'Boy, have we got a vacation for you': Orphanage Tourism in Cambodia and the Commodification and Objectification of the Orphaned Child.

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Abstract

However well intentioned, orphanage tourism locates and commodifies children as objects of rescue fantasies, objectified as adorable innocents, waiting to be loved by enthusiastic westerners. Cambodia offers holidaymakers an exotic destination in which to act out and indulge their contemporary fantasies of compassion and care. Through explorations of both popular cultural representations of the ideal vacation and the orphanage tourist industry - as well as my own observations and interviews with orphanage tourists in Siem Reap - I will reveal how closely notions of the ideal vacation parallel orphanage tourism in Cambodia. As part of a wider qualitative study of the volunteering experience, this paper seeks to critique the problematic relationship between a touristic experience and the needs of Cambodia's poor children.

'Which world did you just come from sir?'[1]

In the 1973 movie *Westworld* (Crichton), for the price of $1,000 a day, holidaymakers chose to indulge their fantasies in one of three themed zones in the futuristic resort of Delos. Described as an amusement park for rich vacationers, the holiday company presented its clients with a means to live out their dreams and desires through the use of almost flawlessly humanised robots that provided anything the tourist required. The film focused on the adventures of two holidaymakers in the cowboy themed zone of *WesternWorld* as they bought into their cowboy fantasies and enjoyed their vacation of a lifetime. The company's jaunty, inviting, slogan proclaimed *'Boy, have we got a vacation for you'*. I will argue here that, much like the fictional destination of Delos, Cambodia today provides a unique and exotic setting in which a growing number of tourists can act out and indulge their contemporary fantasies – though not here of gun slinging and barroom brawls but - of care, affection and compassion. By exploring the case of orphanage tourism I will argue that however well

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[1] Headings in italics are quotes taken from the opening sequence of the movie '*Westworld*' in the scene where returning holidaymakers are interviewed to camera about their vacations of a lifetime.

intentioned, this particular form of vacationing objectifies poor Cambodian children as adorable innocents and commodifies their poorness into a marketable resource that an ever expanding volunteer tourist industry – as well as NGOs and local businesses - are successfully exploiting to satisfy the rescue fantasies of this particular group of holidaymakers. Challenges arise, however, in part from the very act of critiquing what many see to be legitimate gestures of help and compassion but also - and perhaps more pertinently - in what may be viewed as a trivialisation of genuine need. In no way is this exploration intended to make light of the challenges that many of these children face on a daily basis. Rather, the intent is to consider if the current practice of locating tourism alongside the very real requirements of Cambodia's poor and orphaned children has been sufficiently scrutinized. Many would argue that indeed this is not the case (Heath 2007, Salazar 2004, Simpson 2004, Sin 2009).

The paper will be presented in 2 sections. The first section will develop a theoretical understanding of contemporary tourism exploring notions of the ideal vacation but with a particular focus on the benefits of vacation choices; the 'what's in it for me?'; the 'who does this say I am?' I will consider what the tourist gains from their holidaymaking and significantly how vacation choices add to notions of personal identity. The second section will go on to ask how these ideas are utilised to promote the orphanage as a tourist destination and experience and how, within this process, the dualistic images of 'helplessness and charm' are employed to objectify the poor Cambodian child and commodify their neediness in order to fulfil this particular tourist fantasy. As Dann contends, "holidays are essentially experiences in fantasy" (1976: 19). Before exploring the contemporary notions of the ideal vacation however, it is necessary to make clear how I will use a number of the key terms in this paper - principally the terms orphanage tourist; the orphanage tourist industry and orphanhood

'At Delos you get the choice of vacation you want'.

It is acknowledged that there are numerous typologies of the tourist (Salazar 2004) and that any single tourist may fit into a number of different typologies even during the period of a single vacation. A backpacker for instance, may visit the temples of Angkor Wat (a cultural tourist); go on to volunteer in an orphanage (now a volunteer tourist) and then spend time on the beaches at Sihanoukville. The practise of volunteer tourism in 'third world' locations however, has become an accepted, established and professionalized phenomenon (Simpson 2004). It is significant to note here that in 2006 the Western European volunteer tourist market alone was worth around US$150 million. Dominated by the UK, a growth of between 5-10% was recorded from the previous five years with Asia being one of the most popular volunteer destinations (Mintel 2008). However, whilst volunteer tourism is now considered to be a mass niche in terms of the share of the global tourist market, only 7% of the total visitor income generated by all forms of tourism to Siem Reap flows back to the local community,

representing limited pro-poor benefits from tourism in general to Cambodia's needy (Mitchell & Coles 2006).

In this paper I will focus on those volunteer tourists - principally from the developed West - who, for a limited period of time only (less than six months), visit an orphanage either as part of a volunteer placement project or for other unpaid reasons (for example as part of another tour or experience). Callanan and Thomas (2005), proposing a spectrum of volunteer tourists, describe this example as 'the shallow volunteer tourist' - often identified by a lack of specific skills and particularly motivated by destination. Typical examples include young people participating in gap year projects or those who pre-book their time at an orphanage through a volunteer travel company. However brief their visit, these holidaymakers may be described as orphanage tourists. I will use the term mainstream tourist to identify generically all other groups of holidaymakers who are not orphanage tourists and who will therefore here be characteristic of the popular cultural representations of the ideal vacation.

Whilst the term orphanage tourism is now considered unfashionable and the concept hotly debated, I hold onto this descriptive expression for a number of reasons. Firstly, even against the backdrop of the debate, many volunteer tourist placement companies, many NGOs and many local businesses in Cambodia continue to make use of the terms 'orphan and orphanage' in an uncontested manner. Here are three examples taken from websites and representing respectively, 1) a company offering volunteering placements, 2) a Cambodian NGO and 3) a business in Siem Reap:

> This is an amazing opportunity to work in a Cambodia orphanage…
> (Real Gap Experience, 2011)
>
> An Art Orphanage - providing a creative, educative and loving
> environment for these happy but disadvantaged children (ODA 2011)
>
> [The hotel] also provides support to the orphanage through cultural
> exchanges, giving the children an opportunity to sing at the hotel,
> which improves their skills and confidence (Miles, 2011)

As these examples show, these terms continue to be used unselfconsciously by many of those involved in both charitably efforts and the tourist industry generally. As such, and to emphasize this, I make use of the terms here.

Secondly, for some considerable time, a western understanding of child development has moved away from the institutionalised care of vulnerable children and yet the practise of western companies selling short-term volunteer placements holidays to Cambodian orphanages - as well as visits to orphanages as part of a more general touristic experience - is widespread and expanding. I use the terms orphan and

orphanage in an effort to highlight this dichotomy. Globally the term orphan locates and emphasizes vulnerability, helplessness and neglect and has become synonymous with sympathy, compassion and sentimentality and significantly a need for adult intervention (Edstrom et al. 2008; Richter & Norman 2010). A consequence of this assessment, together with the predominant discourse of tragedy, may have resulted in a rush to provide institutionalised care for those depicted as orphans in Cambodia (and indeed elsewhere in the majority world). The 2005 USAID Cambodian orphanage survey claims that of the almost 260 orphanages in the country, just over 20 are government run, the rest being privately owned establishments - although exact figures are unclear as numbers rise daily. Whilst the discussion as to the genuine status of the majority of the children in these establishments is beyond the scope of this paper, it has been estimated that only around 25% of children living in orphanages, are true orphans (Edstrom et al. 2008).

For Cambodia, however, the orphanage has become a fundamental part of the poor Cambodian child's narrative and as a consequence has huge appeal to the rescue fantasies of potential volunteer tourists and the associated volunteer tourist industry. However, in the process of becoming a commodity for the volunteer tourist market, the orphan and orphanage has also become a sanitised experience to be 'enjoyed' by 'compassionate' western visitors. One example from a Cambodian NGO website states:

> You can also visit us and see a working orphanage - come and meet
> the children and see how happy they are (Sok, 2011).

Reduced to the category of a tourist attraction, vacationers may choose to 'go and see some orphans' (see Figure 1) but also be reassured, that because of the children's happiness, this will not be an uncomfortable experience. One participant in Siem Reap, for example, who was looking for a volunteer tourist placement, told me, 'I must say orphans are probably my thing; I love orphans.'

The focus on the orphanage tourism industry is somewhat wider however, incorporating as I will show a range of industries, NGOs and businesses which utilise the notion of orphanhood to fulfil their own specific aims; be they commercial or charitable. Typical examples are volunteer placement companies, businesses selling experiences or tours that incorporate an orphanage visit, as well as NGOs and businesses marketing souvenir items, including artwork, craftwork and photographs, which have been produced by orphans.

'*I just feel marvellous. I mean, it's just a warm glowing place to be*'

In this section of the paper I aim to explore the orphanage tourism industry's relationship with the theoretical notion of the ideal contemporary vacation and reveal the paradox that many of the rewards and benefits of mainstream holiday choices to the

personal narratives of today's mainstream vacationer, translate directly into the rewards and benefits of the orphanage visit to the orphanage tourist. Reward and gain is the significant discourse in tourist literature aimed at potential volunteers for

Figure 1. Tourists taking photographs of orphans in a classroom. (Author's own photograph).

orphanages: 'make a difference and have fun at the same time', 'a most rewarding experience', a great sense of achievement', 'a real adventure', 'an amazing opportunity'. The same literature however, also reveals a language of conflict with the more mainstream holiday choices and a clear attempt to distance the volunteering option from other types of touristic experience. Indeed 'difference' appears to be a mantra in many areas of the tourist industry in general with orphanage tourists in particular frequently claiming to be turning their backs on more conservative, staid and perhaps exploitative examples of mainstream holidaying. It is claimed by one company, for example, that gap year trips and volunteer placements can offer "the kind of authentic cultural experiences that backpackers and package tourists daren't even dream about" (i-to-i 2010) and another volunteer tour operator critically points out that, "some travellers are content partying their way around the world. You, however, are looking for a more substantial experience" (GoAbroad.com 2011). This second example makes an obvious distinction between the 'some travellers' which you are not and, the YOU

that is looking for a superior experience. The use of the word 'you' is particularly effective.

My own research also revealed - and again suggestive of the tensions between the different categories of tourism – that even the term 'tourist' is deeply contested by volunteers working in orphanages. It has been possible to identify examples in my fieldwork of individuals placing their own pursuits well above those of the mainstream holidaymaker. Here are two examples from participants who had both spent time volunteering in Cambodian orphanages:

> **Dan**: As I made friends (both international and Khmer), progressed with work at the orphanage and became a regular at local restaurants, cafes and pubs, I guess I felt part of the community. Furthermore, I could compare myself with other people who were blatant tourists i.e. walking around town with their cameras and even visiting the orphanage for a day's work and taking photos! I suppose that's when I considered myself not to be a tourist, although
> I know I wasn't there long term, only 5/6 weeks.

In this second example, following a discussion about tourists, Pam was asked why she did not consider herself to be one.

> Pam: Because I think that we analysed what was going on… I think a tourist doesn't question, whereas you and I going somewhere like that the immediate thought is 'why'…. You're not looking at it as a place; you're looking at the people. You're not looking at the superficiality of a Thomson holiday.

Whilst disdain for the mainstream tourist is present in these examples, other parts of the same interviews reveal that these orphanage tourists share many of the same reward seeking fantasies – as identified in contemporary sociological exploration – as those vacationers they wish to disassociate themselves from. Dan, for example, planned to take only three or four days out of his trip around the world to see the famous temples in Siem Reap. He claims he was originally inspired to visit South East Asia by the promise of a 'diversity of cultures in a relatively small area' and by stories and pictures shared with him by a cousin. Australia and South America were also included in his tour. This appears consistent with Desforges' (2000) argument that for many westerners the world may be viewed or 'framed' as a series of places to be visited, frequently distinguished by difference and often determined by a developed and developing world measure. The world becomes a product to be consumed in determinable portions, a concept reflected in the technique used by mainstream travel agents and tour operates of zoning holiday destinations and pertinently, how volunteer

placement companies use 'where do you want to go?' as an initial search filter in their marketing literature. Many of my participants were what may be described as well-travelled. Africa, China, Belarus, India, South America and all of the South East Asian countries were mentioned by them in interview; the information always being offered in conversation as questions relating directly to other travel destinations were not included in my interview plan.

Desforges (1998) suggests that in the deeply individualistic culture of the West, travel to, or holidaying in, distant lands can be used to enhance narratives of identity and 'stretch' images of self or, allow opportunities for redefinition into the person we would like to be and/or would like to be seen as. A socially upwardly mobile family, for example, may see a luxury holiday in Thailand as a redefining move away from their previous package tours to the Mediterranean coast; a Jules Verne tour of South East Asia that includes a visit to the temple complex of Angkor Wat says culture, taste and tellingly, an ability to pay. The rewards that holiday choices can bring to the construction or reinforcement of personal identities have been identified as factors that are both valued and sought-after by the mainstream vacationer and are recognized as significantly motivating in 'the where', 'the what' and 'the how' of vacation choices (Desforges 2000).

Linked to the idea of benefit and gain from the holiday experience is also the suggestion of a lifelong western predisposition to the 'witnessing' of significant places (Rojek 1997). A list of 'must goes' is constantly revised as new places are discovered or become de rigueur and older attractions become overdone or passé. To support these urges the market offers an abundance of products that encourage and facilitate this endeavour from a series of 'Places to See Before You Die' publications to iphone applications and Scratch Maps where countries visited are revealed by scratching off the map's gold foil covering; 'The thought of scratching off new destinations serves as a great incentive to pack your suitcase" (firebox, 2011). 'Must do' experiences are often added to the itinerary of 'must go' places with compiled lists available to guide these choices. It is, however, the belief in how far the tally of places visited and experiences accomplished goes towards expressions of 'who you are' and what your social standing might be, that are important concerns for the industries that sell places and activities. Interestingly, item 16 of one 'things to do before you die' website states that volunteering abroad for a month is one of the 50 things that helps to remind us that "the world remains a magical place" (Lew, 2010).

In the second of the examples above, Pam not only describes 'tourists' as superficial but is also keen, like Dan, to establish her own identity as a more thoughtful, analytical traveller. This is consistent with MacCannell's contention that "tourists dislike tourists" (1999: 10). Pam suggests that tourists are only looking at 'the place' whilst her interest is with 'the people' and the people's problems. Interestingly, she is

also keen to ally herself with the researcher – 'whereas you and I'; 'we analysed what was going on' - implying a shared insight towards both the problems of Cambodia and the problem of tourists. Whilst Urry suggests that, "travel is an element which may be of great importance in constructing/reinforcing novel identities" (1995: 169), it is in Barbara Heron's (2007) study of white Canadian women who spent time in Africa as development workers and the notion that identity-making is an important factor in their choice to become involved in overseas development work, that closely links the mainstream holidaymaker to the orphanage tourist in terms of identity and personal narrative; benefits and gains. Heron argues that the choice of destination "to zones [of] relative material deprivation," (Heron 2007: 54) along with a sense of duty to help others as a responsibility of their own privilege, were both central factors in the women's constructions of self as good global citizens. As in the choice of some mainstream holiday destinations, here also is the idea that experiences in the developing world can be used to enhance images of self.

Arguably this notion is particularly apparent in the gap year type experiences and volunteer holidays that incorporate both tours and adventures with a placement in a Cambodian orphanage. Shrewdly marketed to highlight the benefits to the young vacationer, qualities and identity enhancements that are considered particularly advantageous on university or job application forms, are unselfconsciously emphasized in sales literature, often focusing sharply on the personal development of the volunteer. This example is from a website offering advice to the parents of would-be 'gappers' - young people who take a break between school and university.

> Universities value the maturity and focus of gappers who are more
> ready for university than those who go straight there. Employers value
> the life skills such as initiative, communication and decision making
> skills, character, confidence, financial planning and achievement of
> goals that gappers can show on their CVs. In short, they are proven to
> put your child ahead in life (Gallagher, 2011)

It is also contended that, particularly in the case of young gappers, a period away from home on a volunteer tourist placement or gap year break will improve many of the 'soft skills' considered highly desirable for future career prospects (Heath 2007). By contrast the older volunteer tourist may wish to create a post-career persona - perhaps leaving behind the stresses and pressures of a demanding profession - or, as Desforge (2000) describes in one example, a break away from the domestic, mother or wife identity.

It is possible, I have argued, to link and compare the discourses employed by the orphanage tourist industry and the mainstream companies by citing the gains, benefits and rewards to personal identity – the social capital (Bourdieu 1986) - that may be

acquired from vacation choices. For the mainstream tourist certain choices will attract prestige, kudos and an indication of wealth and taste for example, whilst choosing to volunteer in an orphanage could be regarded as an asset for educational or future employment gain or even an indication of a compassionate and caring self.

In the second section of this paper, I will explore the contention that, along with the process of utilising the gains and benefits to the individual in promoting the orphanage (both as a touristic experience as well as a touristic destination), the binary images of vulnerability and enchantment are also exploited to objectify the poor Cambodian orphan child and to commodify their neediness and hardship. And going on to consider the trade of things for money, it is also pertinent to explore just what the individual who chooses to spend some time with the poor or orphaned children of Cambodia, considers they are buying into. For example, as Lash and Urry contend, the tourist is purchasing not only their rights to transportation and accommodation but also, significantly here, "the temporary rights of possession of spaces away from home" (Lash & Urry 1994: 271).

'*Was it worth a $1000 dollars a day?*'

Many theories may be considered when questioning the increased demand for the orphanage tourist experience including, the commercialisation of compassion (Moore 2008); a simplistic notion of development (Simpson 2004); a need for ego-enhancement; (Dann 1977); the effects of 'branding' (Bauman in Franklin 2003); highly professionalized marketing (Lash & Urry 1994); ever increasing meaningless consumption (Bauman 2000); a confidence in the market itself (Callanan & Thomas 2005, Salazar 2004) and an interest in poor chic - a rational though sanitised consumption of poverty (Halnon 2002). It may also be argued that orphanage tourism, often an experience that begins with the act of turning on a computer at home in the developed West, is an example of a product that combines the availability of rapid long distance mobility with the development and organisation of the 'modern experience' (Lash & Urry 1994). In marketing terms, however, orphanage tourist industries must offer an experience (or goods) that represent a sound investment for the consumer.

Radin (1996) argues that commodifying goods or items that challenge the very notion of the trade of things for money - what she describes as "contested commodification" – is that concerns around poverty, racism or 'harm to innocents' for example, are often embroiled with this fundamental exchange and have a complexity that frequently becomes more problematic with efforts to unravel. The commodification of Cambodia's orphaned children when considered against the knowledge that the country remains one of the poorest in the world, is likewise particularly difficult to unravel from a touristic experience that is marketed to improve the circumstances of this very problem. However, as part of the massive industry that is the global fight against poverty, the poorness and orphaned state of Cambodia's children *is* being turned

into a marketable commodity, in part by an equally massive industry that is volunteer tourism. And in terms of the share of the overall tourist market it is claimed that volunteer tourism is now considered to be a 'mass niche' with an explosion in growth particular in the last ten years (Callanan & Thomas 2005). As Scheper-Hughes argues however, "the problem with markets is that they [do] reduce everything – including human beings, their labor, and their reproductive capacity – to the status of commodities" (Scheper-Hughes 2002: 62).

Appadurai (1986) argues that, whilst commodities are objects of economic value, that economic value is merely a judgment and so the value of an experience with orphaned Cambodian children is only equal to what a tourist is prepared to pay – and by association, the worth of the experience to the individual themselves – 'what is the value of this to me'; 'what are the returns on my investment', 'why do I need this commodity'? Marx's general principle of 'the fetishism of commodities' provides a useful guide to these questions and to an understanding of the relationship between the purchase and consumption of what here may be described as a "consumable experience of the 'other'" (Simpson 2004: 683). By revealing the concealed relationships between the industry and the consumer, it is perhaps possible to 'unveil' the fetishism of this problematic commodity and, through a greater understanding of the process of production, illuminate the elements of uneasiness (Mills 2000) in this exchange. Furthermore, peering beneath the surface of what is produced; exploring the 'made by whom' and the 'made for whom', it is possible to see that, not only does the industry create the opportunities and the organizational structure to be able to indulge in an experience with Cambodian orphans, but equally it is also responsible for generating and constructing the desires and fantasies in the potential consumer and the consequential impulse to buy. Referring again to the gains and rewards of this vacation choice, by convincing the potential tourist of their own enormous worth, the product creators are able to evoke the notion of the 'compassionate self'. The intimation that caring, kind-hearted people will select this kind of holiday experience is a significant enticement offered in much of the marketing literature. As Salazar argues, "….when the 'self/other' binary opposition is deconstructed, it becomes clear that concern for 'others', understanding of 'others' and care of 'others' can impinge on the 'self' in a positive way" (Salazar 2004: 104). Here is an example of how this concept is promoted:

> While there are no specific qualifications required to volunteer, Cambodia's orphanages need loving, caring and compassionate volunteers to provide much-needed assistance. Volunteers are expected to be flexible and patient as well as possess a passion and love for children (IFRE, 2011).

Labourers in many of the components of the orphanage tourist industry - echoing Marx's illustration of the conversion of a lump of wood into a useful table

through the efforts of human labour - skilfully transform the poverty and neediness of the orphaned child into 'an amazing experience'; 'a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity'; 'the most fun you'll ever have'. By exposing the production elements it is possible to offer an insight into the manner in which the orphanage experience is produced, packaged, marketed, and finally regurgitated (in the form of testimonies, recommendations, guidebooks and travel-logs, for example) back into the machinery of the industry - arguably as more raw material for the production of more experiences. Behind the orphanage experience then - particularly those experiences sold in advance over the internet - lies the combined expertise of graphic designers, copywriters, researchers, web designers, creative directors, photographers and accountants, to name but a few. As Lash and Urry (1994) have shown, the contemporary travel industry in general is particularly 'design-intensive' and here the innovative skills of a host of creative experts in the advertising industry are employed to commodify the poorness and charm of the Cambodian orphan into a desirable product for western consumption. And designed into this product must also be the consumers trust and belief in the value of the purchase; in the promise of a worthwhile experience and in the assurance that the rewards and benefits of that experience will meet all expectations. In one way this is achieved by the 'lifting out' (Giddens 1991) of the production from the local context of Cambodia ensuring as Halnon contends - and again in deference to Marx - that "the tourist is estranged from what really lies behind the commodity: the haunting humanity of the poor and fearful reality of poverty" (Halnon 2002: 508).

Considering the design-intensive production of the experience, the use of the image is, however, arguably one of the most powerful components. For both the mainstream tourist and the volunteer tourist, the use of photography goes some considerable way towards making the Cambodian child into a tourist attraction. And whilst photography is extensively used by the industry to produce a Cambodia that appeals to the rescue fantasies of the holidaymaker (and this will be discussed more below) it is also evident that photographs are equally responsible for creating the compassionate, caring and enthusiastic volunteer who is able to have a great time in an orphanage. NGO websites as well as marketing literature are teeming with images of happy-looking volunteers together with poor, but also happy-looking Cambodian children. Images make real the relationships between the child and the orphanage tourist and confirm the efforts and compassions of the benefactor and the joy and gratitude of the beneficiary. Familiar poses are repeated - much like the fisherman and his catch - the narrative of neediness frozen in a moment of relief for the child and in testimony of the worth of the commodity for the consumer. From her study of colonial travel writing and the production of European subjectivities, it is possible here to evoking Pratt's concept of 'anti-conquest' which she defines as "the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (1992 p:7). Images from Cambodia are today the real evidence of the experience which, when shown to family

and friends or displayed on social networking sites, complete the circle that began with similar images in the marketing literature of other volunteers and now authenticate the 'been there, done that' of this specific tourist adventure (Urry 1995). The commodity that volunteer tourism in Cambodia offers is shaped by the creative skills of the industry so that through the abundance of marketing literature the holidaymaker has an informed expectation of the experiences they have chosen to purchase and is also able to perform their role within that experience with a knowledgably belief in the part they have chosen to play (Goffman 1990).

However, the commodification of the poorness of the unfortunate Cambodian child extends beyond the sale of volunteer tourist placements by the massive volunteer placement companies. Poverty of itself offers many new opportunities for expatriates, NGOs and local businesses when turned into a marketable resource arguably of [almost] last resort (Scheper-Hughes 2002). On the suitably named Pub Street, described as the centre of Siem Reap nightlife, for example, poor Cambodian children from a local NGO regularly canvass tourists with flyers for the nightly traditional Khmer dancing show performed by other orphans from the orphanage (see Figure 2) .

Figure 2. Billboard advertisement for charity dance show performed nightly by orphans for tourists. (Author's own photograph).

At Christmas time in large hotels, for a fee to the NGO or the opportunity to ask for donations, local orphans entertain holidaymakers with Christmas carol recitals.

Once again the poor child is objectified as a tourist attraction to be enjoyed by the vacationer - here in the luxurious surroundings of the 5 star hotels. For those tourists just looking for 'something to do' some hotels and many guest houses suggest trips to local orphanages. Advertisements are displayed on notice boards alongside other tourist attractions. In one example I observed, notices inviting tourists to visit local orphanages and poor schools were pinned alongside a daytrip to a Commando-run shooting range with the option to shoot chickens with AK-47s or cows with bazookas. The guesthouse manager told me that volunteer groups sometimes choose this activity at the end of their volunteer placements with poor children. Restaurants and bars display notices asking for casual volunteers or suggest visits to NGO visitor centres. Guesthouses and hostels offer good volunteer tourist rates and many businesses are affiliated to their own chosen charity; children's appeals being by far the most popular. Nevertheless it is always possible – perhaps for those tourists seeking more authenticity than the 'authentic tours' – to simply take a tuk-tuk ride to an orphanage to cuddle or hug the orphans. Other options include calling into an orphanage as part of a quad bike adventure tour or enjoying lunch at an orphanage as part of the tour of a local village. Many small scale income generating projects sell gifts and souvenirs through hotels and shops or from their own outlets, aiming to satisfy the needs of tourists who "see sights that make them want to help in some way" (Horton, 2009). Nonetheless, a report by the Overseas Development Institute in March 2009 claims that, because of imports and "kickbacks demanded by tour operators from retailers", pro-poor income on the sale of crafts to tourists is as low as 5% in Siem Reap compared to a figure of over 50% in parts of neighbouring Laos (Ashley & Mitchell 2009:3). As Hutnyk's contends, the desire to 'offer help' or 'do something positive', has "to be understood more closely within the global framework of contemporary capitalist social hegemony" (Hutnyk 1996: 221).Nonetheless, NGOs supporting and coordinating other NGO projects and the travel industry have also been established, recognising and taking advantage of the link between tourism and poverty and whilst part of their role hopes to educate the tourist or would-be orphanage visitor to the debates in this area many of the devises of objectification and commodification are still employed by even these more responsible NGOs (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Notice in a NGO office that links tourists to other NGO projects. (Author's own photograph).

'Did it seem real to you, sir?

Feminist scholars have described objectification as the reduction of a human being, in all their complexities, into a single component or utility (Bartky 1990; Dworkin 1989). By reducing the multi-faceted Cambodian orphan child (and certainly the multi-faceted nature of their condition) into the simplistic component of 'needy and adorable', the tourist industry is able to (almost) complete the process of creating a marketable commodity for the western holidaymaker to purchase and enjoy. Now objectified as lovable innocents the vulnerability and charm of the children can be packaged and marketed to meet the demands of the consumer. And here the extensive use of photographs is again instrumental. The abundance of images – predominantly of beautiful, large-eyed children, frequently looking directly into the lens, often in close-up and generally tightly cropped - is consistent with Sontag's (2002) argument that the photograph has the ability to beautify even the most grotesque of situations. The operation of transforming the suffering of Cambodia's poor children into objects that are both aesthetically pleasing and desirable is a powerful instrument in the toolkit of an industry that must objectify the multi-faceted nature and circumstances of the children's lives, into a sought after commodity. For the volunteer industry to sell placements and NGOs and orphanages to attract visitors and donors, poor Cambodian children must be presented as objects that appeal to the yearnings of the compassionate consumer.

Just as the poor and orphaned child is objectified, I wish to show that, to further strengthen this process and finally create a marketable commodity, it is necessary to also place the desperate, but otherwise beautiful 'other', in direct opposition to the

capable, enthusiastic, westerner. As Said contends, "the construction of identity….*is* finally a construction [that] involves establishing opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'" (Said 2003: 332 italics in original) and here, the objectification of Cambodian orphans also relies on the concepts of both the rescue fantasy and a belief in the ability and right of the willing westerner to meet the needs of these children (Simpson 2004). An exploration of the marketing material reveals that, by clearly defining the differences between those shown to need help and those who are able to administer it - 'us' and 'them' - the dualistic concept which legitimises the rescue instincts of the orphanage tourist are firmly established. The assertion is (as upheld by the industry and many of the NGOs) that by spending some time with poor orphaned children *it is* possible to make a difference. When this claim is coupled with the binary construct of the needy and the benevolent these contentions together go a long way towards enforcing the notions of capability and worthiness in the western orphanage tourist and reinforcing the objectifications of the children. The hermeneutical process of marketing the fantasy is only complete when the suffering *and* delightfulness of the poor child is mixed with the competence and importance of the tourist: *them*/need – *us*/ability – *them*/charm – *us*/compassion – *them*/rescued. Here is part of the testimony of a volunteer used by a UK registered charity on its 'Volunteering in Cambodia' page. The marketing literature reveals many more similar examples:

> I truly felt the importance of what I was doing whilst volunteer teaching. The Cambodian people were all very grateful for the help of the volunteers (James, 2011)

Conclusion

For today's tourist choosing to spend time with poor, sick or vulnerable children, opportunities in the 'third world' are numerous. Many of these opportunities are made possible because of the existence of the orphanage; orphanhood representing not only the quintessential child-in-need but also, as Meintjies and Giese have argued, a commodity that has "economic valence" (2006: 425). Whilst volunteer tourism represents a particularly popular brand of orphanage tourism, I have argued that in Cambodia orphanage tourism covers a wide variety of other options that are easily available and often unselfconsciously marketed. For the pleasure of the holidaymaker these options are offered as sanitised experiences, where only specific kinds of suffering and narratives of hardship are revealed – this is a vacation after all.

I have shown that the orphanage tourist and the mainstream holidaymaker share much in common when focusing on the rewards that both groups hope to gain from their choices of vacation. However, far from acknowledging the many similarities in

these benefits, the orphanage tourist and the massive industry behind the orphanage experience, both strive to distance themselves from mainstream tourist pursuits; the orphanage vacationer working particularly hard to deny their tourist status. Using examples from interviews and observations in Siem Reap and an exploration of the marketing literature however, I have argued that experiences in Cambodian orphanages are very much touristic endeavours with promises of rewards being heavily promoted by the industry. Exploring the specific focus of identity construction and personal narratives it has been possible to show that orphanage tourists, again much like their mainstream counterparts, use the opportunity of travel to majority world destinations as a way to 'tick off' places visited and 'experiences lived' and as such achieve kudos, social standing and prestige; 'social capital' (Bourdieu 1986) that will stand them in good stead for the future. As a way of constructing their own personal narratives, both mainstream and orphanage tourists use their respective choices of vacation to develop, widen or enhance their individual stories. The commodification and objectification of Cambodian orphans have been shown to be essential components in the marketing strategies of a creative and (dis)located industry. Relying heavily on the dualistic representations of desperation and charm, images are extensively utilized, not only to firmly objectify the child as an adorable innocent but equally to make real the relationships between the children and the tourists. Images are proof that the experience did take place and that the tourist was able to enjoy a close-up encounter with orphans. Happy, fun-filled photographic poses reinforce a notion of trust in the industry; of worthiness in the tourist's efforts; of pleasure in the experience; of gratitude for the gestures of love and care and, as advantaged westerners, of a lack of culpability in the circumstances of the children's misfortune.

The current practice of locating tourism alongside the very real requirements of Cambodia's poor children demands further analysis because, from whichever angle the orphanage experience is viewed, it does represent, just like the mainstream holiday, "a leisurely and discretionary choice for the economically privileged" (Halnon 2002: 510). This paper allowed only the briefest of tours around this argument. Until the complicity of the tourist in the fundamental inequalities between the needy and the benevolent are confronted, the issues faced by Cambodia's poor and orphaned children will lack the attention it really deserves. Cambodian orphanages, unlike the fictional destination of *WesternWorld,* Delos, should not represent a vacation of a lifetime.

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