *"specialised enough to require language skills"*, and that it would *"unnecessarily alienate a lot of potential and much needed help"* (Ao, 2012).

The faith placed in the knowledge and expertise of these UK organisations highlights a colonial perspective that indicates the importance in Western intervention. This simplistic and racialised imaginary created by the organisations demonstrates how orientalism is still pervading contemporary practices, and how the colonial other is still portrayed as somehow less worthy (Said, 1978). The influential power the organisations wield is illustrated not only by the acceptance of these imaginaries without critical reflection, but also how they shape the voluntourists' negotiation of their subjectivities. Subsequently, how the voluntourists then come to understand and negotiate their role as carer has a huge impact upon the care environment and the emotional well-being of the children.

### **Special Needs Care**

Projects A and C are home to several children with special needs, and many of the volunteers felt unable to provide sufficient care for these children, due to lack of experience and knowledge.

*"I just didn't know where to begin with them. I've never looked after children with special needs before, and I was frightened of doing something wrong..." (Av4, 2011)*

*"...it scares me going in with them [the special needs children] I don't know what I'm doing... the only thing I do know is that they need more than what I'm giving them..." (Cv1, 2011)*

International standards stipulate the needs of these children require special staffing arrangements, suitable environments with access to facilities, equipment, opportunities and provisions for extra privacy (DRI, 2010). However in Project A, many volunteers identified rather than special treatment, these children were “*stuck in with the babies*”, “*still in nappies* [despite some being over the age of 7] *and changed in full view of other children*”, “*denied certain access rights, and confined to a padded cot*” (Cv1; Av12, 2011). This can have devastating effects on the child’s emotional and physical development as they are not receiving the level of emotional, psychological and physical care they need (Kendrick, 2008). Some specialist facilities and a specialist carer on site are available at Project C, but Project A does not offer these resources. When questioned about this, the manager stated that this would be too expensive, and they simply could not afford it, although several staff members dispute this claim.

Therefore, it could be argued that voluntourism, like all other forms of tourism

“arises from the poverty of other countries, making them subject to development, trading upon cultural traditions and economic hegemony, and in turn, participating in new versions of hegemonic relations” (Kaplan, 1996: 63)

This colonial perspective highlights the assumption that Mexican orphans do not need/require the same care levels as children within the West, implying that their impoverished state can be rationalised, and that privilege is prioritised over poverty. Privilege is a common strategy used to create binary relations (albeit perhaps unconsciously), which creates the expectation that volunteers are the travelling elite, whilst the hosts are grateful for any help received (Simmons, 2004). Although the volunteers genuinely did care for the children, their preconceived notions of Mexican orphans *did* dictate how they thought of and treated the children. The voluntourists’ preconceptions can be related back to the imaginaries created by the organisations’ marketing of the projects and the destination areas. The promotion of need and poverty, and the necessity of voluntourist intervention, imprints upon the volunteers an inflated sense of their value, allowing them to believe in their elevated identities.

Although the responsibility for the treatment of the disabled children has little to do with the volunteers, and in fact all were appalled by standards and the lack of facilities and support available, the care provided by voluntourism is not specialised enough, and the socio-political structure shallow voluntourism operates within is permitting this inadequate care to continue. Neoliberal cutbacks of welfare provisions has ensured that the State cannot enforce the relevant care guidelines, and the commercial pressures of the intensified competition within voluntourism means that care guidelines are fundamentally contradicted in order to maximise voluntourist participation. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the projects are keen to protect an impoverished image in order to attract more volunteers, and they believe the presence of specialised carers is harmful to this image. Mexico has minimal State funding for therapy or equipment for disabled children, and a limited national health service to help families with a disabled child, which is why so many end up in care, often with terrible consequences for the child (DRI, 2010). However, by denying disabled children access to specialist care, and keeping them confined in such a manner is in violation of human rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006).

### **Emotional and Physiological Effects**

These are some of the most widely documented affects upon children in institutionalised care, however because they originate from biological, physiological and psychological literatures, these impacts have been largely neglected in social research, especially within that of tourism. However, it became apparent during the research that such effects upon the children were immediately observable and could not be ignored. These impacts are directly related to the care environment provided for the children and how this is in turn shaped and influenced by the presence of voluntourists (Richter and Norman, 2008), and it is for these reasons emotional impacts of disrupted care are examined below.

## Unstable Attachments

Institutional care can adversely affect children in a number of ways, lasting well into adulthood (Rutter, 1990; Klass et al, 1996; Viner and Taylor, 2005; Ayon and Marcenko, 2008; Huang et al, 2010). The main concern relates to the child's dependency upon the development of stable and secure attachments to one or more adults (Richter, 2004). Attachments are crucial to the healthy development of all children, helping to dictate the patterns of exploration, learning, social adjustment, emotional regulation and stress tolerance, whilst also forming the nature of their future relationships and parenting styles. If the attachments are repeatedly broken, it can have disastrous consequences for the child's emotional development and sense of self-worth, especially if they are already vulnerable (Wotherspoon et al, 2006). The transient nature of the voluntourists' care patterns is therefore concerning, especially considering that volunteers are encouraged by the organisations to make intimate connections with already abused, abandoned and neglected children

*"...the bonds you form with them will stay with you forever..." (Ao, 2011)*

*"...nothing is more rewarding then a hug from these children..." (Bo, 2011)*

*"...the relationship you develop with the children will be the most rewarding part of your trip..." (Co, 2011)*

These statements promote the seeking of personal fulfilment through encounters with vulnerable children, without consideration to the harm this might be doing. The continuous two/three week cycle of forming attachments and having them broken is recognised as a harmful process to their self-esteem and worth (Bowlby, 1952; 1973; 1975; 1984; 2005). However, many of the voluntourists did not consider the effect their care may have on the children, only seeming to have contemplated the benefits. A common reflection when asked about the effect on the children was that they all seemed *"happy enough"* and *"used to it"*;

*"...if they didn't get used to strangers coming in and wanting to be their friend, then they would just be permanently frightened, too scared to come near them and make friends. And that's no way to spend a childhood when these strangers are the only people who are going to show you love." (Av5, 2011)*

*“...the children all appear happy and quite content, and they certainly seem to love us and love having us here...” (Bv3, 2011)*

*“Gosh, I don’t know really. I’ve never thought about it before. I guess the children all seemed pretty used to the care pattern... I mean they never really seemed to be too out of sorts or anything...” (Cv4, 2011)*

These statements highlight the influential power the created imaginaries hold over the voluntourists’ negotiation of their identities as carers; the volunteers believe in them absolutely and do not reflect upon them critically. It was only when pressed on the matter that some volunteers reflected that this type of care could be *“rather damaging”*, whilst others, although accepting the disadvantages, felt it was *“the best alternative”*. It has been argued however, (Howes and Spieker, 2008; Ijzendoorn et al, 2002; Steinhauer, 1991; Main and Solomon, 1990) that transitory care *is* injurious to a child’s emotional development, and steps should be taken to help minimise the damage.

The constant loss of attachment figures promotes insecurities within the child’s self-esteem and self-worth, which deteriorates throughout their childhood (Bowlby, 1952; 2005). If the carer was loving and affectionate, the loss will be felt more severely, highlighting how problematic forming temporary attachments to vulnerable children can be:

*“I saw how heartbroken a child was when their favourite carer left- he was upset for days... He just kept calling for her...” (Av1, 2011)*

For a vulnerable child to repeatedly feel this way every time a carer leaves, does not suggest an acceptable level of stable emotional support, and is not conducive to them feeling secure and confident in themselves or others (Bowlby, 2005). Sadly, it was the most vulnerable children who were most likely to form attachments with carers, already exhibiting their lack of self-esteem in their need for an attachment figure (Ijzendoorn et al, 2002). However, these repeatedly broken attachments are more

likely to exacerbate abandonment issues and thus adversely affect their socio-psychological development.

### **Attachment Behaviour**

The behaviour of the children at the projects epitomised the characteristics identified in Ainsworth's (1978) "Strange theory". Children with behavioural problems tend to exhibit aggressive and detached behaviour from carers, with attachments being dependent on carer behaviour and attitude. However, due to lack of experience, knowledge and perhaps commitment, many voluntourists failed to respond to these children appropriately, resulting in their isolation and exclusion from affection and attention. This response is argued to perpetuate bad behaviour, excluding the child further from emotional care and support, damaging their emotional development (Lyons et al, 1993). Conversely, the children who exhibited indiscriminately friendliness and an excessive need for attention also embodied strange theory characteristics and are cause for just as much concern. These children tended to approach all volunteers with the same level of indiscriminate sociability and affection, even after meeting just moments before. These children were more likely to form attachments very quickly and rapidly adapt to new carers. This behaviour derives from continuous abandonment issues, leaving the child with low self-esteem and a desperate need to feel loved (MacDonald, 1996).

Many volunteers failed to see the dangers in this behaviour, instead regarding it as "adorable", "cute" and "lovely". It was commonplace to see children clinging to volunteers, and they would often move around the home with children hanging off their limbs and clinging to their torsos.

*"...the first time I met [child] he flew into my arms and gave me the biggest hug, refusing to let go for ages... I just melted..." (Cv3, 2011)*

*"...when I arrived, I had a swarm of children around me in moments, all trying to be held and cuddled. It was a much nicer and gratifying welcome than I get from the children at home..." (Bv9, 2011)*



These two volunteers were 23 year old females, one a student (Cv3) and the other a trainee-teacher and both failed to recognise the significance of the children's behaviour. Only one volunteer acknowledged how "*sad*" it was to see children display indiscriminate friendliness to strangers. She wondered

*"...what must they have gone through to make them act that way? Children at home certainly don't act that way... it just makes me think..."* (Bv10, 2011).

Children from more orthodox familial environments tend to be wary towards newcomers and show differential affection and trust towards their carers (Richter and Norman, 2008). However, young children who enter residential care are likely to have experienced very difficult circumstances, making them susceptible to such disorganised and indiscriminate attachment behaviours (Meintjies et al, 2007). Bv10 even questioned whether the volunteers were "*really helping, or are we just making it worse...?*". Interestingly, this volunteer was not experienced in child care, nor did she possess any relevant qualifications, yet she was able to reflect critically on her, and the children's behaviour. Perhaps this was related to her profession in the UK as a police officer, or her maturity; at 25 she was older than most of the other volunteers (over 80% were aged 18-22). This highlights how important critical reflection is in voluntourism, and is something that organisations should encourage, but is not often carried out (VSO, 2007b).

Children look to their attachment figures for affection, security and protection, encouragement and support as illustrated by these remarks (also see Bowlby, 1973);

*"...I guess he came to see me as his protector, and he wouldn't leave my side..."* (Av3, 2011)

*"...they grew to rely on you, I noticed they were more likely to do something or acted more confident if I was round, and they seemed to flourish under your praise and attention..."* (Av4, 2011)

*“...he would always come to me if he was scared, or hurt or upset, and even when he was happy or proud of something he’d done...” (Bv2, 2011)*

Although this is the ideal attachment behavioural standard for a child and their permanent attachment figure, within voluntourism this could cause the child more emotional damage when the attachment is broken. It also causes acute emotional distress when the children realise they cannot rely on their caregivers to provide a secure base for exploration of the world around them (Bowlby, 1952). Once the child has learnt this, other behaviours become apparent, such as avoidance:

*“...they just didn’t seem bothered as to whether I was there or not” (Cv1, 2011)*

*“...they didn’t mind being held, but sometimes they seemed like they didn’t care, like they just sat there thinking, OK, let’s just get this over with...” (Cv9, 2011)*

This happens when the child attempts to close themselves emotionally from that which hurts them, i.e. the departure of their attachment figures. They attempt to respond as little as possible to any volunteer attention in an effort to self-protect. What is interesting is how upset the volunteers felt at this behaviour, highlighting how important an emotional connection to the children was as part of their experience: despite how indifferent the children may have been to their attentions, the volunteers still persisted in the quest to form a bond through imposed physical contact. This again highlights how influential the imaginary of need promoted by the organisations is upon the voluntourists’ negotiation of their carer identity: close and intimate attachments with the children are integral to their perceived success in their role.

*“...I’ve had a rubbish day... you know how much I love [a child at the orphanage]? Well he just didn’t want to know me today... I don’t know what’s wrong with him. No matter how many times I tried to hug him or pick him up, he just tried to wriggle away and was more interested in playing with his truck... I’m well upset, I just wanted a hug.” (Bv11, 2011)*

*“...I love it when the kids hug you, it makes you feel as though they really like you, you know? So when you get ones that don’t want to be hugged or picked up or carried around, it really makes you feel as though you’re doing something wrong. It does make you feel a little sad to be rejected by a child, especially when all you want to do is love them...” (Cv7, 2011)*

Here the volunteers explain their sadness at the rejection of their affection by certain children. The genuine care they feel for the children is apparent, but what is interesting is that the volunteers only contemplated how this situation made *them* feel, and did not consider the reasons behind the child’s rejection. This again demonstrates the myopic vision of voluntourism, how this is promoted and encouraged, but also how important intimate connections are within voluntourism, and how these form key aspects of the volunteers’ experiences and identities (Grayson, 2011).

Some of the children at the projects demonstrated more intense forms of “ambivalence/resistance” behaviour (Ainsworth, 1979). Here the child feels confused about their feelings towards their carers, and displays opposing and extreme characteristics:

*“...she would just pester her [volunteer] and pester her to get her attention, even if she was with another child, and if she didn’t respond in time, there would be trouble...” (Bv3, 2011)*

*“...I saw children get violent with other volunteers because they didn’t want them to leave...” (Bv7, 2011)*

*“...it was like sometimes she loved me and sometimes she hated me...” (Cv6, 2011)*

The children are not yet emotionally mature enough to be able to cope with and process the range of emotions they feel at the prospect of abandonment, so they often lash out with episodic violence, or other forms of bad behaviour (Ainsworth, 1979). Their frustration also leads to confusing behaviour towards the volunteers, often showering them with affection, and then suddenly wanting to get away from

them very quickly. Children often became preoccupied with obtaining the volunteer's attention, but as soon as it was received, they responded angrily and aggressively. This behaviour epitomises the characteristics of severely disrupted emotional development, which is something that may affect their future relationships (Ainsworth, 1979; Walters and Cummings, 2000).

These attachment behaviours are influenced by the carers' behaviour, namely the attachment relationship (Cassidy, 1999). This refers to aspects of the carers' behaviour that promotes development and maintenance of attachment with the child. Howe's (2001) internal working model exemplifies how children's feelings regarding their carers are organised, and reveals how carers' behaviour can affect the security of attachment the child develops (see Figure 2.2). The behaviour of the volunteers exemplified those identified within the internal working model, with not surprisingly, the more mature and experienced carers exhibiting more laudable behaviour;

*"...she was very good, she seemed to know what she [the child] needed and knew just how respond to her..." (As2, 2011)*

This was a comment made by a local member of staff about a female volunteer, and is testament to her exemplary behaviour, as praise from staff was not bestowed lightly. The 28 years old was a teacher at a specialist school, and although she spoke only a little Spanish (she was taking lessons), she tried hard to communicate with the children as much as possible. When compared to a less experienced volunteer;

*"...it was just annoying when you needed a quick time out and the children were just constantly bugging you and wouldn't let you have a moment's peace... sometimes I just had to ignore them or pretend I couldn't hear them and walk away..." (Av2, 2011; age 19)*

It is easy to see how important the volunteer's reactions are to the children's behaviour, and how maturity and age makes a big difference. In this latter quote, the volunteer is putting her own needs before those of the children, by making herself

unavailable to them. Through this distancing, she is reducing her accessibility and sensitivity towards the children, which although understandable considering the high stress levels synonymous with child care, it is not ideal behaviour. It also highlights the inappropriateness of the organisations' emphasis on how previous childcare experience is unnecessary to the responsibilities faced by the voluntourists. The volunteers then internalise this knowledge, believing their lack of experience can be made up for by their enthusiasm and compassion, which clearly is not the case.

Although Av2 was an extreme example, her behaviour was sadly more common than her more exemplary counterpart. Voluntourists often felt unable to respond to what the children needed or wanted, frequently feeling confused by their disorganised behaviour, and this was exacerbated by the inability to communicate effectively. This regularly caused the volunteers to ignore the children they felt unable to relate to, as seen by the comments from Av5 and Cv3 presented above. This again seems to be aggravated by the volunteer's inexperience, with them repeatedly resenting and rejecting the child they do not know how to manage. However, this exacerbated the children's bad behaviour, as in their plight for attention, they continued to exhibit the characteristics that made them unlikeable, preventing them from forming loving and stable attachments (Webb, 1994).

These behavioural patterns exhibited by the voluntourists and the children highlight the impacts the care environment can induce, and how voluntourist subjectivities can influence and shape the care that is provided. Evidence demonstrates that age, experience and occupations can affect how encounters are internalised, and how reactions are shaped accordingly. The colonial tendencies in encouraging Western youth to use the care situation as a platform to engage with experimentation of their neoliberal subjectivities are apparent, and the imaginaries emanating from the industry frequently postulate that such experiments are to be rewarded within the UK by means of increased social capital through measures such as university acceptance or professional promotion. A consequence of such identity-exploration is that the

voluntourists are frequently mentally and emotionally unprepared for the tasks that are expected of them, which as demonstrated, can have an adverse effect on the care environment provided.

### **Increased Vulnerability**

A further reason for the investigation of orphan tourism is the increased vulnerability the children are subjected to. Firstly, as advertised by all three organisations anyone is accepted onto the project, without prejudice, regardless of experience, skill, and without any criminal background checks. This indicates that anyone with an unsavoury disposition towards children *could* become a temporary carer of vulnerable children, which exposes the children to all kinds of dangers. This is contradictory to international standards which indicate that carers should be submitted to a vetting procedure to ensure their suitability to work with children (Surestart, 2009). However, in relation to background checks, the sending organisations claim

*“...the project doesn’t require them. They aren’t a legal requirement out in Mexico. Plus they take time and money, which the orphanage can’t afford and neither can we. It can take months for a CB check to come through, and the orphanage is crying out for volunteers- if they had to wait for every single person to have one of these checks and be properly trained, we’d never be able to send them out the staff they need.” (Bo, 2011)*

Organisations A and C gave similar responses. Although universal children’s rights guidelines demand protection for children in care (UN, 2010), this open door policy is doing just the opposite. It is recognised that applying Westernised universal rights supposes a Western-centric view, potentially undermining local culture (Pupavac, 2001; White, 2002; Jones, 2005b), and in accordance with this, it could be argued that the organisations are simply acting in line with Mexican-specific policy which does not stipulate the need for CBR checks on care-givers (DIF, 2009). Nonetheless, despite the valid case for relativism in child rights, a complete absence of any regulation could condone severely damaging behaviour. The number of documented cases of the sexual abuse of children living in care homes should prove testament to how vulnerable these children are, and the importance of appropriate screening

procedures (Kinnear, 2009; ACHR, 2013; Ahmed, 2013). Voluntourists were also surprised at how easy it was to gain a place without some kind of vetting procedure and believed it to be inappropriate, yet none volunteered with the organisations that *do* require official checks, as they cost significantly more money.

Within Projects A and C, volunteers are expected to supervise and help children during intimate activities such as bathing, clothing and changing nappies, and although technically men were prohibited from performing these tasks, the frequent unplanned absence of volunteers left orphanages short staffed, so this rule was often forgotten. Although it is not suggested that all male volunteers will mistreat those within their care, it is well documented that men are more likely to abuse (NSPCC, 2011; Whealin, 2007) and therefore their exposure to vulnerable children should be limited in intimate situations (UNICEF, 2013). In addition to this, young girls who are reaching puberty have to suffer the indignity of being bathed or dressed by a strange twenty-something year old male. The increased exposure of the children to exploitation, potential abuse and lack of privacy is not only damaging to their development, and emotional well-being, but it also harms their view of self-worth, respect and decency (Freeman, 2000; Emond, 2010).

The lack of privacy the children must endure is degrading, exploitative and injurious, permitting the children to grow up with a warped sense of what is acceptable and dignified (UNICEF, 2010a; 2010b). For example at Project C, children aged 14 were running around naked, demonstrating inappropriate and sexualised behaviour in front of those much younger and of the opposite sex. It is not believed that these children knew what they were doing, more so the fact that they did not understand how or why this behaviour was wrong and unacceptable. The volunteers felt helpless and at a loss to stop the behaviour (*“it’s not exactly acceptable to chase or grab a naked 14 year old...”* Cv1, 2011) and so could only futilely call out to stop. This behaviour is due to continued exposure to undignified and debasing forms of intimate care, and is argued to be irreversible, thus having a long term impact upon how the

children will conduct themselves as adults (Emond, 2010; Viner and Taylor, 2005). Furthermore, this highly sexualised behaviour has lasting consequences upon how males and females will treat and view each other into adolescence and adulthood (Thomas de Benitez and Jones, 2009).

Under the UN convention, children in orphanages have the same rights as children across the globe to have a safe and private home setting (UN, 2010). The short-term visits from voluntourists impinge upon this right, and reduce the children's privacy inside their own home. Not only do the children have to contend with a constant influx of strange new carers imposing upon their privacy, but also the three projects actively encourage visitors (usually wealthy donors) to the orphanage in a bid to encourage further donations. Most volunteers and visitors also take photographs of the children, many of which are posted to social networking sites such as Facebook and personal blogs, allowing hundreds more people to view and observe them. Not only is this exploitative of the children, but it also increases their vulnerability and puts them at risk (UNICEF, 2010a).

The staff at the projects believed that such practices were harmful and exploitative, but frequently felt they could not intervene and undermine decisions made by the manager. They felt they *"didn't know enough"* to question these decisions, and felt the manager often knew what was for the greater good of the home (Cs3, 2011). Nevertheless, a staff member at Project A who was opposed to these violations stated that

*"orphanages are not zoos and strangers should not be allowed to move through their home. In England this would not be allowed, it would be against their rights, and there are laws to protect them from this happening. Mexican children are no different they deserve the same rights too"* (As5, 2011)

Custodial guardians, such as the staff, must have a role in protecting the needs of minorities and/or those without political and economic power (Smith and Duffy, 2003). The fact that the staff felt unable to intervene raises issues of power between



hosts and guests. It has been highlighted previously that power operates in both directions, and the assumption of the continual oppression of the local populace is to be rejected. However this does not diminish the fact that voluntourists are often placed in a superior position, and are treated favourably compared to the local staff. This lack of power felt by the local staff is therefore preventing them from speaking out about inappropriate care practices, and from acting in the children's best interests. Fear of losing their jobs and consequent privileges by opposing volunteers' behaviour are daunting prospects, especially when employers have made it clear that the volunteers' happiness is a priority for the success of the project.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) states that all tourism activities "should promote human rights and more particularly, the individual rights of the most vulnerable groups, notably children... and the handicapped" (Equations, 2008: 164). However, the care environments here appear to be in violation of children's rights, and because the care is unregulated by either the State or the voluntourism industry, these violations have gone unnoticed. This demonstrates how neoliberal market practices favour those in power, and how the needs of the children are being overlooked in favour of commercial pressures. Hence the children and the projects are placed in a more vulnerable position thanks to the intervention of the Western voluntourists, providing legitimacy to the argument that neoliberal voluntourism is a form of colonialism.

Increased vulnerability is a problem at Project A, who allows children to be checked out of the orphanage by volunteers to go on day trips or be given treats, such as taken out for ice-cream. This happened several times a week during the course of the research, and when questioned about it, both the orphanage and the volunteers involved denied any wrong doing. They both believed it was a "*great opportunity*" for the children as they are so very rarely treated or get to leave the orphanage grounds. One volunteer explained

*“...I get so sad to see them in there, I just can’t bear it. And as I can afford to do this with them, why not give them this treat? If ...[Project Manager]... doesn’t mind it, what’s the problem? Its win-win really, we both get to have a nice day out...” (Av8, 2011)*

When questioned about this practice, the voluntourists were quick to denounce the stranger epithet, asserting that providing care affords them an intimate familiarity. Volunteers at all three projects explained that due to the intense, emotional and stressful environment they found themselves in whilst volunteering, they tended to form bonds with each other very quickly; forming friendships within days, that would take months to develop at home in reality. They believed these strong bonds forged between themselves could be transferred to the connections they were forming with the children. Although understandable, this perspective may be a little idealistic, as the children are not old or mature enough to understand such intense and transient emotions and be able to cope with them as adults would.

Furthermore, such a practice creates the opportunity for less scrupulous individuals to take the child away from their home, and subject them to various forms of abuse and exploitation. Many of the volunteers did not question this practice, only expressing concern that the children left behind would be upset. This suggests that caregivers can sometimes be so intent on providing care, they become too close to their charge and fail to see that they can be causing more harm than good (Raghuram et al, 2009). Only one volunteer expressed reservations, stating that

*“...although it’s a nice thing to do, and I don’t doubt their intentions, it just seems weird to me that we’re allowed to do that... you’d never be able to at home, and people would think it’s wrong there... but because we’re out here, it’s like a completely different set of rule apply...” (Av17, 2011)*

This volunteer was perhaps able to question this practice as she was slightly older than other volunteers (31 years old) and was also the only volunteer who was a mother herself. She believed this enabled her to imagine how she would feel if this was how her own children were treated. Again this demonstrates how voluntourist subjectivities can influence how they internalise and react to situations, and how this

can subsequently affect the care environment. From observations, it was clear that there were distinct favourites amongst the volunteers: it was always the cutest and the sweetest child that was chosen for these special treats. The disappointment and hurt felt by those who were never picked was obvious, and unfortunately, this seemed to start a vicious cycle of bad behaviour to release their emotions and attract attention, which unfortunately made the volunteers even less likely to pick them. This can cause acute emotional distress to the children, allowing them to believe they are unworthy of love and attention, which can cause problems for future relationships (Howe, 2001). This behaviour on the part of the volunteers demonstrates a self-deception and neglect of their predefined-values in order to justify personal satisfaction and a misplaced kindness on behalf of the children (Smith and Duffy, 2003). This again provides legitimacy to the argument that voluntourism in its neoliberalised form is akin to colonialism as it exploits those it claims to protect, in favour of the satisfaction of Westernised rescue fantasies.

## **Conclusion**

The opportunities for tourists to spend time caring for vulnerable children are rapidly increasing with voluntourism's growing neoliberalisation and emergence into the mainstream tourism market. The competitiveness of the neoliberal market has caused the children to be marketed as a commodity, with the voluntourism organisations promoting such holidays as to fuel the rescue desires of compassionate people, playing upon the orphan as an adorable innocent in order to attract more voluntourists. The economic valence of orphans as a commodity has catapulted them to a global phenomenon that plays upon the misguided sentimentality and kindness of Westerners. Marketing literature skilfully transforms poverty and need into a desirable experience ready for Western consumption, based upon inducing sympathy on behalf of the orphan and the necessity of the voluntourist to fulfil the needs. By convincing voluntourists of their own self-worth, the organisations are able to invoke the notion of the compassionate-self and capitalise upon it.

The socio-political structures of the voluntourism market unfortunately seem to have generated colonial tendencies, with the volunteers placing their faith in the knowledge of the sending organisations, and internalising the promoted imaginaries in a way that elevates their sense of self-worth and value. Superiority is accredited to the volunteers, based upon their privilege, and this is causing them to indulge in a self-deception that belies their preset values and ideals in order to justify their actions and fulfil their personal desires. The distance involved in the voluntourist care allows notions of difference to pervade the levels of care provided to the children, and justifies to the volunteers a lapse in standards that would not be tolerated if they were providing such care at home. In addition, the feminisation of the care work has allowed care standards to lapse under the apprehension that the work is soft, simple and based upon common sense, due to a maternal instinct inherent in female volunteers (English, 2006). Voluntourist subjectivities appear to be further contributing factors in the breakdown of care standards, as age, experience, gender and occupations shape the level of care provided; younger and inexperienced volunteers frequently struggled with the role, and this was seen to impact negatively upon the children.

The children's emotional development was also affected by the transient nature of voluntourist care; the continuous cycle of broken attachments means the children develop a diminished sense of self-worth, self-esteem and unhealthy templates for future relationships (Bowlby, 1979). The placing of children within institutional care also increases their vulnerability, violating their rights to privacy, and increasing the opportunities for further exploitation and abuse. Thus far, no formal regulations or evaluations of the activities are being carried out, and hence opportunities for these volunteer experiences go on unabated. Despite attempts by activists, NGOs and a scarce number of academics, changes to the status quo are proving to be slow and challenging. The problem is, volunteers come with generous amounts of money, making orphanages a lucrative activity. Thus, it is not an activity that will be easily stopped, especially when the feel-good factor and emotional rewards from hugging an orphan are so strong.

# Chapter 9- Conclusions

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to provide the concluding remarks for the thesis by drawing on the evidence presented by the previous chapters and evaluating how they have answered the research aims and objectives as set out in Chapter One. Each research question will be individually addressed and the emergent themes discussed according to current literature and what this means in terms of the neoliberalisation of voluntourism in Mexico for the organisations, the volunteers, the hosts and the children. The contribution of the research to the pertaining literature surrounding neoliberal development, care and volunteer tourism is also summarised and presented, alongside the identified limitations to the research and some recommendations for future study. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts on the use of volunteers in the commercialised voluntourism sector as the primary carers for vulnerable children.

## **The Research in Context**

This thesis was produced with the aim of answering the overarching research question that wished to discover

*“How do voluntourists negotiate their position as care-givers in the context of marketised voluntourism and the marketisation of care within the neoliberal landscape of voluntourism in Mexico?”*

In order to do this, nine months of fieldwork was undertaken in three separate sites within the Jalisco district of Mexico, using a qualitative approach of interviews and participant observation. Three different organisations and their endorsed projects were investigated in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of commercialised voluntourism in orphanages and care homes within the specified areas of Mexico. The

results have been discussed within the last four chapters, and presented below is a summary of how this evidence has answered the subsidiary research questions that were identified in Chapter One. The final section summaries these findings and presents a conclusion to the primary research question.

It is hoped that this research has provided a deeper and more detailed understanding of the issues surrounding the neoliberalisation of voluntourism, the appropriateness of its utilisation as a development tool, and its allowance of voluntourists to be the primary caregivers of vulnerable children. It has found that the shallow voluntourism organisations and projects demonstrate the acute limitations of simplified ideas of development providing the basis for the care of vulnerable children, especially considering the commercial pressures felt by the organisations and the projects have shaped practices that are fundamentally incompatible with the aims of development. Furthermore, the market for voluntourism has to be understood in a colonial context, with colonial biases implicit within the ideas of intervention, expertise, care, poverty, development and heroism, becoming an inherent part of the business. The imaginaries created by the organisations are a primary contributing factor to this, as well as significantly influencing how the voluntourists come to frame and understand their experiences, encounters and their own identities as carers.

The use of Mexico as a case study has given situational context to the research in an area that has previously been overlooked by the literature, and as such has provided a fresh new insight into the Mexican voluntourism market. The study of three separate organisations and projects has permitted for cross-comparisons to be made and together, this has composed a more comprehensive investigation than has been traditionally seen. Although many findings here are specific to Mexico, the broader critique of the neoliberal and colonial underpinnings of voluntourism can be extended to other countries, or indeed other areas of Mexico.

Furthermore, much of the previous voluntourism literature has solely focused upon the voluntourists, and although they also feature centrally to this research, it has also provided a much needed holistic insight into the perspective of various members of the host communities, as well as those of the voluntourism organisations, thus helping to obtain a wider perspective of the issues involved in the neoliberalisation of voluntourism. In addition, the incorporation of child welfare literature into social research has contextualised the impacts that voluntourism may be having upon the vulnerable children placed within its care. This is an area of voluntourism literature that has (somewhat surprisingly) been overlooked, but yet is of vital significance, to understanding the role of voluntourism in development and provision of care.

## **The Research Objectives**

- 1. How are voluntourism sending organisations and host project practices being shaped by their colonial past and neoliberal present?*

In the context of this study, voluntourism in Mexico appears to adhere closely to neoliberal practices in accordance with the neoliberal market, causing the organisations to face intense competition, and in response they have adopted a more commercial and business-oriented focus in order to compete and survive. This is exemplified by the revenue management pricing systems each of the organisations have adopted, in order to maximise their profits. This neoliberal path is creating a more professionalised and commercial sector, embedded with neoliberal ideologies and practices as seen through how voluntourism is structured, managed and marketed, with the evidence suggesting an occurrence of a degenerative effect on the quality of volunteer assistance. This neoliberalisation has encouraged the organisations within the sector to offer commercial products that are not only marketed, promoted and packaged in the same way as mass tourism products (Ellis, 2003), but are also in line with a shallow-scale typology (Callanan and Thomas, 2005). As a result, empirical evidence has demonstrated that the organisations' appear to be more involved in the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the volunteers as

opposed to those of the projects and host communities and consequently. This seems to have affected what the projects offer, the scope of what the volunteers can achieve and whether the expectations of both the volunteers and the projects are actually met.

The expansion of voluntourism and its incorporation within the neoliberal agenda has allowed the organisations to develop a set of marketable commodities to be packaged as the voluntourism experience. Evidence has demonstrated that these include personal development, education, CV enhancement and the opportunity to make a difference. The success of such marketing has earned voluntourism vocal support from a variety of actors, including those from the State, education and private sectors. However, voluntourism has created simplistic and racialised public imaginaries of Mexico and development work in order to attract their market, rather than critically and reflexively engage with such imagery and perceptions. This has perpetuated colonial and imperialistic tendencies and generated power imbalances, whilst producing depoliticised, notions of development work. Inherently, this has shaped not only the public imaginaries created by the organisations of such concepts, but also how Mexico is promoted as a destination. These imaginaries and the neoliberalised professionalisation process have also influenced how voluntourists are negotiating their subjectivities and how knowledge is internalised and understood by them.

The problems associated with the racialised imaginaries and their uncritical acceptance are being further exacerbated by the neoliberalisation of voluntourism and its adoption of a depoliticised and simplified view of the concept of development. The organisations under study promote the activity of development as something that can be 'done' as part of one's leisure time (Simpson, 2004; Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011) which indicates to voluntourists that they can make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable people with very little effort. This again highlights that the ideology of development adopted by shallow voluntourism companies is simplistic and essentialised, rather than providing innovative policy responses based upon deep



understandings of the social, economic and political specificities of Mexico. The use of language and essentialised images in the promotional material again not only reinforces stereotypes, but depoliticises development and highlights colonialist tendencies. In addition, the power accredited to the organisations through the way the industry is structured and organised has led to a lack of responsibility and accountability on the part of the organisations on behalf of the projects they promote. Power relations stemming from a neoliberal agenda have reinforced the authority of the voluntourism organisations, enabling them to enforce and decide upon policies that are beneficial to them, whilst leaving the projects in a vulnerable position. This colonialist practice is observed through the emergence of the discourse of the 'right kind of poor'.

In terms of the projects, it was witnessed that those endorsed by the voluntourism organisations (and indeed those who wish to be included) need to walk a thin line between appearing too rich and too poor in order to retain volunteer support. This essentially created the image of 'the right kind of poor', which allows the projects to portray an ideal amount of need and destitution in order to continuously appeal to voluntourists. However there are severe consequences for those who fall either side of this line. For those who are too poor, they find themselves continuously overlooked for inclusion from the commercial companies as the level of help they require is beyond the means of the organisations and their volunteers. This can be justified by the legitimate development conditions required by capacity building (Kaplan, 2000), yet nonetheless, the organisations appear to be too preoccupied by commercial pressures to have considered these development-related justifications. This therefore reinforces the argument that it is not viable for commercial companies to engage significantly with the complexities of development (Toner, 2003).

For the projects that appear too rich, they have found the support they may have previously enjoyed is withdrawn without the appropriate procedures put into place to ensure their continuing survival and self-sustainability. This highlights how dependent

the projects become on the financial support provided by the volunteers and the organisations, as well as the vulnerable situations and unequal relationships projects can find themselves within (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008). However, there is an assumed sense of worth and value placed upon the inclusion within an organisation's portfolio, and for the projects that are considered viable for such inclusion, they too face serious challenges in their attempts to attract and retain volunteer and organisational support. One way they seem to be attempting to manage this is to make themselves appear poor enough to be appealing by purposefully reducing the facilities and resources available to the children, some of which have had serious consequences upon the children's emotional development and their welfare (Silverman, 2008). One of these reductions has been on the number permanent and local staff employed to provide the children's care. This has led to harmful impacts upon the children's well-being and development, as well as to the empowerment of local women whom have then found themselves unemployed and unable to provide for their families.

These consequences are not the desired outcomes of development or capacity building, and instead bear testament to how the adherence to neoliberal practices and commercial pressures are in fundamental contradiction with the aims of development. This is seen through the ways the projects and organisations are being influenced by the re-emergence of historic colonial tendencies and contemporary commercial practices. The belief adopted by those within the shallow voluntourism sector that its benefits will permeate throughout society to reach those most in need is therefore an ideological stance that has more faith in market-based mechanisms than is borne out of the evidence. The local complexities, and critically the dynamics, structures and processes of the voluntourism encounter are thereby shaping the outcomes of voluntourism interventions, demonstrating that practices that rely on equitable market distribution of benefits do not always materialise in contextually specific situations.

2. *What are the specificities of the Mexican case and what can this tell us about the context in which voluntourists are working more generally?*

Mexico's adherence to the neoliberal agenda has significantly impacted upon the social provisions provided by the State to welfare organisations, especially for those who provide care for the most vulnerable and impoverished members of society (Mahon, 2010). It has been highlighted and discussed how child care is organised in Mexico, and how the introduction of voluntourism has encouraged an increase of informal and unregistered homes in order to respond to the rising popularity of working with impoverished children (Grayson, 2011). These informal homes find it harder to source a regular supply of funding, and this is key in their desire for voluntourism endorsement. Subsequently, this has meant local projects now have to compete for inclusion within a portfolio, and as discussed above, this can have detrimental impacts upon the children within their care, and also for various members of the neighbouring communities; women in particular.

The voluntourism organisations are capitalising upon this need for their endorsement, and as such, the market has experienced an influx of companies providing potential volunteers with an opportunity to help vulnerable children. As discussed, the imaginaries created by the organisations in order to promote their projects capitalises upon the sentimentality of Western voluntourists, promoting the children as adorable innocents, evoking and encouraging a sense of responsibility and obligation within the volunteers to help them. One way that the voluntourists are expressing and negotiating ideas of their responsibility is through heroism. Although voluntourism easily lends itself to an analysis framed by the application of the western-construct of heroism, this has previously been applied in an uncritical manner (Tomazos and Butler, 2010), and what is apparent from the evidence collected by this thesis is that there are several censures related to the application of the idea of the hero to voluntourists. These have been illustrated through the way volunteers understand their roles and describe their experiences, both of which are imbued with heroic symbolism, imagery and language.

The heroic identity is highly colonial and imperialistic, with links to the acquisition of the British Empire and the historic roles of the coloniser and the colonised (Dawson, 1994; Rushdie, 2006). This has been exacerbated by the unproblematic assumption of *need* of the Mexican host communities the commercial organisations promote, which is causing the volunteers to perceive their hosts with an asymmetrical orientation as the exotic 'other' (Said, 1978). Evidence has also highlighted the imperialistic and colonial tendencies imbued within such practices, demonstrating how voluntourism in Mexico is creating notions of dependency and essentialised and racialised imaginaries of the incapacitated local. This has allowed volunteers to be positioned in the role of expert whilst on their placement, which has externalised the concept of development, insinuating that the host communities cannot be responsible for their own development progression and care of their young, but instead require young and unskilled volunteers to be the agents of change (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011).

The notion of difference appears to be a significant factor in the voluntourists' heroic narrative, with the dichotomies of *them* and *us* frequently appearing within the volunteers' dialogue. The volunteers appeared to repeatedly perceive their hosts in terms of their differences, as opposed to mutuality and similarities, which seemed to be aggravated by the lack of critical engagement with the structures surrounding poverty. This is further exacerbated by imaginaries created of Mexico through its promotion as a destination. The organisations used essentialised, evocative and recognisable imagery, as well as romanticised descriptions and text to invoke the Western imagination. This reinforces to the voluntourists particular ways of perceiving Mexico; restricting its inhabitants into stereotypes ensconced in colonial discourse. This representation of Mexico does little to inform voluntourists of the complexity of its political and social-economic situation, which suggests that voluntourism does not always generate a genuine awareness of the issues facing host communities (Raymond and Hall, 2008), and if the volunteers use this new found knowledge to internalise their judgements of the host communities, they could be reinforcing stereotypes and preconceived perceptions, rather than adopting a critical reflection of the realities.

This shift towards orientalism (Said, 1978) has proliferated the neoliberal discourse of Western superiority and the supposition that the local projects are better off with volunteer interventions than without. This undermines the resourcefulness of the local projects and their staff and their ability to help themselves, again perpetuating the notion that volunteers are needed to encourage and invoke change and progress.

The imaginaries of the hero, need and poverty created and promoted by the organisations have formed a power imbalance, whereby the volunteers assume a more superior and authoritative role over their hosts. The volunteers are internalising the knowledge produced in an uncritical manner, and this has led to an elevated sense of self-worth and value. This accreditation of power to the volunteers can sometimes be inadvertent, with the volunteers' perceptions of the hosts naturally leading them to adopt a more superior and somewhat supercilious role, caused by the belief in the incapability of the local staff, and the assumption that the Western way is best. However, this superiority seems to be exacerbated by the project managers who are happy to accredit authority to the volunteers and provide them with preferential treatment to keep them happy and ensure they get the experience they want. The local staff are not happy with the behaviour and attitudes most volunteers demonstrate, and have even voiced serious concerns over volunteers' performance. However, they feel they do not have the power or the ability to speak out in fear of creating problems and what this might mean in terms of their future positions. This suggests that neoliberalised and commercial voluntourism is not providing the help/assistance these projects may need, and instead, market-forces may simply be creating a platform for voluntourists to act out the heroic and well-meaning fantasies it has encouraged them to form.

3. *What can an exploration of voluntourist subjectivities tell us about the care environments provided by voluntourism projects and how suitable do these conditions render the voluntourists to be as the primary care-givers for vulnerable children*

The opportunities for voluntourists to spend time caring for vulnerable children are rapidly increasing with voluntourism's growing commercialisation and emergence into the mainstream market (Grayson, 2011). The competitiveness of the neoliberal market has caused the organisations to market the children as a commodity to be experienced through the portrayal of orphans as adorable innocents. This use of vulnerable children as a commodity has attracted the attention of several child's rights NGOs (UNICEF, 2010b; Save The Children, 2003; 2010) who have campaigned to promote how this may negatively affect children's welfare, but so far, this issue has been largely unrecognised by those within the academic sphere of voluntourism. Nonetheless, evidence has demonstrated that commodifying and marketing the children in such a way has effectively appealed to the sentimental Westerner, acting upon social pressures for western youth to become model global citizens, invoking within them a desire to provide the children with care, love and affection.

Responsibility is a primary concept in the exploration of voluntourists subjectivities, in order to understand how they perceive themselves and those in residence at the destination. It is important to the volunteers as a reason for engaging in voluntourism and their decision to work with vulnerable children, as they themselves become victims of the neoliberal agenda; needing to compete amongst themselves for university placements, corporate positions and internships, each needing to prove and distinguish themselves from their peers. This signifies how the market influences the voluntourists; within the UK's contemporary neoliberal society, the market's control and exertion of authority over certain political and social pressures, influence how the voluntourists' perceive and think about themselves and their volunteering placement. In response to this, the evidence suggests that voluntourism is now transforming into an extra-curricular activity, with volunteers admitting that they hoped to enhance their

CV through participation in the placements (Bondi, 2005; Baillie-Smith and Laurie, 2011).

Volunteers have also admitted that they are using the experience as a platform to experiment with their identities, gaining essential work experience where it would otherwise be denied in the UK due to the general lack of skills, qualifications and experience possessed by the volunteers in regards to working with children. This professionalisation has caused the voluntourism sector to be dominated by a careerist and professional volunteer-persona and is now in danger of egoism and commerce overruling the original altruistic approach to volunteering. This is exacerbated by the volunteers' unreflexive acceptance of imaginaries of need, poverty and desperation and their belief in their own self-worth as development agents. This focus upon the benefits accruing to themselves and the negotiation of their cosmopolitan-selves has not encouraged them to think critically about the levels of care that they will be providing to vulnerable children.

As discussed above, evidence has demonstrated how voluntourists are using the trope of the hero to help negotiate their responsibilities and identities as carers. In addition to what has been highlighted above, what must also be addressed are the heavily gendered connotations apparent within the concept. Traditionally heroes, risk and adventures have been associated with masculine characteristics, whilst feminine qualities have always been viewed as the opposite of heroic or adventurous (Featherstone, 1999; Maclean, 2012). However, volunteers now seem to be challenging these accepted identities, with the female volunteers (of which represented the majority in the context of this research) exhibiting the masculine characteristics of the hero, whilst simultaneously adopting the traditionally feminine role of the carer. This has therefore allowed the female volunteer to defy conventional feminine roles and adopt new identities for themselves.

Nonetheless, although the feminisation of care has been well documented (Gilligan, 1982; Finch and Groves, 1983; Lerner and Galambos, 1985; Ungerson, 1990; Richardson, 1995; Daly and Lewis, 1998), the organisations seem to be reiterating this stereotype as they categorise working with vulnerable children to be a soft option. This is seen through their policies that previous experience, childcare knowledge and language skills are not prerequisite necessities for participation in the placement. This signifies that caring is thought of as an innate activity for women, and whereby appropriate levels of compassion and kindness can act as replacements for knowledge and skills. The volunteers are internalising this imaginary without critical reflection, and are finding themselves overwhelmed and underprepared for the challenges and realities that face them when caring for vulnerable children. This is negatively affecting the care environment as voluntourists are unable to provide the necessary levels of care required.

Furthermore, the geographical distance and cultural differences between volunteers and their charges has allowed notions of difference to pervade the levels of care provided to the children, whilst simultaneously justifying to the volunteers a lapse in standards that would not be tolerated within the UK. Despite this, the superiority accredited to the volunteers whilst on their placement has caused them to indulge in a self-deception that belies their preset values in relation to appropriate childcare behaviour. This allows the voluntourists to justify their actions and fulfil their personal desires in their attempts to establish the intimate connections with the children so eagerly promoted by the commercial organisations. This is far from the ideal level of care needed to provide adequate protection and guardianship required by these children (Richter, 2004).

Although this study did not take on a direct examination of the impact of voluntourism on children's well-being, evidence here certainly suggests that the children may be negatively affected by the transient and unstable care the voluntourists provide. The commercialisation of voluntourism has seen an increase in the number of projects that



allow their volunteers to work with children for as little as one to four week stays. Faced with this continuous cycle of broken attachments to their carers, the children are likely to grow up with a diminished sense of self-worth and unhealthy templates of what their future relationships should be like. The opportunity to form stable and secure attachments to their care-givers is one that many recognise as being essential to a child's emotional well-being and development (Bowlby, 1952; Ainsworth, 1978; Howe, 2001; Aldgate, 2006). The children were also observed displaying behavioural characteristics associated with 'strange theory' (Ainsworth, 1979), suggesting that the emotional damage from broken attachments and abandonment issues are already beginning to manifest themselves within the children. This is exacerbated by the desires of the voluntourists to establish the intimate connections with the children, so eagerly promoted by the organisations, in their attempts to negotiate successful identities as carers.

Additionally, the placing of children in institutionalised care also increases their vulnerability, violates their rights and increases the opportunities for exploitation and abuse. With the growing popularity of caring for children and the lucrative voluntourism market, new care homes and orphanages are increasing, and institutionalisation is becoming an accepted method for childcare rather than the last resort it has been recommended to be (UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID, 2004; Richter and Norman, 2010).

### **Limitations to the Research**

Despite this project having been carefully thought through and designed to capture as much and as rich a data set as possible given the resources that were available, the research has inevitably some limitations. Although the timescale of this project was a nine month balanced study, it is felt that the research would have particularly benefited from the insights of a more longitudinal study. In addition, the findings here suggest that a study of the impacts of voluntourism on the children themselves is

urgently needed. In such a study, the children's perspective should be centred within the analysis. This would allow the children a chance to voice their opinions on their care environment, their carers, and provide an insight into voluntourism childcare that has not yet been researched. Their voices are as equally important, yet for various ethical and practical reasons, they are often excluded from the research process. This is equally true for the voices of the host projects. Although this thesis has attempted to include the opinions of various local residents involved or affected by the projects, for the various reasons described, this has not been possible to the extent that was originally anticipated. It is therefore considered that a greater inclusion of the local perspective would enhance the analysis of the thesis, and make an important contribution to the literature. Despite these limitations, it must be noted that the intensive nature of the fieldwork has allowed the evidence collected to be rich and varied and has thus produced a detailed insight into the neoliberalisation of Mexican voluntourism.

### **Final Thoughts on the Study**

Although the evidence presented throughout this thesis has offered a harsh critique of voluntourism, it must be reiterated that this is a study of only the most shallow and commercial sector of the industry. Therefore it is not being suggested that the deeper (or even intermediate) projects and organisations cannot engage in development work in a more meaningful, critical and reflexive way to provide a platform for change. However, what must be recognised are the vulnerabilities voluntourism is susceptible to through its increasing neoliberalisation and commercialisation if it remains unmonitored and unregulated as it is now. Activists, NGOs and people within the industry have been campaigning to demonstrate how voluntourism in its current form may be harmful to the vulnerable children within its care. Academia is now beginning to recognise this point too, although much more research is needed on this issue. However, what can be said is that it is no longer appropriate to argue that compassion, kindness and a love for children is enough to justify the continuous stream of transitory and inexperienced care the children are subjected to; this practice has

generated enough attention for volunteers to be made aware of the harm they may be causing, and to think critically about the appropriateness of their actions.

Therefore, in relation to answering the primary research question of this thesis, voluntourism in its commercial and neoliberalised form does not make an appropriate tool for development due to its promotion of a simplified, essentialised and depoliticised notion of development, which appears to be reinforcing colonial and imperialistic imaginaries and practices, thus providing little benefit to anyone other than the organisations and the volunteers. In addition, voluntourists are far from the ideal carers for the vulnerable children they pay to look after. This is because the neoliberalised market of voluntourism has professionalised the volunteering experience, allowing the volunteers to believe they can use their placement as a platform in which to experiment with identity formation and personal development, and also as a means to distinguish themselves through their negotiation of neoliberal subjectivities. The market has simultaneously promoted to the volunteers that they can make a difference to the lives of the children they care for without possessing any previous experience or knowledge in childcare.

Therefore, in order for the promises made by voluntourism to the voluntourists, the host projects, and more importantly the children within its care, to actually become more than just marketing jargon, the organisations' gaze needs to be extended beyond the neoliberal ideologies that dominate their marketing, rhetoric and profit-capture and onto the practices of their programmes and the needs and wants of the host communities they are serving. This is because the evidence has demonstrated that compassion, a love of children and misplaced kindness are no substitute to the inadvertent, but no less real, harm the volunteers seem to be causing to the children and communities they are trying to help by acting out their heroic rescue fantasies.

# Appendix One

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## **Pro-Poor Tourism Principles**

An approach of tourism that is claimed to relieve the level of dependency upon host communities and increase sustainability is pro-poor tourism (PPT). Rogerson (2006) argues that tourism has been lacking attention to the impacts it has upon the poor and more links should be made between tourism and poverty reduction. He describes PPT as how “*tourism affects the livelihoods of the poor and how positive impacts can be enhanced through sets of interventions or strategies for poverty relief*” (2006:p39). He explains it is not a type of tourism, but rather an overall approach to poverty reduction through tourism. Ashley et al (2000) highlight several ways to enhance the economic participation of local people through PPT approaches, as outlined in Table 2.4;

### *Methods of local participation through PPT*

1. Education and training to advise on employment (especially for women)
2. Increased access to microfinance
3. Acknowledgment and support of local producers
4. Develop tourism assets and infrastructures in poor areas where a commercially viable product exists
5. Strengthen local property rights and tenure over wildlife, heritage and scenic tourism resources
6. Encouragement of investors to develop assistance strategies for the poor
7. Minimise bureaucratic obstacles that exclude the least skilled
8. Enhance vendors’ access to tourists
9. Business support to increase and improve infrastructure, supply and overall quality
10. Incorporation of regional/national tourism
11. Avoidance of international all-inclusive resorts
12. Recognise the importance of the informal sector in the planning process

(Ashley et al, 2000:p6)

## Responsible Tourism Principles

The Cape Town Declaration of Responsible Tourism defines it as “*tourism that creates better places for people to visit, and better places to live*” (RTP, 2002). It highlights a set of positive attributes and a set of principles that help, not only to define the concept, but also to distinguish it from other forms of tourism;

### *Attributes of Responsible Tourism*

1. Minimises negative economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism and helps to generate increased economic benefits for local people and enhances their social well-being
2. Improves working conditions and access to the industry
3. Involves greater participation of local people in the decision-making and planning process
4. Makes positive contributions to natural and cultural heritage and environments
5. Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through meaningful contact and connections with local people, and a deeper understanding of local social, cultural and environmental issues
6. Is culturally sensitive and encourages respect between hosts and guests, leading to local pride and confidence

(RTP, 2002)

### *Principles of Economic and Socially Responsible Tourism*

1. Maximise local economic benefits by increasing linkages and reducing leakages by ensuring the community is involved with and benefiting by tourism. Assist in the reduction of poverty by using pro-poor strategies
2. Production of quality products that reflect and enhance the destination
3. Market products in a way that reflects cultural and social integrity and that encourage appropriate forms of tourism
4. Adopt fair business practices, ensuring due diligence for partners, clients and beneficiaries
5. Provide appropriate support for small/medium and micro-enterprises to ensure sustainability
6. Ensure participation of local people (especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged members) in decision-making and planning, and support capacity development
7. Assess all aspects of local impacts throughout the course of the operation
8. Prevent exploitation of local people- especially children
9. Sensitivity to local culture and encourage meaningful contact and reflexive thinking

(RTP, 2002)

## Poverty Tourism Principles

This form of tourism has been analysed as a PPT approach by Scheyvens who classifies it as “*visitation to areas characterised by poverty to enhance mutual understanding, solidarity and equality*” (2001: 18 taken from Holden, 1984: 15) and as an ethical form of inclusion for those who would normally be excluded and isolated from social and economic life. Tourism is therefore a way for them to be included and she believes it has the following attributes (p18);

- Builds solidarity between hosts and guests
- Promotes mutual understanding and relationships based on respect and equality
- Supports self-sufficiency and self-determination
- Maximises local economic, social and cultural benefits

# Appendix Two

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## Respondent Guide (the volunteers)

Respondent	Age	Gender	Occupation	Childcare Experience
Av1	19	Male	Student	No
Av2	19	Female	Student	No
Av3	19	Female	Student	No
Av4	26	Female	Teacher	Yes
Av5	20	Female	Student	No
Av6	26	Female	Social worker	Yes
Av7	19	Female	Student	No
Av8	19	Female	Student	No
Av9	22	Male	Student	No
Av10	20	Female	Student	No
Av11	22	Female	Student	No
Av12	21	Female	Student	No
Av13	22	Male	Student	No
Av14	28	Female	Teacher	Yes
Av15	19	Female	Student	No
Av16	19	Male	Student	No
Av17	31	Female	Mother	Yes
Bv1	18	Female	Student	No
Bv2	18	Female	Student	No
Bv3	18	Female	Student	No
Bv4	27	Female	Au pair/Nanny	Yes
Bv5	29	Female	Accountant	No
Bv6	19	Female	Student	No
Bv7	19	Female	Student	No
Bv8	20	Female	Student	No
Bv9	23	Female	Teacher	Yes
Bv10	25	Female	Police Officer	No
Bv11	20	Female	Student	No
Bv12	21	Female	Student	No
Bv13	20	Female	Student	No
Cv1	19	Female	Student	No
Cv2	20	Female	Student	No
Cv3	23	Female	Student	No
Cv4	20	Female	Student	No
Cv5	19	Female	Student	No
Cv6	21	Female	PA	No
Cv7	20	Female	Student	No
Cv8	27	Female	Teacher	Yes
Cv9	20	Female	Student	No

# Appendix Three

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Additional pictures from Site A: Project A and the surrounding local community (all photographs are researcher's own taken 2011).

*The view from the orphanage – Photos 1 and 2*



*The main road leading from the orphanage to the highway and local community access – photo 3*





*The main road running through the local community – photo 4*



*The local community of Site A – photos 5, 6, 7 and 8*





These pictures show the building work that took place on Project A thanks to volunteer funds. These were taken during 2009, and are courtesy of Apm

*Building works to Project A– photos 9, 10, 11 and 12*



These next pictures are additional pictures of Site B and the immediate area surrounding Project B. All pictures are the Researcher's own and were taken during fieldwork in 2011.

*Entrance to Site B – photos 13 and 14*





*The local community of Site B – photos 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20*



These next pictures show the local area and community of Site C. Again these pictures are the researcher's own and taken during fieldwork in 2011.

*The main road running through the community- photos 21 and 22*



*A typical residential street – photos 23, 24, 25*





*Examples of the decline in the area – photo 26, 27 and 28*



# Appendix Four

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## Example of Organisation Project Price Lists

### OrgA

Destination	Price (per week)
Tanzania	Free
Ghana	£60
Uganda	£75
Kenya	£80
Nepal	£95
Morocco	£100
India	£105
Peru	£115
Ecuador	£125
Thailand	£125
Costa Rica	£130
Mexico	£130

(OrgA, 2013)

These Prices were taken directly from OrgA's website, and are correct as of 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013 for a departure in April to the end of May (off-peak). The prices in the table reflect the cost to the volunteer for visiting a project in the selected destinations, in addition to a £125 registration fee. The list of destinations and their prices are not exhaustive. According to an interview conducted with a member of OrgA management, these prices reflect not only how expensive it is to volunteer in these destinations (certain costs have to be accounted for such as rent, serviceable amenities etc.), but more importantly reflect the popularity of each destination. Management explained that adopting this revenue management pricing system allowed for the organisation to increase the prices of certain placements, not only to increase profit margins (to help cover overheads), but also to allow a reduction in price of less popular destinations to encourage more volunteers to visit those placements. Prices are also subject to fluctuations dependent on popularity, availability and time to departure.

OrgB and OrgC also utilise a similar pricing system that is dependent on project popularity, availability, time to departure and the costs within the destinations. Prices are set out in the tables below, and again are correct as of 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013 for departures April-May:

### OrgB

Destination	Price (per 2 week placement)
Tanzania	£795
Ghana	£895
India	£995
Romania	£1095
Mexico	£1095

(OrgB, 2013)

### OrgC

Destination	Price (per 2 week placement)
Kenya	£995
Tanzania	£1195
Nepal	£1195
Ghana	£1295
India	£1295
Morocco	£1395
Peru	£1395
Thailand	£1445
Costa Rica	£1495
Mexico	£1495

(OrgC, 2013)

These prices across all three tables highlight that not only is Mexico one of the most popular volunteer destinations, but also signifies how much more expensive it is to volunteer with a more commercial and for-profit company, with the prices for Mexico ranging from a potential £285 with OrgA (excluding flights) and £1495 (excluding flights) for a two-week placement.

All three organisations offer within their prices;

1. Accommodation
2. Support at the destination
3. Pre-departure information packs

However, OrgA does not include (but OrgB and OrgC do);

1. Airport pickup
2. Excursions
3. Food
4. Insurance

# Appendix Five

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## **Home-base Model of Health, Safety and Security (EAP, 2007)**

All In-Country staff in each location *must* be trained to handle any emergencies that may arise:

- Medical emergency
- Mental health issues
- Refusal of medical issues
- Death of a volunteer
- Death of a volunteer's family member back home / Other family emergencies
- Crisis
- Large-scale
- Theft
- Threat to a CCS Program or Volunteer
- Arrests
- Disappearance
- Abduction/Kidnapping
- Handling victims of a violent crime, rape or sexual assault
- Incident Reporting
- First AID/CPR
- Post-Program Care
- Health Precautions, Awareness and Response

## **Home-Base model of Safety and Security**

- Operate programs in safe middle-class neighbourhoods
- Hotel/Hostel & Fire/Safety
- Rely on the experts to tell us what potential challenges exist such as:
  - OSAC (Overseas Security Advisory Council)
  - Foreign Common Wealth (UK)
  - Embassies
- Track trends/challenges through both government/non-government media outlets
- E-mail feeds, phone calls
- Continuous access to the local staff on-ground
- Volunteer information packs advising them on local laws, personal conduct, substance abuse, weapons, community relations, safety tips for GLBT volunteers, sexual safety
- Home-Base Safety: guards, curfews, visitors, locks and keys, exits, smoking areas, floors and stairs, electricity and plumbing, perimeter of HB, living areas, bedrooms, bathrooms, fire safety, fire prevention, kitchen/food hygiene, kitchen safety, partner program safety, free-time safety, transportation safety



# Appendix Six

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The following provides in brief the requirements of the British Standards Institute for UK organisations that offer adventurous, educational or volunteering programmes overseas. Adherence to the Standard is voluntary, and not all parts are mandatory, with observance only required on certain aspects to claim compliance (BSI, 2007). OrgA and OrgB state they comply with some of these health and safety aspects when considering and assessing potential volunteer sites.

## **BS 8848:2007**

### **BS 8848 – The basics**

Adventurous activities are designed to be exciting and challenging. Of course, no venture can be risk-free but the British Standard for Adventurous Activities (BS 8848) aims to create an environment where the possibility for accidents and injuries, is reduced. It gives organisations minimum standards to follow to make sure that overseas ventures are planned thoroughly and carried out as safely as possible. It covers all aspects of a venture - from the activities people take part in, to the transport they use and the accommodation they stay in – and has three important core principles:

- **Informed choice** – all risks should be assessed and clearly explained to participants and parents so that they understand what they are getting into before they book.
- **Single provider** - there should be one clearly identified organisation in charge of the venture to take overall responsibility.
- **Capable staff** - all ventures should be run by competent and experienced staff.

### **BS 8848 – What to expect from organisations**

BS 8848 describes what organisations should do, see below. The standard is voluntary, so make sure you choose an organisation that complies.

#### **Clear roles and responsibilities**

- One individual or organisation should be clearly identified as the ‘venture provider’ with overall responsibility for all parts of the venture, including those run by third parties.
- A competent leadership team should be appointed with relevant training and experience, plus knowledge of the activities, environment and needs of the participants.

**Good planning and preparation**

- All aspects of the venture should be assessed for suitability and safety – including travel arrangements, accommodation and equipment, as well as the activities themselves.
- Venture providers should gather information about participants, including pre-existing medical conditions, to assess each person's capability to take part in the activity.

**Clear, accurate information**

- **Before** booking, the venture provider should give all potential participants clear information about price, timings and itineraries, plus an explanation of activities and any significant safety issues. It should also provide details of the expertise of the staff in charge.
- **After** booking, the venture provider should give all participants detailed information about: accommodation, transport, meals, itinerary, payment schedules and insurance. It should also highlight the responsibilities of participants. For example, to get relevant visas or to buy their own insurance.

**Competent staff**

- In addition to the relevant qualifications and experience, all staff should have good communication skills and proven competence for the job.
- There should be a single overall leader who knows the skills of the group, and has supervisory responsibilities.
- Checks should be carried out on all staff working unsupervised with children under 18.

**Be prepared**

- There should be written plans in place to analyse risks and manage safety.
- All staff should be made aware of the key risks associated with specific activities and locations and have procedures in place to minimise and manage them, for example, dehydration or altitude sickness.
- All staff should know what to do, how to act and who to contact in the event of illness, accident or emergency.
- All staff should have access to medical advice and support for each venture.
- There should be a written incident and emergency plan for each venture. It is vital that the venture provider communicates the above information to its entire staff so that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

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