

**NEGOTIATING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES  
IN TOURISM**

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# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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I, Harnng Luh Sin, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted information from other sources, this is always clearly stated within the thesis.

Signed : .....

Date:.....

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I am always told that the single page that is most read in a doctoral thesis would be this one. I cannot quite begin to imagine how the thanks and gratitude I have can be fully expressed within the confines of these two pieces of paper – lunch/dinner/drinks treats from me seem much more in order. But for posterity's sake, in this page I shall still express my thanks, precisely because it will always remain a part of my thesis, and serves as a constant reminder to me and the readers that this thesis is in fact a piece of work reflecting inputs and efforts other than mine.

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# ABSTRACT

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Set within today's context of 'heightened responsibilities', where one is always urged to be a 'responsible' consumer, business or policy-maker, this research aims to address the academic and practical concerns over the ethical dimensions and possibilities of the tourism industry in Thailand. This includes, but is not limited to 'responsibilities' towards tourism development's environmental and socio-cultural impacts. Adopting a geographical approach, attuned focus will be given to tourism-related corporations, tourists', and locals' perceptions of 'responsibilities', showing their complicity in the active production and consumption of 'responsible tourism' at multiple scalar levels. At the academic level, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates in geography and the wider social science arena about the importance of ethics and responsibility. Furthermore, through this empirical study, the complex and dynamic workings of responsibilities in tourism as enacted on the ground will have important lessons for policy makers and businesses alike to implement better (infra)structural conditions for the effective performances of responsibilities.

*Keywords: Geography of care and responsibility, Responsible tourism, Ethical consumption, Corporate Social Responsibility, Thailand.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Preamble

Why don't you be Santa this Christmas?

Why not swap sitting up all night waiting for Santa with a night patrol protecting turtles on a Costa Rican beach? Or swap weeks of shopping for gifts that'll never be used with a fortnight bringing some real joy into underprivileged children's lives? (i-to-i Volunteer and Adventure Travel, 2011).

Why don't *you* be Santa this Christmas? It could be anyone – you, me, or any third person on the streets. And it is easy, or at least it sounds easy, anyone it seems could be Santa, anyone can “protect turtles” or “bring some real joy to underprivileged children's lives”, and it does sound so much more meaningful than “wasting” time and money for “gifts that'll never be used”.

This came to me in an email – a promotional email from i-to-i Volunteer and Adventure Travel. In the early days of starting this research and thesis, I had signed up to be on the emailing lists of several big names – setups that offer what is popularly known as ‘responsible tourism’: Global Vision International; Intrepid Travel; i-to-i Volunteer and Adventure Travel<sup>1</sup>; Planterra Foundation<sup>2</sup>; Responsibletravel.com and so on. And since then, I have had regular emails in my inbox that sounded like this one cited above. I must admit that there were many times that such emails captured my attention (and possibly made me daydream of holidays in exotic destinations doing things ‘other’ tourists do not usually do, like protecting turtles for example). But over time I realized that what I was receiving in such emails did not look all that different from those I received from other travel companies, those with no explicit overtones of ethics and responsibilities, for example Travelocity, Club Med, Easyjet or Air Asia. In fact, they often offer you a similar deal: you could be somewhere else doing something much more fun or meaningful, and look, here is a discount on these particular tours/flights. Embedded in this example are indeed the aims of this thesis – with the ever increasing popularity of tours, flights and hotels that put ethics and responsibility at the forefront of their operations, what exactly does it mean to be responsible in tourism (from the perspectives

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<sup>1</sup> A member of the TUI Travel PLC Group of Companies.

<sup>2</sup> A non-profit organization focusing on supporting sustainable community development through travel and voluntourism under Gap Adventures.

of tourists, corporations and locals)? What are some of the popular discourses on what responsibility in tourism is? Is it really so easy to be responsible? And what actually happens on the ground in the destinations and places where one tries to be responsible? Using fieldwork primarily conducted in/on Thailand, this research aims to unpack notions of responsibility in tourism, whether this refers to how we talk about, practise, or place responsibilities.

## 1.2 Responsible tourism in Thailand?

*Thailand – the Most Exotic Country in Asia*  
(Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1988)

Research for this thesis is set within the context of tourism in Thailand, where until the late 1980s, the Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) leading slogan portrayed Thailand as "the most exotic country of Asia" – a representation argued to be made largely of Western imaginations of Thailand as an mystic and Oriental Kingdom (Cohen, 2008). Although TAT has gradually changed its promotional strategies over the years, and its current slogan is now "Amazing Thailand" instead of "Exotic Thailand", tour agencies, travel guidebooks, magazines and websites still continue to use and play up the 'exotic' nature of destinations in Thailand. Tourism promotion literature often suggests that Thailand is an intriguing tourism destination with various attractions that are mysterious and out of the ordinary. What is rather more intriguing however, is that from as early as 1872, in Thomas Cook's first around-the-world tour, Thailand had already been institutionalised as an "exotic destination" (Meyer, 1988). That is to say – Thailand has been labelled as "exotic" for at least 140 years. Set between such imageries and imaginations of Thailand as an 'exotic' destination, and the contemporary developments and realities of tourism, this research aims to explore notions of responsibility within the context of tourism in Thailand.

Tourism is big business in Thailand, and according to the latest available statistics, in 2010, Thailand received 1.59 million international tourists, and these were dominated by tourists from Southeast Asia (28.45%), Europe (27.88%), and East Asia (22.8%) (Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand, 2011). Tourism destinations in Thailand are popularly divided into the six regions (especially in travel guidebooks): Bangkok, Eastern

seaboard, Southern peninsula, Central plains, Northern Thailand and Isan.<sup>3</sup> Within these regions, the official Tourism Thailand website lists Thailand's top destinations as Bangkok, Hua Hin, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Koh Samui, while top destinations searched for within the website are Hua Hin, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Koh Chang, and Pattaya (see Plate 1.1). Fieldwork for this research was conducted predominantly in Bangkok and Bang Sare (near Pattaya), although short visits and interviews were also done in Hua Hin, Phuket, Vientiane (Laos), and Singapore.



**Plate 1.1: Tourist map of Thailand<sup>4</sup>** (Source: Lonely Planet, 2011b)

Linking ‘responsible’ tourism to Thailand however, seems incongruous at first sight – on the varying occasions where I have had the chance to introduce my research, the typical immediate response I get sounds like this: “Thailand? Responsible? I think you mean

<sup>3</sup> Popular destinations within each region are as follows: Eastern seaboard: Pattaya, Rayong, Trat, Koh Samet, and Koh Chang; Southern peninsula: Phuket, Krabi, Ko Phi Phi, Ko Samui Ko Phangan, Hat Yai, and Songkhla; Central plains: Sukhothai and Ayutthaya; Northern Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, and Mae Hong Son); and Isan: Udon Thani.

<sup>4</sup> Despite being a popular tourism destination, Pattaya is not represented in this map by Lonely Planet. As discussed in section 5.6.1, it is suspected that this exclusion (Pattaya is not at all mentioned in Lonely Planet’s 2011 guidebook) is related to Pattaya being (in)famous for commercial sex tourism.

irresponsible with all that sex tourism, drugs, and over-commercialized beaches right?” The general sense I seem to get from these responses then is that Thailand (and perhaps many rapidly developing ‘Third world’ countries) do not understand what responsibility is, and consciously allow all sorts of ‘irresponsibility’ to happen: the deterioration of the environment, abuse of wildlife, or wasteful and poorly managed consumption of water, plastics, or electricity, and so on. Or that at best, Thailand as a ‘developing country’ does not have the means to right such wrongs in its tourism industry. One respondent in this research for example, regularly shares news articles detailing the abuse of elephants by Thais on her Facebook profile, and just this morning shared an article from the Bangkok Post on “five national park officials suspected of being involved in elephant poaching in Kaeng Krachan National Park” (Satyaem, 2012).

The downplaying of Thailand as an ‘exotic’ destination in official tourism promotion campaigns in the recent years is indeed related such impressions. Thailand no longer wants to be known to the world as a destination for exotic vices such as drugs or sex tourism, or as a place where one can easily purchase exotic animals such as endangered macaques or gibbons. Rather, other than continuing to portray the country as a rich cultural, natural and historical destination (see Henkel et al., 2006; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001), the TAT also wishes to promote

Thailand’s sophisticated present: its super-modern, state-of-the-art facilities, such as the new airport, luxury accommodations and services, entertainment and shopping opportunities, advanced medical institutions, and the international character of its urban culture, art, and cuisine (Cohen, 2008: 10).

Amongst these new positioning includes what TAT labels as ‘green tourism’, an “initiative to protect and preserve the environment and restore environmental quality by raising environmental awareness and by promoting increased Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2011).

At the same time, there is no such thing as ‘responsible tourism’ in the Thai language – Thai respondents in this research highlighted that despite using ‘responsible tourism’ in English in their jobs, it is commonly translated into ‘sustainable tourism’ when one switches to Thai language. Does this then mean then that there is no ‘responsible’ tourism in Thailand? Or is it fair to categorize places as responsible or irresponsible in such casual

manners? And again, what exactly happens on the ground where one tries to be responsible?

### 1.3 Social responsibilities in tourism

Indeed, it wouldn't be farfetched to say that we now live in a world of 'responsibilities'. In the developed world at least, moral exhortations are at every other corner telling us to be *more* socially responsible, *more* environmentally friendly, or *more* caring towards the less-privileged. We are urged, for example, to wear *Gap's* (Product) Red™ T-shirts<sup>5</sup> that were allegedly "designed to prevent AIDS" (or so reads a banner in front of the Gap Store in Orchard Road, Singapore). When I downloaded the *Windows Live Messenger*™, a popular instant messaging programme, I was prompted to join the i'm™ Initiative<sup>6</sup> that apparently donates a portion of Windows Live Messenger advertising revenue to a social cause organization of my choice. Such messages of social responsibility are blasted at us from all directions – whether we are the layperson, the mass-market consumer, the policy-making official, or the business decision-maker.

Set within this context of 'heightened' responsibility, where ethical consumerism campaigns and corporate social responsibility messages are commonplace, the call to be(come) responsible and ethical in travel/tourism is also increasingly widespread and no longer offered only by small companies or niche setups. I-to-i Volunteer and Adventure Travel for example, was taken over by the one of the largest package holiday companies in the United Kingdom, TUI Travel PLC Group of Companies in 2007.

This research therefore takes on and challenges notions put forth about 'responsibilities' in various fields – geography of care and responsibility, ethical consumerism, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and responsible tourism, and aims to address the academic and practical concerns over the ethical dimensions and possibilities of the tourism industry in Thailand. This includes, but is not limited to 'responsibilities' towards tourism development's environmental and socio-cultural impacts. Adopting a geographical approach, attuned focus will be given to tourism-related corporations, tourists, and

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<sup>5</sup> See Gap (PRODUCT) RED™'s website at [www.gapinc.com/red](http://www.gapinc.com/red) [Accessed on 3 December 2007]

<sup>6</sup> See i'm™ Initiative at <http://im.live.com/Messenger/IM/Home> [Accessed on 2 December 2007]

‘locals’” perceptions of ‘responsibility/ies’,<sup>7</sup> showing their complicity in the active production and consumption of ‘responsible tourism’ at multiple scalar levels. At the academic level, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates in geography and the wider social science arena about the importance of ethics and responsibility, while challenging the binaries traditionally set up between what is considered ‘responsible’ or ‘irresponsible’, and from which perspectives (e.g. ‘developed’ or ‘developing’ worlds) these originate from. At the empirical level then, the complex and dynamic workings of responsibilities in tourism as enacted on the ground will have important lessons for policy makers and businesses alike for implementing better (infra)structural conditions for the effective performances of responsibilities.

The notion of ‘responsibility’ however, be it within ethical consumerism, CSR, or the ambits of geographies of responsibility and care, and works considering the ethical and moral responsibility in tourism, is often shaped and constructed around the view that there is a privileged ‘developed’ or ‘First’ world that should be responsible to the less-privileged ‘developing’ or ‘Third’ world. Ascribing responsibility only to the ‘privileged’ is often an unspoken and seemingly unproblematic assumption. Research has tended to indicate this position in apparently innocent statements. For example, in Silk, caring at a distance was said to be “in the context of North–South relations at the global scale, taking as a conceptual starting point the construction of Northern actors as carers who are active and generous, and of Southern actors as cared for, passive and grateful” (2004: 230). In Lester, it was stated that “[t]his contemporary sense of global concern is the product of imagined geographies founded on the webs of material connection that link the lives of privileged Westerners to materially deprived others in different parts of the world” (2002: 277). As such, from the ‘developed’ world’s perspective, the ‘developing’ world is portrayed as a ‘distant other’ that one ought to care or be responsible for, even though most at the consumer-end of ethical or responsibility initiatives will never personally encounter those that they are supposedly socially responsible for. For example, despite

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Responsibilities’ (rather than responsibility) is typically used in this thesis to acknowledge the multiplicity of what one is called upon to be responsible for. For the ease of discussion however, when the term ‘responsibility’ is used, this will refer more specifically to responsibility as a concept. Whereas ‘responsibilities’ will refer to the ways in which the concept is practised. It should be noted however, that this distinction is made purely to facilitate discussion and in no way suggests that the concept of responsibility is singular while practises are plural.

having bought *The Body Shop*'s products for many years, I have never personally seen, felt, or assessed the effects of its charitable initiatives through community trade.

In tourism, however, unlike many other (especially product-oriented) industries, the two 'worlds' (i.e. the 'First' and 'Third' worlds, if they are indeed separate) are brought together into a shared space as tourists act out 'care' and 'responsibilities' in their travel destinations. This means that if I as an end-consumer, choose to take up, for example, i-to-i's offer of being a Santa this Christmas, I actually do personally see and engage with the 'other' that I committed responsibility to when I opted to use businesses with strong responsibility elements. The nature of the tourism industry is thus a rather unique one, and demands adequate review. The way ethical consumption in tourism is practised is indeed very different from those instances where one buys fair-trade coffee or free range eggs – in tourism, end consumers are almost always offered a chance to judge for themselves whether what they are consuming is responsible or not. This in turn means that companies like tour providers or hotels have the incentive to put in place certain practices to ensure that what is on the ground appear to match end-consumers' notions of ethics and responsibilities in tourism. For example, the 'local' or 'cared for' may not always be receptive of the care and responsibility enacted and this can potentially be observed by the 'carer' as they are in direct contact with each other (Sin, 2010b). These aspects of tourism all beckon further research and this thesis aims to address some of these neglected aspects of ethics and responsibility as practised in tourism – where indeed, it is here argued that 'responsibility' can sometimes be the 'product' in responsible tourism itself.

At the same time, responsibility is not an object – but rather an idea or a notion<sup>8</sup> – this means it is always indirectly insinuated, and attempts to re-present responsibility tend to use various assemblages of visual and textual discourses. As such, responsibility is often defined by practice(s), and "is a quality that is ascribed or imputed to practise, either before, while or after that action takes place" (Noxolo et al., 2011: 4). Particular practices are therefore typically categorized as 'responsible' or 'irresponsible', where, for example, respondents in this research tended to talk about what charitable projects they supported,

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<sup>8</sup> Even though it should be noted that 'responsibility' can often be personified as an object – for example, the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) has successfully used the panda as an object/symbol to signal the need to be responsible towards wildlife in general.

or how they had incorporated certain practices to reduce electricity consumption, rather than discuss the philosophical underpinnings of why such practices were considered responsible.

This thesis therefore aims to interrogate how such practices are situated and specific to places, while juxtaposing these against the dynamic movements of ideas of responsibilities. Indeed, it is suggested that tourism and/or mobilities disrupt our notions of geographies of responsibilities – which has tended to be discussed in a rather static manner – us versus them/here versus there/ proximate versus distant. What was observed on the ground, however, highlights that responsibilities and its practises are highly fluid and often simultaneously address many different target audience/spaces.

This research will therefore explore the following issues:

- First, it aims to critically question what ‘responsibility’ entails in tourism. This will be approached by seeking how responsibility is discussed and practised by both human and nonhuman agents in tourism: including travel guidebooks and websites, tourists, travel-related companies, and ‘locals’ in responsible tourism destinations.
- Second, this research highlights the tensions and resistances between different actors and their differing notions of responsibility. Questions also include how such tensions are addressed and/or resolved, and how tourism sites are continually refigured by changing notions of responsibility as enacted on the ground.
- Third, this research also suggests that tourism research has traditionally tended to look at ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ as separately studied/constructed spheres, but (especially in terms of responsibilities) that it is more effective to look at the continual linkages and feedback between production, consumption and reproduction of the notions and practices of responsibilities in tourism. Responsibilities in tourism here are continually enfolded into different encounters and refolded in other instances, due to the different background and understandings of what ‘responsibility’ really is.
- Fourth, in contrast to how the consumer or the corporation is traditionally placed in the centre of discussions, this thesis follows Barnett et al.’s suggestion to “displace ‘the consumer’ [or corporation] from the centre of analytical, empirical, and critical attention” (2011: 1), and instead look at actual practices and performances as they are enacted on the ground (whether these are done by consumers, corporations or other parties implicit in such ‘ethical action’). Ethical consumerism campaigns and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are thus seen as two sides of the same coin – their emergence is considered and understood as a political phenomenon “indicative of distinctive forms of political mobilization and representation, and of new modes of civic involvement and citizenly participation” (Barnett et al., 2011: 1).

- Finally, the aim then, is to decentre the notions of responsibility from a Western-centric ‘First world’ perspective, and suggest that the practice of responsibilities in tourism outside of the ‘First world’ highlights the problematic assumptions of a static understanding of ‘responsibility’.

#### **1.4 Outline of thesis**

In line with these broader themes, the thesis is arranged into eight chapters covering various interrelated but separately presented issues. Chapters Two and Three introduce the literature and conceptual framework of the thesis, with Chapter Two first dwelling on the meanings and uses of ‘moral responsibility’ through looking at classical ethical theory, and geographies of care and responsibility, while putting forth various critiques of the theoretical concepts of responsibility. Chapter Three adds on this through providing a review of how issues of responsibility and ethics have so far been considered in the academic tourism literature, examining ethical theories that have been put forward in ‘moral tourism’, and details some of major forms of tourism that are considered to be ‘responsible’, hence putting in place the foundation for understanding the complexity and varying notions of responsibility in tourism. Chapter Three also looks into popular social initiatives such as ethical consumerism and sustainable development, and the role of corporations in tourism, and suggests that while corporate social responsibility can be very much associated with a neoliberal shift where social responsibilities (including developmental ones) are increasingly assumed by corporations rather than states, existing literature has yet to provide critical analysis between the parallels of CSR/ethical consumerism and (or as) development. Links and connections between CSR/ethical consumerism and development within the travel and tourism industry are thus discussed, noting the problematic nature of responsible tourism with a largely consumer, donor, or ‘First-world’ led enactment of responsibilities in the ‘Third world’.

Chapter Four then explores the rationale behind the methodology used, suggesting that the process of research is inevitably messy, embodied and emotional. Issues raised include thoughts on how to do research involving the intangible notions of ‘responsibility’, and highlights that methods employed, while seemingly structured and clear on hindsight, were instead often a negotiated process as a result of various external factors both within and beyond the control of the researcher.

The empirical section of the thesis is then divided into three chapters – Chapter Five, Talking about responsibilities: Discourses in tourism; Chapter Six, Doing responsibilities: Practices in tourism; and Chapter Seven, Responsibilities in and through places. Chapter Five therefore explores the creation and sustaining of popular imaginations of what responsibility in tourism is and how one pursues such responsibilities. Using a selection of travel guidebooks (both of Thailand and general guidebooks with a responsibility theme), as well as a number of responsible tourism companies' websites, a discourse analysis is provided, highlighting that while such resources do not actually produce any *real* practices of responsibility, it provides a separate sphere in which responsibility can be talked about, negotiated and discussed, many of which can then become related to actual practices on the ground.

Chapter Six follows on with the discussion of some actual practices in 'doing responsibilities' in tourism, with particular focus given to corporations' and tourists' performances of responsibilities. This chapter therefore brings to the foreground what is actually done on the ground – what sorts of practical concerns companies and tourists may have, what are the realities of doing responsibilities (it is not at all easy!), how tourism can perhaps also be a means of escaping everyday irresponsibility, and what are some of the conflicting responsibilities in practice.

Chapter Seven deliberates on how while notions of responsibility are fluid, practices are grounded in places, and provides a critique of how responsibilities in tourism can potentially inscribe notions of poverty and hence responsibility on particular places; tricky situations of enacting responsibility in a domestic space; and considering the Asian elephant as a site of responsibility. These suggest that responsibilities in tourism are continually produced-consumed-and reproduced by various parties in a fluid and dynamic process. While 'place' is indeed inherent as well in discussions in all chapters of this thesis, Chapter Seven brings 'place' to the foreground and gives space (within this thesis) to dwell into the complex interplay of factors of responsibilities in and on places.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes with a reflection of research findings and contributions of this thesis. It highlights amongst other things, the need to acknowledge and appreciate the partial nature of responsibilities in practice, while moving beyond thinking and

talking about responsibility in a binary form – where one is typically considered as responsible or not. Instead, it suggests that responsibilities are always in the state and process of becoming.

### 1.5 Who are ‘we’?

Before plunging into this thesis’ discussions, it is important to highlight the positionality from which I as an author is come from. Let me begin in a seminar I attended in Japan in 2009,<sup>9</sup> Professor Steven Flusty told us (a group of about 10 graduate students mostly from East Asia) about the story of Baber the elephant – Baber was a young elephant who had enjoyed a carefree life in paradise until a hunter shot his mother and in his escape, he had wandered to the urban confines of a (or *the*) city. When Baber approached the city, he became fascinated with the wonderfully modern aspects of the city – its refined culture (leading to Baber’s obsession with properly modern suits and derby hats) and the workings of the city – such that Baber yearned immensely to adopt the ways of the city and to become modern like those of the city. Baber’s story implied that before encountering the city, Baber was backward and misguided, and that anyone, and indeed everyone, even Baber the elephant, could be modernized. But Professor Flusty went on to suggest that despite everything Baber became after adopting the ways of the city – even after changing everything about his appearance and his character, Baber was still at the end of the day – an elephant – and not just *any* elephant, but an elephant comically wearing a suit, much like the postcolonial subject who had abandoned his or her traditional wear for the Western coatee or suit, and is still after all not quite Western (or good and modern) enough (see also Flusty, 2011).

This story was impactful to me – I felt incredibly stupid for I am indeed Baber – the postcolonial subject who tries his or her mightiest best to portray and exhibit a sense of modernity in hope of gaining acceptance from those deemed to be at the pinnacle of civilization (the ‘West’ whom despite being amidst the current financial and debt crisis, is still for some obscure reason always seems to have the ‘natural right’ to judge what it means to be modern and civilized). And not only that. When asked in the beginning of

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<sup>9</sup> “Strange days: Tourism with no tourists” seminar, at Tokyo, Japan, organized by Rikkyo Amusement Research Centre, Rikkyo University, and Department of Geography, Royal Holloway University of London.

Professor Flusty's presentation about who knows the story of Baber, none of the other graduate students answered affirmatively – I was the only Asian who was familiar with the story of Baber the elephant and perhaps it was also because I had always been that Baber in the story to begin with.

It is at this point where I must come clean – as an Asian, as a Singaporean, as a (ethnic) Chinese, I feel that my contribution as an academic is to provide an alternative voice, and to disturb existing assumptions on who are the 'we' that writes research that then possibly becomes knowledge. But perhaps these are just ideals. Let me detail my educational history – the main goals of my pre-varsity education was to obtain good results at the Cambridge 'O' and 'A'-levels examinations, where I learnt more about the chalk cliffs of Dover than about the tropical rainforests of home. I studied in a school that was named the Raffles Junior College – after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles who is celebrated as the founder of modern Singapore, and who incidentally was also a British Colonial Official under the British East India Company. I obtained my Undergraduate and Master degrees from the National University of Singapore (NUS). Other than the fact that NUS has its origins in the earlier Raffles College that was set up by the British Colonial Government, it should be noted that almost all my mentors and tutors – Faculty in the Department of Geography – hold doctorate degrees from universities in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, or Canada. And now, I join the ranks of those seeking a doctorate degree from the United Kingdom. I was also always schooled primarily in English – my official mother tongue is Chinese, but in most of my pre-tertiary education, it was always considered a second-language. It seems that the idea of me as a postcolonial alternative voice is crumbling very quickly.

And yet, it is from this position that I write – where who 'we'/'I' are/am is constantly fluctuating between varying standpoints. I cannot claim at any time that I am the 'we' as assumed as the privileged 'Western' 'First world', and at the same time, I can never claim to be the 'others' – those of the 'rest' and 'Third World'. It is from this position that I began to search for understanding matters beyond such binaries, even as I seek to unravel the bias in what has typically been presented as a universal understanding of responsibility.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework I Interrogating 'Responsibilities'**

## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework I: Interrogating ‘Responsibilities’**

### **2.1 Preamble**

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it (Obama, 2009, Presidential Inaugural Speech).

The message within Barack Obama's Presidential Inaugural Speech is clear – “the world has changed and we must change with it” – and what this change constitutes is a clear idea(l) and belief that as ‘First world’ citizens, we can no longer evade our ‘responsibilities’ to those “people of poor nations”, a message that has been echoed consistently throughout many political statements, academic and popular literature, and in Hollywood movies like *Avatar*, 2012, or even Disney cartoons like *Happy Feet*!

Why then should one (especially one privileged to “enjoy relative plenty”) be responsible for an assortment of matters that could be dear to oneself but is also at times outside of one's immediate concerns? Is it simply that the burden of great power also equates to a necessarily great responsibility for all of humankind? Perhaps, as Castree et al. suggest, it is the undeniable existence of inequality and uneven development that drives this call for social justice, as “we're in the midst of some exceptionally challenging, complex and momentous changes to the global economy, polity, society and ecology” (2009: 1), and that it is no time for us to sit back and continue to be complicit in our permissions of such injustices (whether ‘we’ refer to citizens of nations that enjoy relative plenty, or to academic scholars studying the phenomena of poverty or responsibility). Fregonese et al. further suggest, that, “the application of nations’ responsibility within the international community shapes the world that Obama seeks to place the US into: a world where no nation prevails over another, but where there are different degrees of responsibility” (2009: 951).

How does one become responsible then? What are some of the practical aspects of reasoning and conveying ‘responsibilities’ on the ground? Has existing literature in the

related areas of 'geographies of care', 'caring at a distance', and 'geographies of responsibility' provided answers towards these pertinent questions? And in fact, rather than simply accepting that responsibility comes inevitably as a result of the possession of power, is the converse – with great responsibility comes great power – possibly also true? For example, does the assumption of great responsibility of the 'First world' not also inflict an assumed and often unquestioned power over the 'Third world' where responsibilities are often enacted? Despite a surge in academic literature concerned with the geographies of care and responsibility, comparatively little work has been done in critically considering postcolonial ways of thinking about and assuming 'responsibilities', and this chapter seeks to review existing literature by suggesting, amongst other critiques, that 'responsibilities' as have been discussed tended to sway too much towards the opinions of a 'First world' responsibility towards poorer, less-privileged and long-suffering 'Third world'. Indeed, responsibilities neither exist in a vacuum, nor are taken to be a pre-existing state of humanity, but are understood instead to be "made by people situated in place and time, and so are geographically and historically constituted" (Lee and Smith, 2004: 1).

With these questions in mind, this chapter therefore serves as the first of two literature and conceptual review chapters – covering key discussions, developments and critiques in relation to notions of responsibility, ethics, and geographies of care and responsibility. These in turn set the foundation for the next chapter that delves into how notions of responsibility are incorporated in tourism development, and popularized by broader trends like ethical consumerism and corporate social responsibility.

This chapter therefore prepares us for discussions that explore the nuances between theoretical understandings and the everyday circuits of information and practices that continually (re)formulate idea(l)s of responsibility within the context of tourism.

## **2.2 Introducing responsibilities**

To begin the discussion, a clear (albeit brief) consideration of the classical meanings of responsibility is needed. Interestingly, despite the long tradition in philosophical contemplations of the various fields of ethics, moral reasoning, or philanthropy, the term 'responsibility' is surprisingly new and modern. As Ricoeur observed, the term responsibility is "not really well-established within the philosophical tradition" (Ricoeur,

1992: 11). Indeed, usage of responsibility has tended to be political (see McKeon, 1957; Williams, 2009) or in reference to constitutional and government's responsibilities (see Mill, 1874, 1963-91; Weber, 1903-06/1975, 1917/1949). As such, the early usage of responsibility was often that of duty or obligation, where one's position of power as a politician or as a representative of government institutions comes with the associated responsibility of ethical or moral behaviour that assures the well-being of others (see McKeon, 1957).

Within philosophy, notions similar to responsibility, while not named as such, are well-developed. Kant's writing on ethics and moral behaviour, for example, positions responsibility as law and duty:

1. Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.
2. Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.
3. Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only (Kant, 1996: 422-429).

In this respect, while duty and the imperative to assume responsibility underpins Obama's speech at the beginning of this chapter, as well as in numerous calls for social justice in this 'unequal world', such duty is however poised on justifications differing from what Kant suggests as a "universal law". Warburton, for example, highlights that

[f]or Kant it was clear that a moral action was one performed out of a sense of duty, rather than simply out of inclination or feeling or the possibility of some kind of gain for the person performing it... the motive of an action was far more important than the action itself and its consequences (1999: 43).

It is not within the scope or aim of this thesis to discuss Kant's philosophies or establish what constitutes 'duty' or 'gain', but it is important at this point to highlight such contentions, as responsibility today – whether assumed by consumers, governments or corporations, is still continuously judged along these lines. Are such actions performed because they constitute a moral duty or good? Or are such actions done for the 'selves' performing 'responsibilities'? Indeed, such contentions are relevant and prevalent in tourism, where, for example, Munt questions whether eco-tourism is really more about the ego of tourists (1994).

At the same time, usage of responsibility can be separated into that of individual and collective responsibility, even though this distinction is rarely directly made in most applied fields such as geographies of responsibility (see also Young 2007's discussion on shared responsibilities). It should be stressed here though, that most discussions in this chapter are implicitly referring to individual responsibility – looking at what it means and the options and courses of action that can be taken to be responsible. In contrast, the next chapter's discussions on the role of consumer-oriented movements and corporations and broader tourism development policies by national and international agencies highlight the collective aspects of performing responsibilities.

The assumption of individual responsibility then, is premised on the notion that any normal human adult has moral agency, because,

- Human beings have free will, that is, distinctive causal powers or a special metaphysical status, that separate them from everything else in the universe;
- Human beings can act on the basis of reason(s);
- Human beings have a certain set of moral or proto-moral feelings (Williams, 2009) (see also, Fingarette, 2004).

In today's ethical consumerism and corporate social responsibility campaigns however, it is useful to note that while human adults are understood to have moral agency, there is a tendency to assume that they lack knowledge and awareness. This is similar to what Kant suggested:

It is thus difficult for any individual man [sic] to work himself out of an immaturity that has become almost natural to him. He has become fond of it and, for the present, is truly incapable of making use of his own reason, because he has never been permitted to make the attempt (Kant, 1996 (1784): 59)

It is considered imperative then to point out and challenge such immaturity, and instead move towards adopting a cosmopolitan sense of responsibility and hospitality: “[t]he rights of men as citizens of the world in a cosmo-political system, shall be restricted to conditions of universal hospitality”(Kant, 1891 (1795): 22). Geiman further elaborates that this meant that

all of the earth's inhabitants should enjoy the cosmopolitan right of hospitality in all lands of the planet. Because of the physical limitation imposed by the earth itself, humankind would have to learn to live together in such a way that they could encounter one another without immediately

provoking the kind of hostilities colonial acquisition brought with it (1996: 518).

This condition, “where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt *everywhere*” has been argued to be “a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity” (Kant, 1989 (1795): 107). These aspects of Kant’s writing are therefore highlighted as similar positions are sometimes encountered in research on the geography of responsibility (see, for example Massey, 2005) and in popular campaigns on responsibility.

### **2.2.1 Introducing the ‘consumer’**

In looking at individual responsibility then, it is important to introduce and conceptualize the role and position of the ‘consumer’ as an agent of responsibility. Since the 1980s, the ‘consumer’ has become a dominant figure in public debate and policy discourse (Clarke et al., 2007), where it is increasingly assumed that identities and loyalties are now less defined by traditional categories of work and labour, but rather by what individuals buy as consumers. The ability and availability of choice presented to the consumer is thought to enable individuals to exercise their power and rights (especially through aggregate signalling, see Needham 2003), and “choice is in turn presented as a means of making service-providers more responsive to the variegated needs of citizens” (Barnett *et al.*, 2011: 28).

The ‘consumer’ however, is often viewed with suspicion and typically characterised as individualised, egoistic and concerned primarily with self-interest, in contrast to an idealised ‘citizen’ that is that is selfless and interested in the common good. The underlying assumptions in this form of critique are

either that consuming is self-centered whereas political behaviors is public regarding or public-oriented, or that consuming, whatever its motives, distracts people from their civic obligations. Either consumption is in itself unvirtuous because it seeks the individual own pleasures, or its displacement of political activity has unfortunate consequences for the social good (Schudson 2007: 237).

In this respect, consumerism has been said to infantilise public life (Barber, 2007); cause the decline of social capital and hence undermine active civil engagement (Putnam, 2000); result in a rise of cultural narcissism (Lasch, 1979), or is simply regarded as a destructive culture (Campbell, 1990). The consumer is hence considered to be veering

more towards being ethically egoistic rather than altruistic (see Holbrook, 1998), and it is along such lines of criticism that grounds the idea that consumers and consumption need to be governed, regulated, or at least nudged in the correct directions to ensure that consumer choice is exercised prudently and with broader public responsibilities in mind. Barnett *et al.* however, points out a key contradiction in such critiques – with reference to how the consumer and choice is assumed to be all about “individualised, materialistic, privatised and self-interest”, they note that

Proponents of the market and consumer choice think that people *should* act like this, despite lots of evidence that *they don't*. Critics of the market tend to assume that people *do* act like this, but they think that they *ought not to*, and therefore intone them to act more responsibly (2011: 29, original emphasis).

Indeed, studies have suggested instead a growth in political consumerism where consumers (and producers) are conscientious with their choice and use this to change ethically or politically objectionable institutional or market practices. This has been argued to reflect the emergence of what Micheletti called ‘individualised collective action’, defined as ‘citizen-prompted, citizen-created action involving people taking charge of matters that they themselves deem important in a variety of arenas’, which is distinct from other forms of political engagement ‘involving taking part in structured behaviour already in existence and oriented toward the political system *per se*’ (Micheletti, 2003: 25). In this respect, consumers self-govern their actions and responsibilities, while acknowledging the ordinary ethics of care in situations where “citizens must juggle their lives in situations of unintended consequences, incomplete knowledge, multiple choices and risk-taking” (Micheletti, 2003: 25). Barnett *et al.* has further argued that the act of consumption is often “not undertaken by them as ‘consumer’ at all, but is embedded in other sorts of practices where they are enacting other identities” (2011:38, see also Miller 1998). Rather than assume that the consumer is selfish and individualistic, consumption is instead set within practices of sociability, generosity and care, where

shopping is directed towards others, particularly family members, and how far it is guided by moral sentiments towards them and about how to live. Far from being individualistic, self-indulgent, and narcissistic, much shopping is based on relationships, indeed on love. It often involves considerable thoughtfulness about the particular desires and needs of others, though it may also reflect the aspirations which the shopper has for

them, thereby functioning as a way of influencing them (Sayer, 2003: 353).

These highlight the relational aspects of consumption, where 'choices' are concurrently governed by a plethora of factors, including but not limited to the identity and moral self as shaped by the consumer's values and subjectivities, as well as all sorts of obligations and responsibilities based on relationships and positions outside that of a 'consumer'.

At the same time, 'individualized collective action' suggests the importance of organizations' role in providing ways and means at which individuals can express their commitments and values by choosing to buy particular products or through explicit preferences towards certain brand names that they identify with because of larger moral and ethical concerns. Jacobsen and Dulrud, for example, note the role of collective actors that frame and mobilize 'consumers', where

As for the sovereign active, responsible consumer, there seems to be strong actors within the corporate sector, with governments as well as NGOs that all support the framing of the consumer role and consumption practices in an active direction. An escalation of political consumerism may be congruent with the development of profitable markets, with the de-loading of political and fiscal government responsibilities and with the power and aims of NGOs (2007: 475-476).

This again illustrate how consumption is not only about the exercise of deliberate consumer choice, and instead, the politics of choice involves all sorts of agencies and collective organizations that serve as mediators of ideas, notions and practices of what is to be considered ethical or responsible. This research therefore adopts Barnett et al.'s approach, where

Thinking of consumer-based forms of expression and mobilization as part of a broad repertoire of political action helps us to see that these are not simply the spontaneous outcome of broad socio-cultural changes of individualization. It is the result of organized activities by strategic actors who are highly attuned to the potentials and pitfalls of consumer-activism. In fact, we would suggest that consumer-oriented activism is modular, in the sense that it can be deployed to open up a range of everyday practices to strategic 'ethical' conduct by individuals and organizations (e.g., shopping, investment decisions, and personal banking and pensions), and also because it can be applied to a diverse range of causes.

### 2.3 Geographies of care and responsibilities

As in the broader fields of social sciences, investigations of the moral or ethical nature of human geography also appear to be flourishing within what has been suggested to be a nascent 'moral turn' (Smith, 1997: 38) in human geography. The increasing numbers of published literature related to this 'moral turn' since the late 1990s suggests a continued interest in ethics within academic geographic thought.<sup>10</sup>

Milbourne suggests that this renewed interest in ethics runs concurrent with the trend since the 1970s, where geographers turned their attention to "the 'spatial malfunctionings' of society and the geographical dimensions of poverty and other forms of social inequality" (2010: 158) (see also Coates et al., 1977; Peet, 1975). In *Social Justice and the City* (1988 (1973)), Harvey argued that issues of social justice had been neglected for too long within the capitalist market economy, and that it was vital to work towards an alternative system whereby a just distribution can be addressed and achieved:

If, in the short run, we simply pursue efficiency and ignore social cost, then those individuals or groups who bear the brunt of that cost are likely to be a source of long-run inefficiency either through decline in what Leibenstein (1966) calls "x-efficiency" (those intangibles that motivate people to cooperate and participate in the social process of production) or through forms of anti-social behaviour (such as crime and drug addiction) which will necessitate the diversion of productive investment towards their correction....

The principle of social justice therefore applies to the division of benefits and the allocation of burdens arising out of the process of undertaking joint labour. The principle also relates to the social and institutional arrangements associated with the activity of production and distribution. It may thus be extended to consider conflicts over the locus of power and decision-making authority, the distribution of influence, the bestowal of social status, the institutions set up to regulate and control activity, and so on... We are seeking, in short, a specification of a just distribution justly arrived at (Harvey, 1988 (1973): 96-98).

Set within Harvey's intervention then, is again a message that was repeated in Obama's and many other political speeches – that if we do not address social injustice now, the brunt of it all will eventually be borne by ourselves – through x-(in)efficiency, anti-social

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<sup>10</sup> The examples are plenty, but see for example, Barnett et al., 2005; Barnett et al., 2011; Barnett and Land, 2007; Bosco, 2007; Cloke, 2002; Conradson, 2003; Greenhough and Roe, 2010; Hopkins, 2007; Jazeel, 2007; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Lawson, 2009; Low, 1999; Proctor, 1998; Proctor and Smith, 1999; Raghuram et al., 2009; Sayer, 2003; Smith, 2000.

behaviour or whatever is deemed to be the effects of consuming “the world's resources without regard”. To Harvey and many other geographers then, “a new type of human geography was required; one that was more relevant, humanistic and interventionist in nature and also drew on broader and more critical social scientific approaches to inequality and injustice” (Milbourne, 2010: 158) (see also Knox, 1975; Smith, 1977).

Geographers (and other social scientists) have therefore sought to engage moral philosophy and political theory, in a bid to highlight some of the moral and ethical implications of geographical research, representations, discourses, and practices in various fields.<sup>11</sup> These works have contributed greatly to the discipline and social sciences at large by illuminating the often implicit and yet taken for granted ethical implications of academic theory.

At the same time, the interest in ethics and geography reflects a self-perception amongst geographers that this discipline is well-poised to study moral and ethical commitments, especially in a interconnected globalised world where there is a need to evaluate unequal geographic distributions, and where such commitments to responsibility (are argued to) have great spatial implications. This study on social responsibilities in tourism thus benefits from a critical review of literature espousing ‘geographies of care’, ‘geographies of responsibility’ and ‘caring at a distance’.

### **2.3.1 Geographies of care**

The idea of ‘geographies of care’ (see Conradson, 2003; Parr, 2003) or geography as a ‘caring discipline’ (Lawson, 2007, 2009) is increasingly used in research in human geography. These researches have tended to draw their conceptual inspirations from ‘ethics of care’ and emphasize the situatedness of care in familiar places, such as the

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<sup>11</sup> Some examples include that relating responsibility to the environment and landscape (Armstrong, 2006; Barrientos and Dolan, 2006; Bunkscarone, 2001; Faulstich, 1998; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Greenhough and Roe, 2010; Hanssen, 2001; Hobson, 2006; Howitt, 2002; Pickerill, 2009; Setten, 2001; Smith, 2001a; Syse, 2001); responsibility as generosity or hospitality through cosmopolitan concerns (Barnett et al., 2005; Barnett and Land, 2007; Bosco, 2007; Jazeel, 2007; Popke, 2007); human rights and social justice (Bickerstaff et al., 2008; Castree et al., 2009; Harvey, 1996; Harvey, 2005; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Koschade and Peters, 2006; Low and Gleeson, 1999; Smith, 2009); globalization, geopolitics and development (Hart, 2004, 2009; Hickey, 2009; Milbourne, 2010; Power, 2003; Roy, 2010; Slater, 1997; Sparke, 2007b; Wood, 2000; Young, 1999); responsibilities associated with ethical and moral economies (Hughes et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2009; McEwan and Goodman, 2010); responsibility in relation to the inequalities of a postcolonial work (Madge et al., 2009; Noxolo et al., 2008; Power, 2009); and the ethics of research process (Aitken, 2001; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Hay, 1998; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Matthews, 2001; McDowell, 2001; Newstead, 2009; Noxolo, 2009; O’Loughlin et al., 2011; Valentine et al., 2001).

home, as sites of care provision. As pointed out by Milligan (2001), caring relationships are said to be constructed through/by interconnectivities between people with similar identities within a particular locality. Who and what to care for is therefore often based on socio-spatial boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Key to an understanding of the 'geographies of care' then, is to examine care and its complex web of relations in place, especially since caring relationships cannot be assumed to be uniform across time and space.

Research espousing the 'geographies of care' has thus tended to look at and theorize care, especially health care, in particular settings (Kearns and Gesler, 2002). Situated within the sub-discipline of medical geographies, some of these works have contributed to the understanding of provision, access to and (in)equality of health care (Gould and Moon, 2000; Higgs and Gould; Hotchkiss, 2001; Ricketts et al., 2001). Research has also sought to progress beyond the medical landscape and construct accounts of care in other places, especially in the domestic home-space (see, for example Milligan, 2000; Twigg, 2000). This research has tended to highlight the complex dimensions of care as enacted in various relationships in the home, and indicates that despite best intentions, the quality and consistency of such care is variable and its delivery is often emotionally demanding (see, for example Allen and Crow, 1989; Woon, 2005). Other research has focused on mental health care (Kearns and Joseph, 2000; Parr, 2000; Philo, 1997; Pinfold, 2000); hospices (Brown, 2003a; Brown and Colton, 2001); hospitals (Allen, 2001; Brown, 2003b); and 'alternative' medical/healthcare centres (Brown, 2003b; Wiles and Rosenberg, 2001; Williams, 2000). Within these studies, there is an emphasis on how relations and practices of care – tasks such as listening, feeding, and administering medication—are implicated in the production of particular social spaces. The care-taking tasks which bring people together in these settings involve both physical and emotional labour and often depend disproportionately upon the commitment of women (Daly and Lewis, 1998; Finch and Groves, 1983; Ungerson, 1990).

Research in the area of geographies of care has therefore aided a (re)thinking of how care is enacted (mostly from the point of an individual), while deconstructing often unquestioned assumptions towards care. This however, has limited scope in aiding a consideration of how one might care for someone or something not immediately near to us. Indeed, 'care' can be argued to go beyond the form of medical, nursing or familial

care, and it is not uncommon to also 'care' about sometimes more abstract matters – for example, philosophical ideals, how our selves are perceived by others, or how we judge our own lives and experiences. This form of 'care' while abstract in its terms, often also has real and tangible effects on our daily lives as we make actions based on what we 'care' about. In response to such considerations, it is apt to move into the next section and look towards academic literature on 'caring at a distance' and the 'geographies of responsibility'.

### **2.3.2 'Caring at a distance' and 'Geographies of responsibility'**

While the previous section detailed a trend within geography to explore the situatedness of care, what is perhaps more directly relevant to this research on social responsibilities in tourism, is the possibility of extending care beyond specific sites of care provision. Early works along this lines tended to frame care as an ethics of encounter (Gordon, 1999), arguing that extending the scope of care requires the discipline to move beyond the form of partiality favoured in feminist theories of care and communitarian value (see Smith, 2000). Rather than caring solely for those near and dear to us due to personal sentiments and relationships, Silk (1998, 2000, 2004) suggests that we should and are able to instead 'care at a distance', as in today's globalized world, it is increasingly difficult to imagine our communities are local and bounded as these are increasing "stretched out" (Silk, 1999: 8) across various boundaries. As Smith (1998) suggests, caring at a distance then, is based on the argument that people ought to recognize sameness or close similarity between their 'selves' and 'others' as human beings. In comparison, people should see "traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'" (Rorty, 1989: 196).

Barnett and Land (2007) however, have argued that it is necessary to move beyond such dependency on principles of similarity, and suggest that it is more appropriate to consider discussions in the 'geographies of responsibility', based on the idea(l) as highlighted by Corbridge, that

our lives are radically entwined with the lives of distant strangers ... [so] there is no logical reason to suppose that moral boundaries should coincide with the boundaries of our everyday community; not least because these

latter boundaries are in themselves not closed, but rather are defined in part by an increasing set of exchanges with distant strangers (1993: 463).

What Corbridge describes ties in with discussions of the geographies of responsibility (Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; Popke, 2003) – where geographers have contended that the fundamental imperative for one to extend obligations over distance stems from their understanding of complex causal relationships that connect people living in different places through transnational networks such as market transactions, supply chains, and displaced pollution effects. Geographers have therefore argued that there is a common tendency to privilege the local and proximate over 'distant strangers' in caring relationships, and that such an 'out-of-sight, out-of-mind' mentality needs to be challenged (Popke, 2003: 300). In spatializing our senses of responsibility, both Smith (1998) and Massey (2004, 2005) therefore suggested that responsibilities and care should not be reserved only for those nearest to us, but should instead be extended beyond our immediate territorial boundaries.

Central to this discussion, then, is a widening of our geographical scope of concern, not so much due to the recognition of 'sameness' amongst humankind, but due to the "relations [we have] with one another" in this increasingly connected world. This line of thought is reiterated in Doreen Massey's (2004, 2005) works that call for a recognition of the 'relational politics of place', which suggest that places that are considered 'local' today (and perhaps also in the past, since the days of imperialism) are heterogeneously connected to constituted by other 'global' places. Using London as an example, Massey (2005) argues that the acknowledgement of how a city is connected to the rest of the world through its colonial legacy and today's physical trade, service industries and manufacturing industries, means that London ought to take up responsibility towards those places within these networks that sustains the city. Echoing this perspective, England (2007) suggests that Toronto, like London, is enmeshed in flows of people, capital, commodities, and information, both nationally and globally, and highlights what Massey suggest to be how "the distant is implicated in our 'here'" (2005: 192).

If connectivities and networks with other places make one responsible to distant places, then following this line of thought, all places, whether London or Toronto or elsewhere, therefore ought to have and to assume responsibilities that extends beyond their 'local' boundaries. However, most existing works have tended to speak from a 'First world' or

'global city' perspective, and have argued that the very reason for which we as inhabitants of London (or other global cities) are 'responsible' for distant places, is also the privilege we continue to enjoy at the expense of these distant places. Again using London as an example, Massey suggests that "London is a successful city *and partly as a result of the terms of that success* there are still great areas of poverty and exclusion" (Massey, 2005: 156, emphasis in original), and that it is indeed the concentration of industries and services in such global cities that is one of the propelling forces that continue to produce poverty and exclusion in other places. Here again, as noted in earlier sections, is the notion that responsibilities are to be assumed as a duty of those who are privileged towards those in distant places.

This sense of guilt or burden of responsibility is most evidently brought up by references to the history of colonialism and the injustices that continue to place 'Third world' countries in a disadvantaged position today. Tronto for example advocates that in the course of assuming responsibilities,

we need to return to the painful, ugly and yet perhaps redeemable excesses and injustices of the past, perpetrated by women and men, on men and women, throughout the world. Only if we are willing to give the past its due will we have any firm ground to stand upon and pursue hope for the future (2003: 133).

The acknowledgement of this link with colonialism and enjoying privilege at the expense of subjugating the 'other' is perhaps all the more salient in this discipline, as geographers have noted their hand in the past in 'naturalising' the physical exploitation of colonies – both of its people and resources (see Bell et al., 1995; David, 1994; McClintock, 1995). It has thus been argued that it is both a responsibility (and burden) of the discipline to take up this cause, and also that the concern with space and place in geography makes it well-poised to highlight the spatial linkages (and thus responsibilities) between places.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Other than the spatialization of responsibilities as previously discussed, this sense of responsibilities has also been extended in various fields, including debates on aspects of the construction of knowledge in (and from) geography (see, for example Cloke, 2002; Jazeel, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Smith, 1997; Sparke, 2007a), professional ethics in geography (see, for example Aitken, 2001; Bondi et al., 2002; Harvey, 1992; Hopkins, 2007; McDowell, 1994; Valentine et al., 2001), and the role geography might play in moral education (Hay and Foley, 1998; Smith, 1995).

### 2.3.3 *Postcolonial responsibilities in tourism*

In considering ethics and responsibility then, especially as it is enacted in Asia in this research, it seems strange that postcolonialism and the development of the 'Third world'<sup>13</sup> (see, for example, Crush, 1995; McEwan, 2009) as a strand of scholarly works has so far been little considered in the tourism literature. Set out to expose binaries of the 'west' and 'the rest', postcolonialism has contributed greatly to the decentring of forms of knowledges and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and western domination, and instead has revealed plural societies in their complex heterogeneities (see Said, 1978; Sharp, 2008; Young, 2001; 2003 for comprehensive volumes discussing postcolonialism). While it is not within the scope of this paper to dwell fully on the theories and debates put forward by postcolonialism, it is useful to examine how postcolonialism has informed development theories and practices (also the focus of section 3.5), and how these have in turn made their way into discourses and practices of moral responsibilities.

Postcolonialism, under the broader umbrella of poststructural theory, calls attention to the "the value of approaching culture as a social process rather than a static or immutable entity or ensemble of facts, material objects and rituals" (Simon, 2006: 14). Many works have highlighted how concepts developed in postcolonialism can be applied to development (McFarlane, 2006; Power et al., 2006; Sharp and Briggs, 2006; Simon, 2006). Central to these works is the focus on a nuanced understanding of 'locals' human agency, and subjective knowledges and perceptions, and moving beyond a supposed ideology of development based on western contexts that has been imposed onto different parts of the 'Third world' as if it was homogeneously understood (see Sharp, 2008; Young, 2001).

The plurality in the voices of the 'subaltern' was thus advocated, and examples of localization and locality-based anti-globalization agendas became pivotal in de/reconstructing notions of development and responsibility (see, for example Escobar, 2001; Escobar et al., 2002). The postcolonial approach stressed a spatial genealogy that highlights the multiple sites and heterogeneity of knowledge, space and politics, resulting

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<sup>13</sup> Where development in the 'Third world' is deemed as a responsibility of the 'first world', as will be further discussed in section 3.5.

in an emphasis on “the role of circulations in constituting networks and bringing some sites and forms of knowledge together while distancing others. This circulation is generally not one of seamless travel, but of contested travelling discourses and knowledges” (McFarlane, 2006: 40). This perhaps, is a more theoretically informed way of saying that what is regarded as the norm or absolute rule of the game in one geographic locale or time period may not necessarily hold in another (for a discussion on this, see Bremer, 2008; Roome, 2005). Much has also been said on the importance of incorporating or engaging ‘indigenous knowledges’ in development (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Sylvester, 2000), especially in the need for researchers to ‘speak for’ subalterns. It is noted though, that equal volumes of literature have also critically questioned the representation of researchers’ ‘subjects’ and contemplated researchers’ positionalities and reflexivities between the possibilities of doing research ‘for’ or ‘with’ our ‘subject’.

In the case of tourism then, one has to wonder – are considerations of responsibilities and ethics actually translated into heightened reflexivities or plurality of voices as advocated by postcolonialism? It is important to consider criticisms towards neocolonialism in development and international aid projects, as in similar manners, corporate social responsibility or ethical consumerism are largely consumer and/or donor driven and less initiated by ‘subjects of responsibility’ (whether human or nonhuman). As Spivak (1988a) suggested then, such practice is “promoted as benevolent, but forecloses various complicities and desires. It is championed and propagated by development institutions, which nonetheless seek to obscure their own participation” (cited in Kapoor, 2005b: 1206). This is to say, responsibility campaigns – whether targeted towards governments, corporations, or consumers, tends to seek responsible practices towards one party – for example, ‘the locals’ in tourism destinations, because of the desire to appease another party – in this case tourists or consumers. It is important therefore to bear in mind that while postcolonial theory asks us to incorporate the voices of the ‘Third world’/subaltern, our representations,

cannot escape our institutional positioning and are always mediated by a confluence of diverse institutional interests and pressures... If professional motives dictate, at least to a degree, what and how we do (development), we cannot pretend to have pure, innocent or benevolent encounters with the subaltern. To do so, as argued earlier, is to perpetuate, directly or indirectly, forms of imperialism, ethnocentrism, appropriation (Kapoor, 2004: 635).

Simon, therefore illustrates the importance of “scholars seeking to maintain active and constructive practical, but theoretically informed, engagement have sought diverse ways of promoting non-paternalistic North–South collaborations and deploying participatory and mutual learning research methodologies” (2006: 15), and section 2.4.3 looks in further detail at the importance of looking at power and responsibility in line with postcolonial thought.

## **2.4 Critiques of theoretical conceptions of responsibility**

At the same time, theoretical conceptions of responsibility within geography have been critiqued on several bases, and the next three sections details the issues that will be discussed in this thesis, namely knowledge and action in responsibilities, partiality in the practices of responsibilities, as well as responsibility as power.

### **2.4.1 *Knowledge and action in responsibility***

Barnett and Land (2007) and Barnett et al. (2011) have argued that the approach of geographies of responsibility is misguided to begin with, as it is based on the flawed assumption first, that ordinary people are not at all involved in any kinds of caring or responsible activity; and second, that people are unaware of the network of causal effects of their day-to-day actions and live in a world of veiled relations. Inherent in these assumptions and the drive to highlight causal relationships through geography, is that as long as individuals are then made aware of the causal relationships of their actions to distant places, this ‘new-found’ knowledge will inevitably compel them to act ethically and morally. Such assumptions are perhaps naïve, as daily observations will inform us that knowledge of poverty, inequality, social injustices and so on, put together with an understanding of the causal relationships between us and various distant places, has hardly ensured that all of us will act in ethical or moral term to correct such injustices. For example, do academics in geography not know the environmental implications of their travels for research and conferences? Does the Association of American Geographers’ Annual Conference not attract thousands of academics whose research subject areas ought to inform them of the environmental costs for which they are responsible (see also, Bonnett, 2006; Hall, 2007b)? The fixation amongst geographers to establish chains of causality has the tendency to lead us to forget that “responsible, caring action is motivated not in monological reflection on one’s own obligations, but by encounters with others”

(Clarke et al., 2007: 1069). At the same time, Noxolo et al. highlighted the gap between knowledge and action in responsibilities, where,

Theories of responsibility have entered geography, and have been conducted at, a high level of abstraction. As a result, responsibility is often theorized in ways that make it appear injunctive, even metaphysical. Moreover, it is not associated with a set of practices – there is no 'responsibility work' – and therefore, there are no institutional parameters for assessing responsible action... Hence, while theories of responsibility may recognize the interconnections that make up the modern world, implicating all people irrespective of location equally in responsible action is problematic because in practice responsible action is located in an unequal political world that complicates both the practice and the ethics of responsibility (2011: 420).

It is here then that the study of responsibilities in tourism contribute to further existing works in geography (and in ethics and the social sciences in general), as contrary to many other 'responsible' products (such as fair trade coffee, community trade products in the Body Shop, and so on) the 'carer' will have the chance to possibly meet his or her intended beneficiary, although this generally happens *after* the 'carer' has committed his or her limited resources to a particular beneficiary (i.e. the 'carer' does not necessarily choose his or her beneficiary due to kinship or personal relations, but may in time develop such relations in his or her encounters in the destinations as a tourist). How such fluid identifications of what is 'close to' or 'distant' from 'us' is in fact reflective of today's globalized world – and in exploring the geographies of responsibility, other than realizing that one is enmeshed in a network of causal relations with distant places, it should also be noted that identities today should be seen beyond territorial boundaries, as through tourism and other mobilities such as migration or business travel, the 'proximate' and the 'distant' can be altered. What such fluid identifications mean to the practical enactment of responsibilities would aid in furthering our understandings of responsibility as discussed in geography.

#### ***2.4.2 Partiality in practices of responsibility***

On the other hand, as moral philosophies neglect aspects of the degree and scale of responsibilities, similarly, 'geographies of responsibility' have also tended to overlook the fact that partiality is inevitable in enacting responsibilities. Contemporary academics in philosophy like Williams have noted that "while theories of moral agency tend to regard an agent as either responsible or not, with no half-measures, our everyday language

usually deploys the term 'responsible' in a more nuanced way" (2009) where degrees and scales of responsibility exist.

The attempts aiming to 'educate' the general public, are therefore a problematic approach, as Barnett and Land argue that most works in geography reflects an unacknowledged moralism, and the "presumption is that people are naturally inclined to act in egoistical pursuit of their own self-interest unless motivated by knowledge and reason to do otherwise" (2007: 1068). The partial nature of care favouring those immediately proximate and those who are dear to oneself due to all sorts of personal relationships, has always been portrayed as restricted, egoistic and self-centred, and juxtaposed against the universal justice argued for in 'geographies of responsibility' towards distant 'others'. Indeed, Sack has claimed that the role of geography is to aid people's progress in becoming "less self-centred and more altruistic" (2003). This is not unlike the moralisation also observed in tourism, where awareness campaigns often target the education of tourists to move away from being a 'mass tourist' that has been regarded to be 'self-centred' and living in a 'tourist bubble' and to instead become 'new moral tourists' who are 'people-centred' – one who is sensitive and interested in people and the cultures they encounter during travel, and perhaps also one who will therefore consider issues of responsibilities in destinations they visit (Butcher, 2003: 18).

The valorisation of the 'moral subject' in both geography and tourism however, is often problematic, as it assumes that 'altruism' and 'self-interest' belong to two ends of an irreconcilable spectrum, and when one makes any decision that is partial, this is necessarily a wrongful and unjust act that favours the 'self'. Indeed, the word 'partial' itself often carries negative connotations of bias or unfair prejudices for or against particular matters. These assumptions, however, fail to appreciate that people are necessarily partial – they are only realistically able to care for or be responsible about some things while simultaneously falling short in the taking on of responsibilities for other things. Williams, for example highlighted that, "[i]t is not an accident or a limitation or a prejudice that we cannot care equally about all the suffering in the world: it is a condition of our existence and sanity" (2006: 146). Although debates in the geographies of responsibility have been helpful in highlighting the spatial linkages between places, and have provided a strong case for one to ought to assume responsibility for distant others, in reality, whenever an individual chooses to act on any of such responsibilities,

the practice is almost always partial. One's choice to support, for example, eco-tourism in Thailand, means that at that same point (in time and space), limited resources have been committed to this choice, instead of other eco-tourism initiatives elsewhere, or other practices of responsibility outside of tourism that one might be encouraged to assume. This is to say, that although calls for universal justice in the geographies of responsibility have indeed opened up many possibilities (see, for example Popke, 2003: 300), the furtherance of academic debate has to acknowledge that partiality is part and parcel of enacting responsibilities in reality, and move on to explore 'responsibilities' not as an abstract and comprehensive moral whole, but as a plural and multiple domain in which people, states and organizations make active and partial choices with practical reasoning (see also Clarke et al., 2007; Woon, 2007). Indeed, it is often easy to spot partialities and inconsistencies in the practice of responsibilities. For example, the self-stated eco-tourist might very likely have flown thousands of miles (a large carbon footprint!) to go to a destination to enact their perceived ideas of responsibilities towards the environment. This example brings up a key aim in this research – that is, to move beyond the abstract and explore the practical realities of 'responsibilities' as they are played out, and to highlight the importance of understanding how these are negotiated on a day-to-day basis.

Acknowledging partiality in the practice of responsibilities also aids the avoidance of 'compassion fatigue'. Bosco previously argued that the call for aid and donations in Argentina has often used images and discourses of poverty, hunger, death and suffering of the children of Argentina, in an entirely decontextualized manner (2007). Such images and discourse can also be easily observed in material produced by numerous non-government organizations (NGOs) and international aid organizations. The message here seems to be that one ought to extend responsibilities and ensure that needy children receive sufficient aid and donations. However, when such images are put against numerous other calls to be responsible for all sorts of different causes, lay people is often overwhelmed and experiences what Moeller (1998) argues to be 'compassion fatigue' – where images of suffering are appropriated and commercialized by the media and becomes another commodity. This has been argued to paralyze audiences and result in their indifference towards similar images and discourse in other cases (Bosco, 2007). The idea that people are embedded in a vast network of causal relationships can perhaps propel them towards acting on such responsibilities, or on the contrary, it can also place

them in a position to conclude that their contribution is so mediated and that there are too many things (beyond practical abilities) to be responsible for, that they therefore choose to not act at all.

### **2.4.3 Responsibility as power**

Finally, as already alluded to throughout this chapter, works on responsibility, be it within the ambits of geographies of responsibility and care, or within works relating the ethical and moral responsibility in tourism, have often taken the perspective of a typical 'First world', rich, and privileged position, being responsible for the wellbeing for a 'Third world', poor, and marginalized subject. Embedded in this discourse however, is the notion that the world is divided into a more affluent 'First world' or 'North', and a much poorer 'Third world' or 'South', and that the former ought to be responsible for the latter as the attainment of its privileges were made at the expense of the latter, and also that the latter is incapable of extricating itself from problems and poverty and (the lack of sustained) development, and therefore needs the privileged 'North's' assistances and resources to care for them adequately (see also Friedman, 1991; Silk, 2004).

Academics have observed this in various accounts, and this thesis argues that too little has been done to directly challenge such perspectives. Barnett and Land, for example, have noticed that the "focus of moral agency [is] squarely on the giver, who is ascribed all the active attributes of moral subjectivity, at the cost of the receiver, who is thereby rendered a rather passive subject" (2007: 1071).

The paradox one can observe here, is that the call for responsibility based on universal justice, or 'sameness' between people at a distance, is itself continuously placing the same people into distinct and different categories of the 'rich' and therefore ones who need to assume responsibilities; and the 'poor' and therefore ones who are on the receiving ends of responsible actions. One wonders immediately then – do the 'poor' or the 'Third world' therefore have no responsibilities whatsoever? The absence of the 'poor's' roles in the entire discussion on responsibility is therefore highly problematic, as it assumes an entirely one-sided view towards causality in a network of relationships between different places (see Sin, 2010b). While recent works have highlighted how "complex relationalities of a postcolonial world mean that relations of responsibility are not always cosy but are contested, complicated and productively unsettling" (Noxolo et

al., 2008; 2011: 8; Raghuram et al., 2009), the pervasive tendency to take on a 'First world' perspective needs to be further challenged through further theoretical discussions and observations on the ground.

Indeed, it is not only important to (re)present postcolonial opinions and the subaltern in academic research, but also essential to realise, that the lack of responsibilities given to the 'Third world' might also mean that they (or we<sup>14</sup>) continue to be marginalized and disempowered. Bourdieu, for example, argued that when acts of kindness, care, or responsibilities are

set up in conditions of lasting asymmetry (in particular when they link people separated by an economic or social gulf too great to be bridged), and when they exclude the possibility of equivalent return or the very hope of active reciprocity, which is the condition of possibility of general autonomy, is likely to create lasting relations of dependence (1997: 238).

Kwadwo goes further in suggesting that the violence of colonialism was that it removed responsibility from those who were colonized, resulting in a situation where to those colonized, the "initiative in your own life or your history is taken away. You are taken out of the stream of your own history and put into somebody else's" (2009: 102).

A clear example would be the provision of international aid by rich nations who hold control over resources and have the power to set the terms and conditions on which aid is provided. Silk, for example, highlights that

This power gives them a great deal of control over the activities and mode of operation of recipients—the nature and content of projects and programmes, modes of accountability and so on. This means that relations are not only unequal in terms of transfers of resources, but also in terms of accountability and legitimacy. Recipients have to satisfy donors on both these counts, but not vice versa (2004: 235).

The assumption of responsibilities, then, is not unlike its moralized form with altruistic motivations at its forefront, but instead is very much a force of control and power rich nations hold over poorer ones. While geographers working on the fields of responsibility and care probably did not intend (or perhaps imagine) such a usage of the 'responsibility' they advocate, it is still vital to deconstruct the position from which responsibilities have been repeatedly placed. Indeed, the continued supposition of a dichotomous relationship

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<sup>14</sup> See Section 1.5 on who are 'we'.

between the 'rich North' or 'First world' and the 'poor South' or 'Third world', which parallels the relationship of one with responsibilities and one without responsibilities (or at least one in which responsibilities are almost never mentioned in academic and many forms of popular literature), would inevitably ensure that continuation of dependencies and unequal relationships.

This research therefore aims to work beyond these dichotomies and (re)present opinions of responsibilities of subjects (i.e. what and who am I responsible for, and how I am responsible for them) across the spectrum of what is often classified as 'First world' or 'Third world'. It is important to also note, as Noxolo et al. affirm, that,

fronts along which the binary politics from which colonialism was (mostly) fought have multiplied. Colonizer-colonized or North–South are not necessarily the only divisions along which these politics are played out – the tension between connection and disconnection may be as significant in newly forming global relations. Nor is the nation the most appropriate category of analysis. Rather, in a globalizing world both affiliations and disconnections may occur along other, more transnational, lines (Noxolo et al., 2011: 9).

Indeed, in the ever-changing circumstances of the world today – it is appropriate to ask – who is the 'First world'? While the 'global North' has for years been seen without doubt as the 'First world', it has been observed that international aid and developmental objectives are now also increasingly assumed by those that were or may still be considered as the 'Third world'. For example, aid funding from the People's Republic of China and the various Middle Eastern states has been increasing over the past decade (see, Mawdsley, 2012) – does this mean that responsibilities are now 'South-South' collaborations and are being assumed by parties beyond that of the 'First world'? Or is there a changing geopolitics of power on display? All these considerations highlight the fluid and changing nature of what constitutes responsibilities, and who are to assume them.

## **2.5 Concluding remarks**

This chapter has therefore provided the conceptual background for further discussions on responsibility in this thesis. This will be followed by the next chapter's discussion on popular movements and responsibility in tourism, responsibility as development, and the role of tourism corporations in assuming such responsibilities. At the same time, it

suggests that whether or not one believes in the possibility of assuming such responsibility, the popularity of such discourses of responsibility suggests that such messages – whether they are political or marketing campaigns or in academic literature – are likely here to stay.

Central to this chapter's discussion then include three main issues to be reiterated here – the first is that while classical moral philosophy has tended to see responsibility as an absolute – i.e. one is responsible *or not* for a particular matter, this research argues that there are instead degrees of responsibility – both in terms of scale (for example, how far and who should we care about?) and positionality (for example, should those in positions of power assume higher responsibilities, or does geographical situatedness matter?). Indeed, as discussed in section 2.4.2, the practice of responsibility is necessarily partial as it involves the commitment of limited resources into specific areas one deemed oneself to be responsible for, and not others, even though one can be suitably argued to be responsible for those things not chosen. These notions will in turn be further interrogated through empirical examples and practices observed on the ground in the following chapters, many of which highlight the practical aspects of responsibilities as they are played out and (re)negotiated continually.

Secondly, this chapter has drawn attention to the contextual nature of responsibilities and what this means. As Lee and Smith succinctly pointed out,

The interesting questions which arise here concern not so much the distinction between the 'moral' and the 'immoral', but how 'moral' and 'immoral' come to be defined, practised and reproduced in distinctive ways across space and time. Thus, the transcendence of, or retreat towards, forms of nationalism or more local partiality (e.g. ethnic chauvinism) raises profoundly geographical questions about the nature of human being and how it may be constructed (2004: 7).

Indeed, the transcendence of distance and geographical boundaries of those engaging in responsibilities through tourism both as business and for their leisure continues to put in place important questions on what it means to have the interplay of differing notions of responsibilities in practice.

Finally, this chapter suggests that beyond seeing responsibility as a burden of those with power or privilege, the converse – where assuming responsibility brings about power or privilege, is possibly equally valid. For example, many tourism businesses may choose to

support a particular school or community, in return for having the right or access to develop those specific locales as destinations within their tour itineraries (for tourists to have a 'hands-on' and 'real-life experience' with who they are supporting), or to nurture future potential employees – whether these may be staff in hotels or tour guides in agencies. While such practices can very possibly be win-win collaborations whereby businesses move beyond simply philanthropic notions of assuming responsibilities, it is important not to neglect this aspect of responsibility as power, and the location of power in who decides over what responsibilities are enacted where and when.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework II

**Consumer and Corporate  
Responsibility in Tourism**

### **3. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework II: Consumer and Corporate Responsibility in Tourism**

#### **3.1 Preamble**

After a 5.5 hour turbulent plane ride and waiting 25 minutes for a taxi (I got an eco-cab!) in the 101 degree F [38 degrees Celsius] heat, I finally stumble into my hotel room. I open the door and a heat wave hits me. I don't know the last time I was inside and it felt this hot. The thermostat in my hotel room is off. When I turn it on it tells me it is 86 degrees F [30 degrees Celsius] in the room. It takes a full hour for the room to get to a manageable temperature. I climb into bed a little later and go to turn on the bedside lamp. It doesn't turn on. I check for a light bulb — that's not the problem. I reach around the back and the cord isn't plugged in. I have to blindly grope behind the bed to find the outlet. "What's the deal with this hotel?" I ask myself. "Don't they know I expect things to work?"

Then it occurs to me — the hotel is making an effort to save electricity. (Elizabeth Sanberg, 2008, Director of Go Green Travel Green)

Oh, how easy it is to misunderstand efforts gearing towards responsible practices in tourism! Oftentimes, underlying intentions may not be immediately apparent, and as in this example, tourists may instead be frustrated at the seemingly poor standard of services provided (or in fact, might we suspect that 'eco' is just an excuse for poor service?).

While examples and studies of corporate social responsibility (CSR)<sup>15</sup> efforts are plentiful, the clearest examples have tended to be taken with much cynicism – one often questions the validity of Tesco's claims of greener living or giving back to the community, or perhaps of Easyjet's carbon offsetting programme. In fact, one no longer seems to believe in any of that signage one sees in hotel rooms – those asking you not to change your bed linen and towels so that you will minimize wastage, and therefore help 'save the world'. Yet, alongside such great cynicism are the continued calls to be more responsible – towards the environment, towards the less-privileged, or towards addressing social injustices. From corporate marketing materials to responsible consumption campaigns (of which 'Go Green Travel Green' is a clear example), messages of ethics

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<sup>15</sup> While CSR typically refers to social citizenship and responsibility assumed by large multinational corporations, this chapter argues that it is important not to neglect smaller-scale businesses and their adoption of CSR related practises, especially in an industry such as tourism where small to medium scale companies dominate. This will be further discussed in the later section 'Turning to corporations'. Corporations as referred to in this chapter therefore also include smaller-scale businesses.

and social responsibilities are hurled at us from all directions, and as one of the largest industries in terms of economic revenue and labour employed, the tourism industry is not immune to such calls to be(come) responsible.

In a bid to look beyond agreeing with or brushing off such calls for responsibility in tourism, this chapter sees and positions CSR and ethical consumer activism as two sides of a same story – “consumers use the commercial value of their brand loyalty to lobby corporations for a variety of goods and services, the delivery of which was once presumed to be the obligation and function of elected governments in promoting social welfare” (Foster, 2008: xvii); while corporations have the incentive to take on CSR as a means to create value and brand loyalty through attempts at aligning themselves with what they deem to be consumer perspectives (e.g. carbon offsetting programmes to show consumers that they are equally conscious of their environmental footprint). As such, terms and concepts such as ethical consumerism, CSR, and responsible tourism will be contested while all continuing to stay with us (even though different parties are often at loggerheads over what is considered responsible or not) and in many situations these translate into very real practices on the ground.

One example of such practices would be the increasing popularity of ‘ethical tours’ that are being marketed to mass consumers today. While standards and definitions of ethical or responsible tours of course vary, one example, Exotissimo Travel describes it as such:

Calling Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand our homes, we love to showcase the beauty of the region through our tours and inspire in guests a genuine interest in responsible travel and sustainable tourism. We are fully committed to conserving natural resources, preserving cultural heritage and making positive impacts in the communities with which we come into contact. We work with local charities and encourage our guests to tread as lightly as possible during their travels (Exotissimo Travel, 2009-2010b).

The website continues with a list of tours one could join – tours listed as responsible/ethical. Such a listing is not uncommon, and within the same website and framework then, are other possible tours to join – these *not* listed as responsible or ethical. It is the purpose of this chapter to question such binaries, suggesting that instead of seeing tours (or other tourism-related services such as hotels and transport) as ethical or not, as what a stated ‘ethical tour’ as compared to one not in that list may seem to imply, there is a need to realize the implicit morality in all forms of consumption, and that

“consumers do not choose between ethical and unethical consumption, smart and stupid shopping; they instead negotiate multiple and sometimes contradictory moral demands” (Foster, 2008: 225).

As such, the need to appreciate contexts of responsibility becomes all the more evident, especially as we move beyond seeing tour(ism) as ethical or not, and towards realizing that ethics is involved in all sorts of economic and personal decisions (see Micheletti, 2003). This chapter therefore explores ethics and tourism, while introducing the parallels popular ethical consumption campaigns and CSR in tourism has with developmental ideals. It begins with an overview of the performances of ethics as observed in tourism, followed by consumer and corporations’ role in enacting such ethical responsibilities. While such responsibilities are mostly undefined and can refer to a myriad of concerns from poverty alleviation to environmental awareness, this chapter zooms in on one aspect to aid the discussion - namely the ties both CSR and ethical tourism have with developmental objectives, and suggests that critiques of development should be better understood and integrated into how consumers and corporations construct and practise their supposed ethical responsibilities. At the same time, emphasis in this chapter is given to corporations’ responsibilities (section 3.4) as most research on ethics and tourism (section 3.2) is focused on consumer/tourist responsibility. Differentiation between what is considered consumers’ or corporations’ responsibilities are not specifically highlighted in this thesis in a bid to recognize that responsibilities on the ground are often taken up and performed by a myriad of actors in tandem with each other (including but not limited to what or who are typically considered as ‘consumers’ or ‘corporations’). As discussed in Chapter Two, this thesis therefore understands responsibility as Barnett et al. suggest,

In short, taking responsibility is not just an individualized action taken by a single person or by some collective agent. It is theorized in terms of how distributed actions join actors together, feeding into wider networks of cooperation that reach out and influence events elsewhere (2011: 9).

### **3.2 Ethics and tourism**

The prevalent view today is that ‘mass tourism’ has all but failed to deliver the promised benefits of economic development in ‘Third world’ countries, where multinational companies such as large hotel chains profit at the expense of cheap local labour, even as many countries continue to be heavily dependent on tourism for incomes and

employment. Tourism has been criticized as causing more problems in terms of income inequity, socio-cultural issues such as loss of traditional practices in host destinations, and much environmental damage. Indeed, Cleverdon and Kalisch elaborate that of the ills of mass tourism, “eviction and displacement for construction of tourism resorts, rising land, food and fuel prices, and commoditisation of cultural assets are just some examples” (2000:172; see also de Kadt, 1979; Mowforth et al., 2007; Scheyvens, 2002; Smith and Duffy, 2003). Since the emergence of a series of pieces severely reproving impacts of tourism from the 1980s (Britton, 1982; Butler, 1990; Cohen, 1987; Leung, 1989; Richter, 1989), many have sought to develop new ways of conducting tourism to reform the industry of its ills – all of which met with varying success.

To start off with, the key areas of alternative tourism (Weaver, 1991, 1995) and sustainable tourism (for key initial pieces, see Cohen, 1987; Pearce, 1987) of which many other areas can be considered a subset of, reflect initial efforts to incorporate social and environmental responsibilities in an attempt to develop a form of travel that is beneficial or at least more benign to the local community and the ecological environment. These developed alongside the popularization of the concept of sustainable development through the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), and together brought about an era of tourism development where discourses of responsibility are prevalent in both academic and popular fora. Since the late 1980s then, research have frequently featured notions of ethics and responsibility, and this in the initial stages was seen to be represented by,

tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes (Butler, 1993: 23).

Central to these is the idea that tourism ought to consider ethics, morals and responsibility, as earlier discussed, where implicit morality is accepted in all aspects of life – including consumer and corporate decisions, and that the distinction between what is social or ethical and the economy is but an artificial result of the larger “historical transformation that disembedded the market from social life” (Foster, 2008: 225; see Polanyi, [1944] 1957).

In exploring the notion of responsibilities in tourism contexts, many academics have also turned to classical ethical theory (Fennell, 2009; Fennell and Malloy, 2007; Smith and Duffy, 2003) and analysed the ethics foregrounding what should be deemed to be the responsibilities of various parties involved in tourism development. Using existing definitions of ethics with a business perspective, this is seen as an “inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality where morality means moral judgments, standards and rules of conduct” (Tsalikis and Fritzsche, 1989). Evidences of conceptualizing the moral landscapes, regulatory mechanism, desire and ethical encounters in tourism have, however, surfaced both in academic literature and popular consumption, with increasing number of tours offering ‘ecotourism’, ‘just tourism’, and ‘pro-poor tourism’. Yaman and Gurrel (2006: 471-472), for example, provided a good summary of existing literature dwelling on the linkages between ethics and tourism, and categorized these into six groups. These include:

1. Works with a practical focus aiming to detail ethical issues and challenges in the tourism industry (Dunfee and Black, 1996; Enghagen and Hott, 1992; Font and Harris, 2004; Scheyvens, 2002, 2011; Upchurch and Ruhland, 1996, 1995a);
2. Unethical practices observed in tourism, such as harm to natural resources and communities, misinformation (Butcher, 2003; Butler, 1990; Cohen, 1987; Coughlan, 2001; Holden, 2003; Payne and Dimanche, 1996; Stevens, 1997; Wheeler, 1995; Whitney, 1990);
3. New types of tourism aimed at offsetting the negative impacts perceived in mass tourism (Ashley, Goodwin and Roe, 2001; de Kadt, 1979; Goodwin and Roe, 2001; Holden, 2003; Wearing, 2001; Wheeler, 1995; Wight, 1993);
4. Codes of ethics in the tourism industry (Andrade, 2002; Coughlan, 2001; D'Amore, 1993; Dean, 1992; Fennell and Malloy, 2007; Hultsman, 1995; Payne and Dimanche, 1996; Smith and Duffy, 2003; Stevens, 1997; Wight, 1993);
5. Ethics in tourism education (Hegarty, 1990; Hultsman, 1995; Yeung, Wong, and Chan, 2002); and
6. Ethical work environment and ethical decision-making amongst tourism managers (Fennell and Malloy, 2007; Henderson, 2007; Kalisch, 2000; Whitney, 1990; Upchurch and Ruhland, 1995b; Upchurch and Ruhland, 1996)

Amongst notions of alternative travel are also ‘new’ forms of tourism such as responsible tourism and volunteer tourism, where research has so far suggested that the drive for responsible tourism originated from tourists’ demands of a holiday that fulfils “the satisfaction of social needs: contact with other people and self-realization through creative activities, knowledge and exploration” (Krippendorf, 1987: 105). Consequently, most material in promoting responsible tourism has been to encourage critical and reflexive thinking on the part of the consumer, who will in turn pressurize the industry into adopting responsible tourism practices in order to meet his demand (Goodwin and Francis, 2003; Tearfund, 2000a, b). In such material, tourists are encouraged to ask difficult questions of themselves and the tourism industry in general, such as “ethical issues about working conditions, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities; about who benefits; about the environmental consequences; and about whether or not travelling to a particular place supports democracy and human rights or undermines them” (Goodwin and Francis, 2003: 275). Research on volunteer tourism has also suggested that these forms of travel can have positive influences on its participants – volunteer tourism is frequently seen as an alternative to the ills observed in other forms of tourism (Gray and Campbell, 2007) or is at least assumed to bring about positive changes in either the volunteer tourists (Broad, 2003; Brown and Morrison, 2003; Campbell and Smith, 2006; Cousins, 2007; Halpenny and Caissie, 2003; McGehee and Santos, 2004; McIntosh and Zahra, 2007; Scheyvens, 2002; Stoddart and Rogerson, 2004; Uriely et al., 2003; see for example, Wearing, 2001; Wearing, 2003; Zahra and McIntosh, 2007) or in host communities (Scheyvens, 2002; Uriely et al., 2003).

Within the popular discourse of responsibility in tourism development however, is often an underlying (but not always specified) assumption that the origins of tourists, travel agencies and multinational corporations owning hotel chains, airlines and other tourist services, were from the ‘developed world’. The host destinations and ‘locals’ were often regarded to be of the ‘developing countries’. Responsibilities here are thus seen to be that of the ‘privileged’ towards ‘others’, and the overwhelming imperative to be responsible was also due to the great privileges accorded to the developed world (as discussed in Section 2.4.3, see Massey, 2004, 2005). Smith and Duffy, for example, highlight this notion of responsibility of the privileged towards the less privileged in some basic questions about ethics in tourism: “is tourism all about the egoistic satisfaction of those

paying for the privilege or should ethics play a part? What does it mean to say that a certain way of behaving, or a particular kind of tourism development, is wrong? Can the tourism industry ‘afford’ morality?”(2003: 7) The privileged – namely the paying tourists who can afford travel and the large tourism companies who earn profits from tourists – are all pictured to have great responsibilities in ensuring ethical tourism developments. Other than looking towards consumers, such privilege and the ability to assume responsible is also observed when one looks towards corporations. Kalisch, for example, suggests that,

We live in a world where largely unaccountable transnational corporations, whose main aim is profit maximization, can wield tremendous economic power over national state governments and international trade agreements. Consequently, the calls for corporate ethical business practice and a fairer trade system are gradually increasing. Ever since Greenpeace confronted Shell over its environmental and human rights record, corporations are beginning to consider ethical policies and social and environmental audits to improve their public relations image (2000: 1-2).

Ethical forms of tourism have therefore surfaced both in academic literature and popular media, with increasing numbers of tours offering ‘ecotourism’, ‘just tourism’, and ‘pro-poor tourism’. There is no clear definition, however, of what constitutes ‘ethical’ forms of tourism development, and it is suggested that it is indeed because of its complexity that there is no suitable definition that can comprehensively encompass its many dimensions (Butcher, 2003; Lovelock, 2007; Smith and Duffy, 2003). While initial efforts were largely biased towards incorporating environmental responsibilities in tourism development, since the turn of the century, increasing calls have also been made to refocus on social responsibilities. Mowforth, Charlton and Munt state this clearly – “countless instances of exploitative nature of tourism developments in the Third world have been documented over the last two decades. The new forms of tourism, however, are intended to overcome such exploitation” (2007: 47). Referring specifically to sustainable tourism development, Briassoulis comments that the central issue is,

how to manage the natural, built, and socio-cultural resources of host communities in order to meet the fundamental criteria of promoting their economic well-being, preserving their natural and socio-cultural capital, achieving intra- and intergenerational equity in the distribution of costs and benefits, securing their self-sufficiency, and satisfying the needs of tourists (2002: 1065-1066).

As mentioned in the opening section however, the popularity of attaching ethical responsibilities to tourism development has not come without a dose of cynicism and scepticism. Most significantly, many have since questioned how different (if at all) are these new forms of tourism. Butcher, for example, argues that such ‘moral’ forms of tourism are but a superficial sense that tourism development is achieving the “moral regulation of pleasure-seeking [that] is necessary in order to preserve environmental and cultural diversity” (2003: 7). Furthermore, research has shown that even though so-called green consumers may claim to support pro-poor or fair-trade initiatives when polled in surveys, many continue to disregard such notions of responsibility when booking holidays, and instead choose holidays based on finance considerations and convenience (Balooni, 1997; Cleverdon and Kalisch, 2000).

‘Ethical tours’ have also been criticized as being nothing more than a marketing gimmick to make tourism development appear responsible, where a change in rhetoric has not necessarily meant a change in practices on the ground. New terminologies of alternative tourism products are continually introduced to the market, including: ecotourism, responsible tourism, fair trade through tourism, volunteer tourism, pro-poor tourism, green tourism, cultural tourism, soft tourism, ethnic tourism, sustainable tourism and so forth. “The question is, are these just new names for old products which have ultimately been repackaged to appear more attractive to consumers, or do they indicate a fundamental change in approach to tourism?” (Scheyvens, 2002: 11).

Indeed, what makes it even harder to establish whether a particular tourist, tour or tourism-related company is ethical or not, is its lack of a physical and tangible product which researchers and activists can trace much like efforts made for fair trade coffee. While it is possible to identify ‘products’ in particular sectors of the tourism industry, for example accommodations provided in the hotel sector, or local handicrafts produced as souvenirs for tourists, the tourism industry as a whole lacks physically tangible ‘product’ in the traditional sense. Crouch et al. (2001) and Gibson (2009), for example, has argued that tourism is instead an encounter – something that can be created and sustained by rhetoric.

The nature of what is considered to be an (ethical) tourist can also differ significantly from that of an (ethical) consumer. As discussed in section 2.2.1, the consumer is

typically conceptualised as an individual who is able to make particular decisions because of the availability and ability of choice. The ethical consumer is asked to act responsibly on his or her choice, and this is most commonly seen in terms of what the consumer chooses in his or her shopping. The key adjustment that an ethical consumer needs to make in his or her daily behaviour is therefore made through the act of buying what is supposed to be ethical, sustainable, or fairly produced (although ethical consumerism campaigns also encourage individuals to consider their wide-ranging and spatially extensive responsibilities (see Clarke et al., 2007; Green, 2008)). In contrast, the ethical tourist is held to guidelines and suggestions that are rather vague. Being a responsible tourist is thus not as straightforward as being an ethical consumer who can just buy, for example, a product that is labelled as ‘fair trade’ – he or she cannot simply pay for a tour that is labelled as ‘responsible’, or just donate money to offset the carbon emissions from his or her flights. Instead, the responsible tourist is asked to alter his or her behaviour in many varied ways: from reading up on local cultures and learning to use words of the local language during their travels, or bargaining fairly with a smile (to be respectful of locals), to using water sparingly (to reduce their environmental footprint). Indeed, the most responsible of all potential tourists, is sometimes deemed to be one who chooses not to travel at all, as this ensures that the individual does not have the opportunity to create wastes, damage environments, and offend locals through their travels. It can, however, be argued that the tourism industry contributes to economic development and provides employment and income to a large number of ‘locals’, and therefore, to not travel at all can negatively impact the incomes of many and is considerably irresponsible. An ethical tourist therefore needs to manage and negotiate such conflicting notions between macro contexts (for example whether or not to participate in international travel), with micro questions of how to travel responsibly. The methodology for this research, however, allows us only to have access to those who have chose to travel, and reflects that amongst those interviewed, many attempt to negotiate their responsibilities through, for example, minimising the number of flights in their holidays, taking longer holidays (in terms of time spent overseas) to justify the long haul flight (and carbon emissions), or choosing what they suppose to be responsible destinations (see section 7.2) or activities in their holidays.

This suggests that while the ethical consumer's responsibility is mainly realised at the shopping till, the ethical tourist's responsibility is much less confined. The lack of wide-ranging accreditation for responsible tourism (and related products and services), together with the emphasis on changing behaviours and actions beyond shopping, means that the ethical tourist is often held to a standard that is potentially harder to achieve, and this perhaps, is related to how in tourism, unlike many other (again product-oriented) industries, the two 'worlds' (i.e. the 'First' and 'Third' worlds, if they are indeed separate) are brought together into a shared space as tourists act out their 'care' and 'ethical responsibilities' in their travel destinations. In comparison, in most other industries where fair trade or ethical consumption is strongly promoted, be it tea, coffee or eggs, most at the consumer-end will never personally encounter the farmers or even the chicken that they are supposedly responsible for. In a typical 'fair' product for example,

the concrete application of the Fair Trade principles by companies is something that cannot be observed directly by the consumer. Since the beneficiaries of the fair characteristic (the producers in the South) are located far from the ones who finance it (the consumers in the North), there is an information asymmetry that requires a certain level of trust from the consumers (Becchetti and Huybrechts, 2008:735).

Ethics as observed in tourism is therefore a rather unique situation – since as an end-consumer, tourists actually do personally see and engage with the 'other' that he or she had committed responsibility to when he or she opted for 'ethical tours'. In fact, Korf has even suggested, using the case of philanthropic giving after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, that "[i]n the 21st century, spatial distance has become much more fluid: lifestyles have become more cosmopolitan, global tourism has brought large numbers of Westerners into remote places where they personally experience an encounter with distant others" (2007: 371), and this in turn encouraged a vanishing of distance between what was 'proximate' or 'at home', and what was 'distant' or 'away' (as discussed in Section 2.3, see England, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; Popke, 2007; Smith, 1998). Through such an encounter then, tourists are able to assess and judge in person whether what has been done is 'ethical' or not, and in some cases, tourists may even be able to observe that the 'local' or 'cared for' may not always be receptive of the care and responsibility enacted and this can immediately be observed by the 'carer' since they are in direct contact with each other (see Sin, 2006; Sin, 2010b). Indeed, despite this, 'going local' is most prevalent amongst almost any responsible or ethical travel credo. On

Responsibletravel.com, one of the most successful travel websites focusing on responsible travel, the notion of the 'rebellious tourist' that was recently introduced best encapsulates this fascination with all things 'local'. On its website, it states,

When you think of Rebellious Tourism think of how Michael Palin travels - with a sense of humour, local guides, using local transport. Real-life characters such as Palin, Bruce Parry and Simon Reeve get their confidence from a curiosity to discover and learn about new places and people. It's clear to see it pays off and they are consistently rewarded with acceptance, laughter and wonderful travel experiences (Responsibletravel.com, 2010).

At the same time, given its broad scope, the tourism industry is necessarily implicitly linked with all sort of 'irresponsibilities', whether one is consciously cognizant of it or not. For example, transport – whether air, sea or ground transport provided in tourism, continues to be highly reliant on fossil fuels and thus even as a tourist may opt to take up one of such 'ethical tours' as described earlier in the chapter, he or she continues to add on to environmental damage and can still easily be implicated in many petroleum companies' irresponsible corporate activities – whether this refers to Shell's exploitation of fuels in fragile areas such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (cited in Chatterton and Maxey, 2009), or British Petroleum's lack of decisive action to stop environment damage caused by the its massive oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico. While some may argue that this is too far removed from a tourist or tourism corporations' decision-making process to attribute moral agency and responsibility, this situation highlights the connected nature of production in today's world, where ethical responsibilities cannot be allocated to one industry or another. It also draws attention to the way responsibility is seen in ethical tourism – should this be figured as an active engagement in changing the way the industry (and beyond) operates? Or would it be enough to view responsibilities as the absence of unintended harm? While academic works detailing the relational aspects of responsibilities across space and time (see Massey 2004; 2005) suggests that we recognise the implications of our actions – whether intended or not – responsibilities as discussed in tourism has tended to be mostly about micro contexts of how a tourist should behave during his or her travels (see discussions in Chapter 5). Little is said about the broader responsibilities of tourism as an industry or beyond, and this is further complicated as tourism is an industry that is transnational in its nature, and will have to continually contend with differing expectations of responsibility. This is not unlike

broader observations of transnational corporations ‘localizing’ their brands, advertising and production, as Foster (2008) observed was the case for The Coca-Cola Company’s latest corporate mantra. However, the tourism industry is dominated by much smaller-scale corporations, where even multinational hotel chains would typically see themselves as small players that cannot make a significant difference even if they were to try to be responsible. For example, while some companies such as Intrepid Travel and Gap Adventures have pulled Myanmar out of their tour itineraries on account of violation of human rights by its military regime, these represent the minority, and it is indeed easier to find tour companies that continue to organize tours to Myanmar – often justifying their responsibilities on account of economic development on the ground. The different expectations of social responsibilities are thus not only ones that exists between who is considered ‘local’ or ‘foreign’, but here is also amongst foreign-managed tour companies that adopt differing idea(l)s and priorities in practising their responsibilities. The dominance of smaller-scaled corporations in tourism thus challenges traditional ethical consumerism campaigns – where boycotts or buycotts are aimed towards corporate giants – and instead forces a re-evaluation of responsibility campaigns that have so far tended to focus on large, visible, multinational corporations or on consumers.

Indeed, the tensions of enacting responsibilities in tourism are not only encountered between different expectations of various parties, but also on the larger scale of ever changing societal norms based in differing geographic locales. The active deconstruction of sites and forms of knowledge and the contestations of such are therefore useful in serving as an academic backdrop from which real observations made on the ground can be explained. As Bebbington suggests, “[c]onsideration, for instance, of where, how and why economic decisions are made and structured, by whom, and with what geographical consequences is too often absent or underdeveloped in these analyses” (2003: 300), and the consideration of development (to be discussed in section 3.4.2) and postcolonial theory (discussed in section 2.3.3) can be helpful in broaching both theory and real-life observations in tourism.

In tourism then, it is vital to appreciate that tourist destinations are indeed places that bring together the tourist, corporation, and ‘locals’, places whereby each party is able to observe first-hand what is practised in the name of ethics and responsibility, even as attempts by corporations to conceal any irresponsibility may continue to exist. Much like

Massey suggest, in tourism, “‘place’ [all the more] must be a site of negotiation, and that often this will be conflictual negotiation” (2004: 7). Indeed, while many supposed responsible tourists would possibly desire to be ethical in all respects, in reality, varying aspects of tourism are within or out of their controls, and what is considered ethical and responsible is itself also highly debatable as the rest of this chapter and thesis elucidates.

### **3.3 Popularizing responsibilities**

Suddenly we are not just billions of individuals and millions of collectivities but a single species alongside other species, one whose survival is threatened by its own behaviour. References to millions of years, which used to make our brief lives seem inconsequential, now endow us with gargantuan agency and an almost unbearable level of responsibility – intuitively beyond our capacities for rational or concerted action (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009: 321).

As Gibson-Graham and Roelvink state, another key strand in both academic and popular literature is the drive towards highlighting (especially privileged) people’s capacity for action. Cloke, for example, suggests that as individuals who are also consumers and agents in this globalized world, one holds “the ability of initiative, spontaneous activity and innovation to disrupt causal chains of processes and practices” (2002: 596). People should thus be held responsible to take decisive actions in changing or ensuring social justice in the causal chains of processes and practices. Cloke (2002) also warns against indifference, as even though inequality and social injustices may not have resulted through our a conscious choices, these are often sustained through an unquestioning acceptance of social norms and patterns (which replicate inequality) without question. In many popular campaigns, such as ethical consumption, and the green movement, there is a strong notion that the collective of like-minded individuals can bring about strong pressures to question and change what is deemed as unjust ways, including for example, unfair trade conditions prevailing in today’s capitalist world. Together with the call for action is a message of urgency – as clearly observed in Plumwood’s statement that “if our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure... to work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves... We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all” (2007: 1). Here, the underlying message is the desire to come together as one unified species, as well as the pertinent need to “survive the crisis”. It is indeed within such premises that related movements such as ethical consumption, and a range of “going green” initiatives are situated, and this section serves

to discuss some of the major trends in popularizing responsibilities and their related counterparts within tourism.

### **3.3.1 Going ‘green’**

Since the 1960s, activism under various umbrella terms – from the environmental movement to the green movement – has created awareness and called for action with regards to various environmental issues. The protection of the environment whether on an individual, organizational (including private corporations), or government level, has received much attention, where activists highlighted the environmental pressures and impacts of human activities such as industrialization and urbanization.

Amongst key interventions in the 1960s were Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962 (2002)) that drew attention to the impact of chemical usage (referring particularly to pesticides) on the natural environment and how this was in turn affecting humans; and Garrett Hardin’s *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) that highlighted the dilemma in the protection of shared and common resources such as the environment, where multiple individuals tended to act independently in their own self-interest, and hence cause long-term degradation, even though this will serve no one’s interest (see also Cochran, 2007). To date, Hardin’s argument continues to be cited in calls towards sustainable development, and for individuals to organizations or governments to take up responsibilities towards such “commons” (see, for example Hopwood et al., 2005; Redclift, 1992; Robinson, 2004).

While the green or environmental movement has progressed to encompass a large variety of issues – from sustainable management of resources and stewardship of the environment, to implementing policies and practices of reforestation, recycling or conservation – one aspect that has received considerable attention in the recent decade is the impact of global warming. Notions of human-induced climate change and its attendant impacts on weather systems and broader scale sea-level changes have been brought into the limelight, especially after events such as Hurricane Katrina in the United States of America, and Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*. In line with such concerns, mass-market oriented campaigns such as the Climate Camp, Live Earth concerts, and observations of Earth Day, are becoming increasingly popular, at least within the developed world context. As such, while the environmental movement essentially covers

a broad range of actors both human and nonhuman, and encompasses various notions of environmental conservation and protection, the overwhelming popular reference today tends to be in the aspect of climate change and global warming.

Such green movements are best observed within tourism under the advent of “ecotourism”, one of the earliest and most popular forms of sustainable/responsible tourism, that was developed almost in immediate response to the Brundtland Commission’s call for sustainable development (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The most commonly used definition for ecotourism is provided by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), which deems ecotourism to be the “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (TIES, 1990). While both environment and ‘local people’ are mentioned in this definition, consideration of the environment dominated over other social responsibilities for much of ecotourism’s development in the 1990s. This perhaps, is inherent in how ecotourism was first conceptualized, where “eco” was short for ecology, and most often understood as natural ecology (D’Amore, 1993). As such, popular ecotourism holidays have mostly tended to offer nature-oriented types of holidays, such as safari tours, hiking in national parks, or resorts that emphasize minimal environment impact by reducing wastage and recycling items. This, however, has been gradually changing since the turn of the century, and responsibilities towards local people have increasingly been featured as the draw of ecotourism. As Scheyvens suggest, ecotourism today is about “emphasizing local lifestyles, values, and economic well-being of the local community, [as] eco-tourism promotes local identity, pride and self-accomplishment” (2002: 11).

Responsibility in ecotourism then, lies with the ecotourist and the tourist company developing and promoting their ecotourism product, and sometimes also with international and local non-government organizations (NGOs) who champion the causes of the environment or local people. Responsibility also lies with the numerous certifying bodies in ensuring that accredited ecotourism products do fulfil eco-oriented responsibilities (see Chester and Crabtree, 2002; Epler Wood and Halpenny, 2001; Font, 2001; Font and Harris, 2004; Griffin and De Lacy, 2002).

Like the green movement however, ecotourism has also been criticized. Outside of tourism, the green movement has seen various international governmental collaborations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol and various United Nations Climate Change Conferences in Bali in 2007 and Copenhagen in 2009, all of which have met with varying success and attendant criticisms of the failure to bring about significant changes despite their many declarations. In a related vein, ecotourism has also been criticized as being nothing more than a “green-washing” of the tourism industry, where its successful marketing and lucrative growth has become its bane due to the widespread adoption of the term ecotourism even amongst tourism providers who do little to ensure that eco-oriented responsibilities are indeed fulfilled, or even considered. Johnson, for example, criticizes the haphazard of development of ecotourism, stating that in some countries, there is a “frontier mentality – with rapid investment and minimal regulation”, and it is in fact the development of ecotourism that is now accelerating problems such as pollution and climate change. She goes on further that “NGOs coalition warn that ecotourism is really just a new form of mass tourism, bringing globalized corporate profits at the price of localized hardship” (2005: 15). In line with this, some have argued that the term “eco” was indeed referring to “economy” instead of “ecology”, as tourism providers seem to prioritize ecotourism’s rapid and profitable growth rather than maintaining the principles of minimal environmental damage and increasing economic well-being of the local people (Wight, 1993). It is within such ambiguous circumstances that responsibilities in tourism as discussed in this thesis is observed – where while immensely and increasingly popular, equally many are just as cynical about the positive outcomes of assuming (environmental) responsibilities in initiatives such as ecotourism.

### **3.3.2 *Ethical consumerism***

Another similar and yet broader field to consider is that of ethical consumerism – whereby four key principles serve as guidelines on what and how to consume ethically:

- Positive Buying

This means favouring particular ethical products, such as energy saving light bulbs.

- Negative Purchasing

This means avoiding products that you disapprove of, such as battery eggs or gas-guzzling cars.

- **Company-Based Purchasing**

This means targeting a business as a whole and avoiding all the products made by one company. For example, the Nestle boycott has targeted all its brands and subsidiaries in a bid to get the company to change the way it markets its baby milk formula across the world.

- **Fully-Screened Approach**

This means looking both at companies and at products and evaluating which product is the most ethical overall (Ethical Consumer, 2007b).

Ethical consumerism thus targets mass market consumers, and adopts and celebrates the persona of a responsible consumer – one who is able and willing to discern and make conscientious choices between what products he or she consume based on what is considered ethical or responsible. As such, it is important to note that ethical consumption is indeed distinctive from anti-consumerist movements (Littler, 2005; Zavestoski, 2002), such as, the voluntary simplicity movement (Cherrier and Murray, 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002) or ‘No Logo’ forms of anti-globalization campaign (Klein, 2000).

Ethical consumption campaigns are prevalent in the popular media, especially in literature produced by pressure groups that have tended towards ‘consumer awareness’ campaigns (see, for example ECRA). The main message in such campaigns is often that as consumers, “[w]e don’t have to feel powerless about the world’s problems. Our till receipts are like voting slips... If you care at all, it’s really simple to do something about these difficult issues, just by making good choices while you’re out shopping” (Ethical Marketing Group, 2002: 9). The push towards ethical consumerism is therefore rooted in an assumption that it is possible for people to recognize their own wide-ranging and spatially extensive responsibilities, and their ability to intervene through their choices of what they consume in terms of goods and services (see Clarke et al., 2007; Green, 2008). Indeed, as Barnett et al. succinctly put it,

Ethical consumption campaigning seeks to embed altruistic, humanitarian, solidaristic and environmental commitments into the rhythms and routines of everyday life – from drinking coffee, to buying clothes, to making the kids’ packed lunch... Ethical consumption, understood as an organized field of strategic interventions, seeks to use everyday consumption as a surface of mobilization for wider [global], explicitly political aims and agendas... The sense of the ‘global’ here is itself open to multiple interpretations in different campaigns – it encompasses not only activities

premised on the assumption that consuming certain goods can assist distant actors or help in reshaping international trade, but also activities that seek to reshape highly localized practices in order to minimize ‘impacts’ or ‘footprints’ that contribute to broader environmental processes (2011: 13).

As such, other than addressing individual consumers, ethical consumption as a social movement has also sought to and celebrated its moves in pressurizing corporations into taking on responsibilities beyond that of shareholders’ and owners’ economic gain<sup>16</sup>. The development and popularity of various forms of tourism such as ecotourism, green tourism, or responsible tourism (amongst others) are also built upon such notions of ethical consumerism. Consumer awareness campaigns and academic literature have both been largely directed towards this ‘education’ of the masses, based on assumptions that people’s consumption patterns are malleable (Warde, 2005). The flipside of these assumptions then is that consumer behaviour that does little to acknowledge one’s wide networks of responsibilities, is seen as a result of a lack of information of what constitutes responsible behaviours. Clarke et al. use the example of the proliferation of ‘how-to’ guides to illustrate this notion – it appears that popular publications along the lines of the *Rough Guide to Ethical Shopping* (Clark, 2004), magazines like *The New Consumer* and *The Ecologist*, have been making headways as mass-market media (2007: 237). Similarly, amongst popular travel guides and tourism publications, it seems fashionable to include sections on how to ensure responsible or sustainable tourism, and tips on cultural sensitivities that a tourist ought to observe in destinations. Entire volumes on these topics have also surfaced in recent years, such as the *Lonely Planet Code Green* (Lorrimer, 2006), *The Good Tourist: An Ethical Traveller’s Guide* (Popescu, 2008), *The Green Travel Guide* (Jenner and Smith, 2008), or books with the bulk of their material discussing responsible travelling, such as *The Rough Guide to a Better World* (Wroe and Doney, 2004). Indeed, in *Lonely Planet’s Best Travel in 2009* (Lonely Planet Publications, 2008), a third of the volume was dedicated to the theme “water”, with key discussions on environmental stresses relating to water, highlighting both tourism

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<sup>16</sup> To name just a few, popular cases often cited include the campaigns against major corporations like Nike (Barnett et al., 2005; Carrigan and Attala, 2001; Carrigan et al., 2004; Locke et al., 2007), Coca-Cola (Palazzo and Basu, 2006; Ying, 2005), Nestle (Carrigan et al., 2004; Elliott, 2008), McDonald’s (Sassatelli, 2004; Schroder and McEachern, 2005; Shaw et al., 2006), and Exxon (Crane, 2001; Orts and Strudler, 2002; van den Hove et al., 2002).

experiences in, on, and through water, and what sorts of responsibilities tourists have with regard to water issues in destinations.

Responsible tourism also focuses on the practical and tangible benefits of adopting responsible practices for tourism companies, and argues that “a company could gain a competitive advantage by adopting ethical policies” since consumers are likely to make their travel choices based on perceived responsible practices (Tearfund, 2000b). However, as discussed in the earlier chapter on geographies of responsibility, the focal point of responsibilities lies on the tourists in developed countries, and continues to portray destinations as passive and lacking the means to protect themselves in the face of rapid globalization. Such interrelations between consumers and corporations highlight what Barnett et al. have criticized about the fixation on the agency of ‘the consumer’, as focusing (only) on the consumer fails to appreciate other parties in the mix – corporations, governments, and especially “campaign organizations as prime movers in the politicization of consumption” (2011: 13). This thesis therefore benefits from adopting an alternative model as Young suggests, one of *shared responsibility* (2007: 179), where “responsibility is distributed across complex networks of causality and agency” (Barnett et al., 2011: 7; see also Barnett et al., 2008; Kuper, 2005), and where as discussed in Chapter Two, actors involved contribute their partial understandings towards what is responsible and what they are responsible for, as well as notions of power and privilege in effecting changes.

### **3.4 Turning to corporations**

If we put aside sceptics’ frequent questioning of whether corporations can truly behave in responsible manners (for example, Frankental, 2001; Munshi and Kurian, 2005), and accept that such contestations are part and parcel of (re)defining corporations’ moral obligations, it is encouraging to note that most works make strong claims that there is indeed no good reason why corporations should not assume social responsibilities. Carroll, for example, provided a significant review on the evolution of the concept of CSR up to the 1990s, suggesting that CSR was quickly gaining ground both within academic literature and more importantly, within corporations themselves (1999; see also Garriga and Mele, 2004 for a more recent review). From as early as 1979, it was already noted that many *Fortune 500* companies included a section on CSR in their annual

reports, mostly covering the five main categories on environment, equal opportunity, personnel, community involvement, products (Abbott and Monsen, 1979). Indeed, companies like Ford and The Cola-Cola Company have issued dedicated reports specifically targeting their adherence to corporate citizenship since 1999 and 2001 respectively. A more recent study also highlighted that CSR issues and concerns were addressed in more than 80% of the *Fortune 500* companies, “reflecting the pervasive belief among business leaders that in today’s marketplace CSR is not only an ethical/ideological imperative, but also an economic one” (Hobson, 2006: 9). The popularity of CSR can also be observed by the large range of publications, conferences and organizations dedicated to the subject, as well as the increasing number of consultancies providing CSR solutions, with large firms like PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Deutsche Bank having entire units dedicated to the comprehensive management of CSR within their corporations.

Indeed, the idea that corporations should assume some sort of moral responsibility is not new – this has evolved from decades of related concepts, and as early as the 1960s, authors like Joseph McGuire had already succinctly stated that “[t]he idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations” (1963: 144). While its current day usage refers to a myriad of supposedly socially responsible practices by businesses from responsible investments to strategic philanthropy, the broad and seemingly vague definitions of CSR provided by McGuire aid the continual development of what “certain responsibilities to society” encompasses at different geographical and time scales. Despite its undefined nature, CSR has increasingly become the buzzword in business literature (from academic to popular literature, and in company profiles and annual reports). At the World Economic Forum in New York (February 2002), for example, chief executive officers (CEOs) from the world’s largest corporations signed a joint statement on “global Corporate Citizenship – The Leadership Challenge for CEOs and Boards”(see discussion in Matten and Crane, 2003) that starts on the note that,

leaders from all countries, sectors and levels of society need to work together to address these challenges by supporting sustainable human development and ensuring that the benefits of globalization are shared more widely. It is in the interests of business that these benefits continue

both for companies and for others in society (World Economic Forum and The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum, 2002).

As seen here, the keen adoption of CSR then is not always purely ethically motivated, as it is equally “in the interests of businesses” to ensure that “benefits of globalization are shared more widely” (see also Hawkins, 2006; Hopkins, 2003; Vogel, 2006). For example, one of the earliest works propounding the relations between CSR and business power is the ‘Iron Law of Responsibility’ put forward by Davis, which held that “social responsibilities of businessmen [or corporations in today’s lingo] need to be commensurate with their social power”, and that “the avoidance of social responsibility [will therefore] lead to gradual erosion of social power” of the corporation (1960: 71-73). In this argument then, it is not so much that corporations ought to take up CSR, but that corporations that fail to do so will inevitably go out of business. While this is a rather strong claim, many other works have since drawn attention to the importance of CSR initiatives as a branding and marketing tool, or as a competitive edge in a company’s long-term strategies, especially in the current-day context of increasing consumer pressures towards responsible corporations (see, for example Burke and Logsdon, 1996; Dentchev, 2004; Husted and Allen, 2007; Zadek, 2004). This is in line with what Bonini et al. argued for - that companies “must see the social and political dimensions not just as risks — areas for damage limitation — but also as opportunities” (2006: 21), since companies are in the business of creating trust relationships between themselves and their customers (see Foster, 2008), and as such, if CSR concerns are addressed sufficiently ahead of time, it will put their businesses in good stead.

Interestingly, as much as CSR is seen as a business opportunity, the same holds true in how tourism business managers expressed their commitments in CSR as a personal belief or commitment. It has been suggested that employees, managers, owners, or shareholders are also individuals (as in ethical consumerism) that “care not only about fairness to themselves, but also about the external actions of firms” and therefore pressure the corporations to act in responsible manners (Aguilera et al., 2006: 153; see also Foster, 2008). The basis of corporations having moral obligations has therefore most often been formulated in terms of how their practices (mostly conducted via employees or managers) have wider moral implications.

In more recent studies, it has been further argued that companies today have become so massive (in terms of revenues generated, employees hired, and markets served) and transnational in nature that they have also become powerful social institutions that can at times be more influential and/or effective than states or civil society organizations in dealing with social issues such as eliminating discrimination in employment, putting in place ‘fairer’ trade practices, as well as improving environmental quality and standards (Davis et al., 2006). In line with the social permission theory later proposed by Uyl (1984), Dodd (1932) suggested that the modern large firm is “permitted and encouraged by the law primarily because it is of service to the community rather than because it is a source of profit to its owners” (cited in Cochran, 2007: 499). Thus, while the corporation may not be a moral being on its own, it exists because of its role as a service provider to society, and also has the collective capacity to act and perform deeds through corporate decision makers, and as such have derivative obligations and duties towards social responsibilities. Indeed, many articles put across claims that it has become the business imperative to assume social responsibilities (other than responsibilities towards profit-generating for shareholders). Hart, for example, states that, the

sustainable world falls largely on the shoulders of the world's enterprises, the economic engines of the future. Clearly, public policy innovations (at both the national and international levels) and changes in individual consumption patterns will be needed to move toward sustainability. But corporations can and should lead the way, helping to shape public policy and driving change in consumers' behaviour (1997: 76).

Supporting this assertion, Kaku (2003) suggested that the Japanese concept of *kyosei* should be taken up by all corporations in general, where companies work towards assuming larger responsibilities to society in each progressive stage of their development, eventually addressing global imbalances that plague the world, and possibly even urging (or pressuring) their national government to work towards rectifying such global imbalances.

Growing interest in CSR has made it such that it is now “increasingly regarded as a natural component of good management” (Buhr and Grafstrom, 2007: 15). However, while there is a general popular consensus amongst academic and the corporate world that corporations do *have* moral obligations, the same cannot be said on what these obligations are, why corporations have such obligations, and how corporations ought to act on such

obligations. CSR has so far been used loosely to refer to a myriad of social responsibilities or causes, including but not limited to environmental protection or implementing acceptable environmental standards (see for example Gueterbock, 2004; Hart, 1997); fair labour and trade standards (see, for example Christopherson and Lillie, 2005); and social progress or ‘development’ related to the eradication of poverty (see, for example Blowfield and Frynas, 2005; Jenkins, 2005). Indeed, it is worth repeating Votaw’s comments on CSR, that

The term is a brilliant one; it means something, but not always the same thing, to everybody. To some it conveys the idea of legal responsibility or liability; to others, it means socially responsible behaviour in an ethical sense; to still others, the meaning transmitted is that of ‘responsible for,’ in a causal mode; many simply equate it with a charitable contribution; some take it to mean socially conscious; many of those who embrace it most fervently see it as a mere synonym for ‘legitimacy’ (1973: 11).

To this end then, many civil society organizations (CSO) and non-government organizations (NGO) have since taken to collaborating with private sector corporations, including many instances of large corporations providing direct funding for civil society programmes (Bendell and Lake, 2000; Heap, 1998; Warren, 2005). What has received considerably less attention then, is the role of smaller-scale companies, something that is especially important to note in the tourism industry where typical operations cannot compare in size with ‘corporate giants’ such as Shell or The Coca-Cola Company. Such rather modest tourism setups often remain transnational in operation (especially when considering the nature of the tourism industry), and many have considerable tie ups with CSOs and NGOs in niche initiatives such as supporting rural schools and orphanages. For example, Exotissimo Travel and Khiri Travel that were interviewed in this research both regularly organize ‘responsible tours’ and fundraising events in support of rural villages and schools. Indeed, a simple search in comprehensive portals such as [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) pulls out numerous options for tourists to support a variety of civil society programmes in their holidays – most of which are conducted by small-scale niche companies rather than corporate giants as most often discussed in works relating to CSR. The inclusion of such smaller-scale companies, and at times even family-run businesses and niche initiatives, then throws in additional dimensions to CSR that has been less discussed. For example, are there any differences in smaller-scale companies in carrying out CSR, as compared to large and highly visible MNCs that are also easily targeted for

consumer activism campaigns? And considering how tourism is dominated by smaller-scale companies, is it right then to only hold large corporations to standards of moral obligations while neglecting ‘responsibilities’ that smaller companies may also have? And finally, what are the implications of considering corporations of various scales in tourism – in contextualising CSR, how does size matter? These questions will be further discussed in Chapter Six: Doing responsibilities – Practices in tourism.

Indeed, at times, CSR appears to be optional because a company or organization is small and lacks resources or the power to change policies or trends. Chatterton and Maxey, for example, uses the case of the Universities Superannuation Scheme in the United Kingdom to highlight how the general stand is that they are “not big enough to really make a company such as Shell change its policies” (2009: 434). However, if this argument was taken, then almost all of the tourism industry with perhaps the exception of large airline companies and multi-national hotel chains, would then have no need to adhere to ethical and moral obligations in their business operations. A quick look at the popularity and emergence of numerous eco, pro-poor, or responsible tourism initiatives would however suggest that despite being dominated by smaller-scale operations, the adoption of notions similar to CSR (whether or not they are named as such) is indeed prevalent. Amongst the need to contextualize moral responsibilities in business operations then, is not only that corporations have moral responsibilities, but also the need to consider the size and scale of corporations, and what this means to responsibilities as enacted on the ground.

#### ***3.4.1 Corporate social responsibility as development***

Indeed, as alluded to earlier, corporations’ responsibilities are so widely extended today that they are increasingly being sought as partners for developmental aims and projects, based on the perception that “[b]y following socially responsible practices, the growth generated by the private sector will be more inclusive, equitable and poverty reducing” (DFID, 2004:2) than that generated through traditional means of international aid and development loans. This line of thought is echoed by several state and inter-state development agencies – for example, Antonio Vives, consultant at the Inter-American Development Banks (IDB) states that “CSR, by its very nature, is development done by the private sector, and it perfectly complements the development efforts of governments

and multilateral development institutions” (2004:46). Major international institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations are also involved in promoting CSR as development, through the World Bank Institute and Global Compact respectively. The launch of the Global Compact in 2000 at the World Economic Forum was seen as “a means of getting corporate involvement in CSR worldwide; it urged business to embrace universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour standards, and the environment as a means to a ‘more equitable global marketplace’” (Mitra, 2007: 3; also see special issue on tourism as work in *Tourist Studies* 2009). Following this, the European Union also joined the call for CSR in 2004, with the development aspects of CSR as one of its main agendas (European Commission, 2004).

The parallels between a good and moral corporation’s CSR practices and the bid to work towards international development and the related goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable development are evident (at least to some development practitioners), and CSR is increasingly intertwined with the rhetoric of universal human rights, equity and economic growth (see Blowfield, 2005; Blowfield and Frynas, 2005). This is largely based on the assumption that large corporations not only have the financial muscle to pull off developmental projects, but that such development can be more sustainable in the long run (as compared, for example, to donor generated or government sponsored international aid). Indeed, some authors, while critical of what CSR has achieved to date, have suggested that the private sector or businesses have been left out of development thinking for far too long – foreign direct investments have always been seen as a major contributor to increasing wealth and providing employment in developing areas, and it is now argued that large corporations can and ought to play a bigger role in development initiatives (see Blowfield, 2005; Jenkins, 2005).

Fox, for example, points out that “many core development issues are central to the CSR agenda, including labour standards, human rights, education, health, child labour, conflict and transparency in relation to government natural resource revenues” (2004: 33). In addition, businesses are now seen as the “main force behind economic growth”, and therefore initiatives such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Global Compact’s “Growing Sustainable Business For Poverty Reduction” are premised on the ability of the private sector to achieve the following objectives through its CSR strategies:

To facilitate increased investments and business activities in developing countries that link large companies to local small and medium enterprises, along with communities and other relevant local partners.

To highlight innovative sustainable business projects that demonstrates how commercial business activities can contribute to poverty reduction and promote sustainable development.

To encourage overall greater engagement and contribution of the private sector in national poverty reduction strategies (PRS), aligning private investments more closely with development priorities (UNDP, 2003).

Indeed, CSR as development can be placed within the larger context of a “globalizing era dominated by discourses of neoliberalism and privatization [where] it has influenced the displacement of various social, political and regulatory functions from traditional governmental institutions to the corporate realm” (Hughes et al., 2008: 351). Since the early 1980s, neoliberalism has increasingly decentred the state as the monolithic source of power, while pointing to governance in a multiplicity of other agencies, such as NGOs and private corporations (Hart, 2004; Sadler and Lloyd, 2009). Such deregulations were on the basis of the neoliberal belief that “the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit” (Harvey, 2005: 2).

Instead of viewing neoliberalism simply as a retreat of the state from the market, it is useful to explore literature on neoliberal governmentality (see Binkley, 2009; Tellmann, 2009), where a transformation of politics leads to the restructuring of power relations in society, i.e., “[w]hat we observe today is not a diminishment or a reduction of state sovereignty and planning capacities but a displacement from formal to informal techniques of government and the appearance of new actors on the scene of government” (Lemke, 2000: 11) – actors such as NGOs, private corporations and even the ethical consumer. Hart emphasizes that,

Rather than *less* government, neoliberalism in this view represents a *new modality* of government predicated on interventions to create the organizational and subjective conditions for entrepreneurship – not only in terms of extending the ‘enterprise model’ to schools, hospitals, housing estates and so forth, but also in inciting individuals to become entrepreneurs of themselves (original emphasis, 2004: 92).

In other words, the traditional binaries and categorizations of state and society, politics and economy, or social and economy cease to function, as governance increasingly acknowledges various actors' involvement and commitments. As such, social campaigns for greater governance in corporations, for example, emerged to act as a check on the ethics of transnational trade. Similarly, the lack of global enforcement of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions led to one of the earlier CSR movements that brought about the largely voluntary corporate codes of labour conduct (especially in developing countries) that ensures minimum standards in working conditions and prevents labour exploitation (Barrientos and Dolan, 2006).

Neoliberalism therefore grounded the role of CSR in development (favoured over state interventions), as echoed in the earlier quoted statement made by DFID (2004). Indeed, Sadler and Lloyd argue that while CSR reinforces processes of neoliberalisation, “[t]here is a quality to the onset of neo-liberalising corporate responsibility which reflects and reveals the disjointedness of social life” (2009: 615). Instead, “attention should turn to the pro-active role of bottom-up socio-cultural processes such as changing consumer expectations, the decline of deference, the refusals of the subordinated, the politics of difference, and contested inequalities (Sadler and Lloyd, 2009: 614).

At the same time, ethics and responsibilities in tourism have long been positioned along the lines of developmental aims in the ‘Third world’. It is not uncommon to find reports related to tourism beginning with a strong statement of tourism’s immense growth and economic vigour – for example, through stating the vast numbers of international tourist arrivals worldwide (924 million in 2008), or its economic contributions in terms of international tourism receipts (US\$ 865 billion in 2007), and that “[o]ver time, more and more destinations have opened up and invested in tourism development, turning modern tourism into a key driver for socioeconomic progress” (UNWTO, 2008). While such opinions have been largely debated, since the 1960s, tourism has been advocated as a way in which ‘Third world’ countries can benefit through economic profits, investments, and the subsequent spill over and multiplier effects of economics gains in tourism. In the late 1970s for example, de Kadt’s seminal publication, *Tourism: Passport to Development* (1979), based on the World Bank funded first international seminar on tourism and development with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization), clearly showed optimism in the tourism industry as a means to generate jobs and incomes, and thereby reduce poverty and income gaps in the world.

Despite the earlier mentioned discontent towards the attendant social and cultural problems tourism development has caused (see Section 3.2), tourism was and is still seen (especially by national governments) as a major currency earner for the ‘Third world’, and as such was supported by international development institutions such as the World Bank through a series of tourism related development loans and projects throughout the 1960s to 1980s (Hawkins and Mann, 2007). The developmental impacts of tourism have thus been documented and well-discussed by a number of theoretical works (see Sharpley and Telfer, 2002 for a comprehensive review of the literature). Amongst these include Britton’s ‘dependency model’ (1982) which highlights that instead of promoting universal justice through income alleviation, tourism may well be reproducing existing inequalities between the ‘First’ and ‘Third Worlds’. While Britton’s works informed much contemporary discussion of tourism as development – especially through adding a more critical stance towards the positive impacts of tourism in general (see Briassoulis, 2002; Johnston, 2005), the tourism industry in general continues to be framed within a development paradigm (Jafari, 2001; Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Sharpley and Telfer, 2002).

Also, participatory methods as made popular in the development arena have strands similar to community involvement and inclusionary methods in tourism, where under the banner of sustainable tourism development, parties involved in tourism, especially the state, sought to “maximize the potential of tourism for eradicating poverty by developing appropriate strategies in cooperation with all major groups, and indigenous and local communities” (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002: 17). At the national scale, for example, there has been a movement towards ensuring fair trade in tourism between countries with different economic strengths. This idea is adapted from the ‘Fair Trade Movement’ that seeks to “redress unequal trading by promoting fair trade in commodities with small producers in the South, enabling them to take control over the production and marketing process and challenging the power of transnational corporations” (Cleverdon and Kalisch, 2000: 171). Fair trade in tourism thus aims to support locals in host countries and “to take initiatives and participate in activities aimed at establishing fair production and trade structures in the South and on the global market” (European Fair Trade Association,

1996; see also Kalisch, 2000). However, despite such calls for participatory methods, the role of institutions and states in tourism as development has remained as the focus (see Hawkins and Mann, 2007 for a comprehensive review of the relevant literature).

The role of tourists as ethical consumers has also received ample attention. Within this pool of literature, there is an underlying supposition that tourists should and would uphold ideals of sustainable development and therefore pressure the industry into complying with its developmental responsibilities (see, for example Jenner and Smith, 2008; Tearfund, 2000a). This is a similar approach to the ethical consumerism, as discussed in Section 3.3.2 (Barnett et al., 2005; Clarke et al., 2007), that has led to a number of significant changes within the private sector, especially in terms of their CSR, where “for the companies concerned, consumers seem increasingly willing to flex their muscle and alter their consumer behaviour on the basis of ethical considerations” (Gueterbock, 2004: 265). At the same time, ethical consumerism is “seen to encapsulate forms of green and socially responsible tourism, the purchase and use of second-hand goods, the procurement of locally produced goods, ethical banking and consumer boycotts of specific commodities and brands” (Ethical Consumer, 2007a; cited in Hughes et al., 2008: 350).

The role of private corporations however, has received considerably less attention. Amongst existing works, corporations have tended to assume a passive yet pervasively present role, as targets for government sustainable development policies, or by reacting to consumers’ demands for ethical practices. However, the agency of corporations has been little discussed – how do corporations indeed set and influence trends in ethical tourism? How do corporations understand their own ethical responsibilities? Understanding CSR in tourism and its close associations with developmental objectives can thus contribute greatly to decoding the commercial language of ‘win-win partnerships’ and pushing engagement with corporations beyond the rhetoric. At the same time, works have argued that “CSR maintains a company perspective and questions of profitability remain at the forefront, not to be eclipsed by social and environmental agendas” (Henderson, 2007: 231), suggesting that social responsibilities in tourism are conducted pragmatically to also ensure economic profits and well-being of the company.

### **3.4.2 Development and its discontents**

Pushing this a little further, delving into the theoretical insights in development studies can also aid our understanding of how corporations can fulfil their ethical responsibilities. Most significantly, while the limited works on CSR as development have suggested a critical stance towards evaluating CSR's successes in the development project, it does little in considering the many critiques made to 'development' itself. For instance, much has been written about the failure of the 'development project' as a neocolonial myth of progress and modernity (Escobar, 2004; Hart, 2001), and its failure to achieve desired outcomes of poverty alleviation and universal justice. It is not so much that CSR has failed to achieve developmental goals, then, but that in general the developmental ideals set out in the Washington Consensus in the 1980s were possibly wrongheaded to begin with. This chapter therefore argues that adopting and critiquing CSR without an understanding of the progress in development theory therefore presents a dangerously one-sided image – one could easily express disapproval of CSR for failing to reach developmental goals, while being entirely oblivious that the term 'development' and its associated meanings have come under much attack and is at present continually evolving to better reflect the plurality of what 'development' should denote. Demanding that CSR should achieve 'development' that focuses on achieving economic indicators, while failing to realize that the language of development encompasses problematic colonial discourses of race, progress and civilization as suggested by Escobar (1995), is perhaps a fundamental flaw not yet acknowledged in CSR and responsible tourism.

Indeed, despite the enthusiasm and policy prescriptions such as those in the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, by the next decade in the 1990s, "people were becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of success in [development projects' ability in] transforming and improving lives of the global majority" (Sharp and Briggs, 2006: 7). The view was that development had reached an impasse (see, for example Leys, 1996) – regardless of the many theoretical positions and insights researchers were proposing, the report card on development was that the overwhelming majority of population in developing countries had not and did not seem to be on track for improving. The confidence, at least amongst academics and researchers, was all but crumbling in the beliefs that the answer to eradicating poverty lay in fiscal reforms such as trade and capital liberalization, and the privatization and deregulation of markets. In a

comprehensive and insightful volume critiquing American-aided state-led developmentalism in Colombia, Escobar asked serious questions about the inability of development to fulfil its promise of a minimum of well-being for the world's people, despite the massive displacement and ecological destructions many had to put up with in projects defined as 'development' (1995).

In line with such brewing unhappiness, Joseph Stiglitz (then senior vice president and chief economist at the World Bank) "delivered his famous 'post-Washington consensus' speech to the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) in Helsinki in which he asserted that financial market liberalization had contributed to instability, and called for a reversal of neoliberal orthodoxy" (Hart, 2001: 653; Stiglitz, 1998). Increasing suspicion against aid and development, and the subsequent anti-development stands saw the emergence of reports detailing development's failure and inappropriate use of funds. For example, the radical UK-based development NGO, War on Want (2004), produced a report condemning DFID's role in privatization programmes tied in as aid or development, and exposed Britain's inappropriate use of its budget to support 'aid-funded business' whereby the private sector was encouraged to provide consultancies and related services and thereby profit through the funds spent by international financial institutions and donors in the developing world (see also Simon, 2006).

In addition, despite its promises, numerous accounts (for example, see Third World Quarterly Special Issue, 2004; Curry, 2003; Jackson, 2005) have pointed out that development (and development practitioners) tended to be "interpreted as a particular vision and intervention, and therefore as a regime of knowledge, truth and power that is not necessarily empowering or rewarding for many of those on the receiving end" (Sidaway, 2007: 347), and that the discourse surrounding development translated instead to the persistence of a dominant Western hegemonic power to intervene, transform and rule the 'developing world'. Poverty here is seen as a problem to be solved, and particularly a rich man or rich nation's burden.

Indeed, the very terminology of development – in 'developing countries' or the 'Third world' – has in fact already assumed these areas are inferior. For example, while perhaps not fully representative of all in the field, Gibson-Graham point out that amongst development practitioners, "[m]any comments and judgments were made about the

‘mentalities’ of local people that stood in the way of realization of any of their development goals... [suggesting that locals in developing countries are] inferior, residual, non-productive and ignorant” (2005: 10-11). McKinnon goes further in expressing her dismay that,

In discourses of development, the professional subject takes shape around a similar ideological foundation and sense of duty towards the ‘needy’ communities of the Third world. It is the duty of the development professional to intervene, in order to do good, to make a difference in communities of the ‘poor’ and disadvantaged (2006: 25).

Development, as Cowen and Shenton noted, thus comes with its companion ‘underdevelopment’ of the ‘Third world’ – propounding a universalizing understanding of human progress as transformations from uncivilized to civilized under colonialism, and from underdeveloped to developed in a classic development discourse (1996; see also Escobar, 1995). Perhaps indeed, today’s development and geographies of responsibilities do not differ very much from ideas of civilization in colonial days, as here exemplified by in the British Parliamentary Papers that,

The British empire has been signally blessed by Providence, and her eminence, her strength, her wealth... are so many reasons for peculiar obedience to the laws of Him who guides the destinies of nations. These were given for some higher purpose than commercial prosperity and military renown... Can we suppose otherwise than that it is our office to carry civilization and humanity, peace and good government, and above all, the knowledge of the true God, to the uttermost ends of the earth? (1836-1837: 76; cited in Lester, 2002: 281).

In its appropriation of the idea of progress, of superior and inferior knowledge and the attendant higher and lower stages of human improvement, development thinking today appears to be much like a neo-colonial project, that has produced “the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local and the non-productive” that need development by “the scientific, advanced, superior, global, or productive realities” (Santos, 2004: 18).

While such criticisms on the failure, or neo-colonial nature, of development, are plentiful within development literature (see, for example, Mignolo, 2000), these have yet to be integrated comprehensively into what this means when corporations pursue their supposed ethical responsibilities in tourism. If corporations were to go beyond immediate aims of profit-generation and truly fulfil the potentials of achieving developmental goals through CSR (as earlier indicated that many institutions seem to express they believe in),

a careful deconstruction of what development entails is necessary so that CSR does not repeat or feed back into the not-too-constructive cycle already established by international institutions and aid agencies.

### **3.5 Concluding remarks**

Tourism as a space in which social responsibilities are enacted between ‘First world’ ideals and ‘Third world’ realities therefore demands closer scrutiny. While the fluid constructs of responsibilities in tourism is indeed one of its strengths in adapting and being malleable towards ever-changing social expectations and norms with regards to moral responsibility, this also complicates what happens in practice. This chapter therefore highlights the importance of contextualizing responsibilities rather than discussing it in abstract terms. Specific to our discussion in tourism then, it points out several key contexts to consider, namely, 1. As a service-industry with no tangible ‘product’, how do responsibilities in tourism then play out, 2. How can CSR also include smaller-scale companies especially in an industry where traditional corporate giants are far and few between? 3. How do notions of ethics and responsibilities differ from place to place and from people to people? and finally, 4. When different parties – consumers, producers and locals are all brought into the same sphere, what sorts of practices comes into play, and how then must responsibilities be managed?

These are all important questions looking at tourism posits towards the larger field of ethics and moral responsibilities, and it is here argued that the existence of tensions between differing priorities, as well as at times conflicting responsibilities towards different parties should be assumed (for example, a fairer trading structure that involves paying local producers higher rates often equates to higher prices consumers have to pay, and this in turn marginalizes certain segments of consumers). This chapter has therefore set the stage for the following empirical chapters delving into such tensions and how they are being actively negotiated on the ground, while highlighting the urgent need to go beyond abstract binaries of being ‘ethical’ or not.

Through identifying the parallels of responsibilities in tourism with developmental idea(l)s, this chapter has also highlighted how tourism is also seen as part of the development agenda. At the same time, it suggests that beyond looking at the consumer/tourist, looking at corporations in tourism (and their CSR strategies) can bridge

an existing literature gap within tourism, while informing CSR through complicating notions of distance. Herein lies a need to understand critiques towards development and postcolonialism (as discussed in Chapter Two), so as to ensure that social responsibilities as enacted and practised in tourism do not repeat the ‘failures’ or neocolonial nature of the development project. Indeed, the underlying assumption that responsibilities (and tourist/tourism companies) originate from the ‘First world’ and are then practised in the ‘Third world’ itself needs to be examined, as tourism today increasingly features mobility between and from supposed ‘Third world’ countries (see Winter et al., 2009). All these observations complicate typical notions of ethics in tourism based largely on classical ethical theories, and by focusing on issues of development, this chapter has set the ground to unpick in the following chapters some of such problematic assumptions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Researching on Responsibilities: Embodied Methodology**

## 4. Researching on Responsibilities: Embodied Methodology

### 4.1 Preamble

#### **Box 4.1: Correspondence with Ellie<sup>17</sup>: Homeless Dok Rak**

On 25 February 2010, I was surprised to find a photo of Dok Rak (a domesticated elephant that belongs to one of the Thai mahout families I met during fieldwork) posted on Facebook – in the photo, Dok Rak was said to be homeless and tied to a tree and accompanying the photo was a comment from Ellie:

“I was accused of setting up a rival ‘volunteer’ business at Tai Tai [elephant camp], ‘someone’ showed the boss an email, alleged to be from me, proving this. I had friends staying for 3 days, just visiting us on their way home after 3 months in Thailand, the boss told them to get out or we all had to get out. We all got out because we’ve been threatened and lied [to] since I got back in September [2009]. We couldn’t stay where our friends aren’t welcome - even when we’d paid for the water and electricity they would use.

It wouldn’t have been a problem - and wasn’t a problem when we asked the boss if they could come - if ‘someone’ hadn’t been spreading malicious lies.”

More shocked at the turn of events than anything else, I decided to send Ellie a private message, also via Facebook to ask what had actually happened and found out that the ‘someone’ she was referring to was likely to be Lek, the Thai coordinator of the volunteer tourism business at Tai Tai Elephant Camp. It was a difficult piece of information for me to swallow, as I had lived under the same roof and was well taken care of by Lek for more than a month when I did my fieldwork at the Elephant Camp. I wasn’t sure who I should trust, but Ellie replied with her side of the story:

“I first met Lek about 3 years ago when she worked for a different organization that did the Elephant Mahout Project. Her and Emma (who’d gone to them as a volunteer) then broke off from that company and set their own up. They used to take their “volunteers” to a different camp but about 18 months ago started bringing them to Tai Tai. Am’s [Ellie’s husband] family had moved to Tai Tai about 9 months prior to that, I’d moved with them and there was never any problem with me staying there. When I was in England last year, Emma phoned me and asked if I paid Khun Vit [the Thai manager of Tai Tai Elephant Camp] for staying at the camp, I said no, she said that Lek said I had to pay. Nothing to do with Lek but Joy went to ask Khun Vit if he wanted me to pay to stay but he said no as I was part of their family. Lek didn’t like that but I was never anything to do with her business/project.

Just before I came back last September, Lek threatened Joy (Am’s mum) that if I spoke to any volunteers about the project then she would make trouble with the boss

<sup>17</sup> All respondents from the Elephant Mahout Project are cited using a pseudonym. Issues of consent and anonymity are further discussed in section 4.4.4.

(Khun Vit) for us. She also told several people that I'd been 'saying bad things on the internet' about the project. I never have, of course, although it's been sorely tempting sometimes! Because I live with Am and among the mahouts and their families, I know more about what the project does, or rather doesn't do - how much the mahouts get paid etc, that she doesn't want anyone to know.

2 weeks ago Am was called into the office (Khun Vit's) and, among other things, was told that I'd set up a rival project and that he'd seen an email - alleged to be from me - proving it. Of course I've not set up a rival project and never sent an email that pertains to a project. Whoever has done this has access to a computer and printer so that rules out the mahouts and only leaves a few suspects but, as I said, I'm only speculating as to who it could be..." (9 March 2010).

At the same time, I had emailed Eka, Lek's assistant, to ask about why Am's family and Dok Rak had to leave the camp, and her replies were brief and almost seemingly evasive:

"for Am's family I don't know too... Mr. Vit just tell us..." (3 March 2010).

My further correspondence with Ellie continued to bring up details that shocked me, amongst these was when I asked her about how much mahouts like Am were paid when they hosted volunteer tourists. Lek had earlier told me that the amount was 4,000 baht per week. Ellie's reply (while I have no means to verify if it is true) was a much lower figure - 200 baht a day, which works out to be 1,200 baht a week since volunteers do not go to the camp on Sundays. Ellie continues:

"that meant when they had a volunteer that was eating with them 3 times a day, as some did, it actually cost them to have a volunteer. They like to have people eating with them as they're so hospitable but Lek never reimbursed them for volunteers' food as she claimed she would" (14 March 2010).

Eventually I decided not to press on with too many questions for Ellie as I didn't want to make things difficult for her and her family, as her final reply in this string of correspondence indicates:

"They're all quite concerned here that trouble is going to follow us if I say too much - my opinion is that I haven't said anything that isn't true to you, and what can they do to us now anyway? I've told Am and his family all that I've told you, had to get the info from them anyway! They're saying (as I type) if you ask what's going on at Tai Tai [elephant camp] now, we don't know 'cause we're not there anymore..." (17 March 2010).

In recognition that "research is a *process* [and] not just a product" (England, 1994: 82, emphasis in original), this chapter sets out to present in a coherent manner the realities of doing fieldwork for this thesis - the entangled and messy nature of what was presented to me as 'facts', and as seen in the excerpts in Box 4.1, the continued struggles I had with contending information, which in this case emerged *after* I had completed the more than

three months stint in various parts of Thailand for fieldwork. I had returned to London by that time, satisfied with what I had managed to achieve over the intensive fieldwork period, and was in the midst of transcribing and analyzing interviews and data I had obtained. In all, it was at a point after a tiring and long stint away from home, and I was lured into the false sense that my fieldwork was done, and the only next step was to analyze the material I obtained and to “just write the thesis”. What emerged then was not just shocking to me – the first questions were – why wasn’t I aware of such simmering tensions when I was just there in person not too long ago?<sup>18</sup> Who can I trust, and how do I deal with information that has been presented to me as facts, when in reality I had no way to ascertaining if these were true?

At the same time, what happened with Ellie’s family became a clear reminder to me that indeed, while fieldwork itself was a snapshot of what could have been reality at a single point in time, what happens on the ground is continually evolving. What I have seen and will then report in my ‘findings’ are indeed pieces of information belonging to the past, and one should in no way assume that such ‘findings’ are also representative of what is actually happening in the present or future.

This chapter therefore gives me such space to dwell into methodological concerns and issues, accounting not only for what was done and what difficulties were presented during fieldwork, but indeed critically questioning and evaluating choices made in fieldwork, and how these influenced the ‘field data’ as it emerged. Indeed, this chapter echoes (particularly feminist) geographers’ calls for reflexivity, as it is now widely accepted that “geographical knowledge does not arise in a vacuum” (Proctor, 1999: 9), and that any research intent should be accompanied by reflexivity and introspection on the part of the researcher, questioning amongst other matters, one’s positionalities and subjectivities in research (see, for example Cloke et al., 2004; Cope, 2002; Madge, 1993; McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997). It is vital to point out here then, that this chapter is not, and cannot be taken as an unproblematic descriptive account of what methodology was used in a bid to fulfil particular research objectives. Instead, by tracing the various options,

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<sup>18</sup> To add though, throughout my time at the elephant camp, I was actually aware of tensions that existed between Lek and Ellie’s family. Lek commented many times on how she thought it was inappropriate for Ellie, an older British lady to marry Am, a young Thai mahout. There were also times when Lek rebuked Mel, Am’s father, also a mahout, on not caring well enough for the elephant under his charge. What surprised me, rather was the severity of such tensions - I had no inkling that it would have resulted in the family getting booted out of the Tai Tai elephant camp.

considerations, unexpected opportunities that emerged, and even choices that were made simply because there were few other alternatives that I – as a researcher – could imagine, this chapter hopes to reveal the complex negotiations involved in the research process. Coherence, if any, with regard to the *research process* should therefore be taken as a retrospective accounting of such messiness and uncertainties on the ground, and in no way representing easy or straightforward decisions.

The chapter therefore begins with a discussion on situating myself in this research, before moving on to thinking about doing research on the intangible notions of ‘responsibility’, as well as the added awareness of responsibilities in research when one is indeed researching on responsibilities. This is followed by discussions on the organization of research methodology, detailing what and why different methods were chosen. This section clearly exhibits how methods employed, while seemingly structured and clear in hindsight, were indeed a result of various external factors both within and beyond my control. Echoing this, the third section on the embodied and emotional nature of research further illustrates how while in-depth immersion enables certain levels of access, it also brings up the minefields of emotional attachment during research, as well as the desire to appear responsible to respondents. These all point towards the usage of various methods, whereby the story is indeed weaved together by respondents who may at times present contending views towards what exactly constitutes ‘responsibility’ in tourism.

## **4.2 Situating the self in research**

Cloke et al. have suggested that “the impetus to do research often comes from deep within us, out of our personal engagement and desires” (2004: 365), and without a doubt, my interest in this research was initiated out of my personal involvement and awareness toward responsible tourism. In recognition that “all knowledge is marked by its origins, and to deny this marking is to make false claims to universally applicable knowledge which subjugate other knowledges and their producers” (Rose, 1997: 307), I endeavour to outline in this section (and throughout the thesis) my subjectivities, positionalities and situated knowledge, so that those reading this thesis can have a better understanding of my own biases. This research is therefore as much an exercise of re-presenting opinions of respondents interviewed, as a piece of work detailing the researcher’s standpoints as a subject enmeshed in the complex dynamics of responsible tourism. Two aspects of the

‘self’ will be discussed here: first, my position as a tourist and, in the later section, my role as an Asian researcher in Thailand.

I was first introduced to the notion of being a ‘responsible tourist’ in my encounters with volunteer tourism as an undergraduate student. I have participated in three separate overseas volunteering trips, to Guang Xi province in China (May - June 2002), Ha Tay province in Vietnam (December 2003), and the Western Cape in South Africa (December 2004). These trips were all organised by different student societies in the National University of Singapore, and the volunteer work involved refurbishing schools and accommodations in rural villages. Questions, however, discomfited me throughout my initial experiences – were such short-term overseas volunteering efficient and sustainable, and what and how much were my peers and I learning through such volunteer travel? On realising how little existing literature (then) addressed these concerns, I decided to base my Master’s dissertation in research on volunteer tourism (see Sin, 2009, 2010a; b for publications from my Master's research).

When I decided to embark on this PhD journey, I wanted to expand my scope of research from the typically niche volunteer tourism, towards a broader and more general understanding of what responsibilities in tourism were. This again was influenced by what I encountered as a tourist. In between attempting to trek in Nepal in a ‘responsible manner’, to learning scuba diving because of my own romanticised notions that it was ‘eco’, I realised that it was in fact not as easy to be responsible as I was led to believe by the numerous ethical consumption marketing posters, or information boxes in travel guidebooks that I was constantly exposed to. Box 4.2 is one of many examples where the ironies of ‘responsible travel’ confronted me.

**Box 4.2: Field Journal: Recalling my irresponsibility as a scuba-diver (August 2005)**

**Date: 20 March 2010**

It was 4 a.m. in the morning and the almost-full-moon lit up the night skies. Such a seemingly peaceful scene – the calm seas, the brilliant reflections on the waters, and floating in the midst of it all were us – sitting in a little motor boat that was loaded to its capacity with I think another about 12 other scuba divers who were all headed for Pulau Aur, a small island off the East Coast of Peninsula Malaysia that was most frequented by scuba divers from Singapore.

Except that we were crashing through coral reefs.

We had managed to arrive an hour late because of some delays at the Mersing port, so apparently the tides had gone down, and this was also the day of the month/year with the lowest water levels. We were told that it was the opposite of the spring tide, and that the boatmen have never encountered sea levels so low in their many years of working here. But there you have it. We were about 50 metres from the shoreline, and our boat had come up against the house coral reefs. The only way to get us ashore was to crash through it all.

I remember sitting on that boat at that very moment, and telling my now-husband in a sarcastic yet distressed voice: “everything I know and have learnt about sustainable tourism development is crashing down right now. I thought scuba diving was supposed to be eco”.

And it could only get worse. The boatmen and dive masters eventually decided that the boat was stuck and the only way to get us ashore was for each and every one of us to get off and walk. There was no other choice (unless we were to sit on the boat until the tides came in many hours later). I jumped off the boat like everyone else and walked. Crushing corals beneath my feet with every step. That crunching sound of dying corals, accompanied with the intense remorse I felt in my heart – I think I can still hear and feel it today. This was just wrong.

The following morning after the sun rose, I went back to the beach to take a look at the damage. There was a distinct path of stampeded corals all the way across the house reef. The boatmen assured us that the corals will recover and patch themselves in no time at all. I remain sceptical. Yet I am complicit in the murder. To appreciate the ‘eco’ I had all but ravaged the coral reefs that scuba divers have claimed to love and protect. What irony.

This thesis thus reflects my various positions – as a volunteer/responsible tourist with first hand experiences on the ground, and transiting from this almost ‘powerless’ position of accepting the given structure, responsibilities and tasks of a volunteer/responsible tourist, to an ‘empowered’ position in directing research and contemplating existing structures. Throughout this work then, it must be noted that at any point of research, I am at once a tourist, and also a researcher, and from this angle, I hope to provide new perspectives and a critical analysis of what are in fact considered responsibilities in tourism.

Another aspect that emerged in this research is my positioning in between being Thai (or Asian) and being *farang* (Caucasian foreigner). In Thailand, the term *farang* refers in general to ‘Caucasians’ (Becker, 2002) or to people of European descent. Within the tourism context, *farang* is typically mentioned in a favourable manner<sup>19</sup> – for example, mahouts and Thai coordinators from the Elephant Mahout Project often talked about how *farangs* were more generous and likely to give a larger gratuity than other Asian tourists

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<sup>19</sup> Many foreigners, especially those who have settled in Thailand for many years, may however be averse to being labeled as *farang* because of, amongst other things, its connotations of being an ‘outsider’ in Thailand.

(see also Wilson, 2004). Also, almost all volunteer tourists at the Elephant Mahout Project (details to be discussed in section 4.4.3) were considered *farangs*. My positioning in this mix then was a fluid and at times odd one – as a Singaporean Chinese, I was often mistaken as a Thai local. What sets me apart from the Thais was more in terms of my dressing, rather than my skin tone or hair and eye colour. This means that I could potentially be disguised as Thai, and the mahouts and Thai coordinators often enjoyed and laughed heartily at my self-introduction: “*Dii-chan chi Mali, pen kon Thai*” (My name is Jasmine, I am Thai). This eventually became a game of sorts – when I was introduced to mahouts I had not yet met at the camp or at the Surin Elephant Festival, Lek or Eka (Thai coordinators at the camp) would tell me to keep quiet and ask the mahouts where they thought I was from. If the answer was “Thai” or “from Bangkok”, Lek and Eka would appear to be overjoyed to reveal that I was actually from Singapore, and this would be followed by an enthusiastic discussion about how “Thai” I looked. At times, Lek went as far as to claim that I was her niece that was visiting from Chiang Mai, and Eka always referred to me as her sister. Yet at the same time, I spoke English fluently and was obviously more comfortable conversing with the *farang* volunteer tourists than with the Thai mahouts. As such, Lek and Eka often saw me as a bridge for communication and I had in many occasions acted as a translator for the other volunteer tourists when they did not seem to understand what Lek and Eka were trying to express. I had also helped Lek write several work emails to their partner at Go Differently, and Lek had more than once said to me: “Harng Luh, you understand more, because you Thai like us” (*sic*).

This positioning as pseudo-Thai was helpful in many respects. For a start, it established trust and familiarity between me and the Thais I encountered in research. Such “Thainess” was at times deliberately performed – from introducing myself as Thai, to adopting a Thai name, *Mali*, I continuously attempted to associate with my Thai respondents as I found that this generally sets a pleasant tone for further interactions with them. However, my limited understanding of the Thai language meant that despite how “Thai” my looks suggested, I was unable to converse with locals with ease, and was still an outsider no matter how hard I tried. Attempting to be Thai also meant that I was considered less *farang* – throughout my research, I often sensed that Emma, the British coordinator at the project, was somewhat at a lost over how to treat me – I was not the typical first-timer *farang* tourist in Thailand, and having grown up in the neighbouring Singapore, I was not at all fascinated by things she was excited to share with other tourists, for example, the

exotic tropical fruits Thailand has to offer (I can find these at home too). The interviews I conducted, whether with *farangs* or not, therefore often start out with such bits of disclaimers – was I Thai? If not, where exactly am I from – considering that I am ethnically Chinese, hold a national citizenship from Singapore, and am doing my PhD in the United Kingdom. Being a little bit of both – Thai and *farang*, but yet never either clearly highlights the fluid positions one can hold in research. While this was not directly relevant in interviews, it was often presumed that biases and predispositions arise from where I am considered to come from, again highlighting the main arguments in this thesis – that responsibilities are partial and specific to local contexts, as the next section will explore.

### 4.3 Research in responsibilities and responsibilities in research

**Box 4.3: Field journal: The moral hazards of researching responsibilities**  
**Date: 31 Jan 2010**

When presented with the menu for lunch, I began feeling slightly panicky. This was lunch hosted by Khun Jern,<sup>20</sup> the CSR representative at Six Senses Hua Hin. What I was so far shown at Six Senses was rather amazing, but my most immediate problem now was what to order for lunch.

It is a little tricky – would Khun Jern be one of those avowed vegetarians who do not eat meat for ethical and environmental reasons? I have met many such individuals throughout my research, and the ways in which they react to having another person eat meat in front of them (as I might be about to) varies greatly – from those who did not mind at all, to those who might just launch into a tirade on the irresponsibility of eating meat. Should I order a salad in case I might inevitably offend Khun Jern? Would I be seen as hypocritical if I ate meat and then talked about environmental concerns in the tourism industry?

I decided to tackle the easier order first – a freshly squeezed fruit juice, this can't possibly go wrong – until the juice was served that is. The straw was presented at the side of the cup, with the paper wrapper still on it. Do I tear the wrapper and use the straw? Or should I approach the cup without using the straw? In my mind flashed dozens of photos of young turtle hatchlings trapped by plastics thrown into the sea, and in that instant I did something I did not typically do – I drank my juice *without* the straw. Khun Jern looked a little surprised and asked me why I did that, and in my haste I explained that straws were one of the easiest to avoid wastages of plastics, and that I tended to try my best not to use straws. This was not true. I use straws all the time! I had lied, but Khun Jern looked suitably impressed by my environmental consciousness, and secretly I beamed at being looked upon as a properly responsible individual. It felt like I had scored a brownie point.

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<sup>20</sup> Her real name is Srichan Monrakharom but went by the nickname Khun Jern.

But there was still lunch to order. And I was too hungry to just order a salad. So I decided that I would just try my luck and ordered a steak sandwich. After all, Khun Jern has already been impressed by the fact (or rather lie!) that I don't use straws. True enough though, Khun Jern was a vegetarian by choice – and for environmental (not health or religious) reasons. I felt slightly defeated and had a twinge of regret throughout lunch for not heeding my earlier worries. I should have ordered the salad after all, never mind the hunger later.

In this short example, doing research in the treacherous terrain of responsibilities is clearly indicated – is it responsible to eat meat? Is it responsible to use straws? Indeed, is it responsible to lie about not using straws? What was treacherous then, is the lack of clear identifiable markers of what constitutes 'responsibilities', and as discussed in Chapter Two, herein lies one of the key objectives of this research – to go beyond the theory and abstraction in the discussions of 'responsibility', and instead ground such notions within actual practices and outcomes. But before that though – how then does one start to study something as abstract, imagined, and intangible as 'responsibility'?

Foster's, *Coca-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea* (2008), offers some initial ideas (see also Cook et al, 2004, 2006; Cook and Woodyer, 2012). Using the single example of soft drinks, the book traces "cultural, economic and political aspects of globalization – the cross-cultural consumption of branded commodities, the business operations of transnational corporations, and the new forms of corporate and consumer citizenship taking shape in and against these operations" (Foster, 2008: xiv).<sup>21</sup> Its aims are similar to this research – with the intention to bring out the complex connectivity of actually existing and variously imagined linkages among people and things, and in the case of this research, with a focus on responsibilities as imagined and practised in tourism. Tracing the 'life' of objects or particular consumer products as a methodology is not a new one, and this has been popular even outside purely academic pursuits, for example, consider efforts in tracing commodities such as cod (Kurlansky, 1997), salt (Kurlansky, 2002), potatoes (Zuckerman, 1998), diamonds (Hart, 2002), coal (Freese, 2004), and tobacco (Gately, 2002).

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<sup>21</sup> Another interesting example would be followthethings.com, a spoof online shop created by Cook that collates the works of academics, students, filmmakers, artists, journalists and others, and aims to make explicit the hidden aspects in the production of consumer items – including "who makes the things we buy... why/how they were made, how people discussed them, and the impacts that they have had".

Such tracing of ‘things’ runs along the lines of a ‘material turn’ in recent geographic and social science thought, where “amid the dissatisfaction with the idealist excesses of the cultural turn in geography and in the social sciences more generally, there is a growing interest in thinking beyond this, albeit caricatured, dualist understanding to appreciate the role of nonhumans, broadly defined” (Lorimer, 2007: 912). Attention then is called on towards research that acknowledges that agency of nonhumans (Latour, 1987, 2005; Law, 1992), and encompass a ‘more-than-human’ or posthuman world (Braun, 2004, 2005; Castree and Nash, 2004; Hinchliffe, 2003; Whatmore, 2002, 2006), “nonhuman social partners” (Murdoch, 1997: 328). At the same time, a more general ‘re-materialization’ of geographical thought and practice (Jackson, 2000; Latham and McCormack, 2004; Lees, 2002; Philo, 2000), and in various accounts, the corporeality and performativity of such nonhuman subjects are put in centre place, whether these refer to cetaceans, corncrakes, elephants, mosquitoes, or the Muñeca Zapatista doll (Flusty, 2003; Lorimer, 2007; Lorimer, 2008; Lorimer and Whatmore, 2009; Mitchell, 2002). Social agency then, is argued to come not only from humans or nonhumans, “but is a heterogeneous achievement of both” (Del Casino et al., 2011: 60), where, as Latour suggests, “an ‘actor’ in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it” (2005: 46).

Contemporary usage of such methodologies abound – for example, major fair trade accreditation organizations like Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), Fair Trade USA, and Fair Trade Canada, all focus on particular products – their mobility, agency and complex interplay with power structures and economic wellbeing, and in examining these use similar techniques of tracing products to ensure that the process of production itself guarantees a fair price for those involved – whether these are coffee planters or factory labourers. Indeed, FLO clearly states in its standard operating procedures in the development of fair trade the “collective requirements that producers and traders must meet as applicable to be certified as Fairtrade” (Kratz, 2006). These include “the minimum price that must at least be paid to Fairtrade producers for their goods. This minimum price is intended to cover the average producers’ costs of sustainable production per product” which again emphasizes tracing the production process in local terms.

This research therefore benefits from arguments and methodology put forth in such projects – but not so much that things are *the* focus as with projects that trace products across different geographic spaces (although their importance is acknowledged). Rather, this research takes on the challenge and analytical task of disentangling the causes, processes, and/or effects of what makes ‘responsibility’ in myriad and mobile spaces of tourism. And it recognises what Flusty suggests – that one need to identify “how particular everyday practices are brought together so as to embody the effect of a globalization from above” (2003: 6). In the same vein, as Mitchell argues, taking into account and understanding how things play their parts – in his example of the mosquito’s role (amongst many others things) in the creation of the contemporary Egyptian state (or the failure of colonialism) – allows us to realize the circular conceptions between imagination and practice on the ground, where

Plans, intentions, scientific expertise, techno-power, and surplus value were created in combination with these other forces or elements [such as the mosquito]... The world out of which techno-politics emerged was an unresolved and prior combination of reason, force, imagination, and resources. Ideas and technology did not precede this mixture as pure forms of thought brought to bear upon the messy world of reality. They emerged from the mixture and were manufactured in the processes themselves (2002: 52).

Methodologically however, as a service and ‘experience’ industry, tourism lacks a specific product like colas or coffees which one can trace over historical and geographical boundaries. This poses a tricky question in terms of methodology – what exactly should I be tracing – the Lonely Planet travel guidebook, the flight, the tour guide, the hotel room, the souvenir, or indeed, the tourist? Each of these aspects represent but one segment of the entire ‘tourism experience’, and to focus on just one area seems to miss the vital linkages that these different segments have with each other, while to embark on a project to trace each segment is well beyond the scope and operative capacities of the researcher. Indeed, tourism as an industry is one made up of assemblages, where notions of what makes a good and worthwhile tourism experience, or what is considered luxurious or relaxing, are in fact all intangible notions pieced together by various, oftentimes subconscious, touches (at least to the tourist). Notions of responsibilities, especially within the tourism context, are also indeed made up of an varying accounts of what is made up to be the rhetoric of morality – whether such is sourced from environment or ethical consumerism campaigns (as earlier highlighted in Chapter Three), from travel

guidebooks' sections on do's and don'ts, or from actual in-depth understanding of social (in)justices in theory or as they are enacted on the ground. Also, as pointed out in both Chapter One and Chapter Three, a study of responsibilities in tourism further complicates matters as, in traditional industries,

Commodities are transported out of the producer community. Producers will not usually come into contact with the consumer or the culture where their product is sold. The fact that tourism is consumed in the place of origin puts it into a substantially different realm from any other commodity. Exporting coffee or tea might have environmental implications. The effects of certain planting methods and the 'carrying capacity' of a plantation can be measured and addressed with some degree of scientific planning. However, the 'demonstration effect' and the social implications of encountering the consumer face to face is not something that needs to be taken into account in coffee production (Cleverdon and Kalisch, 2000: 177).

In view of such lack of some 'thing' one could trace and comprehensively picture, this research has set out instead to take the tourist as a central 'product' and follow the footprints of the ideal of responsibility as it emerges to a potential tourist – how does it surface to tourists? Is this through popular media sources like travel guidebooks and internet resources? What do such sources tell tourists to do? Where do tourists go if they want to be responsible? Who or what do tourists think they are responsible for? Which tour company or hotel offers tourists chances to be responsible? How do they do so? How do those subjects that tourists are responsible for (for example, locals, wildlife or the environment) see such efforts? To approach the myriad of questions here suggested, a variety of methods were adopted. These included discourse analysis of travel guidebooks and online travel media; interviews with various respondents from tourists, to tour companies and hotels, to locals; in-depth case studies and participant observation with two specific organizations – 1. The Elephant Mahout Project; and 2. Exotissimo Travel Thailand; and eventually also included nuggets of information informally accessed through social media such as Facebook (each aspect and why it is included will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.4).

Methods used in this thesis are hence situated deliberately between what is on one hand the tracing of things – focusing on the mobilities of objects and ideals (looking at guidebooks and websites and interviewing various actors at different positions within the larger ideal of responsibility in tourism), and on the other a slow ethnographic style of research – where in particular, two case studies are conducted whereby I pursue

participant observation and immersion for one to two months each at the Elephant Mahout Project and Exotissimo Travel (further details explored in section 4.4). This was done precisely because there is indeed value in both – while introducing and following a myriad of actors, human or nonhuman (guidebooks, internet sources, tour companies, hotel managers, tourists, ‘locals’, elephants, and so on) allows us to see the “mixed ways things happen” (Mitchell, 2002: 52), marrying such methodologies with staying put at particular locations in an ethnographic manner is perhaps especially useful in tourism – where the tourist enters and exits transiently, while mahouts, elephants, and tour providing companies like Exotissimo<sup>22</sup> indeed stay put in their own positions, adapting to the countless and continuous coming and going of tourists (amongst other things, see further discussion in section 4.5). Staying put, hence, is not so much about entering and getting to know a particular spot really well, but rather to stay put alongside actors/respondents in this research, thereby developing an understanding that things and ideals not only move, but that they move in relation and in relative speeds to others. Admittedly, more perhaps could also have been achieved through adopting one end or the other between these two approaches, but such methodology chosen for this research reflects a resistance against yet another binary, putting in practice indeed the notion that one should not favour human over nonhuman subjects (or vice versa), or tracing and moving with things/ideas/people over staying put at particular locations (or vice versa) for fieldwork. Indeed, what is eventually chosen as the methods, as well as what is structured as the main arguments and empirical chapters in this thesis, are therefore a result of both an ambition to look at the many aspects of responsibility in tourism, while working with very real constraints in both time and funding.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that mahouts, elephants, or tour companies are stationary and/or immobile. Indeed, even within the short period I stayed with these actors, it was easy to notice the ebbs and flows of movements – mahouts come and go between their hometowns (mostly in Northeastern Thailand) and working in tourist-oriented elephant camps (near popular tourism destinations like Pattaya, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket and so on), between different elephant camps (mostly due to economic opportunities or personal relations with others at the camps); elephants ‘migrate’ with their owners, or move between resting points within the village alongside their mahouts and in the ‘jungle’ for the night; and in fact even Exotissimo Travel as a headquarters office of their Southeast Asia operations had itself recently moved from Ho Chi Minh to Bangkok.

<sup>23</sup> Many initial ideas in terms of methods originally envisioned for this thesis proved to be beyond a realistic scope – for example, I had intended to do discourse analysis of a larger number of travel guidebooks and websites (including, for example, those not primarily in English), or of travel documentaries and magazines, or of newspaper features, or to conduct more interviews across Thailand instead of focusing only in Bangkok (although interviews were eventually conducted in Bangkok, Phuket, Bang Sare, Hua Hin in Thailand, and even in London, Singapore, and Vientiane), or to include more actors – guesthouses, ‘locals’

Using these different methods together to gather the nuances of notions of responsibilities from varying aspects is also in line with recent developments within the discipline, where geographers have become increasingly critical of the assumptions of research and the construction of knowledge (Aiken and Valentine, 2006; Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). The rise of feminist methodologies within the discipline has sought to problematise “historically constructed dualism of qualitative and quantitative knowledge” and how the latter has always been privileged as legitimate (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi, 1995: 432). Embodied methodology used in this research is hence also an attempt to a move away from empirical approaches that distance the researcher in a bid to achieve ‘objectivity’.

At the same time, as alluded to in Box 4.1 and 4.3, inherent in researching on responsibilities is the uncertain notion of truth and trust – as there is no ascertaining whether what respondents said to me was indeed reflective of their actual practices on the ground (or in fact whether a researcher like myself is being truthful when I claim I do not use straws!). Embedded within discussions and interviews are desires and performances to appear as socially conscious or aware – whether this is an extension of how one would like to appear as an individual, or if there was also the motive of representing the companies they speak on behalf of in a positive light (see Section 4.4.3 for more discussion on this). Also, while the empirical chapters have since been structured and separated into Chapter Five: *Talking About* Responsibilities and Chapter Six: *Doing* Responsibilities,<sup>24</sup> it should be noted that what is discussed as ‘doing’ responsibilities is oftentimes based on respondents who ‘talk about’ how and what they ‘do’ in the name of responsibilities. While in some instances – especially at the two case studies, it was possible to actually observe what is ‘done’ in comparison to what was expressed at interviews, in many others, I did not have the opportunity to actually visit for example, schools that companies said they sponsored, or to participate in tours that were listed as ‘ethical’. Like a lay-consumer buying a cup of fair-trade coffee then, what was presented as responsible behaviour from the companies has to be accepted at times with a leap of faith – determined purely by information that were provided at the point of sale. It is vital

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in rural home stay programs, employees in tour companies or hotels (for example, talking to the gardener or receptionist in a hotel or the tour guide, instead of just interviewing key managers). Approaches to this research are indeed endless, and section 4.3 highlights how I negotiated opportunities and limitations to arrive eventually at what is presented in this thesis.

<sup>24</sup> A split that was necessarily made *after* deciding the course of action that made up fieldwork.

to point out here then, that as a researcher, I was not present to judge (or moralize) what were good or bad (or effective or not) practices of responsibilities as enacted in tourism. Instead, in line with Foucault's (1980) arguments in the importance of rhetoric in creating what constitutes 'knowledge' (see also Biesecker, 1992; Foss and Gill, 1987; McKerrow, 1989; Phillips, 2002), this thesis is a representation of what is being constructed as responsibilities, what is presented as facts and truths about what people do as responsibilities, and how various actors would present themselves in a bid to appear responsible (or not).

Another aspect of researching responsibilities is also my own desire to present myself as responsible, or at least to avoid the cognitive dissonance of personally immersing myself in research (through embodied methodologies discussed later in Section 4.5), while disregarding (environmental and social) (ir)responsibilities in my own daily life. Box 4.2 and 4.3 show this most clearly, and at the same time questions long-held notions that awareness equates action in much academic and popular literature on responsibilities (see, for example Clark, 2004; ECRA; Sack, 2003; Warde, 2005). I am obviously fully aware of the principles behind various practices, such as not damaging corals, eating meat or using straws as discussed in Box 4.2 and 4.3, but practising these in reality calls for another level of commitment, of which abandoning meat in my meals is something I doubt I can ever achieve (and in fact, I personally do not even think that being vegetarian is indeed *the* solution to stopping animal cruelty or high carbon production in meat industries).

Beyond personal commitments and on a broader level then, is also the call for responsibilities in research that is commonly discussed in works on ethics in the research process in geography (Aitken, 2001; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Hay, 1998; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Matthews, 2001; McDowell, 2001; Valentine et al., 2001). And researching responsibilities at times could possibly call one to adhere to or be even more sensitive to the responsibilities of the research/er – it does seem severely hypocritical otherwise. As Jazeel and McFarlane highlight,

Broaching a topic like responsibility in critical geographical knowledge production, however, betrays a certain metropolitan privilege at the outset. Who has the privilege to define, map or write about responsibility? On whose criteria is the responsibility or effectiveness of knowledge established? These questions strip bare any pretence to level playing fields in intellectual work (2010: 110; see also Mohanty, 2003).

While this chapter does not have the liberty to dwell too deeply on the full nature of ethics in doing research, two related aspects have emerged strongly throughout the research process as important points to discuss – namely actors/respondents’ authorship in the research, as well as political action through research.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, geographers (and other social science academics) have long critiqued the ways in which knowledge production is “skewed towards the perspectives and modes of articulation of Western writers and institutions” (Noxolo, 2009: 55) (see also Hill Collins, 1991; Mohanty, 1991; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), and with one of the key aims in this research being that of (re)focusing attention on those which we claim responsibility for or towards (e.g. the ‘locals’ in tourism destinations or the environment), it is important to highlight my desire to ensure that what eventually emerged as written research clearly represents the voices of respondents. Kapoor, for example, echoes Spivak (1988a) when he calls for researchers to consider “to what extent our depictions and actions marginalize or silence these groups and mask our own complicities?” (2004: 628), and argues that existing works have often seen “researchers who see themselves as transforming ‘raw facts’ or ‘information’ gathered from the South into ‘knowledge’... [And] the Third world is ‘worlded’ on the basis of this theory/practice binary, which perpetuates the pattern of placing the Western academy and intellectual at the centre” (2004: 633) (see also Cahill and Torre, 2007). Instead, as this chapter aims to accomplish, research should acknowledge “one’s contamination, [and this] for Spivak (1988b), helps temper and contextualize one’s claims, reduces the risk of personal arrogance or geoinstitutional imperialism, and moves one toward a non-hierarchical encounter with the Third world/subaltern” (Kapoor, 2004: 641; 2005a; Žižek, 1989).

Indeed, I embarked on fieldwork armed with such (postcolonial) ideologies of empowering respondents, with the clear hope and intention of ensuring that what eventually is constructed as ‘knowledge’ in this thesis give a fair representation of what respondents say, do, or think. In practice though, as Žižek (1989) suggested, our complicities in research and the complexities of power relations on the ground, makes it less than simple to achieve or establish such empowerment or authorship. As Noxolo elaborated, indeed, there is no unified or authentic, ‘white/black’, ‘western/non-western’ or ‘indigenous/ non-indigenous’ perspective that can be responsibly ‘represented’

(Noxolo, 2009: 55, see also Spivak, 1988; Hall, 1996; Langton, 2003). Also given the range of subjects in this research – from guidebooks to tourists to corporate managers to elephant to mahouts, whose story to represent, especially in times where these can very possibly be in conflict as seen in Box 4.1, becomes increasingly difficult. And this is made even more complicated as I seek not to romanticize for example, the elephant and ‘local’ that might typically be seen as powerless and passive. This then leads to the related challenge for theory to take on a new relation to action, where

to understand the world is to change it... [And] Our role as academics has thus dramatically changed. We are less required to function as critics who excavate and assess what has already occurred, and more and more pushed to adopt the stance of experimental researchers, opening to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground. To put this in the form of a mandate, we are being called to read the potentially positive futures barely visible in the present order of things, and to imagine how to strengthen and move them along (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009: 342).

As academics we are asked to guard against dwelling only in the abstract and theoretical spheres (see Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Raghuram and Madge, 2006) and instead take on public roles and actions (see, for example Burawoy, 2006; Castree, 2006; Chatterton and Maxey, 2009; Mitchell, 2008; Pain et al., 2007). For example, very relevant to this research, is the call for academics to take on large multinational corporations and seek their adherence to social responsibilities (see Blomley, 2006; Castree, 2000; Chatterton and Featherstone, 2006; Hughes and Reimer, 2004). However, looking at the simple example brought up in Box 4.1 shows the difficulties in pursuing ‘actions’ (or resulting in minimal harm) in research – in this case, what actions on the part of the researcher is deemed appropriate? Would it be to redress the seeming injustice encountered by Ellie and her family? If so, who should I be ‘confronting’? The Thai coordinator, Lek that Ellie believes to be the chief cause of their problems? Or the Thai manager of the elephant camp, Mr. Vit? Or the British coordinator of the volunteer tourism project, Emma? What effects or benefits would likely ensue from my course of action if I did embark on it? And how could I be certain that my ‘caring from a distance’ (see Barnett et al., 2005; Silk, 2004) would not in turn create more trouble for the family as Ellie had clearly expressed was a fear? In the end, I conceded to silence and inaction<sup>25</sup> in that I did not eventually ‘confront’ anyone, press on what is the ‘truth’ or right any ‘wrong’ – as it was impossible

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<sup>25</sup> Although of course, writing this thesis and eventually publishing from this work can indeed be argued as my way of ‘confronting’ the issue at hand.

to judge what impacts my actions could result in, especially since I was far away from the elephant camp and had no means of mitigating any potential harm. And while it is easily apparent in this case, in many instances of enacting such ‘responsibilities’ one wishes to assume, one is often unable to establish whether the net outcome is positive or negative, and when unintended harm can instead occur. And this is precisely why I include a section (7.2) that discusses how one is often unable to judge whether responsible tourism initiatives are truly responsible or not, even if as a tourist for example, one is able to physically visit and see the sites for themselves, and that at times, awareness may not lead to action as hoped, but rather leads to disillusionment or inaction.

#### **4.4 Organization of research**

To achieve the stated research objectives of critically questioning what entails responsibility in tourism, and especially to highlight how such notions can differ between the various actors in tourism, a multi-method or triangulation approach was used, whereby various methodological tools and scales will be adopted. This approach is in line with postcolonial and feminist interventions that have argued that the strategy of triangulation has the advantage of ensuring that the weaknesses of a single method may be compensated by the counter-balancing strength of another (see, for example England, 1994; England, 2002; Kwan, 2002). This section therefore discusses the methods used in this research (discourse analysis, case studies and participant observations, and in-depth interviews), under the broader umbrella of the scales at which this research will consider ‘responsibility’ – including popular travel related literature, travel related companies, tourists, and local communities in destinations of responsible tourism.

Before detailing the methods used however, it is useful to note upfront, that while the researcher is often seen to be in control and writing in a matter-of-fact way, actual research performances are indeed much more complex and clearly go beyond what is written in a thesis or academic article (see Gregson and Rose, 2000). It is useful to here consider Pratt’s (2000) notion of research performances where the fluidity of research practices and experiment is looked upon amongst a broader repertoire of research strategies, and her call for more critical reflexive thinking of the research process that far exceeds what can merely be represented in our written performances. Indeed, as elaborated in section 4.5, research here is instead embodied and oftentimes, messy and emotional. Rather than being detached, stable and in control, the researcher should always

be seen as reconstituted through the research process, within a fragmented space of fragile and fluid networks of connections and gaps. As shown in Box 4.1, the actual doing of research often spins into unexpected situations far beyond my predictions. Reflexive accounts provided in this chapter are therefore not those in which I am firmly located, instead, they are accounts in which absences, fallibilities and moments that require translation are brought into visibility (Pratt, 2000). Indeed, as Valentine further articulates, it is precisely through the exploration of such moments that we might begin to “de-centre our research assumptions and question the certainties that slip into the way we produce knowledge” (2002: 126).

#### **4.4.1 Discourse analysis of travel writing**

Discourse analysis of travel guidebooks and websites was chosen as the starting point of the research and methods used as these are often the first point of contact and information an individual tourist will get when he or she decides to go on a holiday, and at times, they can also be the key sources of information on what constitutes responsible behaviour in tourism. This therefore considers how responsibility is portrayed in travel writing, and how such resources shape potential tourists’ first impressions and continued perceptions on how one can be responsible even on their holidays. While such resources do not actually produce any *real* practices of responsibilities, they provide a separate sphere in which responsibilities can be talked about, negotiated and discussed, many of which then (at times) become related to actual practices on the ground. The selection of which material to be analyzed was then determined based on the most widely-used travel resources, and can be sub-divided into the following categories:

- Guidebooks on responsibilities in tourism in general:
  - Wroe, M. and Doney, M. (2004) *The Rough Guide to a Better World*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
  - Hammond, R. and Smith, J. (2009) *Clean Breaks: 500 New Ways to See the World*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
- Guidebooks on Thailand (latest editions and editions published between 15 to 26<sup>26</sup> years ago)
  - Williams, C., Beales, M., Bewer, T., Bodry, C., Bush, A. and Presser, B. (2010) *Discover Thailand. Experience the Best of Thailand*. Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet.

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<sup>26</sup> The large range in year of publication for guidebooks is discussed later in this section.

- Cummings, J. (1984) *Thailand. A Travel Survival Kit*. Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.
- Ridout, L. and Gray, P. (2009) *The Rough Guide to Thailand*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
- Gray, P. and Ridout, L. (1992) *Thailand. The Rough Guide*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
- Shalgosky, C. (2008) *Frommer's Thailand*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc.
- Levy, J. and McCarthy, K. (1994) *Frommer's Comprehensive Travel Guide Thailand*. New York: Macmillan Travel.
- Websites of companies with overt focus on responsible tourism
  - Responsibletravel.com
  - Exotissimo Travel
  - Khiri Travel and Khiri Reach
  - Go Differently and Elephant Mahout Project
  - Six Senses Resorts and Spas
  - Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts

The first subgroup of guidebooks reflect the recent trend for established travel guide publishers to produce entire volumes on how travellers could be and should be responsible in their travels, and is but the tip of the iceberg in a burgeoning selection of similar books. The basis for selecting these specific volumes was that they are published by some of the most widely circulated travel guidebook publishers (i.e. Lonely Planet and Rough Guides), and this was taken as a gauge in an otherwise difficult to establish the popularity of such guides.

The next subgroup included Thailand specific travel guidebooks – both latest editions at the point of research, and those published between 15 to 26 years ago. Notions of responsibility may or may not be explicitly discussed in such guidebooks – which have traditionally focused on providing practical and logistical advice such as where to stay, eat, or visit. A discourse analysis of Thailand travel guidebooks published more than 15 years ago indeed illuminated how responsibility as a theme was seldom discussed previously, and yet has now made its way into mainstream traveller/tourist (guidebooks') consciousness. The selection of which guidebooks to include then was again based on established and popular usage (notably usage in English), while the actual year of publication of the older guidebooks used depended mostly on which volumes were

available. Sourcing for guidebooks published more than 15 years ago proved to be challenging – book stores and libraries have necessarily phased such copies out of their collections since timeliness and hence accuracy is a key aspect of travel guidebooks. I began the search by contacting relevant publishers and asking if they had kept older copies of their guidebooks for reference, but found that this was not the usual practice. Indeed, it was the Lonely Planet contact person that suggested I look instead at web stores like Amazon.co.uk, and through this I was able to find sellers for such old copies of travel guidebooks. As a result of this limitation though, the guidebooks I was able to obtain ranged over a ten-year period and were published between 1984 and 1995.

The final subgroup included websites of companies with overt focus on responsible tourism – Responsibletravel.com was selected as it is often cited by both tourists and companies interviewed as the key player in advocating and advertising responsible travel (that is not specific to Thailand), while Exotissimo Travel; Khiri Travel and Khiri Reach; Go Differently and Elephant Mahout Project; Six Senses Resorts and Spas; Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts were companies I had the opportunity to interview either in the one-off interviews or in the case studies (see 4.4.3).

Basing the choice of which guidebooks/websites to analyze on their perceived popularity necessarily brings up particular biases in the research's findings, and more details on for example, the target audience, place of production and authorship of these sources will be discussed within the empirical analysis in Chapter Five. Positioning this discussion within the empirical chapter and not within this methodological chapter is again a deliberate move to ensure that as one reads the observations and arguments put forth in Chapter Five, one ought to keep clearly in mind where the sources are situated. Also, this selection of material to be analyzed is of course admittedly a very limited selection compared to the vast resources available – especially in terms of websites and other online resources such as travel fora. The selection and analysis here should therefore be taken as a subjective representation of popular resources, rather than as a comprehensive overview of the entire industry of travel media and literature. Indeed, in the earlier stages of research, I had considered including numerous other forms of media, such as travel documentaries, social networking sites such as Facebook, and twitter, online travel journals and blogs, newspaper and magazine coverage, as well as popular travel fora such as tripadvisor.com. In comparison, websites selected for this research are largely authored by companies, and

provides little opportunity for users like tourists to feedback or interact with and thereby create discourses on responsibility themselves. While the ways in which responsibility are represented by ‘lay people’ like tourists remains an interesting area for future research, I made the decision to limit and balance discourse analysis with case studies and one-off in-depth interviews to ensure an understanding not only of how responsibilities were represented, but also towards various aspects of responsibilities in tourism – *talking about* (Chapter Five) and *doing* (Chapter Six) responsibilities in tourism, as well as how responsibilities relate to *actual places* in tourism (Chapter Seven). Discourse analysis of the selected travel literature is therefore just one piece of the puzzle, and should not be taken as a thorough examination of all travel resources.

The actual analysis is framed around a semantic scrutiny of political rhetoric and how certain issues are framed with the exclusion of others (Lees, 2004). Here constructions of particular tourist activities across guidebooks and websites, for example seeing/riding elephants in Thailand, or trekking in rural hill tribe areas, are therefore placed side by side for comparative purposes. This is useful in sieving out the various sources’ stands towards whether such activities are considered ethical or not, and what nuances makes for example particular trekking tours to see the Northern ‘hill tribes’ or ethnic minorities celebrated as responsible, while at the same time condemning tourist villages showcasing the ethnic ‘long-neck’ Padaung women.

As such, guidebooks and websites were read and coded (in comparison) according to themes such as:

- General tone towards responsibilities in tourism – e.g. were these advocating, sympathetic, or do they even discuss responsibilities in tourism?
- What was represented as responsibilities in tourism (including what words were used and what they specifically referred to, e.g. responsible/sustainable/eco etc.);
- Who represented these notions of responsibilities;
- What actions were suggested or demanded, and how one was to be responsible;
- Practical aspects such as cost and logistics of engaging in responsible tourism.

As far as possible, an analysis of the suggested materials also engages with Rose’s (2001) guide to visual methodologies through incorporating interpretations of visual images. However, while visual methodologies seem largely in sync with research in tourism as tourism studies have often emphasised on the dominance of the visual or the gaze (Urry,

1990) (see also Cohen, 2007; Edwards, 1996), it should perhaps be noted that images have tended to be lacking in travel guidebooks (especially those specific to Thailand) as such volumes have traditionally been rather wordy. When available however, as they are in the first subgroup of guidebooks on responsibilities in tourism and on websites listed, the plethora of images were categorised according to sections defined in Chapter Five (going local; saving the green and wild; and rectifying irresponsibility) and analyzed premised on the notion that visual representations have their own effects and should thus be taken seriously, according to Rose's (2001) recommendation on thinking about the social conditions and effects of visual objects and to be reflexive about one's own way of looking at images.

#### **4.4.2 *In-depth interviews***

In a bid to move beyond the rhetoric and to augment this research with actual observations from the ground, fieldwork was conducted in Thailand, largely based on interviews with key decision makers in travel-related companies, as well as with tourists and 'locals' – elephant mahouts in one of the case studies at the Elephant Mahout Project (details in section 4.4.3). Smith identifies qualitative interviews to be useful in discerning a "multiplicity of meanings, representations and practices" (2001: 24), and this method is hence adopted to recognize the diversity of opinions and experiences, and in order to gain deeper insights into the processes shaping our social worlds.

Interviews were sought with travel-related companies – a broad and deliberately vague category used in this thesis as it is often difficult to define where the boundaries of the tourism industry lie – although the typical sectors include hotels and other short-term guest accommodations, and tour-providing companies, it is harder to establish if the 'tourism industry' also includes sectors such as airline companies, ground and sea transport companies, food and beverage companies, and retail companies, as these tend to provide goods and services to both tourists and non-tourists alike. However, whether they are technically considered as part of the tourism industry or not, as travel facilitators and collectives of tourists, these companies can potentially play a (larger) role in shaping perceptions of responsibilities, and in providing 'solutions' to achieving such desired responsibilities. Similar to Roy, who "wanted to understand how powerful institutions, such as the World Bank, control 'capital', or circuits of knowledge production... [and] to make sense of this management of poverty" (2010: ix), it was envisioned that this

selection of respondents could enable me to see how increasingly (especially financially) powerful companies manage knowledge production and practices regarding responsibility. As such, while this research focuses on tour-providing companies and hotels, it also includes some interviews with not-for-profit responsible tourism initiatives (within case studies) and travel website authors.

The research had initially set out to approach various airlines, small scale guesthouses, website authors, and eco/responsible tourism initiatives' founders to get a fuller picture of what was happening on the ground. However access proved difficult both logistically (most niche responsible tourism initiatives were scattered across Thailand, especially in more rural areas and I was unable to travel to many locations given time and financial constraints), and also because many such potential respondents declined to be interviewed. For example, both Air Asia Thailand and Thai Airways had tentatively agreed to be interviewed but despite numerous attempts and reminders on my part, managers at both companies eventually declined the interviews on the basis that they were too busy with operations and could not find a suitable interview date. Indeed, numerous interview requests went unanswered (as expected in all research), and many declined interviews citing reasons that they did not have any responsible/eco-tourism initiatives (clearly reflecting the notion as discussed in Chapter Three that many saw a clear distinction between what was an 'ethical tour' or not). For example, Viraj Chimprasert, Inbound Tours Manager of World Travel Service Ltd, was kind enough to call to explain their situation:

We do very simple tours mostly cultural tours to see temples and so on. We do tell our guides to tell tourists not to touch the temples and things like that, but for green or climate change it is too big we don't do anything about that. We don't have trekking or cycling trips so we don't have anything to do with the environment. So I don't think we should waste your time to come here for an interview, we really don't have much else to say (personal phone communication, 14 Dec 2009).

As such, what is reflected in this research naturally over-represents those companies that are self-consciously involved in responsibilities in tourism, even though those who declined to be interviewed, i.e. those who see themselves as not involved in responsibilities in tourism (indeed, perhaps those who could potentially see themselves as having no responsibilities) could possibly bring up rich discussions and notions (see Sin, 2010a). Indeed, reflection on such gaps and silences is critical, as Callon and Rabearisoa

(2004) insist, we need to engage with “those who refused to be moved, who will not speak in these public spaces, suggesting not only is silence a constructive political intervention, it may actually turn out to be at the centre of politics, and demands to be taken seriously” (cited in Davies and Dwyer, 2008: 400).

Eventually, 56 interviews were conducted between June 2009 and March 2010<sup>27</sup>, on top of participant observations conducted on site. These can be separated into the following categories (including interview conducted at the case studies – Exotissimo and the Elephant Mahout Project, details in section 4.4.3):

- 6 interviews with key decision makers at tour-providing companies;
- 14 interviews with key decision makers at hotels;
- 1 interview with Thailand travel website author;
- 1 interview with NGO facilitator;
- 5 recorded<sup>28</sup> interviews/discussions with key decision makers at Exotissimo;
- 18 recorded interviews with elephant mahouts and their family at the Elephant Mahout Project;
- 3 recorded interviews with coordinators of the Elephant Mahout Project; and
- 8 recorded interviews with volunteer tourists at the Elephant Mahout Project.

In these interviews, I discussed what respondents viewed as their (as well as other parties’) responsibilities in tourism, how they put in place and practise such responsibilities, and what were some of their experiences with responsible tourism. It is also necessary to note that it is likely for at least some of the respondents to not have considered responsibility in tourism at all, or to not see themselves as having any role to play in responsible tourism. As such, interviews were largely exploratory in nature, guided only generally by an aide memoire<sup>29</sup> prepared beforehand. Also, fieldwork for this research was mostly undertaken in informal settings, with interviews deliberately semi-structured to give respondents the freedom to elaborate on their experiences. Informal interviews were useful as they were more adept at “engaging in real or constructed dialogues in order to understand the people studied in their own terms (sometimes described as the insider’s view)” (England, 1994: 82).

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix A for the profile of respondents.

<sup>28</sup> Many other informal discussions also occurred throughout the 1-2 months I spent at each case study site, and these are documented through my field journals as will be discussed in section 4.4.3.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix B and C for aide memoires used at the interviews.

#### **4.4.3 Case studies and participant observation**

In addition to one-off interviews, internships were arranged with two case study partners, both of which propound responsible tourism, so as to further understand the realities of responsibilities in practice, and also to interview tourists and local communities involved in or affected by the developments of responsible tourism destinations. It was envisioned that through personally participating and getting involved in the actual day-to-day work in these case studies, research in this aspect would foreground an embodied experience (see, for example Davies et al., 2005; Waite, 2007; Whitelegg, 2005 for the advantages of embodied research work) that enables the researcher to truly envisage the real tensions and difficult decisions one might need to make in effecting what one views as ‘good’, ‘moral’, ‘ethical’, or ‘responsible’ tourism. This also allowed me to appreciate the various actors both human and nonhuman in the process of ‘being responsible’. Informal discussions and participant observations, adept at developing “understanding through being part of the spontaneity of everyday interactions” (Kearns, 2000: 108), were therefore noted in my fieldwork journal (Latham, 2003). This form of participant observation was more spontaneous and less directed by the researcher, and provided valuable insights into the respondents’ negotiation of various issues encountered in responsible tourism.

What were considered suitable and chosen as case studies went through several iterations – considerations included whether proposed or potential partners were keen or not, or if it could be logistically managed on my part. Indeed, in the initial phase of this research, I had originally intended to carry out the entire research based on fieldwork in Vietnam rather than Thailand, and the shift in field site was itself propelled by the lack of access to a suitable travel company as the case study partner in Vietnam. Having contacted several travel companies in Vietnam, I had found that most were largely uncomfortable with having an independent academic researcher join their company, especially since I had no prior contact with individuals in the company. As such, I approached a friend of mine (Xinyi Liang) who happened to be working at the headquarters of Exotissimo Travel (first case study) in Bangkok, Thailand, and asked her to approach her managing director to enquire about the possibilities of arranging for me to be an intern in Exotissimo’s Vietnam office. While Exotissimo Vietnam’s general director did not directly reply me, I later heard from Xinyi that they seemed concerned about Vietnam’s strict regulations

towards foreign academic researchers, and were uncertain if having me intern (without a pay and relevant work permits or visas) might cause them any problems legally. Xinyi suggested that I could instead be an intern at the headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, as she had the chance to speak to Oliver Colomès (Chief Executive Officer and Founding Partner), and Hamish Keith (Managing Director), and both seemed more open to the idea of having me join the company in Bangkok for a few months as a research intern. As no other suitable alternatives in Vietnam seemed close to materializing, I decided to radically shift my focus to Thailand – fully aware that what becomes represented in this research would very possibly have changed because of this shift in field site. While many works have established the researcher as in a position of privilege and power, and that academics need to recognize this and actively share power with their respondents (Bailey, 2001; Cloke et al., 2004; England, 1994; McLafferty, 1995; Sidaway, 1992), it is perhaps ample to here highlight that potential respondents also have the power to restrict access (whether deliberately or subconsciously) to the researcher in one way or another.

Eventually, I managed to arrange internships with two separate organizations, the first being the internship with Exotissimo Travel, the Bangkok-based headquarters of an inbound tourism destination management company that conducts tours to Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Indonesia, where I aided the company's initiatives in setting up a philanthropic foundation in the two month internship; while the second case study was an opportunity to work in the 'The Elephant Mahout Project', a elephant camp with a responsible tourism twist – it was mainly involved in providing 20 minute elephant-rides for tourists typical in many places in Thailand, but also had on the side, a chance for tourists to have a longer stay at the elephant camp, so as to “get a basic understanding of the Thai domestic elephant and their relationship with their mahout. [Where] You will not only learn how to ride your elephant but also how to care for these intelligent, gentle giants” (Go Differently Ltd, 2008a). Here I was to sign up as a volunteer tourist, so I was at once the tourist and the researcher, as I carried out interviews with the coordinators, tourists, and mahouts. Details of both case studies are as follows:

### **1. Exotissimo Travel (Bangkok)**

Exotissimo Travel in Bangkok is the global headquarters of a regional tourism company that organizes tours to Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

Exotissimo was established in 1993 (it was first based in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, and the headquarters moved to Bangkok less than 5 years ago), and started out initially as a mainstream tourism company priding itself on providing tailor-made tours in the region. In recent years, Exotissimo has become increasingly interested in incorporating responsible products in its slate of available tours (these also include volunteering projects, some of which are similar to the Elephant Mahout Project). A brief chat with two of the directors during my reconnaissance visit (July 2009) indicated that the drive to 'go green' is compelled by the management's personal beliefs, and they also think that while assuming responsibilities in tourism may reflect positively on their businesses, the main reason why tourists come to their company is predominantly because of the assurance of good quality and reliable tourism services provided by their company. As such, Hamish Keith, one of the directors, said that Exotissimo does not need responsible tourism to attract its clients. However, in the same discussion, he also reflected that Exotissimo could and should assume more social responsibility, and the key reason for its lag in implementing such idea(l)s was due to a lack of manpower and expertise in the field of responsible tourism within the company. My research internship was thus seen as an opportune one for the company, as they saw this as a suitable push to get something concrete done.

This case study therefore explores how responsibilities are incorporated within a mainstream tourism company, instead of limiting this research to niche 'responsible tourism' products such as volunteer tourism. The internship at the headquarters of Exotissimo had the additional benefit of allowing me to observe socially responsible strategies made beyond Thailand, and I also had the opportunity to interview Jean-Yves Paille, the then Product Manager of Exotissimo Travel Laos, who was in charge of several responsible tourism initiatives in Laos (Jean-Yves had tendered his resignation at the time of the interview, and perhaps because of this was especially forthright in his opinions – both positive and negative towards responsibilities in tourism). Also, because the proposed philanthropic foundation was not solely limited to operations in Thailand, I was also in touch via email with product managers of all the Exotissimo branches in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

## **2. The Elephant Mahout Project (near Pattaya).**

The Elephant Mahout Project is an informal arrangement set up by local Thai coordinators together with a British not-for-profit tour company called Go Differently Ltd that specializes in “tailor-made ethical holidays, voluntourism tours and volunteering adventures based on the appreciation and respect of the local environment and people” (Go Differently Ltd, 2008a). While the project in general aims to create awareness towards the importance of providing a safe working and living environment for elephants, their mahouts and families in Thailand, the mainstay of the project is an elephant camp called the Tai Tai Elephant Camp, situated at Bang Sare, near Pattaya city, where some 30 elephants and their mahouts and families reside. The Tai Tai Elephant Camp is a mainstream tourist elephant rides camp, and has been set up in its current location for about seven years. Typical tourists visiting the camp are from Korean tour groups (several other elephant camps nearby focus on Chinese and Japanese tour groups), and their visit includes a 20 minute elephant ride, refreshments such as a coconut after the ride, and a souvenir photo with an elephant. The Elephant Mahout Project is hence an add-on in the camp, set up to provide an alternative livelihood and source of income to mahouts and their families (which is said to include the elephants) through tourism, in light of the outlawing of logging in Thailand where many mahouts and their elephants previously worked at. The coordinators of the Elephant Mahout Project therefore do not own the land or other camp facilities, and are also not involved in arranging for tourist elephant rides with the Korean tour groups. Tourists who come to Tai Tai Elephant Camp through the Elephant Mahout Project, so-called ‘volunteer tourists’ typically stay a minimum of one week (the longest a volunteer tourist has stayed was for six weeks), although they also offer a shortened one-day experience programme. Volunteering in the camp involves helping mahouts carry out day-to-day tasks of taking care of the elephants (such as feeding, walking, showering the elephant), and volunteers generally learn how to ride and command elephants as if in training to be a mahout themselves. In-depth interviews were conducted with the mahouts and their families, the two local Thai coordinators and one British coordinator (based onsite), and the volunteer tourists onsite during the fieldwork period. These interviews explored how responsibility in tourism were envisioned by different actors, and how responsibilities were practised on the ground in a site that caters to both the niche sector of volunteer tourism that is explicitly social and community-oriented, as well as to mass tourism.

It should be noted that limitations existed in terms of language, especially in this case study, as the mahouts and their families all had at best limited command of English, while my Thai was not fully conversational either. Because of this and their awkwardness towards notions of an ‘interview’, actually tape-recorded interviews with mahouts and their families were often short, simple, and always dependent on one of the two Thai coordinators’ translations. While I was often able to get the gist of replies during interviews<sup>30</sup>, I was fully dependent on my translators for details and additional comments from respondents. This dependency on my translators presented another problem – tensions existed between various mahout families, and also between the Thai and British coordinators, and at times, it was apparent to me that my translators were anxious to present to me a side of the story that they saw and understood (rather than, perhaps what an uninvolved party may translate). Research became increasingly messy and emotional throughout the fieldwork, as I listened in on gossip, scandals, and all sorts of accusations (whether genuine or not) from the different parties. Getting entangled and disentangled continually proved to be a big challenge, even after the actual period at the elephant camp, as displayed in the opening Box 4.1, and negotiating such pitfalls is further discussed in section 4.5 that looks into the emotional aspect of fieldwork.

Language difficulties also existed beyond interactions with human subjects – as subjects of care and responsibility, elephants at the Elephant Mahout Project ought to be chief contenders as suitable respondents for this research. While recent years have seen a rise in animal geographies (see, for example, Lorimer, 2007; Philo and Wilbert, 2000), with some significant work specifically on elephants (Lorimer, 2010; Lorimer and Whatmore, 2009; Whatmore, 2002), these provided much insight, but is admittedly not my area of expertise. I do not pretend to be able to ‘interview’ elephants, or to have the ability to seek biological evidence as to whether elephants are well-treated or not. Instead, what I focus on in this research is an understanding that elephants (like other things) have agency and are enmeshed in both the rhetoric and practices of responsibility, and discussion acknowledging this is interspersed throughout the chapters, with a dedicated section in Chapter Seven looking especially at elephants as a site of responsibility.

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<sup>30</sup> I typically understood about a fifth of the Thai words used by mahouts. It was helpful that they tended to speak in very straightforward and simple Thai (as compared, for example to my Thai colleagues at Exotissimo), but in general I was usually only able to catch the general tone of their replies rather than the actual words and expressions they used.

#### **4.4.4 Consent and Anonymity**

Conforming to ethical guidelines, issues of confidentiality and the ways in which research findings will be used (in this thesis and in future academic publications) were discussed with my respondents prior to the commencement of all interviews (including those within case studies). Consent was also sought for the use of material that respondents shared via emails and Facebook. In all such instances, respondents had prior knowledge of my research and issues of confidentiality were discussed face-to-face in an earlier meeting, and these were repeated via email or Facebook to ensure that respondents were fully aware that what they were now sharing will be used in my research.

To aid documentation, I also sought respondents' permission to tape-record interviews. All respondents agreed to be taped and respondents from travel companies showed little hesitation in allowing me to their names and cite positions in their organizations. As suggested by Cloke et al. however, I informed the respondents that he or she was "free to switch off the tape-recorder and terminate the interview if the respondent is upset by the issues raised" (2004: 164). While no respondent actually did request for the tape recorder to be switched off, there were occasions when respondents did ask for specific segments of the interview to be quoted anonymously, or provided disclaimers that they were not the authority on the specific issue discussed and that what was said was purely a personal opinion. As discussed in section 4.3, it has been widely acknowledged that the research process is inherently exploitative (Bondi et al., 2002; Cloke et al., 2004; Women and Geography Study Group of the Royal Geographical Society, 1997) but Bennett and Shurmer-Smith (2002) rightly point out that interviews make a researcher sensitive to differences and contradictions. It is thus hoped that this process allowed respondents greater authority in the research process and over what they thought should be included in research or not, and more certainty in expressing opinions that may be considered controversial or extreme. Interviews were then transcribed, at times with personal notes attached to reflect sentiments or expressions that were not captured in an audio recording.

While most interviews cited in this research reflect the actual names of respondents and the organizations they represent, it should be noted that all respondents from the Elephant Mahout Project have been cited using pseudonyms. This has been done in part because of requests of respondents themselves (all volunteer tourists have asked to be quoted in pseudonyms), and also because of my own desire as a researcher to protect individuals

within the Elephant Mahout Project. Discussions in this thesis have at times revolved around rather contentious topics – for example the issue of money that has been paid or not to mahouts for their involvement in the project, or sexual relationships between mahouts and volunteer tourists. While permission was obtained from the respondents to cite their real names in this research, I have decided against doing so in a bid to reduce any potential harm this research may bring about if it is read in an unfair manner by those who may have a say towards what happens on the ground (for example, by tourists who may be deciding whether they should participate in volunteer tourism at the Elephant Mahout Project; or by coordinators or mahouts involved in the project). It should be highlighted here that this research in no way suggests that the Elephant Mahout Project is irresponsible, but rather that the practice of responsibility is partial and simultaneously enmeshed within many aspects of tourism and local livelihoods that may be considered responsible or not (depending on whose standpoint one was to adopt). Such negotiations regarding consent and anonymity again point towards what the next section will discuss – the messy, embodied and emotional aspects of research, where ‘right answers’ rarely exists, and instead particular decisions are taken up as a balance between at times conflicting ideas in amongst other things, my responsibilities as a researcher.

#### 4.5 Research as messy, embodied and emotional

**Box 4.4: Field Journal: Embodied methodology, research as an experience**  
**Date: 14 November 2009**

My first week at the elephant camp is going by extremely quickly – in between learning how to ride and command an elephant myself, and getting mightily sun burnt. Attempting to ‘talk to’ or say commands to my elephant in Thai is quite a bizarre experience. Am I really expecting that my saying “*pai, pai*” (go in Thai) would make San Noi (the elephant I’ll be attached with for my month’s stay) move forward? And would my saying “*Hao! Hao ning!*” (stop, stop here) *really* have some chance in stopping this gigantic beast that I am now sitting on? I try to say it as forcefully or be as commandeering as I can be without bursting out in laughter at how silly this must all look to a third-party bystander.

My mahout (Meh, San Noi’s mahout rather) encourages me – everything I seem to do or achieve is really “*dii mak*” (very good) or “*geng mak*” (very skillful). But when I’m sitting 2.5 metres elevated off the ground on the neck of an elephant, I can’t help but perpetually think of two things: 1. I didn’t write the risk of falling off from an elephant in my fieldwork ethics and safety form; and 2. I am getting bristled on my bottom by elephant hair, I really ought to wear thicker pants.

It was getting bristled on my bottom by elephant hair that inspired my naming this chapter as ‘embodied methodology’ (see Davis, 1997; Keefe, 2010; Madison, 1999) – this trivial (and almost embarrassing!) observation might not be mentioned if I were to depend solely on discourse analysis or interviews in my research. And indeed, even if it was mentioned, I have to argue that being told about something like that, as contrasted with having felt it bodily myself, might very well give me a very different perspective on the matter! Beyond being self-reflexive in research, this was an attempt to move beyond relying on the rhetoric and discourse of responsibility, and to go a step further, immerse, and engage through bodily experiences – by ‘being here’ in research (Geertz, 1988). In the elephant camp then, this meant that I would most likely say yes when asked if I would like to do something that the mahout does – whether this was eating with the mahout’s family; making origami grasshoppers with dried coconut leaves (that were then sold to other tourists); taking a nap on the elephant chair while waiting for tourists coming for the 20 minute rides (which was what all other mahouts did); or waking up at 5:30 am, putting on rubber boots and gloves that were too large for me, lugging a wheelbarrow with a misshapen wheel across the road to a neighbouring field, and cutting grass with my mahout for her elephant. It also included walking around the elephant camp, smiling to other mahouts, getting to know them, and speaking to them in my broken Thai, and at times, drinking whiskey and watching TV with them in the evenings (thankfully, they were mostly watching soccer matches from the Southeast Asian games at the point of research, which was much easier to engage with and understand without a very good command of the Thai language). This is not unlike ethnographic methodologies, where methods include going along or hanging out with respondents, with previous works having used embodied experiences (Davies and Dwyer, 2007) like working alongside participants to understand manual labour (Hanna et al., 2004; Waite, 2007; Whitelegg, 2005), sharing the embodied mobilities of cyclists and drivers (Jones, 2005; Laurier, 2004; Sheller, 2004; Spinney, 2007), or reflecting on the embodied nature of academic work itself (Davies et al., 2005), or Lorimer’s account of the embodied skills and emotions involved in corncrakes, where it is suggested that,

Tracking corncrakes involves a thoroughly embodied set of practices and is reliant on a full complement of senses... Through their technologies and practices, corncrake researchers re-align their bodies to tune into the lively corncrake. In this wild ethology they immerse themselves in the field and feel for the bird (2008: 383-384).

Along these lines then, I feel, there is an inherent value in bodily experiencing the day-to-day activities of respondents (in this case, referring to mahouts, volunteer tourists who would also be participating in such activities at the Elephant Mahout Project, and various personnel working on setting up the philanthropic foundation at Exotissimo) – certain know-how could be achieved only by doing it yourself – for example, in the simple act of showering the elephant with a water hose, I learnt how to cooperate with the elephant, as she would lift her trunk up to store water from the hose and then spray it on her underside where I could not reach while sitting on top of the elephant. I also learnt how to dodge around on top of the elephant to ensure I would not end up with totally soaked through pants, and that some mahouts did not even bother dodging – they would simply take a shower together with their elephants. The intimate ways in which mahouts lived with their domesticated elephants formed a deep impression on me throughout my research (to be discussed in Section 7.4), and indeed, while I do not intend or pretend to have achieved an ‘insider’ view, doing what respondents do was helpful in opening up areas to talk about subsequently, and also in comprehending the often more trivial aspects of broad and abstract ideologies such as responsibilities.

This aspect of research – doing what potential respondents do and immersing myself into their daily lives, was rather different in action at the second case study. This included working together with the staff and management at Exotissimo, discussing the feasibility of various aspects of the company’s philanthropic foundation that I was tasked to help set up, eating and chatting over lunches with the staff, listening in on office gossip, overhearing phone conversations staff had with clients, talking about whether a poster on the walls of the office that featured an elephant holding a paintbrush with its trunk should be considered ethical or not, and in general participating and forming social relationships with various staff members. Over lunches, I casually asked Thai colleagues (mostly in marketing roles since this was the department I was attached to, i.e. also the department in charge of setting up the philanthropic foundation before a full-time staff member takes it over as his or her job portfolio), about what they thought ‘responsible tourism’ was – something Exotissimo was rather well-known for championing, and found out that in fact, ‘responsible tourism’ was a term with no equivalent in the Thai language. Despite Exotissimo’s English website (which these same marketing folks were in charge of managing and writing) making many references to ‘responsible tourism’, the closest term and understanding in the Thai language was still that of ‘sustainable tourism’ and there

was no explicit difference made between ‘sustainable tourism’ and the newer and more-used (in the website) term ‘responsible tourism’.

Such immersive methodologies also enabled *some* access to respondents that may be restricted – sometimes deliberately and at others unconsciously – for example, as shown in Box 4.1, the stories of Ellie’s family remained hidden from me even though I was physically present at the elephant camp in the period leading up to the confrontation and move. Indeed, as I went around the camp approaching mahouts for interviews, it occurred to me that Lek, the Thai coordinator of the Elephant Mahout Project, had more than once walked pass Mel (Ellie’s father-in-law) and Am (Ellie’s husband), both mahouts at the camp, even though they appeared to be resting and available for an interview.<sup>31</sup> I had found this strange because this was despite the fact that I personally knew both Mel and Am rather well, and had on occasion eaten lunches with their family, as two volunteer tourists were attached to Mel and Am during the time of my fieldwork. However, I had attributed this to the disagreements between Mel, the volunteer tourists, Emma and Lek, in how the elephant should be treated (e.g. whether it was appropriate to use the ankus, or elephant hook, an aid in handling elephants, further discussed in Section 7.4). Indeed, it was because I had established personal contact with Ellie via Facebook, an unexpected outcome of having structured research around participant observation in case studies, that I was able to find out what happened in the aftermath.

At the same time, other than an outright restriction towards potential respondents as discussed above, it should be highlighted that in the elephant camp all but one of the over 30 mahouts are men (and out of luck, I was attached to the one lady mahout). As such, one potential issue is that ‘locals’ voices’ as represented in this research may be strongly skewed towards the voices of men who are seen to be the heads of families and therefore have the authority to speak on behalf of their families. Perhaps fortunately though, it is regarded as natural or acceptable for women to chit chat amongst themselves in the village setting, and while I was not fluent enough in Thai to really converse with the women in all such settings, it was useful to have been able to casually sit alongside the women during such afternoon idle chit chatting and listen to the general things that they

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<sup>31</sup> I did eventually manage to interview Mel and Am when I initiated it, simply by saying to Lek, “Oh look, Mel is resting, let’s interview him”. This was after we had interviewed every other mahout that seemed available for the past few days, and I presume that Lek was too polite to outrightly stop me from interviewing Mel and Am. However, the interview was notably shortened as Lek said Mel was busy and had work to do, and suggested it was time for me to go have lunch instead.

talked about on a day-to-day basis. Most of these revolved around village gossip that may not seem directly relevant to my research upfront, but many times, it emerged that the ‘scandals’ that were still being repeated involved previous volunteer tourists, whether this was about someone who partied and drank a lot of alcohol with some of the mahouts, or how some female volunteer tourists got romantically involved with male mahouts in the camp. While it was difficult to verify their extent of truths (being gossip after all!), these anecdotes served to show what locals’ *real* impressions of the impacts of responsible tourism was, even as they all earnestly answered in interviews that they liked and appreciated receiving volunteer tourists.

At the same time, messy and embodied methods highlight the emotional dynamics necessarily transpired through the doing of fieldwork. Rather than being an ‘expert’ gazing at research subjects from a distance, examples brought up above all clearly illustrate how I was continually responding on the ground, investing personal feelings and emotions, and many times, respondents were likely not to treat me as a researcher, but rather as a friend or companion. Indeed, investigations into emotionality in research have yielded incisive revelations into the multifarious and fluid subjectivities of researchers and allow alternative ways of knowing, grounded in lived experience, embodiment and emotionality (McKendy, 1992). Each of the anecdotes of fieldwork brought up in boxes in this chapter betray such emotionality, and also brings up the nature of the ever-present field – where instead of entering a field site for research, it becomes increasingly apparent that there is no real distinction between life in or out of the research ‘field’ – at times perpetuated through internet connections and personal commitments (e.g. to certain responsible practices) on a day-to-day basis. Caring (or not caring) at a distance (Silk, 1998, 2000, 2004) here becomes less abstract, and indeed actively and personally negotiated through such methodology.

#### **4.6 Concluding remarks**

In conclusion, this chapter has elaborated some (but definitely not all) of the issues I have encountered in the course of research. While I suggest some means of negotiation through these issues, I also wish to admit that many times, it is impossible to judge, whether on the spot or on hindsight, if decisions made during research were indeed justifiable or the best course of action to take. Instead, as Bailey suggests, I agree that to be

accountable for the moral spaces beyond the research encounter... I think that we need to be morally honest... We need to speak of shaky ground, of the unknown, of possibilities, potential outcomes, maybes and simply don't knows. Ironically this shaky ground I suggest, needs to be part of the research contract if the moral high ground is ever to be reached (2001: 109)

Insofar that there is much to be known through the doing of research, I have also called for the recognition of chance/luck, and embodiment and emotions in re-orienting and altering the research process. Indeed, as Crang highlights, the process of research is not only one of such shaky ground for researchers, but also that

none of the participants in the scene can claim to understand it all or even take it all in. Everyone is a little confused (some more than others, to be sure), and everyone finds some things that seem clear and others that are unintelligible or only partially intelligible... understanding must take on a different character when to understand things like the natives is to miss most of what is going on (2005: 227).

The idea of a smooth and linear project, where a researcher plans ahead and achieves exactly what he or she has set out to do, is indeed but an illusion, and in this chapter I have tried to disrupt such notions and talk about what *really* happened as I negotiated all sorts of opportunities and limitations as they emerged during my work. While the writing of this chapter is itself a process that allowed me to further think through how research practice was shaped and evolved (and also reflect more carefully on could have been otherwise impromptu decisions made on the ground), it remains guilty of glossing over all sorts of ambiguities encountered in the 'field'. The existence of such ambiguities and all sorts of intricacies in the process of research that I am unable to express in full in this writing, reminds us that written traces, like this text, are but one outcome of processes that far exceeds them. It is in such fallibility that drives me to continuously and critically question my methods, intentions and outcomes, and to me, it makes it more real.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Talking about Responsibilities: Discourses in Tourism**

## **5. Talking about Responsibilities: Discourses in Tourism**

### **5.1 Preamble**

Often [it is] simply a matter of redirecting where you spend your money. Taking action to influence change can be as simple as buying food that has been traded fairly, choosing green electricity from renewable sources, or opening an ethical bank account (Wroe and Doney, 2004: 65).

When we talk about responsibilities and this indeed we talk about regularly – messages like the one above are constantly hurled at us as everyday consumers. These are often based on the underlying premise that being ‘responsible’ is first of all simple and easy, and that once we as consumers are made aware of how easy it all can be, we and everybody else can then make the switch and make a difference. Played along the lines of ‘thinking global and acting local’, messages of responsibilities often target how one would be able to integrate responsible practices in one’s daily lives, and as in the above example, through changing the ways we consume and purchase food, electricity and banking services, one would then have “the power to make a difference to the way international trade works” (Wroe and Doney, 2004: 65).

And indeed, the same premises are frequently used to convey notions of responsibilities within tourism materials – where like our other consumption habits, we are also implored to make our tours and travels more socially and environmentally responsible. This chapter therefore explores how responsibilities are talked about and expressed in tourism, through a discourse analysis of a selection of travel guidebooks and websites within the following categories 1. Guidebooks that focus specifically on responsible travel, 2. Thailand travel guidebooks including both current editions and those published between 15-25 years ago, and 3. Websites of travel companies with overt focus on responsible tourism. Details and backgrounds of specific material selected will be further discussed in the following section 5.2.

Looking at such travel materials is an important piece in the puzzle in understanding how responsibility is (re)presented to tourists, where like landmarks and tourist attractions, issues of responsibilities could (or not) become signposted as what tourists should observe or look out for during their holidays. Many contemporary tourists refer to travel

guidebooks and websites as a source of information when they decide to go on holiday, and at times, this could also be where they read about what constitutes ‘responsible behaviour’ in tourism. Also, as earlier discussed in Chapter Two, responsibility is not so much an object, but rather an idea or notion, and this chapter is thus an attempt to consider how responsibility is portrayed in travel literature, and how such resources shape potential tourists’ first impressions and continued perceptions on how one can be responsible even on holiday. While such resources do not actually produce any *real* practices of responsibilities, it provides a separate sphere in which responsibilities can be talked about, negotiated and discussed, many of which then (at times) become related to actual practices on the ground. Looking at guidebooks and websites then, is seen in this research as tracing one step back from the point in which a tourist comes into contact with those he/she is supposedly responsible for in the destination he/she chooses, while understanding how ideals of responsibility are circulated through objects like guidebooks and websites before, after and during the actual act of travelling/touring.

## 5.2 Background of sources

Before embarking on the discussion on what and how responsibility is portrayed, it is useful to consider the background of the sources analyzed, and what presuppositions and nuances these entail. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the sources analyzed can be broadly divided into three categories, namely:

- Guidebooks on responsibilities in tourism in general:
  - Wroe, M. and Doney, M. (2004) *The Rough Guide to a Better World*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
  - Hammond, R. and Smith, J. (2009) *Clean Breaks: 500 New Ways to See the World*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
- Guidebooks on Thailand (latest editions and editions published between 15 to 26 years ago):
  - Williams, C., Beales, M., Bewer, T., Bodry, C., Bush, A. and Presser, B. (2010) *Discover Thailand. Experience the Best of Thailand*. Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet.
  - Cummings, J. (1984) *Thailand. A Travel Survival Kit*. Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.
  - Ridout, L. and Gray, P. (2009) *The Rough Guide to Thailand*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.

- Gray, P. and Ridout, L. (1992) *Thailand. The Rough Guide*. London: Rough Guides Ltd.
- Shalgosky, C. (2008) *Frommer's Thailand*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc.
- Levy, J. and McCarthy, K. (1994) *Frommer's Comprehensive Travel Guide Thailand*. New York: Macmillan Travel.
- Websites of companies with overt focus on responsible tourism:
  - Responsibletravel.com
  - Exotissimo Travel
  - Khiri Travel and Khiri Reach
  - Go Differently and Elephant Mahout Project
  - Six Senses Resorts and Spas
  - Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts

A range of sources was chosen, as opposed to focusing solely on one area (for example only at Thailand travel guidebooks), as this give a broader and more comprehensive view of what 'popular imaginations'<sup>32</sup> of responsibilities in tourism might entail. For example, do guidebooks and websites say similar things about how tourists should concern themselves with the environment in their travels? Or are there any distinctions between the two? For example, it can be argued that websites and guidebooks are used in very different manners – guidebooks are not only read before a trip, but are also potentially carried along as 'companions' and constantly referred to during the time when tourists are on their trips overseas. In comparison however, websites tend to be referred to before trips, and depending on the availability of computer and internet access in destinations, and whether the tourists want to make time to access these, they may or may not be referred to as regularly as guidebooks during the trip.<sup>33</sup> For the ease of discussion however, this chapter will present material from both guidebooks and websites collectively referred to as 'sources', unless views presented between guidebooks and websites differ significantly. Where relevant then, such differences between sources are

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<sup>32</sup> Or at least 'popular imaginations' as supposed and reinforced by travel guidebooks and websites.

<sup>33</sup> The ease of using electronic devices like smart phones and tablet personal computers is however changing the extent to which such observations may hold true. For example, I am increasingly reliant on my iPad and iPhone during travels overseas – both as an easy means of staying connected and online via emails, and also to check the internet for travel tips, guides and ideas in local destinations as and when I need such suggestions on the go. While this research does not look at such interactive use of internet resources in tourism, it is suggested in Chapter Eight that future research can be done in this area.

noted and the reasons for such are postulated. Most notably, for example, section 5.6's discussion on 'rectifying irresponsibility' is based almost solely on material presented in guidebooks, as websites examined revealed few if any references to similar issues.

At the same time, what this research selects as sources assumes that 'popular imagination' is what is readily and easily accessible to the public – guidebooks selected for analysis are thus those that one can easily find in most major bookstores, while [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) is generated at the top of the hit lists when key words such as 'responsible travel/tourism', 'sustainable travel/tourism', or 'volunteer travel/tourism' are keyed in on search engines such as Google or Yahoo. Most of the websites selected however, may appear less frequently if the potential tourist is not knowledgeable about which companies are the key players in offering responsible tourism within the Thai context. Websites of Exotissimo Travel, Khiri Travel, Go Differently and Elephant Mahout Project, Six Senses Resorts and Spas, and Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts were chosen for this project as they are companies that are strongly committed to and well-known within the industry (at least in Thailand) for their efforts in incorporating responsible practices into tourism. In addition, I also interviewed or worked closely with these companies during my fieldwork period in Thailand, and was directed to these companies through word of mouth (including through respondents). Including these websites for discourse analysis thus sets the background on how supposedly well-known responsible tourism companies in Thailand position themselves, in preparation for further analysis in later chapters, as their online presence and marketing materials are compared to what they actually do on the ground. The three categories of sources selected therefore provide the multiple angles considering how tourists or someone working in the tourism industry obtain information about what 'responsibilities' in tourism.

It is important to note however, that what is analyzed in this chapter remains at the tip of the iceberg. With massive and still burgeoning travel literature available to the general public – whether in terms of hardcopy guidebooks or online resources (including but not limited to other travel companies providing destination and tour information online, as well as fora such as Tripadvisor and social media like Facebook and Twitter), analysis in this chapter acts an introduction rather than a comprehensive coverage of such popularly available and accessible resources. Further research beyond the scope of this thesis is

envisioned, particularly on how notions of responsibility are produced and negotiated on interactive platforms on the internet.

Also, all sources selected are in the English language, and this again introduces certain cultural nuances and biases in what is represented. Notably, of the guidebooks selected, four (those under the Rough Guide series) were published in London, United Kingdom, two (Lonely Planet series) were published in Victoria, Australia, and two (Frommer's) were published in New York and New Jersey, United States of America. The places of production, as well as authors of these guidebooks therefore originate from largely English-speaking developed country contexts, and target audiences of similar backgrounds. While it would have been interesting to consider guidebooks and websites in different languages, for example in Thai (to understand local constructions of responsibility), or in Chinese or Korean (two of the largest growing tourist markets to Thailand), due to practical language constraints and the limited scope of this thesis, the focus here remains on English-language resources, and further research encompassing these sources would provide helpful comparative studies.

In addition, guidebooks, and to a certain extent, websites selected, target potential (at least partially) independent or small-group travellers, rather than the stereotypical 'mass tourist' that signs up with a tour package. This target audience is of interest in this research, as it is assumed that independent or small-group tourists make a series of many small choices in their travel – from which airline to fly, what hotel to stay in, which attraction to visit, and where exactly to go (choosing for example to go to the neighbouring and quieter Jom Tiem beach instead of staying at the main Pattaya beach). As such, there are potentially more opportunities for the tourist to take on a 'responsible tourism' initiative amongst one of these many choices. In comparison, tourists in big tour groups often do not make detailed decisions on similar levels, and could potentially have little say over, for example, whether the hotel they are staying in has any green initiatives, or if their tour supports community based tourism. This is not to say that people travelling in tour groups are not interested in or unaware of responsibilities in tourism,<sup>34</sup> but rather that the availability of options that do claim their commitment to responsibilities in

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<sup>34</sup> In fact, 'volunteer travel' tour groups are increasingly offered by big tour companies, and student volunteer travel from Singapore, for example, typically feature groups of 25-40 youths per group. See Sin, (2009).

tourism is after all still considerably limited, and as such, it does take certain effort and initiative from the tourist to seek out these options – something which may or may not be done in large tour groups depending on the operating ethos of the company involved. As such, this chapter places emphasis on the importance of agency, awareness and decision making on the part of readers of both guidebooks and websites, and this forms the key reasons as to which sources are selected for analysis.

Guidebooks from the Rough Guide, Lonely Planet, and Frommer's range have also tended to be associated with independent travel, and are at times considered to be budget or shoestring travel. Lonely Planet for example, has especially strong usage amongst those who consider themselves as 'backpackers'. Indeed, all three publishers' first and founding volumes, namely *The Rough Guide to Greece* (Ellingham, 1982), *Lonely Planet: Across Asia on the Cheap* (Wheeler, 1975), and Frommer's *Europe on \$5 a Day* (Frommer, 1957 (2007)) targeted low-budget backpackers, while highlighting the notion of independent travel and adventure. As Frommer's website indicates,

We at Frommer's want to help you explore your travel destinations *the way locals do*. Whether you're venturing close to home or across the globe, whether your budget is limited or limitless, we strive to live up to your discerning approach to travel by delivering the most candid and reliable information on this Web site and in our guidebooks and products (Frommers, 2000-2011, my emphasis).

Lonely Planet on the other hand highlights that "the company is still driven by the philosophy in *Across Asia on the Cheap*: 'All you've got to do is decide to go and the hardest part is over. So go!'" (Lonely Planet, 2011a). I had made the conscious choice of analyzing this range of guidebooks, rather than choosing, for example higher-end luxury guidebooks such as Luxx or Conde Nast, as while 'backpackers' or budget-conscious independent travellers were originally seen as 'explorers' or 'alternative tourists', such forms of independent travel have become increasingly mass-market. Many tourists today simply arm themselves with one of the guidebooks from these publishers (or other popular publishers such as Let's Go) and make their travel arrangements and plans based on information provided in such guides and websites – whether such information is really as reliable and accurate as the publishers themselves claim or not. Indeed, I had on a particular occasion found myself in a dingy little café in Rome, Italy, where the food was lacklustre and ambience severely lacking, but yet business was decent, as 'backpackers'

one after another streamed in for a cheap dinner, each and every one of them holding a copy of Lonely Planet Europe (or similar) in his or her hands.

At the same time, backpackers, youth or budget travellers have been criticized for generating little positive impact and can instead drive prices down, thereby restricting the development of higher end tourism due to the lack of capital, and eventually establish destinations as potential areas for takeover by mainstream tourism (which until now is still often considered to be irresponsible) (see, for example, Cohen, 1982; Firth and Hing, 1999; Richards and Wilson, 2004; Westerhausen, 2002). Hence, looking at guidebooks that specifically target budget-conscious independent travellers is useful in seeing how (or if) such notions of responsibilities are conveyed.

In comparison, websites of companies chosen are not at all ‘budget’ – chains like Six Senses Resorts and Spas and Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts better known for providing luxury accommodations at premium rates. Khiri Travel and Exotissimo Travel are known as higher-end destination management companies for small-group travellers – a Bangkok Chinatown tour or Chao Praya cruise for example, would typically be more expensive when booked at these companies than at mass-market budget options. While packages offered at Responsibletravel.com or Go Differently are hardly budget options either – a week at the Elephant Mahout Project will set the tourist back £400, and while this could perhaps be considered very reasonable for tourists from developed countries, it must be noted that in comparison, backpacker or guesthouse accommodations can be as cheap as £5 to £20 per night in Central Bangkok. The websites selected, however, reflect a key observation in the field (as well as through searches on the internet), that tourism options that are explicitly ‘responsible’, or at least those who pride themselves to be so, have tended to be available only at a premium. This again highlights the uneasy and at times possibly contradictory partnership between ‘responsible tourism’ on one hand, and budget conscious independent tourists (the target audience of guidebooks selected) on the other.

### **5.3 Ideas of responsibility**

Having established what sources are analyzed, this section moves on to discuss how and what ideas of responsibility are represented in the sources selected – what exactly are described and considered as responsibilities in tourism? How are they positioned within the larger ethical responsibilities one has? Why are they considered as responsibilities?

And what sorts of advice are typically provided to potential or would-be ‘responsible tourists’?

### 5.3.1 *The responsibility imperative*

An appropriate point to start this discussion, is how ‘responsibility’ is often positioned as an obligation or duty, a sort of a social and moral imperative, whether within the tourism context or beyond. In *Rough Guide to a Better World*, for example, it is stated that,

*It feels as difficult and unfair as ever – maybe more so, now that technology beams images of rich Western societies into even the poorest African villages. Two billion people, a third of all of us living on this planet, do not have access to decent sanitation – making them highly vulnerable to disease. More than one hundred million children don't go to school, while ten million children die each year before their fifth birthday, largely from preventable diseases. The trouble with statistics like these is that they appear so daunting that the task seems impossible. But with a rising world population and an epidemic of HIV/AIDS in some regions, the fight against poverty remains a moral imperative... What can people in relatively wealthy countries like the UK do about poverty? (Wroe and Doney, 2004: 10, my emphasis).*

Here, “poverty” is positioned as deeply unjust, and as with many other sources, the magnitude of the problem and suffering – i.e. poverty and its attendant issues of the lack of access to sanitation, schooling, and resultant vulnerability to diseases and epidemics like HIV/AIDS are put forth, and these are compared to the stark contrast of the “images of rich Western societies”. Within such discourses is the notion that one ought to consider him or herself as a part of a global community – and hence be compelled to feel injustice and discomfort when one compares one’s own wealth and wellbeing to the two billion people who also live “on this planet” that have every human right to have similar access to basic amenities as ‘we’ do. Indeed, when the authors refer to the two billion people who do not access to such amenities, they describe them as “a third of us”, clearly exhibiting what Smith argues to be the ‘sameness’ between people despite their disparate geographic locales (1998), while stretching out our notions of care beyond what is proximate and immediate (Silk, 1998, 2000, 2004). At the same time, as Barnett et al. suggest,

The prevalence of this vocabulary of responsibility suggests that everyday consumption practices are being publicly redefined as ethical practices, in the sense that injunctions about what *one ought to do* are combined with

strong appeals to people's sense of personal integrity and sense of self (emphasis in original, 2011: 113).

'We' or the targets of such messages are therefore often assumed to be "people in relatively wealthy countries like the UK", and similarly, in Banyan Tree's website, a message from the organization's founder, Ho Kwon Ping, reflects such sentiments:

As business leaders CEO's must not only embrace but continually demonstrate by personal example, that we have the awesome responsibility as well as exciting challenge, to inspire in our younger or more junior colleagues, the notion that the pursuit of *business can be a noble enterprise*. We need to inspire the understanding that businesses can, if morally driven and passionately executed, be *a positive force in making this a world of greater equality and prosperity for all in the community* (Ho, 2008, my emphasis).

Here, rather than speaking to and of individual persons, those who are "relatively wealthy" are extended to include businesses, which with the right attitude and approach, can become "noble enterprises", or a "positive force" in addressing the inequality that is so prevalent that we ought not be able to ignore.

Indeed, such imperatives to be responsible come not simply with altruistic or noble intentions, as the following from *Rough Guide to a Better World*, suggests:

*As a global community, we sink or swim together...* It is precisely because parts of the developing world are cut off from the rising wealth generated through trade that some of them feel desperate. We should not be so surprised that such *despair at the inequalities in wealth fosters anger and social tension* – the kind, it must be admitted, which might even *undermine global security and create the conditions in which terrorism can emerge*. So if we discover that workers in developing countries who produce for the global market are badly paid by First world standards, the onus is on consumers – as well as governments – to pressurize companies to pay fair wages and provide good working conditions. If companies simply pull out of developing countries, then the jobs and prospects of economic improvements go with them (Wroe and Doney, 2004: 18-19, my emphasis).

Here, a warning is clearly issued to those "relatively wealthy", that should 'we' (continue to) ignore such responsibilities, "such despair at the inequalities in wealth fosters anger and social tension" and will ultimately threaten whatever riches or privileges 'we' now enjoy, through undermining global security or creating conditions that encourage terrorism. The call for responsibility thus here moves towards Massey's (2004, 2005) idea of responsibility because of complex causal relationships in an interconnected world

(Lawson, 2007; Popke, 2003, 2007). It should be noted however, that most sources fluctuate between whether one ought to be responsible because of ‘sameness’ or because of the relationships we have in a connected world, and little conscious differentiation is made.

In a slightly different, but yet still largely ego-centric tone, the call towards responsibility has tended to come from an association with what is considered ‘local’, where ‘home’ is positioned as where one ought to be responsible, and that when one is truly able to transcend this divide between where one holidays or is at home, one will then have the natural compulsion to pursue responsible actions. For example, in Responsibletravel.com, it is stated that,

If the people who created your holiday lived and worked in the place you were going, or knew it intimately, they would really care about giving you a different kind of experience - something really exceptional... It's like really living somewhere and enjoying the peace and quiet or the pace and excitement of the place as much as the people who live there do (Responsibletravel.com).

In another example, Exotissimo Travel states in its mission statement that,

Calling Southeast Asia *our home*, we love to showcase the beauty of *our countries through our tours* and inspire in guests a genuine interest in the region. We firmly believe in giving back to society and working with local charities to support community development (Exotissimo Travel, 2009-2010b, my emphasis).

Indeed, such a position is similar to what has been discussed in section 2.3.3, where ‘going local’ is somewhat deemed as a postcolonial response to assuming responsibilities in tourism. However, one ought to question – does ‘going local’ necessarily mean the tourism is hence responsible? Such questions beckon further discussion and will be explored in section 5.4 and 6.2.1.

### **5.3.2 ‘Ethical tours’ - Responsibility as an attraction**

At the same time, it a variety of ‘ethical tours’ under various labels – such as ecotourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, propoor tourism, volunteer tourism are increasingly popular and advertised. Responsible options while on holiday such as dining in places that support and empower local causes or serve organic dishes, and hotels with ‘green’ practices are also on the rise. In such instances, perhaps it can be argued that in today’s world, responsibility can be and is often the attraction (see also section 6.4 and 7.2),

where tourists will seek out places such as Cabbages and Condoms in Bangkok, precisely because it is considered a “restaurant with a purpose. Opened by the local senator Mechai Viravaidya, founder of the Population & Community Development Association, this restaurant helps fund population control, AIDS awareness, and a host of rural development programs” (Shalgosky, 2008: 117).

While Cabbages and Condoms has a long history and was recommended in guidebooks as early as *The Rough Guide to Thailand* (1992), it was indeed one of the few available in the early days, and the advent of the ‘responsible’ destination or attraction is largely a recent phenomenon. In Thailand guidebooks examined, compared to older issues, responsibility in tourism is featured much more in current issues. All three current Thailand guidebooks examined include sections detailing how to engage various responsibilities through tourism. *Discover Thailand*, for example, suggests that tourists seek out some of Northern Thailand’s “bests”, and this includes going to Chiang Rai for “an easy departure point for treks that have a philanthropic hook”, or Mae Sariang for “remote trekking with eco- and culturally sensitive guides” (Williams et al., 2010: 150). *The Rough Guide to Thailand* (2009) on the other hand, lists a series of charities and volunteer projects where tourists are welcomed to help in some way under its section on “Travel essentials” (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 80). In *Frommer’s Thailand* (2008), introductory sections on the ‘best of Thailand’ includes numerous examples – The Evason Hua Hin for its “organically inspired mud-built spa” (Shalgosky, 2008: 6), Birds and Bees (a sister resort of Cabbages and Condoms) as a “rustic country-style hotel [that] admirably supports HIV/AIDS education” (Shalgosky, 2008: 8), or going for sea-kayaking with John Grey, “a much lauded, Phuket-based eco-warrior who has long fought to protect the marine life in Andaman Sea” (Shalgosky, 2008: 11). ‘Responsible’ options abound and are scattered throughout guidebooks. It is almost as if a tourist could arrive at a destination, flip open the guidebook and decide – oh, I shall be responsible for dinner, and head on to dine at some place like Cabbages and Condoms.

In comparison, websites examined tended to refer rather to tours that are ‘ethical’ – a ten day “Timeless Thailand holiday” that have “local guides [that] take active steps to ensure our groups behave in an environmentally responsible manner, such as not leaving anything behind and not removing any plants in rural areas” (Responsibletravel.com) or a 15 day “Thailand voluntourism tour” where your contributions as a tourist “will help to

give the children a safe, happy and supportive environment in which to live, grow and learn” (Go Differently Ltd, 2008b). Perhaps as previously suggested, this is a distinction due to the differences between the way in which guidebooks and websites are used – where guidebooks are brought along for holidays, websites are largely referred to before trips.

Both sources tend also to refer to ways in which tourists can and should aid the recovery process after disasters, and in Thailand’s example, sections covering the geographic region of the Andaman coast of Southern Thailand all describe the devastations of the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, and how tourism and tourists have responded to alleviate the situation. *The Rough Guide to Thailand*, for example says this:

This is of course the same sea whose terrifyingly powerful tsunami waves battered the coastline in December 2004, killing thousands and changing countless lives and communities forever. The legacies of that horrific day are widespread... all the affected holiday resorts have been re-built, with the tourist dollar now arguably more crucial to the region’s well-being than ever before (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 645).

While Exotissimo offers trip to Koh Yao Noi, Phuket, for tourists to,

Make a difference on your holiday. Visit villages affected by the 2004 tsunami. You will not only gain insight in to the recovery efforts, but you will also participate in some of the initiatives established in the aftermath to ensure a sustainable income for the victims (Exotissimo Travel, 2009-2010a).

Tourists in both instances are hence encouraged to (re)visit areas affected by the tsunami, not only because it is now the responsibility of the ‘tourist’ dollar that ensures the region’s well-being, but also because tsunami impacts and ‘responsibility’ through recovery processes are now increasingly marketed as attractions to tourists.

### **5.3.3 Guidelines for responsible tourism**

While not always available in the selected sources, specific guidelines for how one can be or ought to be responsible in one’s travels can be found in *Responsibletravel.Com*, *Exotissimo Travel*, and *Six Senses Resorts and Spas*’s websites (see Boxes 5.1 for highlights).

### **Box 5.1: Guidelines on Responsible travel**

#### **Tips from Responsibletravel.com**

##### **before you travel**

- Read up on local cultures and learn a few words of the local language - travelling with respect earns you respect
- Remove all excess packaging - waste disposal is difficult in remote places and developing countries
- Ask your tour operator for specific tips for responsible travel in your destination
- Ask your tour operator/hotel if there are useful gifts that you could pack for your hosts, local people or schools
- Ask your tour operator whether there are local conservation or social projects that you could visit on your trip, and if/how you could help support them

##### **While on holiday**

- Buy local produce in preference to imported goods
- Hire a local guide - you'll discover more about local culture and lives, and they will earn an income
- Do not buy products made from endangered species, hard woods or ancient artefacts
- Respect local cultures, traditions and holy places - if in doubt ask advise or don't visit
- Use public transport, hire a bike or walk when convenient - it's a great way to meet local people on their terms and reduce pollution and carbon emissions
- Use water sparingly - it's very precious in many countries and tourists tend to use far more than local people
- Remember that local people have different ways of thinking and concepts of time, this just makes them different not wrong - cultivate the habit of asking questions (rather than the Western habit of knowing the answers). For more ideas on deeper and more responsible travel see here.

##### **When you get back**

- Write to your tour operator or hotel with any comments or feedback about your holiday, and especially include any suggestions on reducing environmental impacts and increasing benefits to local communities. You will find independent holiday reviews from travellers on many responsibletravel.com holidays.
- If you've promised to send pictures or gifts to local people remember to do so, many are promised and not all arrive!
- Why not donate to a local project in the area you've visited? Take a look at TravelPledge for community and environmental projects around the world

(Source: Responsibletravel.com)

### **Responsible Travel Guidelines from Exotissimo Travel**

Here are some simple guidelines:

- **Stay informed.** Be familiar with the history, customs and biodiversity of the destination before embarking on the trip. Learn a few phrases in the local language.
- **Green your stay.** Stay in an eco-lodge. Reuse hotel towels and request housekeeping not to change the bed linens every day. Turn off the lights, fans and air-conditioners when you leave your room. Use water sparingly.
- **Waste minimization.** Waste should be recycled or properly discarded. When trekking in remote areas, use toilet facilities provided and avoid polluting water sources. Minimize the use of plastic packages and opt for a recyclable shopping bag instead.
- **Support the local economy.** Buy locally made crafts or products. Bargain fairly, and with a smile. Enjoy local food at local restaurants.

(Source: Exo Cares, Exotissimo Travel, 2009-2010b)

### **Six Senses Sustainability Policy**

**Six Senses** has identified a team of key individuals to drive such programme and has established the following objectives to be met seeking innovative and appropriate solutions during both development and operation:

- Set up group wide standards, wherever possible meet the local legislative environmental requirement as well as complying international agreements;
- Reduce resources consumption and waste generation through responsible waste reducing policies, reusing, recycling and composting programmes;
- Systematic management of energy use and consumption and to apply, where possible, renewable energy uses;
- Effective management of water resources and waste water;
- Promote awareness of sustainability amongst hosts, guests, local communities, as well as suppliers/business partners through environmental awareness and capacity development efforts and events;
- Contribute a significant part of revenue to establish a Social and Environmental Responsibility Fund benefit to the local, national and global community;
- Address the issue of climate change through both energy management, as part of resource management policies, and avoidance of fugitive emission of CFCs;
- Develop action plans as well as regularly monitor social and environmental impacts through regular environmental meetings, monitoring and updating of Key Sustainability Indicators (KSIs) database;
- Prevent any escape of hazardous substances into the environment and to phase out environmentally damaging products as benign alternatives as practicable;
- Purchase local, environmentally friendly, socially responsible products, especially organic and fair trade products;

- Strictly avoid the use of animal products derived using unnecessarily cruel or environmentally destructive production methods or those derived from any endangered species;
- Engage local communities and actively employ local staff and service providers wherever practicable;
- Integrate social and environmental concerns into planning and decision making processes.

(Source: Six Senses Resorts & Spas)

Other than Six Senses' Sustainability Policy, that presents what they as an organization do to ensure responsibility, guidelines for responsible travel tend to be directed towards the potential tourist, whether this is presented as a specific list of to-dos, or incorporated into nuggets of information within travel guidebooks or websites. Little mention of for example, governments', or locals' roles in ensuring responsibility in these to-do lists suggests that once again, too much emphasis is given to the tourist or consumer (see Barnett et al., 2011 for the importance of shifting focus away from the consumer in studies on ethical consumption). Looking at other actors' agency and practices in tourism is thus central to discussions in this thesis, and will be introduced throughout Chapters Six and Seven.

Going back to the guidelines quoted, it is notable that two main themes tend to emerge, namely 1. Engagement with locals during travel (see section 5.4 Going Local), and 2. Environmental concerns with tourism development (see section 5.5 Saving the Green and Wild). The following sections will be divided as such to provide further analysis of how responsibilities are positioned within selected sources. While intersections between responsibilities towards environmental concerns and local communities do occur in reality, within the contexts of sources examined, they are often discussed separately, and indeed, different environmental concerns are hardly discussed in tandem with each other. As such, discussions are divided as a reflection of how they are represented in sources examined, even though overlaps do occur in reality.

## 5.4 Going 'local'



**Plate 5.1: Responsibletravel.com homepage banner: Travel like a local**

(Source: <http://www.responsibletravel.com/>)

Amongst calls to assume responsibilities in tourism, 'going local'<sup>35</sup> appears to be consistently encouraged. The banner at the homepage of Responsibletravel.com clearly shows this emphasis – where responsibility is directly correlated with the need to 'travel like a local'. Embedded within such rhetoric then, is the belief that locals know better and are more responsible due to their commitments to places and destinations that are their homes, and hence if one is able to 'travel like a local', one ought to be better placed in assuming responsible practices (even though contradictory discourses continue to exist where local companies for example are blamed for environmental pollution and ignorance). This section looks into such discourses and unpicks why exactly 'going local' is considered responsible, while pointing out some of the issues in how the 'local' is (re)presented in the sources examined.

Deconstructing discourses around 'going local' then, reveals that this can mean an assortment of things – and many times, guidebooks and websites refer to several aspects of 'going local' simultaneously. For example, in the banner above, going local means: 1. Tours run by locals that have deep connections to places visited, 2. Living with and

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<sup>35</sup> The term 'local' is acknowledged to be a highly problematic one – who exactly is a 'local'? Is, for example, a guide from Bangkok leading a tour in Chiang Mai considered a local? Or is an elephant mahout hailing from Surin but who has worked in an elephant camp in Pattaya for the past 10 years considered a local? Also, local 'communities' have tended to be used without definition within popular media – and this ignores the deep discussions of the dangers of assuming monocultural communities, when indeed in many situations, heterogeneity (e.g. age, race, religion, gender, etc.) may instead be more commonly observed.

making real connections with local people, and 3. Supporting local economies and providing a source of income and employment to local people. Most prevalent is that to truly travel (as compared to being bussed around like a mass tourist), one has to get to know something local (for discussions on the higher perceived social and cultural capital involved in ‘travelling’ rather than ‘touring’, see Crang, 2006; Minca and Oakes, 2006, 2011; Oakes, 2006). This is clearly emphasized in the following quotes from *Clean Breaks*:

the real pulse of the Caribbean is found in the homes of the locals (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 228).

It’s far too easy to visit Thailand and come away feeling that you never really got to see what life for Thais is like outside of the tourist centres. If you’re curious, then a visit to the tranquil rice-growing village of Ko Pet in the northeastern Isan region may be just what you’re looking for... The activities on offer – joining elders foraging for edible insects or mushrooms, learning how to weave baskets from raffia, seeing silk being produced, are not staged, since they comprise what the villagers would be doing any way. Guides ensure these are rotated between the twenty or so participating families, so there is little disruption of routine and income is spread evenly (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 301).

How to enter such authentic local livelihoods is the natural next step offered – where many guidebooks and websites suggest activities one can pursue to go local. Such activities usually revolve around having tourists tag along and observe daily routines of locals or simply perform mundane tasks together. As in the above example, foraging or weaving baskets, all of which are supposedly not staged for the tourists, are considered tasks which the locals would be doing in their day-to-day lives whether the tourists are there or not. The image of an elder or lady weaving baskets from raffia for example is used in various sources, as seen also in Plate 5.2 on *responsibletravel.com*’s pages on ‘cultural immersion holidays in Thailand’.

It is clearly assumed that the opportunity to engage with locals in their day-to-day activities avails tourists a chance to connect with and build intimate relationships with locals, where most common are images depicting tourists in local community settings or playing with children (see Plate 5.3 and 5.4) and also in descriptions of activities:

The real joy of staying at Ban Talae Nok, though, is the time spent in between these activities – playing with the children; picnicking with the family on the beach at sunset; listening to the villagers describe their

experiences; and understanding what life is like here and how hope can spring from even the worst disasters (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 294).



**Plate 5.2: “Cultural immersion holiday in Thailand”**

(Source: <http://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/4129/cultural-immersion-holiday-in-thailand>)



**Plate 5.3: Interactions with local community**

(Source: [http://www.GoDifferently.com/thailand/voluntourism\\_thailand.asp](http://www.GoDifferently.com/thailand/voluntourism_thailand.asp))



**Plate 5.4: Playing with children**

(Source: <http://thailand.exotissimo.com/travel/tours/phuket-charitable-experience-thailand-tour/gallery/>)

At times, activities depicted in guidebooks and websites also include volunteering opportunities for tourists, with typical examples including teaching English in villages or assisting in community tourism initiatives. Such examples were more common amongst current guidebooks, suggesting an increasing popularity and availability of volunteer tourism in Thailand.

What such rhetoric suggests, is that there is a *real* Thailand (or Caribbean or any other destination) out there, waiting to be discovered by those intrepid and willing to put in more efforts to dig a little deeper. And that without doing so, one would have come and left Thailand without ever *really* seeing and understanding Thailand. This search for what is ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ often grounds what is marketed as the appeal of tourism in sources examined (Culler, 1981; MacCannell, 1989; McIntosh and Prentice, 1999; Wang, 1999), and guidebooks and websites alike allude to the existence of a ‘truer’ form of destinations once all sorts of commercialization and reification are stripped away. However, it appears obvious to question – how can one rice-growing village be more representative of all of Thailand than for example supposed ‘tourist centres’ presumably referring to large beach resorts like Pattaya, Koh Samui and Phuket, or large cities like Bangkok? Indeed, many researchers have long questioned such unchanging notions of authenticity, and have suggested instead the emergent qualities of authenticity – where what is considered ‘real’ can change over time and space, and that these are but culturally specific social constructions (see Brunner, 1994; Cohen, 1988; Dylser, 1999; Hendry, 2000; Wang, 1999). Oakes has argued that authenticity is itself a paradox (see also Minca and Oakes, 2006), where “the search for authenticity is perhaps best thought of as a convenient code for something that in fact evaporates under scrutiny and yet remains nevertheless necessary as a framework for understanding the tourist experience” (2006: 233). Despite the numerous works questioning what authenticity is in tourism however, within guidebooks, websites and much tourism marketing material, such discourses of the quest to go local and finding what is ‘real’ in your holidays are commonplace. Such a portrayal of ‘going local’ to seek the ‘authentic’ and the assumption that the ‘authentic’ equates to what is responsible is often presented in a worryingly unquestioned and unproblematic manner, once again highlighting what is observed throughout this thesis – while being ‘responsible’ is increasingly popular, no one seems entirely certain of what exactly

responsibility is,<sup>36</sup> and how to do it – not even those who feel they have enough authority to write guidebooks to tell tourists what to do or not in their holidays.

At the same time, it is assumed that tourism is able to generate jobs and incomes in the ‘local’ economy. Such rhetoric is repeated across various guidebooks as quoted below:

There are many things we can do on holiday which not only support local communities but also add to the enjoyment of a trip. For example, by using local guides rather than expatriates, we can gain a better insight into the environment and culture – and boost local employment opportunities. We can further benefit local economies by buying food and souvenirs from local markets or craft cooperatives, not simply from hotel lobby shops, which are unlikely to pass much value back to the producers (Wroe and Doney, 2004: 80).

[T]he tour makes sure that the people you meet will benefit from your trip, with eighty percent of profits going to local charities. A tour highlight is a visit to the school and community centre built with these funds (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 335).

[home stays] They are also a positive way of supporting small communities, as all your money feed right back into the village (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 53).

This is similar to notions of fair trade where attempts are made to ensure that items are sourced locally, and where the removal of a middle-agent ensures that profits go directly to the locals. Amongst websites, there are also many initiatives to help locals which revolve around donations and tours to destinations recently hit by natural disasters – for example, Exotissimo’s website cites their efforts in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis in 2009, Banyan Tree describes emergency funds and donations in China after the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, and examples of post-tsunami relief in Thailand are common across various sources including numerous tour options on Responsibletravel.com and Go Differently. *Clean Breaks* for example details one of such tour options, clearly stating that:

Within weeks [of the Dec 2004 Tsunami], however, the villagers had begun rebuilding their lives, and with the help of a young American who had been working in a nearby guesthouse, they set about deciding on a new future for themselves. The result was Andaman Discoveries, a community-based tourism venture that aims to provide a supplementary income to fishing in the villages like Ban Talae Nok. It’s a form of tourism

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<sup>36</sup> Even as guidebooks and websites appear certain in their instructions of being responsible by ‘going local’.

very much on the villagers' terms: they are involved and consulted throughout, and eighty percent of the trip's cost goes direct to the village (twenty percent of this via a community fund)... (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 294).

Finally, embedded within such discourses of 'going local' is also the importance of respecting local cultures and practices when one encounters locals. Repeated in all guidebooks and many websites are typical do's and don'ts that one ought to observe in Thailand – including for example, what constitutes appropriate clothing, how women should behave towards Thai monks, or how the King is revered in Thailand. For example, the *Rough Guide to Thailand* advises tourists that,

Clothing – or the lack of it is what bothers Thais most about tourist behaviour... Baring your flesh on beaches is very much a Western practice: when Thais go swimming they often do so fully clothed, and they find topless and nude bathing offensive (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 59).

Such advice has remained largely similar between various sources over time, as Lonely Planet's *Thailand: A Travel Survival Kit* that was published in 1984 also encourages tourists to cover up, as

Thais took nudity as a sign of disrespect on the part of the travellers for the locals, rather than as a libertarian symbol or modern custom. I was even asked to make signs that they could post forbidding or discouraging nudity – I declined, forgoing a free bungalow for my stay. Thais are extremely modest in this respect (despite racy billboards in Bangkok) and it should not be the traveller's purpose to 'reform' them (Cummings, 1984: 37-38).

The supposed cultural difference in day-to-day activities and practices is thus highlighted both as warnings to tourists – heed such dos and don'ts or risk incurring the wrath of locals; but also as an appeal itself – highlighting the nuances and cultural displacements from what one considers to be the norm, so that being in a different location as a tourist again seems more real, or might I say 'authentic'.

#### **5.4.1 'Locals' in the 'developing world'**

This drive to 'go local' however may not be common throughout all geographical destinations. Amongst sources examined that cover areas beyond Thailand (such as *Clean Breaks*, *Rough Guide to a Better World*, and *Responsibletravel.com*), one notable trend is that the above discussed ways to travel responsibly through engaging with 'locals' is usually prevalent only in developing countries. In contrast, responsible travel as seen in

the developed world has tended to focus on environmental concerns such as national park conservation, or lowering one's carbon footprint (see further discussions in section 5.5).

To begin this discussion, it is useful to note that ironically, responsibilities and locals are often presented in two contrasting manners – on one hand (and less common) locals are presented as being committed to destinations and with better ground knowledge, and hence are more responsible than foreigners (including tourists) who are but transient in such destinations and therefore know or care little about the long-term consequences of their actions while on holiday. Such discourses can be observed in many of the examples quoted in earlier sections. Responsibletravel.com, for example, states that,

The holiday providers that we work with have thought a lot about where they live and work. They care passionately about keeping it unspoilt by tourism. They don't want their beaches packed like sardines, or their restaurants selling food you can get everywhere else. They want you to have a remarkable experience (Responsibletravel.com).

On the other hand, locals are also and more commonly portrayed as passive subjects, who are ignorant of all sorts of responsibilities that are assumed to be 'natural' for someone from the developed world – including, but not limited to, notions towards saving water and energy, proper waste management to prevent pollution (especially in beach areas where local hotels are often blamed for releasing untreated sewage into the sea), and environmental and wildlife conservation. Such portrayals of the ignorant local often vary, and can be depicted as a simple lack of awareness, in which the foreigners' (at times including the tourists) role is to enlighten or teach locals. For example, in *The Rough Guide to Thailand*, the role of foreigners in helping locals is evident:

salvation for many Mrabri has come in the form of weaving hammocks: *foreign visitors noticed their skill in making string bags out of jungle vines and helped them set up a small-scale hammock industry*. The hammocks are now exported to fifteen countries, and the Mrabri weavers have the benefits of education, free healthcare and an unemployment fund (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 374, my emphasis).

A similar stance is observed in another example from *Frommer's' Thailand*:

Another stellar outfit, the Ecotourism Training Centre (ETC), is a nonprofits organization set up by *dynamic American, Reid Ridgway*, to provide long term career training to tsunami-affected youth. Established in 2005, *the Khao Lak program trains local Thais in sustainable community tourism and diving skills* to PADI dive master and instructor level (Shalgosky, 2008: 258, my emphasis).

In some cases, locals are further portrayed as being resistant towards better and more responsible ways of doing things, and in such situations foreigners need to enforce or pressurize them into changing. For example, in *Rough Guide to a Better World*, it was stated (seemingly as an unproblematic fact) that “the presence of leading multinationals in poor countries often sets a good example that local firms are increasingly having to follow” (Matthew Bishop Business editor, *The Economist*, cited in Wroe and Doney, 2004: 20).

Such representations of the local in the developing world are problematic on several accounts. Firstly, as mentioned, the existence of contrasting portrayals – the local as responsible in some instances, and the local as irresponsible in others, often within the context of the same guidebook or website, suggests that even in discourse alone, contrasting ideologies and realities of responsibilities do often co-exist. This indeed serves as a precursor to the Chapter Six, where divergent and sometimes contradictory notions of responsibility are often observed on the ground in what is done in the name of responsibility.

Secondly, the emphasis on locals only in developing countries suggest a presupposed division between developed and developing countries, where engaging, knowing and helping the local through tourism activities (as in earlier examples) can only be done in a developing country. Sources examined in this study therefore highlight that tourists only need to be responsible towards locals in developing countries. Or to push it further, that there are no locals who are marginalized or unfairly treated (for example, those who are underpaid and exploited) in developed countries. On the other hand, locals as a target or even attractions in responsibility possibly perpetuates the romanticism and exoticism of the ‘local’ in developing countries. While guidebooks on the one hand condemn places like the Union of Hilltribe Villages in Chiang Rai,<sup>37</sup> it concurrently celebrates other forms of ‘going local’ – why indeed is weaving baskets with old men in villages considered responsible, while seeing Paduang women with their brass neck coils is

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<sup>37</sup> This is a purpose-built tourist attraction presented in a village set up, where ‘local hill tribe villagers’ wear traditional costumes and do traditional crafts for tourists to visit and observe. Amongst the hill tribes are the controversial Paduang or ‘long-neck’ women – whom in some accounts were said to be forced to continue the painful act of wearing brass neck coils on their necks as this was the feature attraction of the Union of Hilltribe Villages.

considered a lack of respect and a form of zooification? Such tensions and dilemmas are often lacking in sources examined.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, what is presented also often neglects what locals themselves already do whether or not responsible travel or tours are in place. This is particularly evident in Thailand's example, as merit-making is a strong component of Thai Buddhism, and most locals regularly donate to charity, Buddhist temples, or local schools to gain merit. Indeed, such examples are easily found again amongst all guidebooks examined, and *Discover Thailand. Experience the Best of Thailand* describes this:

By feeding monks, giving donations to temples and performing regular worship at the local temple they hope to improve their lot, acquiring enough merit (*bun* in Thai) to prevent or at least reduce their number of rebirths. The concept of rebirth is almost universally accepted in Thailand, even by non-Buddhists (Williams et al., 2010: 362).

Representations of the local in the developing country as passive and 'irresponsible' is thus a problematic account, as it fails to appreciate their role and agency in the geographies of responsibility. This is, again a disjuncture between researchers that have argued for a postcolonial sense of responsibility (see Noxolo et al., 2011; Raghuram et al., 2009) and what is popularly presented as responsibility to the lay consumer/tourist.

## 5.5 Saving the green and wild

Another area commonly depicted in sources is environmental concerns in tourism. Typical concerns include conservation of national parks or forestry, conservation of wildlife considered native and threatened in Thailand, and 'green practices' such as efficient use of energy and water, and appropriate waste management. Like 'going local', the ways in which tourists are encouraged to go 'green' also varies from simply seeing and enjoying nature, to pressurizing destinations' communities and businesses, including tour companies and hotels, to adopt environmentally friendly practices, protect the environment and wildlife, or to eradicate 'cruelty' to animals.

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<sup>38</sup> Although *Rough Guide to Thailand* does say this "the first decision you have to grapple with is whether to visit one of the three villages of "long-neck" women around Mae Hong Son. Our advice is don't: they're effectively human zoos for snap-happy tourists, offering no opportunity to discover anything about Padaung culture" (2009:391).

### 5.5.1 'Green' places

Most commonly, sources examined showed trends of how certain places are increasingly labelled as 'green' or not. For example in *Clean Breaks*, special sections on 'Green' Amsterdam, Copenhagen, New York, Patagonia, Tokyo, Luang Phabang, Mumbai, Sydney, and so on, tells readers and potential tourists how to holiday in these places while supporting green movements like eco-friendly hotels, restaurants, or innovative set-ups such as Club Surya in London that has "technology fitted into the dance floor, the more clubbers shake their stuff, the more energy is transferred into a dynamo powering the club" (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 25). Just as how places and tours are increasingly seen to be 'ethical' or not as argued earlier in Section 5.3.2, alongside the discourse of such 'green' places is also a comparison with places that one should not visit while on holiday. In Thailand's case, different destinations are often compared within guidebooks or websites, suggesting that newer and typically less visited destinations are 'greener' and hence more worth a visit. A typical account would be what is written in *Frommer's Thailand*, suggesting that "for many tourists, Krabi has become a popular, more eco-friendly alternative to the heavily commercialized Phuket and backpacker boomtown of Koh Phi Phi" (Shalgosky, 2008: 260). In this example, it should be noted that Koh Phi Phi is actually zoned as a marine park under conservation in Thailand, but guidebooks and websites often actively re-classify what are considered 'green' places one should or should not visit despite their official status as national or marine parks. At the same time, such definitions within guidebooks and websites point towards an uneasy trend – like backpacker, youth or alternative travel, responsible travel could indeed be seeking out places that are seemingly 'untouched', and in time to come, if and when such places become established tourism destinations, responsible tourists then move on to newer places that are yet considered 'green' again. While the 'green' cities listed earlier do show a wide selection of very established and mature urban tourism destinations like London or New York, the example of Koh Phi Phi shows otherwise. In earlier editions, guidebooks had zoomed in on the natural and pristine beauty of Koh Phi Phi in comparison to Phuket, but in current editions, as seen above, Krabi is now favoured as the place to go over Koh Phi Phi.

In addition, as discussed earlier in section 5.4.1, anecdotes often detail how locals have little notion of their responsibilities towards the environment and flout official rules and

regulations in Thailand. For example, despite a ban on logging instituted in Thailand in response to rapid deforestation, *Thailand: The Rough Guide* states that:

There was little likelihood that the [logging] ban would ever be fully observed, as nothing has been done to change the pattern of wood consumption and the government has instituted no supervisory body to ensure the cessation of illegal logging. To make matters worse, there's the endemic problem of "influence": when the big guns from Bangkok want to build a golf course on a forest reserve, it is virtually impossible for a lowly provincial civil servant to resist their money. On top of that, there's the problem of precisely defining a role for the Royal Forestry Department, which was set up early this century to exploit the forest's resources, but now is charged with the maintenance of the trees (Gray and Ridout, 1992: 457).

A check against a more current copy of *The Rough Guide to Thailand* (2009) and *Discover Thailand. Experience the Best of Thailand* (2010) suggests that similar problems are still prevalent almost 20 years later (or are still reported as such), and in addition many examples are given of areas now zoned as national parks but with little real difference in management:

all visitors to Ko Samet are required to pay the standard national park fee on arrival (B200...), and most hoteliers also pay rent to park authorities, but there's little evidence that this income has been used to improve the island's infrastructure (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 446).

Despite promises, official designation as a national park or sanctuary does not always guarantee protection for habitats and wildlife. Local farmers, well-moneyed developers and other business interests easily win out, either legally or illegally, over environmental protection in Thailand's national parks. Few people adhere to the law and there is little government muscle to enforce regulations. Ko Chang, Ko Samet and Ko Phi Phi are examples of coastal areas that are facing serious development issues despite being national parks (Williams et al., 2010).

Locals – whether this refers to local communities, businesses or authorities, are often deemed as the weakest link in ensuring responsible development of tourism destinations, and notions of responsible actions and practices are often portrayed as originating from foreigners outside of Thailand. Such representations of locals' positions towards environmental concerns begs further discussion against what was indeed observed on the ground, and will be elaborated in Chapter Six.

In another example in *The Rough Guide to Thailand*, it is suggested that tourists can make a difference in Ko Phayan in Southern Thailand, where,

As the island gets more popular, residents and expats are beginning to try and forestall the inevitable negative impact on the island's environment. In particular, they are urging visitors not to accept plastic bags from the few shops on the island, to take non-degradable rubbish such as batteries and plastic items back to the mainland, and to minimize plastic water-bottle usage by buying the biggest possible bottles or better still creating a demand for a water-refill service (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 657-658).

This example highlights a trend within the literature examined – that while some places are considered 'green' and worthy of visits, other places can potentially become green through incorporating responsible practices. Indeed, cities like New York, London, or Mumbai are perhaps not always immediately imagined as green when mentioned to tourists, and the inclusion of some of the initiatives to change this in guidebooks like *Clean Breaks* suggest that while guidebooks put places in a binary between green or not, there is also an underlying awareness of the fluid and changing courses of developments at destinations (and their wider networks of responsibility). The question then is – how indeed does one place *become* green? Most concrete amongst such examples are efforts extensively published on websites (most notably by Banyan Tree and the Six Senses Group) that highlight actual practices put in place to ensure or turn their destinations (or resorts) into ones that comply with responsible guidelines:

An abandoned tin mine site labelled as toxic by the UNDP and Tourism Authority of Thailand in the late 1970's, Bang Tao Bay [Phuket] has been rehabilitated into what is today not only a lush tropical garden supporting not only a thriving ecosystem of wildlife, but also a community thriving from the jobs and tourism income. This location is a truly unique demonstration of the social development and environmental remediation potential of the tourism industry (Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts, 2008).

As our resort is managed by Six Senses Resorts and Spas - an acknowledged industry leader in environmental responsibility through careful consideration of the effects that operating systems, materials and purchasing policies have on the environment - we are continually developing new initiatives and procedures to minimize our ecological impact. Six Senses Samui was Green Globe 21 Benchmarked on 20 December 2006. Specifically, we achieved best practice results in six indicators: water saving, waste recycling, community commitment, community contributions, paper products and pesticide products (Six Senses Resorts & Spas).

Indeed, a difference observed between websites (mainly of tour companies or hotels) and guidebooks examined highlights how target audiences of guidebooks might sometimes remain ignorant or indifferent towards such practices of responsibilities –

Of course you could happily stay here [Evason Phuket] and remain completely unaware that the world's first commercial biomass reactor is powering the air-conditioning system. Most guests are perfectly oblivious, as almost all the initiatives being put in place to make the hotel carbon neutral by 2020 take place behind the scenes... (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 300).

In another example, Banyan Tree resorts in Thailand are typically described as 'high-end' or 'luxury' within guidebooks, and only passing mention is given towards their environmental commitments (as compared especially to Banyan Tree's website that literally has pages and pages on what they do in this respect). One guidebook, *Frommer's Comprehensive Travel Guide Thailand* even writes this of Bang Tao Bay: "our local intelligence tells us that there may be problems with the cleanliness of the water and the shoreline, as a number of tin dredges offshore have damaged the ecology during the past 20 years" (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 231), suggesting that this might not be a place one would enjoy visiting due to its environmental problems, and failing to appreciate Banyan Tree's efforts in re-greening the place. The current issue of *Frommer's Thailand* does however acknowledge Banyan Tree's "many international awards, especially for its Green Initiative and eco-friendly stance" (2008: 242), and no longer mention environmental problems related to tin mining.

### 5.5.2 *The plight of the 'wild'*

In a similar manner, wildlife in Thailand is also depicted as under threat, often with the underlying assumption that locals do not value or protect wildlife as per international standards. In the *Rough Guide* series for example, a comparison between its 1992 and 2009 editions show that little real change is perceived even in the span of 17 years, where,

In April 1991 the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) denounced Thailand as "probably the worst country in the world for the illegal trade in endangered wildlife", and branded Chatuchak Weekend Market [in Bangkok] "the wildlife supermarket of the world". Protected and endangered species traded at Chatuchak include gibbons, palm cockatoos, golden dragon fish, Indian pied hornbills, even tiger cubs and lions... Although Thailand is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)... Vendors are hardly likely to forego the estimated \$500,000 earned from trading wildlife at Chatuchak each year, and domestic demand will continue until it's no longer so amusing to have a cute white-handed gibbon chained to your tree or a myna bird screeching from a cage outside your front door (Gray and Ridout, 1992: 93).

While the 2009 edition adds that,

The illegal trade goes on beneath the counter, despite occasional crackdowns, but you're bound to come across fighting cocks around the back, miniature flying squirrels being fed milk through pipettes, and iridescent red-and-blue Siamese fighting fish, kept in individual jars and shielded from each other's aggressive stares by sheets of cardboard (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 172).

Inherent in such descriptions, is that unfortunately, there is a demand for exotic wildlife to be illegally traded, often for leisure hobbyists, or to zoos overseas, or in the case of the gibbon, simply in cafes and pubs along beaches in Phuket and so on where the animals are kept to entertain tourists. *Frommer's Thailand*, for example, highlights the plight of gibbons where

At bars, restaurants, and guesthouses around Thailand, caged or drugged lar gibbon offer a dubious form of entertainment to tourists, many of whom are completely ignorant of the abuse these endangered creatures endure. These fragile primates are poached as pets when young, caged until they mature – and become aggressive. At this point they are sold to a bar, dressed in children's clothes, and fed amphetamines to stay awake at night (when they are normally asleep). Imprisoned by their owners by day, by night they are fed a diet of cigarettes and whisky – all in the name of “entertaining” the tourists. Many develop psychological problems and become extremely menacing, and a simple bite can bring dire consequences (Shalgosky, 2008: 253-254).

While this chapter focuses on the analysis of websites and guidebooks identified, it should be also be noted that the “dire straits of wildlife” in Thailand (and indeed in many countries in Asia) is also commonly discussed in newspapers, magazines, documentaries, and so on. As with other aspects of responsibilities in tourism, in such representations, we can see that there is the supposition that such demand for endangered wildlife exists because of ignorance on the part of consumers. The role of travel literature like guidebooks then, is to educate and increase awareness of the plight of such wildlife, and it is assumed that once consumers such as tourists come to know of the situation, the demand for exotic wildlife will also decrease, even as researchers have questioned if knowledge is enough to lead to action (see Barnett et al., 2011; Barnett and Land, 2007; Noxolo et al., 2011).

At the same time, ventures like ecotourism are often depicted as the answer – in an example in a different context in Japan, it is suggested that “one of the best ways you can support the conservation of whales is to join a responsible tour like those offered by North Sailing – it will help show [the locals] that a whale is worth more alive than dead

(Hammond and Smith, 2009: 103). While Thailand has less to do in terms of the conservation of whales compared to Japan, a similar stance is often used in Thailand's case towards conservation of animals such as gibbons, tigers, turtles, and elephants. For the benefit of discussion and also in line with how elephants are often considered the pride and symbol of Thailand, the rest of this section will focus on how elephants, their conservation issues, and relation with tourism, are portrayed in the sources examined.

The plight and threatened state of the Asian elephant is discussed often in many sources, and typical in such accounts are issues of overworking and ill-treating elephants in the logging industry (which is actually illegal in Thailand), in various tourism activities such as elephant shows and trekking, as well as 'street elephants' that are brought to cities and beach resort areas by their handlers called *mahouts* that typically earn money through selling bananas and sugarcanes to tourists who in turn feed these items to their elephants in tow. Passages in *The Rough Guide to Thailand*, for example, comprehensively capture these:

With the 1989 ban on commercial logging within Thai borders... elephants and their mahouts face with the further problem of unemployment... most mahouts struggle to find the vast amount of food needed to sustain their charges – about 125 kg per beast per day. Tourism has stepped into the breach, mostly in the form of elephant shows and trekking, through it's been a mixed blessing to say the least, as the elephants are often poorly treated, overworked or downright abused. In town streets and on beaches, you'll often see mahouts charging both tourists for the experience of hand feeding their elephants bananas or sugar cane, and Thais for the chance to stoop under their trunks for good luck. At any one time, there may be up to two hundred elephants effectively begging in this way in Bangkok, which is simply not the right environment for them – they're regularly involved in road accidents, for example, despite the red reflectors that many sport on their tails; overall, it's best not to feed city elephants in this way (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 366).

[T]here is also increasing concern about the ethics of elephant trekking, a fast-growing and lucrative arm of the tourist industry that some consider has got out of hand... now endangering Southeast Asia's dwindling population of wild elephants as more and more are captured for the trekking trade." (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 833).

In another example, Go Differently's website states that,

Mahouts were forced to take their elephants onto city streets to beg by selling food for the elephants and photographs with them. This is dangerous for the elephants as living and working within a city and its

pollution causes respiratory problems, there are also dangers from traffic. Some mahouts will also feed their elephants amphetamines to make them work longer hours and there is not adequate food or grazing ground within a city, forcing the elephants to live under bridges and beside busy roads... [Also, many elephant trekking and rides camps,] overwork the elephants offering rides and treks all day long in intense heat, allowing the elephants insufficient time to eat and drink - an elephant eats 200kg of food per day. It takes a long time to do that! The elephants also have to wear their 'tourist chairs' all day which can damage their spine (Go Differently Ltd, 2008c).

However, alongside such expressed concern in the said sources, readers (and hence potential tourists) are often encouraged to see or engage with elephants as a key attraction in Thailand, albeit typically with what is judged and depicted as more responsible companies or organizations. Looking again at *The Rough Guide to Thailand*, tourists are encouraged to visit

The Thai Elephant Conservation Centre... the most authentic and worthwhile place in Thailand to see elephants displaying their skills. Entertaining shows put the elephants through their paces, with plenty of loud trumpeting for their audience. After some photogenic bathing, they walk together in formation and go through a routine of pushing and dragging logs, then proceed to paint pictures and play custom-made instruments. You can feed them bananas and sugarcane after the show, and if you are impressed by their art or music you can buy a freshly painted picture or a CD by the Thai Elephant Orchestra, as well as souvenirs such as cards made from elephant-dung paper... By promoting ecotourism the centre is providing employment for the elephants and enabling Thai people to continue their historically fond relationship with these animals. (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 365).

Much like works pushing for a postcolonial understanding of responsibilities (see Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Noxolo, 2009; Noxolo et al., 2011; Raghuram et al., 2009) differing opinions often exist towards whether it is considered ethical to have shows where elephants entertain tourists through painting or playing musical instruments, while my fieldwork in Thailand revealed that Go Differently's Elephant Mahout Project is indeed based within an elephant camp where tourists do come for rides using the criticized 'tourist chairs' after all.



**Plate 5.5: Elephant Riding in a responsible holiday in Thailand**

Source: <http://www.responsibletravel.com/holiday/1794/thailand-holiday-northern-mountains-southern-beaches>

In another example, Plate 5.5 shows a typical image advertising a responsible holiday in Thailand with elephants, and at one glance, it is almost impossible to differentiate this from other elephant treks the same sources would criticize for ill-treating elephants. What can be observed here is that varying ideals and standards exist in what is considered responsible or ethical, whether between or within sources, and at times sources examined are also conscious of such discrepancies. In some cases, it is explicitly stated that the situation is far from ideal, and instead of upholding somewhat romantic visions, what is achieved through tourism is indeed a best-case scenario amongst many practical constraints. For example, *Clean Breaks* relates that,

While most people would prefer that these creatures were truly wild, for two-thirds of the three thousand Asian elephants left this isn't currently feasible: they have worked in the logging or tourism industries all their lives and wouldn't survive independently (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 300).

*Discover Thailand* adds that,

The history of elephants and people living and working together spans 5000 years. We work to preserve this history by training the elephants in the old tradition (as military machines) and the mahouts as proud elite warriors. Elephants need to work and be productive to keep them stimulated in captivity... If it was not for the tourists supporting elephants, there would not be any left in Thailand (Williams et al., 2010: 127).

In other cases however, the issue of whether domesticating elephants is ethical or not is often swept aside (see Section 7.4 for further discussion), while guidebooks and responsible tours recommend numerous tours and treks where one can have a close encounter with elephants – all of which feature elephants in some form of captivity (see, Go Differently Ltd, 2008c; Gray and Ridout, 1992: 215; Responsibletravel.com; Responsibletravel.com; Ridout and Gray, 2009: 365; Shalgosky, 2008: 156; Williams et al., 2010: 28).

## 5.6 Rectifying irresponsibility

At the same time, what one ought to be responsible for is also positioned around how tourism and tourists can rectify ‘irresponsibility’ observed on the ground. In many instances amongst sources examined, especially in guidebooks, it can be observed that tourism is often blamed for causing all sorts of problems. For example, *The Rough Guide to Thailand* described the situation in Koh Samui in Thailand as a double-edged sword, as

development behind the beaches – which has brought islanders far greater prosperity than the crop could ever provide – speeds along in a messy, haphazard fashion with little concern for the environment. At least there’s a local by-law limiting new construction to the height of a coconut palm (usually about three storeys), though this has not deterred either the luxury hotel groups or the real-estate developers who have recently been throwing up estates of second homes for Thais and foreigners (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 592-593).

Here, as in many examples scattered throughout sources examined, “luxury hotel groups or the real estate developers” are pictured as sinister businessmen, seeking profit and hence development at the expense of and without concern for laws that protect the environment. Indeed, the local by-law itself is described as a reaction to all sorts of irresponsible practices that are already damaging aspects of the destination. In another example, *Rough Guide to a Better World*, the ills of tourism (despite economic gains) are highlighted again:

while this staggering growth of tourism has expanded our holiday options and boosted revenue, investment and jobs, it has also become a focus for concern – particularly in relation to developing countries. The economic prosperity that tourism brings to these destinations can be cancelled out by its impact on the environment and local communities. Fragile coastal ecosystems are creaking under the strain of mass hotel complexes, local water supplies are drying up through over-demand, and ancestral homes are vanishing to make way for tourism development. All of this means that

the type of holiday we choose and what we do while on holiday is becoming important, not just for safeguarding our own enjoyment but for the future prosperity of the destinations themselves – the very places we so love to visit (Wroe and Doney, 2004: 76).

Set within such rhetoric then is the causal network of responsibilities as suggested in the literature on geographies of responsibility (England, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004, 2005; Popke, 2003) – where the view is that although as an individual, you may not have been the one whose immediate actions resulted in the ‘irresponsible’ development in tourism, the fact that you are now a tourist and hence dependent on the larger networks of production and labour in the tourism implicates you in aspects of the industry that is considered less desirable. This indeed is the case whether one is referring to the exploitation of environments or ‘locals’ as discussed in earlier sections, but is all the more apparent when guidebooks give specific instruction on what are some of the don’ts when it comes to responsible behaviour as a tourist. The general sense is that irresponsibility caused by the tourism industry, should be rectified by efforts from the tourism industry, while irresponsible practices should gradually become a thing of the past as tourism today strives to become responsible.

For the sake of discussion, this section looks only at three selected issues that are most typically observed in Thailand’s context (in addition to those discussed above) – namely the sex industry, usage of illegal drugs, and overdevelopment (and its accompanying ills), and tourism’s role in creating such problems and its bid to rectify them. It is also useful to note that material discussed in this section is drawn solely from travel guidebooks as similar themes are notably lacking in the websites examined. This is not to say that there are no websites that discuss such subjects, but rather reveals the bias in websites chosen for analysis – these were all websites of companies marketing their tours or hotels, and perhaps what my friend, Xinyi Liang (then a travel content writer in Exotissimo Travel) said in passing could be reflective of why there is such a gap:

tour companies will never tell you not to go somewhere. We only tell people what is good or better and where you should spend your money. If you read between the lines, sometimes some places and things are missing – those are the not that great parts. But we wouldn’t write it in the website for sure! (interview, 16 December 2009).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the view that marketing material had to report only “what is good or better” though, is itself worthy of a lengthy discussion we do not have the space to go into here.

Even within guidebooks, it should be noted that the stance on the issues discussed can be differentiated from what was put forth as an imperative for tourist/tourism to respond to and be(come) responsible discussed in sections 5.4 and 5.5. Rather, most of what is quoted in the next sections tend to be situated within guidebooks' segments on general information about Thailand, or special boxes as a word of caution, or carry a tone of what tourists should avoid in Thailand, rather than the proactive encouragement to tourists to take up responsible options in tours, destinations, and hotels.

### **5.6.1 Sex industry**

References to the sex industry in Thailand are often made in disparaging terms, with typical descriptions of the girls as "tawdry" or "lifeless" (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 169-170), or destinations with sex tourism easily available like Pattaya as "the epitome of exploitative tourism gone mad" (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 435) or as "the once infamous red-light capital of Thailand, promiscuous Pattaya invites adulation as much as disdain with the dubious flacon of some of its late-night shenanigans" (Shalgosky, 2008: 10), and Bangkok as the "sin capital of Asia" (Shalgosky, 2008: 146).

This however, was not always the case, and as recently as 1994, *Frommer's Comprehensive Travel Guide Thailand* showed an uneasy acceptance towards tourists who may indeed be interested in engaging the services of commercial sex workers, describing the situation as follows: "just as the film *Deep Throat* made it acceptable for 'nice' people to go to porno movies, so has Patpong's Asian mystique and anything-goes sexuality become a standard stop on the 'Bangkok By Night' bus tours" (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 122). The same guidebook also lists "one night in Patpong's sex clubs, cabarets, massage parlours, and bustling Night Market for unrivalled entertainment and shopping bargains" (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 38) in its section on "What's so special about Bangkok". It also provides a section on "Massage Parlours/Adult Entertainment", which reads:

Bangkok has hundreds of "modern" or "physical" massage parlours, which are heavily advertised, and offer something not meant to relax your limbs. Physical massage usually involves the masseuse using her entire body, thoroughly oiled to massage the customer, a "body-body" massage. If one wishes, a "sandwich," with two masseuses, can also be ordered. Nearly all massage parlours are organized along the same lines. Guests enter the lobby where there is a coffee shop/bar and several waiting rooms where young Thai women wearing numbers pinned to their blouses sit on

bleachers. Guests examine the women through a window and select their masseuse. Both guest and masseuse take a room in the building and typically spend between one and two hours on a massage. Rates for physical massage start at about 500B (US\$20) (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 127).

A look at current day guidebooks however, show a clear and outward disapproval towards tourists engaging in commercial sex in Thailand, and *The Rough Guide to Thailand* clearly states its position: “As with the straight sex scene, we do not list commercial gay sex bars in the guide” (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 77). While this research does not commit to a judgment of whether sex tourism is morally responsible or not,<sup>40</sup> what we can observe is that what constitutes responsibilities can and does often vary across sources, and also over time.

At times, what is not said also clearly shows a guidebook’s inclinations. In *Discover Thailand’s* case, the entire guidebook does not mention Pattaya or Patpong in Bangkok even though they are popular destinations for tourists, and does not make any reference to sex tourism in Thailand (Williams et al., 2010). While I am unable to verify this with authors of the guidebook, it seems very possible that such destinations were excluded precisely because both are places well-known to cater to commercial sex seekers (both tourists and locals). Indeed, as will be discussed in 6.2.3, an interview with managers at Exotissimo highlights their company’s policy of not organizing tours to Pattaya because they do not wish to support the commercial sex industry prevalent there.

In *The Rough Guide to Thailand* and *Frommer’s Thailand* that do elaborate on places like Pattaya and Patpong however, additional notes detailing the plight of sex workers or the dangers of engaging in commercial sex in Thailand (especially with minors) accompany

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<sup>40</sup> On a personal level, I do feel that the commercialized sex industry is a moral vice – I do not quite believe in the idea of placing a monetary value on sex and selling it as if it is a commodity. On the other hand, my time in Thailand has made me realize that as an industry so entrenched in the country, it is difficult to ignore the multifarious aspects of what the sex industry means to the people involved in Thailand. While there are of course some sex workers who are under aged, trafficked or forced into the profession, there are also a significant majority who choose to work in the sex industry. The question of respect for individual freewill thus complicates matters, and at the same time, I have personally wondered if the economic and social impacts would necessarily be positive if there was no commercialized sex industry to begin with. As such, a careful non-judgment on my part is deliberately held in what is discussed here, in section 6.2.3 and also in the related concerns of sexual relationships between tourists and mahouts as discussed in section 7.3. These sections therefore discuss others’ representations on the issue, while refraining from concluding whether these constitute moral right or wrong (if there is such a thing as moral right or wrong in the first place).

the write ups. *Rough Guide to Thailand* for example refers the women working in go-go bars and “bar-beers” as

economic refugees, they’re easily drawn into an industry in which they can make in a single night what it takes a month to earn in the rice fields. Many women from rural communities opt for a couple of lucrative years in the sex bars to help pay off family debts and improve the living conditions of parents stuck in the poverty trap... [and] often endure exploitation and violence from pimps and customers... (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 168).

Underlying such discourse is the moralizing against any form of engagement with sex workers, and a seeming attempt to correct misjudgements and ignorance towards sex workers:

It is a sorely misplaced myth to believe that CSW [commercial sex workers] live a good life of fun and freedom. Addiction to drugs, or physical abuse is commonplace. Rape is even more frequent. Girls contract STDs or fall pregnant, and scores of unwanted children – many with HIV – are dumped on orphanages. Poor regulations and scheming between gangs and police do nothing to stop this. Though legislation coyly prohibits full nudity in most go-go bars, it just means the illegal backroom deals, kidnappings, rape, and the enslavement of children carry on behind closed doors, funded by the profits paid by the brothel’s ignorant clientele (Shalgosky, 2008: 34).

In another snippet presented below, having sex with a prepubescent virgin is questioned, as the plights of child prostitutes are highlighted:

While most women enter the racket presumably knowing at least something of what lies ahead, younger girls definitely do not. Child prostitution is rife: an estimated ten percent of prostitutes are under fourteen, some no older than nine. They are valuable property: in the teahouses of Chinatown, a prepubescent virgin can be rented to her first customer for B5000, as sex with someone so young is believed to have rejuvenating properties. Most child prostitutes have been sold by parents as bonded slaves to pimps or agents, and are kept locked up until they have fully repaid the money given to their parents, which may take two or more years (Gray and Ridout, 1992: 168).

Almost as if presenting the plight of commercial sex workers may not be a strong enough deterrent to potential tourists, various dangers and warnings such as the risk of HIV/AIDS, severe criminal prosecution towards those are caught having sex with a prostitute below the age of 18, or anecdotes of customers getting ripped off or robbed are also included:

If you choose to support prostitution, you are not only breaking the law, but you are also supporting the trafficking and abuse of women and men, including minors. You are putting your own life at risk from STDs and perpetuating a trade that ruins lives. It's not all fair play either: Numerous cases are known where tourists have been drugged in their hotel rooms by their sleeping partner. If they are lucky, they awake 2 days later to find all their valuables gone. There are a shocking number of stories about Western travellers found dead after a liaison with a CSW, but rarely will the newspapers report the full details. Exercise caution in your dealings with any stranger. If in spite of all these warnings, you decide to use the services of Thailand's CSWs, take proper precautions; carry condoms at all times, and check the person's ID. If you are in any doubt, walk away – it could save your life (Shalgosky, 2008: 34).

In these respects then, (contemporary) guidebooks' position towards tourism and the sex industry goes beyond what 'moral risks' a typical consumer faces – tourists who do engage in commercial sex workers are not just implicated in the reproduction of harm, but are considered to be the cause itself – whether this harm was deemed to be towards women, rural communities, prepubescent children, or to themselves. The ways in which awareness on the part of the tourists is deemed to change actions and hence reduce demand is again prevalent within such discourse, and little is mentioned about what can be done or is already in place to tackle the issues of prostitution in Thailand.

### 5.6.2 *Drugs*

In a similar manner, older guidebooks suggest an uneasy truce between drug use and tourism. For example, Lonely Planet's *Thailand. A Travel Survival Kit* describes the charms of hill tribe treks from Chiang Mai as an opportunity to spend "the night in rustic surroundings, [and] perhaps share some opium with the villagers" (Cummings, 1984: 123), while *Thailand. The Rough Guide* and *Frommer's Comprehensive Travel Guide Thailand* both elaborate on the scale and financial perks of growing opium poppy for local farmers:

For the hill farmers, the attractions of the opium poppy are difficult to resist. It's an easy crop to grow, even on the most barren land; it's a highly productive plant, with each flower pod being tapped several times for its sap; and it yields a high value for a small volume – around B500 per kilo at source. Refined into heroin and transported to the US – the world's biggest market – the value of the powder is as much as 10,000 times greater (Gray and Ridout, 1992: 188).

Each February, after the dry-season harvest, mule caravans transport poppy crops from the mountains to heroin factories in the Golden

Triangle; the annual yield of 4,000 tons represents 50% of the heroin sold in the United States (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 367).

A comparison with today's guidebooks show, a clear shift in stance, with warnings and dangers against drug use by tourists accompanying sections about destinations like the Golden Triangle in Northern Thailand that is well-known for opium poppy growing. For example, *The Rough Guide to Thailand* states that,

Drug-smuggling carries a maximum penalty in Thailand of death and dealing drugs will get you anything from four years to life in a Thai prison, penalties depend on the drug and the amount involved. Travellers caught with even the smallest amount of drugs at airports and international borders are prosecuted for trafficking and no one charged with trafficking offences gets bail... Despite occasional royal pardons, don't expect special treatment as a *farang* [white foreigner]... The police actively look for tourists doing drugs, reportedly searching people regularly and randomly on Thanon Khao San, for example. They have the power to order a urine test if they have reasonable grounds for suspicion, and even a positive result for marijuana consumption could lead to a year's imprisonment (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 63).

While *Frommer's Thailand* gives further stern warnings to tourists:

Thailand can offer illicit temptations that may seem harmless to naïve travellers. Yet the Thai government has zero tolerance of drug trafficking and use. Many people who think they are being offered a casual puff on a joint don't realize they are being set up; every year a few will end up never leaving the kingdom, serving a life sentence in a Thai jail cell." (Shalgosky, 2008: 36).

Narcotic use is illegal and the Thai government imposes a ruthless, zero-tolerance policy on drug use. Trek guides, many of whom are addicted to opium, are tested, and tour operators run the risk of being shut down if found promoting drug use on their treks. Drug dealers and addicts are often executed. Foreigners, if they're lucky, merely go to prison for life (Shalgosky, 2008: 303).

Indeed, as can be observed in these snippets from guidebooks, the change is in line with a toughening of policing and prosecution of drug use in Thailand in general. This example again shows how notions of what is considered responsible behaviour or not (in tourism and beyond) is often subject to greater changes of perceptions of problems and moral responsibility both within Thailand and internationally. However, as in the case of sex tourism, guidebooks examined do little to challenge for example why exactly drug use is irresponsible, whether there is for example, a difference between heroin and opium (except in the price they can fetch), and why there are now such strict laws and penalties

for drug abuse and trafficking as compared to the past. Instead, guidebooks only provide warning don'ts, without substantially discussing what is so irresponsible about illegal drug use.

### 5.6.3 Overdevelopment

Finally, overdevelopment and its associated (social and environmental) ills is and has always been described as the bane of tourism (see Chapter Three). The numerous examples given within sources of 'once pristine' destinations that have since become degraded through poorly managed and unsustainable development clearly show the concern with overdevelopment. Indeed, it seems that the majority of mature and popular destinations in Thailand are labelled as such, as seen in the following accounts:

In Thailand, ecological ignorance, along with rabid commercial gain, poor or little-enforced regulation, and corruption has seriously impacted hitherto unspoiled places. The once charming city centre of *Chiang Mai* suffers from not just acute pollution, but also seasonal flooding and deadly smoke haze in the dry season. On the southern coast and on resort islands, luxury villa and condominium developments are devouring the last of the prime beachfront land. As a result, places like *Koh Samui* are facing problems with water shortages, trash disposal, and wastewater. Thankfully, some authorities are taking eco-friendly measures – *Krabi* province has banned noisy jet skis, for instance, and *Pattaya* is taking small steps to overcome unregulated construction (Shalgosky, 2008: 1, my emphasis).

[in *Phuket*] a congestion of high-rise hotels and souvenir shops disfigures the beachfront Thavee Wong Road and pollution is becoming a problem as the big hotels persist in dumping their sewage straight into the sea (Gray and Ridout, 1992: 380, my emphasis).

*Ko Phangan [at Koh Samui]*... rather than paradise, it typifies an environmental nightmare of the nineties... On the east side of Haad Rin there is one of the most beautiful white powder beaches, arched in a gentle cove enclosed by rocky cliffs, that we've ever seen. It's covered with garbage. Plastic bags and discarded thongs, water bottles, dead coconut shells, food packaging, cigarette butts and boxes, plant matter, and myriad other fly-encrusted items are washed up from litter-filled sea or tossed wholesale from the trash collection, and for generations (before the age of plastic) the Gulf of Siam was counted on to absorb all the islanders' waste (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 191, my emphasis).

Tourism boomed in the 1980s and unchecked resort development [in *Pattaya*] was exacerbated by a lack of tourism infrastructure upgrades - so much so that beaches became flooded with raw sewage. Recent years have seen a few civil projects to clean up the bay area with some success, but environmental work is still needed to improve water quality (Shalgosky, 2008: 151-152, my emphasis).

These quotes from guidebooks show yet again several points already brought up earlier in this chapter – the passive, ignorant or downright irresponsible local who has caused or at least condoned the ills of overdevelopment; and also the binary placed between what are here considered ‘irresponsible places’ (Phuket, Pattaya, Koh Samui and so on) that one ought to avoid, and the alternative (more) responsible places one should visit (Krabi). Again, newer, less developed, and more untouched places are often suggested –

If you’re had enough of Thailand’s many overdeveloped beach areas, the small town and beaches near *Prachuap Khiri Khan* might just be the answer. Some of the kindest people in Thailand live here, the beaches are lovely and little-used, and the town begs a wander... (Shalgosky, 2008: 182, my emphasis).

The town beach, along *Pattaya Beach Road*, is polluted and not recommended for swimming... If you are serious about finding a really great beach, move on to nearby *Ko Samet*; but for convenience, *Jomtien* is the best in the area (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 146, my emphasis).

A closer look at these quotations however shows that little is said about what tourists can do to rectify such problems caused by overdevelopment, other than suggestions to avoid these unpleasant destinations. The actors mentioned remain limited to “luxury villa and condominium” developers, “high-rise hotels and souvenir shops”, “islanders” (one has to wonder what exactly the “islanders” are. Tourists? Locals? Hotel developers?), or again a vague reference to “tourism” and “unchecked resort development”. Unlike earlier sections on going green and local, the agency of tourists is hardly presented when guidebooks talk about rectifying the problems of overdevelopment, and this seems odd when compared to how tourists as ethical consumers are often put at the forefront of all sorts of responsibilities. Indeed, it is almost as if the tourist now disappears under the broader guise of “tourism” or “garbage” found in beaches, and that for example in the case of poor waste management, only the hotel developer’s bad practices are held responsible, whereas the massive numbers of tourists that created the waste that needs to be managed falls out of the picture.

At the same time, as section 5.5.1 had discussed, the irony of this situation is that instead of correcting the problems of overdevelopment, guidebooks are encouraging tourists to go “off the beaten track” and this may in turn result in exactly what they are criticizing. For example, the 1992 edition of *Thailand. The Rough Guide* described Ko Phi Phi as “encircled by water so clear you can see almost to the sea bed from the surface... Ko Phi

Phi Leh, whose sheer cliff faces get national marine park protection, on account of the lucrative birds' nest business" (Gray and Ridout, 1992:395). In the later edition, it was said that "by the early 1990s, Phi Phi's... beaches began to lose their looks under the weight of unrestricted development and non-existent infrastructure... floundering under unregulated, unsightly and unsustainable development" (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 739). While sources examined mostly criticize overdevelopment and positions it as tourism's responsibility to rectify (many examples also stated in section 5.5), there exists an inherent and often unsaid perception that tourism development will lead to some sort of degradation at the very least, as can be seen in the following example:

For years it [Koh Chang] was purely a foreign backpacker and Thai weekend getaway, but now, with the opening of Amari Emerald Cove in 2005, a more upscale international clientele is visiting. A luxury marina and condominium complex at Klong Son Bay is planned, a new Dusit Princess resort opened in late 2007, and a super deluxe Soneva Kiri will open on isolated Koh Kood in 2008. All are bound to bring more visitors, so the environmental impact on the waste disposal system and dry-season water supply is a concern (Shalgosky, 2008: 165).

In this situation then, what is observed within sources is a paradoxical love-hate relationship between tourism and responsibility – on one hand, guidebooks and websites mostly seem aware of and present a vision of tourism and tourists actively addressing a range of (ir)responsibilities which tourism brings, whether this is towards the local, the green and wild, or in terms of the problems created and sustained by tourism in Thailand. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter Six using interviews with tour companies and hotels, many times what is deemed as corporate responsibility often includes notions of economic development, where companies seek to 'open up' new destinations in otherwise rural and poor communities. On the other hand, the age-old notion that tourists are bound to negatively impact the environment and at times also create all sorts of social problems, continues to surface. And indeed all of these messages are embedded within such sources – travel guidebooks, or hotel and tour company websites – all of which aim to and whose profits depend on attracting more people to travel and tour in featured destinations. Their vested interest in presenting an image that reflects their fulfilment of popularly imagined responsibilities should therefore be taken into account, and what is discussed hence provides a basis for what is actually observed on the ground as will be detailed in Chapters six and seven.

## 5.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter has highlighted several key observations when responsibilities in tourism are discussed in popular media. As the typical first (formal) points of contact/information for many individual tourists<sup>41</sup>, guidebooks and popular websites have a potentially large role to play in governing and regulating ideas of responsibility and irresponsibility within the tourism context. This means that they are possibly in a position to set the expectations and agendas of tourists (or simply readers of the guidebooks or websites), and become key resources in instructing potential tourists on the do's and don'ts of how to behave when on holiday. These can sometimes be directly related to responsibilities (for example, guidebooks may instruct its readers on the ills of illegal drug use in Thailand), but in numerous other instances, they could very well be cultivating a general sense of what was considered to be a normative behaviour of tourists – for example, through directing the attention and gaze of their readers towards what is pictured as attractive destinations and enjoyable experiences, and with clear (and sometimes authoritative) suggestions for readers to replicate such routes, itineraries, and activities in their own holidays. Guidebooks and websites therefore have a potential ability to govern behaviours of tourists (that do read these sources) in general, and an extension of this means that they can also have an impact on regulating ideas and behaviours about responsibility and irresponsibility in tourism. As discussed in this chapter then, we can observe that several themes about responsibilities recur whether in Thailand's context or beyond – namely 'going local', environmental concerns towards the 'green and wild', or rectifying irresponsibility brought about by tourism. Guidebooks and websites reviewed are therefore actively suggesting that being responsible as a tourist or tourism corporation in Thailand (or elsewhere) meant addressing one or more of the issues related to such themes.

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that guidebooks and websites are here considered only to be first *formal* points of contact for *individual* tourists. Most tourists should have encountered their destinations (e.g. Thailand) or activities (e.g. backpacking) long before they pick up a guidebook or read a website (e.g. through popular media representations or personal connections). However, it is typically only when a tourist decides to travel to a certain destination, where he or she will begin the process of formally collecting and collating information about the destination or activity to be pursued through reading guidebooks and websites. On the other hand, for tourists who travel with tour groups, there is also a good possibility that they do not refer to any guidebook or websites at all prior to and in preparation for their holidays.

The question, however, is whether readers do respond to these sources. Preliminary research as discussed in the next two chapters suggests that respondents do talk about whether something or somewhere was considered responsible or not according to what they have read online and on guidebooks. At times, certain actions (for example, not travelling to Myanmar because of its supposed oppressive political regime) are justified based on what respondents read in such sources. However, all sorts of other subjectivities are often found embedded within the anecdotes shared in this research – for example, respondents often have existing opinions about what to do to be respectful to locals, and these are not necessarily informed by guidebooks or websites (even though guidebooks and websites can possibly serve to reinforce or correct opinions). Also, as will be discussed in Chapter Six, practices of responsibility are often set within all sorts of mundane everyday occurrences, and perhaps tourists may not even be entirely aware that they are making decisions regarding responsibilities when they do so. Sources studied in this chapter therefore have the potential and obviously endeavour (to varying degrees) to promote a style of travel that is responsible, but have no means of controlling whether readers respond to their calls. Indeed, as Dean suggests, “regimes of government do not *determine* forms of subjectivity. They elicit, promote, facilitate, foster, and attribute various capacities, qualities and statuses to particular agents” (1999: 32, original emphasis, see also Rose et al., 2006). The lack of a calculative feedback mechanism like those pursued in typical ethical consumerism campaigns further add to the ambiguity about the role of guidebooks and websites in governing and regulating tourists’ ideas and performances of responsibility. Barnett et al. for example, highlights that ethical consumerism

campaigns to raise awareness and encourage people to exercise consumer choice ‘ethically’ lead to a disparate set of purchasing acts that are classified, counted and represented in new ways in the effort to alter retailing practices, and procurement and supply policies. In so far as these alterations take place, they in turn facilitate further acts of ‘ethical’ purchasing by anonymous consumers, which are classified and counted again in new rounds of surveying (2011: 50).

In comparison, apart from *The Rough Guide to a Better World*, *Clean Breaks*, and *Responsibletravel.com* that focuses its attention especially on responsibilities, sources examined in this chapter can hardly be claimed as active and broad-based campaigns that seeks to change tourists’ behaviours. Instead, notions of ethics and responsibilities are

simply subsumed as one part of many sections of the writing presented. Unlike typical ethical consumerism campaigns then, these sources do not seek to classify, count or represent whether their readers alter their tourism practices through all sorts of surveys. The exception here is perhaps *Responsibletravel.com* – set up specifically because its founders believed that “change in tourism would be slow until there was a proven demand for more responsible holidays, and that this depended on tourists being easily able to find and buy this type of holiday”, the website records and tracks such statistics, and as of April 2011, boasts having launched almost 4,000 holidays and sold over US\$100 million of responsible holidays in its ten years of operation. It also has a presence on popular social media platforms like Facebook (12,381 likes) and Twitter (4,967 followers), and these statistics are utilised in emphasising the growing demand and interest in responsible tourism in manners similar to ethical consumerism campaigns. However, “looking at *how* calculative technologies enable new ways of acting on individuals suggests that the aim is not to generate specific subjective identifications, but is rather to enable various sorts of acts” (Barnett et al., 2011:50), and *Responsibletravel.com* and other sources here examined also work towards enabling various sorts of acts rather than changing subjective identifications.

For example, abstract ideals underlying such guidelines are typically left unmentioned. While many sources in the popular media rush into providing guidelines on how to be responsible, oftentimes little consideration is presented on what exactly responsibility is and why this is so. For example, why exactly is ‘going local’ necessarily more responsible (when it may indeed essentialize the ‘local’ as passive or exotic)? Should the focus on elephants consider if they are wild or domesticated? And is engaging in the commercial sex industry always immoral and hence irresponsible, and would Thailand be a better place if prostitution ceased to exist? And indeed, what do Thais themselves do in terms of responsibilities? Considering the strong notion of Buddhist merit making in Thailand, it seems strangely lacking that there are so few references to what Thais themselves do to address issues and concerns in tourism.

At the same time, inherent in many quotes brought up in this chapter, is the perception and presentation that it is indeed “easy being green [or responsible]” (Shalgosky, 2008: 41), or as *Clean Breaks* puts it,

Whether you go to CAT [Centre for Alternative Technology, Wales] for a week-long education course, an intensive weekend or just to stroll about for an afternoon, it's likely you'll leave, scratching you head, thinking "I could do that" (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 21).

Sources examined position their readers (and potential tourists) as individuals who are ready and willing to make the change to become more responsible in their travels, and seem to assume that with just a few guidelines, instructions, special mention, or case boxes in guidebooks and websites, potential tourists will then be armed with enough information to now make a difference, veer away from irresponsible practices in tourism, or spot such irresponsibility in tourism and hence bring about changes in the industry. This is much like what has also been observed in studies on ethical consumption, where 'educating' the public appears to be the key objective. This however, reinforces Barnett and Land's (2007) criticism towards such unacknowledged moralism both in works in geography and ethical consumer campaigns (see also Barnett et al., 2011). As the next chapter will highlight, knowledge or awareness may not necessary result in attendant action due to all sorts of practical limitations and constraints.

Discussions in this chapter, especially with regards for example to tourism and the sex industry and drug use, also highlight the changing nature of what is considered responsible or not, in what is otherwise often thought of and presented as stagnant and evergreen responsibilities based on moral values. This reflects the need for a postcolonial understanding towards responsibility, where rather than assuming that there is a universally accepted norm towards what is considered moral or not, there is a need instead to have a conscious understanding that ideals of responsibilities vary across time and space (see Noxolo et al., 2011; Raghuram et al., 2009). The medium that potential tourists are now using to seek out information on destinations is also changing, with newer guidebooks often giving many more details than older editions, while platforms like travel fora and social media are increasingly important in shaping one's ideas towards destinations and issues of responsibilities in tourism. This study therefore provides a timely investigation on discourses of responsibility within tourism, and further research incorporating newer (and often more interactive) media sources, as well as how tourists and other actors involved use such sources on the ground can very possibly broaden findings that will be useful in deconstructing what and how responsibilities in tourism is positioned.

This chapter therefore highlights that sources examined hold the position of being key resources and references in instructing potential tourists on the do's and don'ts of responsible practices when on holiday, while also reproducing notions of responsibilities that are already in existence on the ground. So while they are not directly producing any real practices of responsibilities, they provide a separate sphere in which responsibilities can be talked about, negotiated and discussed, which then has the potential of becoming actualized by those who read such sources. What this chapter thus does, is to take one step back from the tourism destination, and examine how potential tourists' perceptions of responsibility are formed through what is represented in guidebooks and websites. The next two chapters then examine how such notions of responsibility carry themselves in the messy reality of tourism destinations.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

# Doing Responsibilities: Practices in Tourism

## **6. Doing Responsibilities: Practices in Tourism**

### **6.1 Preamble**

I have seen some tour operator that they try to distribute some income, like 10%, like the one in Chiang Mai to distribute to the local. And also I have seen some fake travel agent who said that they are going to contribute income, but they didn't... They haven't do anything, but they advertise that they help the local. Because when you say something it's hard to know that you really do, everybody can say yes our company do like this and that, especially when they get the customer from the internet, how do you know that this company is doing really good? (Khun Eng, Let's Tour Bangkok, interview, 19 Jan 2010).

How do we tell if responsible tourism is indeed responsible? As what Khun Eng, a Thai owner of a local tour company here suggests, the ambiguities surrounding responsible tourism often make it difficult to figure out whether what is promised as responsible or sustainable practices are indeed carried out in reality. If this is the case for someone experienced and working in the tourism industry, it is probably safe to assume that a lay tourist or consumer will likely be unable to judge on the matter (even as many continue to make and firmly believe in their own personal judgments). It is indeed such ambiguities that this chapter seeks to illuminate. Building on the discourses and perceptions of responsibilities discussed in Chapter Five, this chapter suggests that it is important to go beyond talking about responsibilities, and instead interrogate aspects of doing responsibilities - namely what are actually practised and performed in the name of responsibility in tourism. What sorts of 'real' concerns do people on the ground express? And what happens when conflicting notions of responsibilities arise?

Particular focus is given to corporations' and tourists' performances of responsibilities in this chapter, while noting that no matter whether it is the corporation or the tourist, responsibilities are indeed performed by people – senior management to operation staff in corporations, tour guides, tourists, and locals. While corporations form a collective for doing responsibilities, each and every act of responsibility is eventually enacted through the people involved. Indeed, it ought to be noted that the focus on corporations addresses a gap in empirical research where tourism development is often assumed to be largely the job of government and public policies (see, for example Edgell et al., 2008; Hall, 1994;

Hall and Jenkins, 1995; Telfer, 2002) while works on responsibility or sustainability in tourism have tended to be cast in terms of tourists or locals involved. This chapter therefore draws on both practices by corporations and tourists (with noted focus on the former) in a bid to address this empirical gap, and will discuss various issues in the coming sections, including what is actually done on the ground (section 6.2), what sorts of practical concerns companies and tourists have (section 6.3), the tendency to become ‘hyper-responsible’ (section 6.4), and what sorts of conflicting responsibilities there are and how these are negotiated on the ground (section 6.5). In these sections, views sourced from both corporations and tourists are presented alongside each other to achieve a balanced understanding of two of the various parties involved in the practices of responsibility, while acknowledging that the positions of each party can at times be aligned<sup>42</sup> and in others divergent.<sup>43</sup> What corporations and tourists do in destinations is also different. For example a tourist may stay in Four Seasons Resort Golden Triangle for only three nights, while operators and employees of the resort, while not completely immobile, are much more permanently located and committed within and towards particular destinations. How practices of responsibilities vary within such differing contexts are integrated within the discussions in this chapter. When applicable and as far as possible, views from each group of respondents is presented in each section while noting that these do not exist in a binary relationship.

Before going into the separate areas though, it is important to note that while Chapter Five highlighted a strong sense of a ‘responsibility imperative’ in guidebooks and websites, the situation appears to be slightly different on the ground amongst those interviewed. Many corporations interviewed did emphasize the need to incorporate sustainability and responsibility in their businesses. For example, Willem Niemeijer, Founder of Khiri Travel, elaborates that,

The one thing we look for... is doing social responsibility since we started our business in 1994. It was one of our founding philosophies, and it still is. So we’ve grown in that respect, we’ve seen that actually to it the right way you got to do it in a sustainable way, and we have to take the lead into many things, and that’s the main thing, is to get these projects, get them

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<sup>42</sup> For example, in their desire to have a ‘good’ tourism experience.

<sup>43</sup> For example, tourists may be concerned with managing limited budgets and spending less money, while tour companies and hotels profit from tourists spending more money.

up, give them a helping hand, to get well known and to be sustainable on their own, and obviously it is something that we will keep pushing, keep helping, but the best projects are the ones that take a life on their own, those are the best ones, that in itself is a challenge (interview, 11 Jan 10).

Thivagaran Kesavan, General Manager of Alila Cha Am, echoes such commitment,

It's also the Alila corporate policy, today we represent the community and the community represent us, and we are there to give back in terms of balance keepers, and we believe that as we go on to contribute in giving the satisfaction the value... We're very conscious of what we do, we're very conscious of not putting many things that are going to be abandoned, or are not going to be used. Most of our properties today are built with this concept (interview, 30 Jan 2010).

However, embedded in these quotes is also the fact that being responsible in travel businesses is a challenging process. While there are projects that “take a life on their own”, there will also always be those that prove to be unsuccessful, and indeed those that Kesavan does not want to abandon in the long run. This differs from what Chapter Five highlights in the discourses of responsibility, where responsibility is portrayed as crucial and imperative. It is often presented as evidently necessary for both tourists and tour-related companies to take on responsibilities, and the difficult step is assumed to be how to convince one of such a ‘responsibility imperative’. Once one is convinced, the next step of practising responsibility is often presented as simple and straightforward. However, companies quoted here suggest that despite their corporate and personal values and policies, taking on responsibilities in practice are a lot more tentative and exploratory. It is not so much the convincing or awareness that is lacking, but rather that the next step of practising responsibility presents numerous uncertainties and unknowns. Michael Holland, author of website *Thailand for Visitors*, adds,

The challenge I think for me has been partially... just sort of figuring out how to tell if something is or not [responsible]. There's also the issue of how to actually inform people about it so that they make an informed decision as opposed to maybe just getting turned off... so in some cases I just left things out (interview, 25 Jan 2010).

At times then, perhaps inaction may not necessarily imply an abdication of responsibilities, but instead, as in Holland's case, it may indeed be a reflection of much consideration towards what responsibility means, and how one's words and decisions can then impact peoples' actions (see Section 6.3: Realities of doing responsibilities for further discussion).

(Responsible) Tourists<sup>44</sup> interviewed also share similar uncertainties – Peter<sup>45</sup> elaborated that,

I would not easily define responsible tourism ‘cause it means different things to different people. In its most basic level is that you are not damaging the environment more than you have to I would say. I mean all tourism is damaging really, up to a point just ‘cause you have to fly there apart from anything else so there’s no such thing as fully responsible tourism but it’s all relative and erm this [the Elephant Mahout Project] I would say is certainly a lot more responsible than other holidays one could take, like skiing (interview, 19 Nov 2009).

This chapter therefore seeks to unpack such ambiguities and fluidities of responsibilities in practice. Also, it is important to note that ‘responsibilities in tourism’ as presented in this chapter and thesis represents what respondents deemed and expressed it to be, rather than what the author or prevailing classical moral reasoning argues it to be.

## **6.2 Responsibilities in practice**

As discussed in Chapter Five, one can often pursue responsibilities in their travels in various ‘ways’. This section is thus divided into subsections similar to Chapter Five so as to give an overview of what is actually done in the name of responsibilities. This section can therefore be read against Chapter Five to compare the differences between what is practised versus what are the discourses of responsibilities.

### **6.2.1 Going ‘local’**

Going ‘local’ as an aspect of responsibilities in tourism was clearly expressed amongst respondents interviewed for this research. Many tour-providing companies interviewed offered tours to ‘see’ locals, often in their homes. However, to respondents interviewed, going local seems more about providing incomes and employment opportunities, rather than seeking the ‘authentic local’ as discussed in section 5.4. For example, Exotissimo Travel created home stay tours to tsunami-struck destinations, and during a meeting, Hamish Keith, Managing Director of Exotissimo Thailand, elaborated his view on ‘going local’, saying that,

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<sup>44</sup> As detailed in Chapter Four, all tourists interviewed were participating in ‘volunteer tourism’ at the Elephant Mahout Project. As such, they may potentially exhibit better understanding towards responsibilities in tourism than the ‘average tourist’ as they represent what can be considered an already converted crowd towards responsible tourism.

<sup>45</sup> All respondents from the Elephant Mahout Project are quoted using pseudonyms.

I think that's important because then you're protecting, basically you are giving communities more, not reason to exist, but more of an opportunity to earn money which will give them a motivation to remain in the community, and most communities get broken down when the wage earners have to leave and make money in the city. This [tours to visit local people] gives people opportunity to make money because they are a community, and there's less chances that they will break down. But these, in visiting, in finding communities that are interesting for us... for example things like finding out or knowing of a mahout community in Surin that is working or rehabilitating elephants... [where] you can go and visit and learn about, that's interesting, that's life, that's what our clients is interested in discovering, it's this kind of things or other kinds of things to discover or be told about, things that exist out there can help us breathe life into these itineraries (interview, 17 Dec 2009).

In the same vein, a volunteer tourist, Lucy, elaborated what responsible tourism meant to her:

To me, I suppose it's respecting the country that you visit, feeling that you are contributing but by not just giving the money but by participating in what the country does, respecting the people and the laws I think and not trying to condone bad behaviour if you see it (interview, 11 Nov 2009).

Also, the Elephant Mahout Project's British<sup>46</sup> coordinator, Emma expressed the importance of going local as far as possible, saying that they are always

trying to keep money within the community... we have somebody on the camp that grows vegetables, so we'll try and buy vegetables from her, and even if we don't buy them from her we'll go to the local market and buy them and kind of a supermarket is absolute last last last resort for the things that we can't get anywhere else (interview, 16 Nov 2009).

Despite such stated commitment towards 'going local' though, what I observed throughout my time at the Elephant Mahout Project was that Lek and Eka, the Thai coordinators who were the ones in charge of cooking for tourists on weekdays, often frequented hypermarkets like Tesco Lotus to shop for groceries. This points out a clear problem - not so much regarding the honesty of what was said in interviews, but rather where each respondent's positioning comes from. For Emma, the "we" she was referring to meant herself and the mahout families in the camp. What she had not considered when answering this question was how tourists hosted and living at the Thai coordinators' homes were often brought along to supermarket shopping trips, and in this case one has

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<sup>46</sup> At the point of the interviews, the Elephant Mahout Project was jointly coordinated by a British lady and two Thai ladies. This is specified here because there were often divergent opinions between the British and Thai coordinators, many of which will be further discussed particularly in sections 7.3 and 7.4.

indeed to question – why then does going to a local market make one more responsible than buying groceries from a supermarket? While “trying to keep the money within the community” is often used as an easy answer, the Thai coordinator’s answer to why they shop at the supermarket was that things were much cheaper and hence it saves operating costs of the volunteer tourism project and therefore more profits can be channelled into the community, i.e. to keep the money within the community. Indeed, Meh, the mahout I was attached to, had regularly said that shopping in a supermarket saves money, but that she did not do so because their family’s motorbike has broken down (the supermarket is about 15 minutes’ drive from the camp) and they did not have enough savings to buy a new motorbike. Herein lies what Barnett et al. (2011) argue in their book, *Globalizing Responsibility*, that the act of consumption is often ingrained in ordinary practices of banal and everyday life, and that to understand ethical consumption (and in this thesis, CSR), one has to keep in mind the politics of this ordinariness (Hilton, 2007) –

it is not possible to understand the dynamics of ethical consumption initiatives, whether from the strategic perspectives of campaign organizations or from the perspective of the people they seek to enrol into their projects, without appreciating the mundane and ordinary dimensions of consumption (Barnett et al., 2011: 16).

Observations throughout this chapter point again and again towards the idea that when one (whether this is a tourist or representative from a corporation) makes all sorts of decisions relating to ethics and responsibility, classical moral reasoning, or indeed what underlying principles guide certain popular practices like “not buying from supermarkets” are often not at all at the forefront of respondents’ minds. Lek, for example, insisted that Emma does not go to the supermarket simply because she does not have her own car (she occasionally drives a shared car that is usually used to ferry tourists between the camp and their accommodations), and that when Emma craves for ‘English food’ like mashed potato, she will dutifully head to the supermarkets.

Beyond such aspects of ‘going local’ as presented in guidebooks and websites, interviewees also mentioned several aspects of responsibilities assumed by travel businesses, such as specific corporate social responsibility projects related to their business lines, charitable donations, as well as fair treatment towards employee and supplier welfare. A number of hotels interviewed, namely Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok, Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, Pathuwan Princess Hotel, and The Sukothai Bangkok

Hotel, also shared their participation in the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) initiated Youth Career Development Programme that provided vocational training and subsequent employment opportunities within the hospitality industry to disadvantaged young women. Sammy Carolus, Executive Assistant Manager of Marketing, at Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, for example, described the programme and their participation as,

like an internship, they coming as a trainee, so they learn many departments, so they clean rooms or then they personally grow. If they want to grow with the company and to stay, it's basically their call. But we give them the opportunity, so while you want to grow there is a lot more potential in the human resources, because hotel is about the people, yes technology it's important, but at the end of the day you expect service right, because we're in the service industry... It's a people industry, so that's why HR is the number one thing that we want to grow. How to educate, train, and develop the communities (interview, 14 Dec 2009).

Many respondents, echo this sense that the hospitality industry is a people industry and hence can most appropriately add value and achieve corporate social responsibility through providing opportunities to less-privileged locals, and especially youths. Philippe Le Bourhis, General Manager of Novotel Siam Square Bangkok, for example, affirms this, saying that as a group,

We [Novotel] focus on children worldwide, we focus on charity projects in children, 'cause there's a future. Because it's the future, well a lot of people need help and if we can change something it's easier to change the kids also we try to invite them inside the hotels, teach them, why not in Bangkok, in Jakarta, we had part of the city, we had a little school we were teaching them English, computer, so on and so on. Why not to have one day to train them inside the hotel, or to employ them? So that was the idea behind (interview, 15 Dec 2009).

Six Senses Evason Hua Hin Resort, on the other hand, discussed their support of a local project, named 'English for Youth Guides', where funding and expertise was given to train youths to become tour guides to a mangrove swamp area within the local community where the resort was situated. A highlight for the youths in this project then, was a short two night camp for participants in the resort, where they

stay in the resort for all youth guides. And they come and learn in the resort.. basically from the eco team.. and then [referring to photos from the camp] this activity manager, he explain like guest cultures... And everyone enjoy. And this is good feedback, because they [participants] are local people, and yet they not even know how the resort is if not for this

camp (interview, Srichan Monrakharom, CSR Representative, 31 Jan 2010).

In addition, while none of the volunteer tourists interviewed made direct donations to charitable organizations in Thailand and expressed misgivings or at least dilemmas on whether it was appropriate to make cash gifts to the locals they had come to know on their travels (see section 6.5.1) almost all companies interviewed talked about donations and philanthropic gifts made to charitable organizations, schools, and temples in Thailand. A number of companies interviewed have even gone further to set up specific foundations to manage such funding and gifts, namely Accor Group, Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, Exotissimo Travel, Khiri Travel, and Six Senses Resorts and Spa. Such aspects of responsibility in the travel industry are usually less mentioned within sources looked at in the previous chapter, possibly because of the nature of the selected sources targeting tourists. For example, if discourse analysis was done on travel companies' annual reports, it is likely that such aspects of corporate gifting may have been more apparent.

Finally, it is interesting to note that only one respondent, Luzi Matzig, chief executive officer (CEO) of Asian Trails Ltd shared the importance of ensuring fair treatment and remuneration to the company's employees and suppliers - an aspect of corporate social responsibility that is often mentioned in other industries, particularly in manufacturing and fair trade products. I am uncertain as to whether this failure of mention of fair employee and supplier treatment is due to respondents believing that this aspect is already well-addressed in their companies, or whether it is neglected as provision of responsible tourism tends to centre on catering to what tourists demand as 'responsibilities', and hence have typically focused on a particular segment of 'locals' who appear extremely poor and marginalized, rather than tour company employees and suppliers who usually earn higher incomes and are seen as relatively well to do in developing countries like Thailand.

### **6.2.2 *Saving the green and wild***

Again similar to sources examined in the previous chapter, another large area within which responsibilities tend to be positioned in tourism revolves around the 'green' and 'wild'. However, while tourists interviewed do typically identify where they deem to be 'green places' to visit, interviews with companies showed a larger focus towards how

they are incorporating 'responsible ideas' into management and daily operations. For example, several respondents, namely Dusit Thani Bangkok, Novotel Siam Square Bangkok (under Accor Group), and Six Senses Evason Hua Hin are properties certified under the Green Globe sustainability certification Programme,<sup>47</sup> while at the time of the interview, Alila Cha-Am shared that they were going through the certification process. Philippe Le Bourhis, General Manager of Novotel Siam Square Bangkok, for example explained what being certified Green Globe meant in practice:

It covers several areas like energy-saving, electricity, water, recycling water, and using clean energy, to controlling using gas and fuel. Controlling where the *energy* comes from, often we don't have much choice as it depends on the government. Then we have using less *chemicals*, controlling the use of chemicals, training, all the stocks of chemical should have labels what is dangerous what cannot be mixed together, we really have to control the chemicals. *Charity*, you need to have a social plan, helping some local communities, usually as Novotel and Accor we help poor children, we have a strategy to help underprivileged children. *Energy* is a big thing, energy it takes a lot of time and money actually, it is interesting actually because it sometimes requires a lot of investments, but there is also return on investments. We save energy, for example now we are spending 20 million baht here, and we require a lot of money to change our lift machine and boiler to have a more efficient system. So we save the money 5 to 10 year return on investment, with investments. Then we have invested in a lot of equipment in the past, we have heat pumps, hot water is mostly produced by the heat pumps, we have VSD to control the pumps, variable speed control, variable speed device. It is a machine that controls the heat pumps in order that the phase and it is quite complicated but the pump doesn't consume too much in balancing the phase it is an investment but it is saving also. Filters for the shower to reduce the *water* flow. Now we're doing renovations in the rooms, change toilets to a more efficient toilet system, also there is energy-saving, *water treatment*, *wastage*, that is part of the environmental commitment we have, we need to where the solid waste is going to, so it should be going to the proper, it should be recycled as much as possible, and whatever is left is supposed to be sent to an official landfill, not just the Riverside... And the water treatment, because it is the government they have nothing here, it is not like in Europe I'm not sure in Singapore, in Europe you don't even think it goes to the drain and then it goes to the city and the city treats the water. In Bangkok, like in Bali, we need to have our own water treatment, so it is quite expensive setup, a big setup, where we clear the waste in sedimentation tanks, yet on-site. And you have to treat by law; we had to treat the water to a certain level before we can release it (interview, 15 Dec 2009).

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.greenglobe.com>

As can be seen from this interview, the respondent was very hands-on with what needed to be done in line with the Green Globe and local law requirements, and being 'green' in practice often involves navigating around existing limitations – such as having to depend on energy sources (whether considered sustainable or not) and the absence of water treatment as determined by local municipal provisions; and various technologies available to moderate energy use (such as the variable speed device) and the costs of putting such technologies in place. Later in the same interview, the respondent also highlighted that while he acknowledges that solar energy is the 'greenest' form of energy, it was simply too expensive to put in place given current costs. Such responses were typical, and clearly highlights what Barnett et al. (2005) and Barnett and Land (2007) pointed out that awareness alone would not necessarily change practices, while existing responsibility campaigns (for example in responsible tourism) are based on the mistaken assumptions that subjects do not already practise responsibility in their day-to-day lives.

While standards vary between companies interviewed, two particular companies stand out with comprehensive coverage towards ensuring their commitment towards environmental concerns – Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, and Six Senses Resorts and Spas. Srichan Monrakkharom, CSR Representative of Six Senses Evason Hua Hin Resort, elaborated their notion and practices of responsibility:

what Six Senses think is complete structures of we call social and environment responsibility programme... holistic environment management programme. This is something very important, what we will be responsible to others, we have to be responsible ourselves. Simple and easy... Like this one, energy consumption, we use sunlight to dry the towel. Normally the towel, one is washed right, we have to use, we have dry it by the machine and then use energy consumption two times basically, but if we, if we wash and rinse right, we put in the sun first, and then we dry it in the machine, not too long. Just in case, because maybe it is not dry properly or maybe like hygiene. Because we have huge, we have not enough space, because we have many many of the towels, and we just do it once for drying in the machine... (interview, 31 Jan 2010).

Again, practical considerations, however detailed and minute, pervade such descriptions, suggesting that doing responsibilities are indeed much more complex than that expressed in sources examined in the previous chapter.

When considering the other aspect of 'saving the wild' – i.e. protecting and conserving threatened animal species then, few respondents had much to say. While this is very

possibly due to the concentration of respondents who are hotels and tour-providing companies, and tourism attractions featuring animal rights and protection tend to be very small-scale niche set ups such as the Elephant Mahout Project, another reason may also be the tendency for many to see many tiers of responsibility or moral progress – where concern falls first and foremost towards people and the environment, before animals are considered. When the animals are indeed mentioned by respondents in this research, it has almost always referred exclusively to the welfare of elephants in Thailand, again highlighting the symbolic importance of the elephant in the country.

### **6.2.3 Rectifying irresponsibility**

In comparison, notions of rectifying irresponsibility such as issues concerning illegal drug-use, the sex industry, and overdevelopment in Thailand were hardly mentioned in interviews. While tourists and some companies' representatives interviewed did often express disdain towards, for example, the openness and prevalence of Western men engaging in the services of Thai prostitutes, or the rapid environmental degeneration of beach resorts like Koh Samui or Ko Phi Phi, few talked about what they themselves were doing in practice to address such issues. Only one respondent, Chitpamong Venu-athon, Corporate Human Resources Support Manager of Accor Group, spoke about a partnership with ECPAT International,<sup>48</sup> where Accor had,

signed a code of conduct with them [ECPAT]... we are doing is two things, one is to raise some money for them and helping them for their activities, and secondly we train our staff what to do when the guest is coming with child under 18, and what you observe them, how you can react, how can we communicate to the guest nicely, something like that to prevent this kind of things happening in our hotels (interview, 29 Jan 2009).

Most respondents who did mention problems like overdevelopment in tourism destinations in Thailand often also quickly concluded that such issues were beyond their immediate scope and ability, and that it was the responsibility of the government to manage such matters.

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<sup>48</sup> "ECPAT International is a global network of organisations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. It seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation." Source: <http://www.ecpat.net/EI/index.asp>

### 6.3 Realities of doing responsibilities

Interviews with various respondents highlighted that the realities of doing responsibilities are much more complex than discourses present, and that oftentimes, what is done or not is governed by very practical concerns rather than ideals of responsibility. Rather than assume that the practices and performances of responsibilities are the result of a highly reflexive process where consumers and corporations are consciously pursuing moral goals, what is shared by respondents highlights instead what Barnett et al. (2011) argue to be the ordinariness of consumption (and corporate responsibility in this thesis) (see also Hilton, 2007). As Warde observed,

People mostly consume without registering or reflecting that that is what they are doing because they are, from their point of view, actually doing things like driving, eating or playing. They only rarely understand their behaviour as ‘consuming’ (2005: 150).

This section focuses on aspects of *doing* responsibilities not usually revealed in travel guidebooks and websites examined in the previous chapter, and indeed also in typical ethical consumerism campaigns, and highlights how consumer and corporate responsibilities are embedded in practices that are much more sticky than awareness campaigns assume, and as such,

the key questions become how people are recruited into practices, what levels of commitment they have to those practices, and how the consumption of things, stuff, and resources is embedded in these over time, in more or less path-dependent ways (Barnett et al., 2011: 69).

#### 6.3.1 *It's not easy at all!*

Most significantly, despite the typical presentation that it is “easy being green [or responsible]” (Shalgosky, 2008: 41), most respondents highlighted the numerous limitations and contradictions they encounter in practice, and how one is never sure if what one does in the name of responsibility does any good in reality. Sukich Udindu, Vice President of CSR at Minor International (the parent company of Anantara, Four Seasons, St Regis, J.W. Marriott, and Marriott in Thailand<sup>49</sup>), for example, shared how even though awareness and the desire to be responsible often exist, it is easier to put off changing practices, as

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<sup>49</sup> Minor International also own, have joint ventures and manages numerous other hotel, restaurant, and retail chains globally. See <http://www.minornet.com/MBiz/Business.php> for more details.

[doing responsibilities is] very difficult, because [even if] everyone want to do the good thing, and they busy so their excuse is that they don't have time, and then a day pass, a week pass, and a month pass... It is similar to people's life, people always think I am busy I have to work for the money and when I get old I will helping the society. And then when you get old you don't have power to do anything, just want to sit and relax, so this is the most difficult part, with how can you doing good, doing well everyday (interview, 26 Jan 2010).

At which point does awareness translate into action and practice is thus missing from existing works focusing on informing the consumer or corporation, and this also fails to appreciate that while for example, the act of “turn[ing] off lights and air-conditioner (or heater) when you leave the hotel room” (Shalgosky, 2008: 41) is indeed an extremely easy act that only involves the flick of some switches, it is perhaps harder to incorporate these into practice together with numerous other also equally trivial practices in everyday life. At the same time, Sukich's response shows that when queried about their ‘responsibilities’, tourists and corporations alike do not necessarily think of it as something as simple as switching off lights – instead, there is a sense that responsibility is something larger and more abstract (like “helping the society”) than such banal and mundane practices, and that it requires more effort, time and money. In these instances, respondents tended to highlight how it is not within their abilities to always be responsible in their operations, even though they do think that this would have been an ideal outcome. In a meeting at Exotissimo Travel for example, respondents shared such considerations:

**Hamish Keith**, Managing Director, Exotissimo Thailand: But how much, how feasible is that for us to do that [only use hotels that fulfil certain responsibility criterion], to keep that operating and keep that working, considering how many thousand hotels we work with, we've to be realistic about what we can achieve.

**Anne Cruickshanks**, Group Product and Marketing Manager, Exotissimo Travel Group: Of course, that was definitely one of the things we said would be ideal to do. But in reality it is very difficult.

**Oliver Colomès**, Chief Executive Officer, Exotissimo Travel Group: Yarh, but it's something we can add as our next, all the hotel contracts we sign every year, if it's a one page charter.

**Hamish Keith**: I remember doing things like that before, and the

**Oliver Colomès**: Which doesn't mean they will sign off and respect, but at least we have informative duty that is already the starting point. So...

**Hamish Keith:** I think that's quite a difficult thing to push through, personally, unless you put a lot of resources on it, I mean I remember trying to get, I know how hard it is to just try to create fact sheets on hotels. So I mean we have to be realistic about what we want to achieve and what we really will be able to achieve....

**Anne Cruickshanks:** So initially the question was can we use hotels, only use hotels that are green.

**Hamish Keith:** We can't

**Oliver Colomès:** We can't but we can tell all hotels that we are committed.

**Anne Cruickshanks:** You're right, there's thousands of hotels, it's not completely realistic, but it's just a long term and it would be nice

(meeting, 14 Dec 2009).

Inherent in this conversation then, are the constant negotiations of what is considered to be 'ideal' and what is actually 'practical' every time one chooses to put in practices of responsibility. Indeed, Luzi Matzig, CEO of Asian Trails goes further in saying,

Yarh, give me some that we haven't introduced, *which are feasible...* Hotel is easier... I mean, I can [use] only a bus and they either use diesel or uses gasoline, and I am not going to change the engine to make it 2.5% more or less pollutant. So what can a tour operator do. Like [glass] water bottles is one good thing, but at the moment we still use plastic. Because I don't want to carry hundreds of [glass] bottles 7 days around Thailand in a bus, I need a separate bus to carry all the empty bottles... It's not that we don't want to help, we do want to help, but hey waiting for good ideas. Say you are an airline, and they say, ok you produce so much waste and you carry to the Maldives and you now dump all your rubbish to the Maldives, they have very little land, you should actually carry out your waste. So then you need planes to carry the rubbish to Europe. Well how much does that pollute and cost? Reasonable? Probably not (interview, 22 Dec 2009).

Such aspects of the realities and difficulties of doing responsibilities are perhaps nothing shockingly new or unexpected, but are typically left out in both publicity materials encouraging individuals and companies to be(come) more responsible, as well as in academic analysis till date. Perhaps due to the desire to encourage responsibility or fearful of potential misrepresentation or discouragement, companies, individuals, as well as responsible tourism (and other ethical consumption) publicity material have tended to neglect this aspect – that it is not at all “easy to be responsible”. Inherent in these accounts is also the ways in which responsibility is seen in a binary nature – one is either responsible, or not – and at times precisely because that task at hand is so large, where for example, “there's thousands of hotels, it's not completely realistic”, the natural course of

action is to not pursue such endeavours at all. The lack of a halfway mark in between being responsible or not, or the recognition that doing responsibilities is a continual process between ideals and practice, is thus a persistent challenge, and acknowledging this thus sets the stage for more appropriate and critical analyses of what doing responsibilities is about.

### **6.3.2 Whose responsibility?**

At the same time, there is often little consensus on who should be responsible for what in ensuring ethical and sustainable development in tourism. For some respondents, responsibilities clearly start from the self – for example, a volunteer tourist, Janet, highlighted that it is indeed ‘our responsibility’, and that it is important to realize and understand her own impacts as a tourist such that she or other tourists in general should “blend into the town [or destination], bring the town money or income but not destroy the nature of the town” (interview, 27 Nov 2009). In a similar way, Thivagaran Kesavan, General Manager of Alila Cha Am emphasized what he as a general manager or they as a company can achieve through their plans such as fulfilling Green Globe criteria (interview, 30 Jan 2010).

Also common, however, were respondents who placed responsibilities on others – whether this was on larger, more established companies than theirs, or on the government. Khun Eng, Director of Let’s Tour Bangkok, for example, said,

for the big company, the owner or the management they have more time, they can be able to manage that if they really want to, I think it’s doable, it depends on how much they want... But mostly the Westerner company they have a system which is good enough and strong enough then they have more time to focus on that (interview, 19 Jan 2010).

Another respondent, Peter Weingard, Managing Director of Arosa Travel, commented that it is “the government, and in that sense the authorities which are responsible for the tourism, they should play a big role in protecting the environment”, even though he adds that there are numerous examples in Thailand where he thinks that the government has not assumed this well. For example, in

Koh Samed, there is in many places, a garbage problem. There’s supposed to be a national park but it doesn’t look like. And quite a number of places, the development is too fast and too uncontrolled. So everybody can just build where they want, what they want, and sometimes the result is not so

good for the environment and for the general look (interview, 12 Jan 2010).

Much like what was argued to be the ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968), issues like environmental protection and social equity were seen to be beyond the purview of individual consumers or corporations, and that they did not have the power to change how things were done. Most respondents agreed that it is everyone’s responsibility, and that only when there is collaboration and negotiation between all parties involved will there be tourism that is responsible. Sammy Carolus, Executive Assistant Manager (Marketing), Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, for example stated this clearly:

Everyone plays a part? We play what we have to play, and the government will play what they have to play. But the most important is, I think when it comes to CSR, it will be sometimes we have to go to our own sources to find out, about people we want to develop, and there’s no hard and fast rule, I think depends on how we want to help, to what extent, but the good thing is the government here is really encouraging that (interview, 14 Dec 2009).

Sukich Udindu, Vice President (CSR) of Minor International, goes further to say that CSR (both within and beyond the tourism sector) has evolved, and it is indeed the importance of collaboration that is becoming key today:

I think very long time ago, [it was] just giving, philanthropy. Second generation is strategic CSR, more thinking. I think that’s five to ten years ago. A couple of years ago I think is third generation, it’s called CSR networking. That’s why business people said we cannot do it alone, for example in Minor, every, we have almost a hundred small company, but each company do it alone, individually, now it’s time to working together to have as a group, so we arrange a little bit. And then not only Minor, we go together with other company, so you see a network of CSR in stock market of Thailand. We soon launch CSR of Bangkok...

Some people think we pay tax already, so [it is] the duty and the responsibility of the government. Some people think, and sometimes NGO said the government is too slow and very politic, so the NGO want to do and they don’t have much resource. They ask for donation and they don’t talk together. And CSR we know that everyone has competency in, we have different expertise, so we have resource, we can get in easily, but we don’t know much as NGO, so we have to work with NGO to go deeply. We have to go with the government, and if something develop and success, if the government can change policy, so now the impact (interview, 26 Jan 2010).

The problem with this however, is that everyone is aware of and acknowledges the importance of assuming responsibilities and that this needs coordination and collaboration

with many parties – but continue to be uncertain on who should be responsible for what in tourism, and as such typically remain in an impasse on what exactly to do with their ‘responsibilities’.

### **6.3.3 *Costs of responsibilities***

At the same time, academic and popular works on responsibility seem to exist in an alternate reality where real concerns like costs do not surface. Whether or not one ought to care at a distance or if we are implicated in the geographies of responsibility through larger (and often unfair) networks of production is perhaps less important to lay consumers and corporations – instead many respondents were often more concerned with real and practical issues such as the costs and coordination of responsibilities. For example, almost all interviews with managers of corporations highlighted the concern that they have to juggle high(er) start up or operating costs of particular technologies that enable a cleaner or greener business with the need to rake in profits as a company, and such costs are often premised on uncertainties in the industry. Thivagaran Kesavan, General Manager of Alila Cha Am, put this succinctly:

[tourism-related companies are] irresponsible not in the sense that they want to be irresponsible, but look, the [tourism] industry is as such - it's hit by different kinds of elements when the business goes down. I have to look at managing my costs, I have to look at managing my people, I need to pay water bills, I need to manage the business. So where does the ecosystem comes in? The back of the particular critical mind (interview, 30 Jan 2010).

On the other side of the story, interviews with volunteer tourists also confirm the preoccupation with costs. For example, even in the search for responsible tours, Lucy shared that she chose to go to the Elephant Mahout Project because “it sounded really good and it sounded really cheap as well, compared to what a lot of other places charged” (interview, 11 Nov 2009). This, together with the high costs of putting in particular responsible tourism initiatives and the uncertainties of the industry, were often cited as one of the key roadblocks to practising responsibilities in tourism. Willem Niemeijer, Founder of Khiri Travel, for example lamented that,

the realization should be with the big tour companies, our clients, they should realize that they should do more, there should be more focus, but the focus is too much with business politics, too much with margins, too much with value, too much with lower prices, too much with this and not enough with what can we do extra, how can we add value without only

looking at this sort of things... in all honesty in the end of it, it's still about money. And it's about business politics, debt counts and social responsibility is a very tiny element in the whole mix. Too small, it should be bigger, but it's isn't (interview, 11 Jan 2010).

Realizing that responsibilities do not come 'free', and that there are always costs (at times opportunity costs) involved highlights the partial ways in which one then has to go about in doing responsibilities, where as discussed in section 2.4.2, tourists and corporations (and indeed any actors involved) are in the continual process of selecting who and what they should be responsible for, simply because limited resources exists alongside endless needs of "a demanding world" (Barnett et al., 2008).

Understanding costs of practising responsibilities is also much more complex than just simply assuming that it is more expensive and hence not a viable option to travel related companies. As Michael Kwee, CSR Director of Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, explained,

there's always the financial side, what is it going to cost and what are the practical solutions that are economically feasible. Sure there is a lot of technology out there, you know deep water cooling, solar power, wind, tidal electrical generation, all of these things are out there, they exist, they aren't commercially viable yet, so what point does that, do you find that it is affordable, practical, if the returns on investment is 50 years, versus one year, that's pretty simple, but it's in the grey and in between that's hard to determine and how accurate are models moving forward.

He elaborated this with the example of how while Banyan Tree's resort manager at Seychelles succeeded in implementing the usage of biodiesels filtered from used cooking oil, this might not be easily applied in other properties:

One of the reasons why it worked in Seychelles so well, was because the price of diesel [in Seychelles] is compared to say Singapore, compared to Bangkok, it's significantly higher. So with that, well Maldives, we're looking at that, they don't have cars, but they have boats that run on diesel, so we're working on those types of things. And the difficulties can be doing it in China where there is hydropower that is cheaper (interview, 10 Feb 2010).

#### **6.3.4 Coordinating responsibilities**

Another aspect frequently mentioned in interviews but yet little discussed in popular and academic literature, is the need to coordinate and put in place doing responsibilities in tourism. And it is indeed in this area that many respondents shared their own experiences, highlighting that assuming responsibilities in tourism is not at all easy or ideal as

portrayed in responsible travel guidelines, while often involving various trials and errors or compromises. Different companies therefore deal with such issues in a variety of ways. For some organizations, such as Exotissimo Travel Group and Khiri Travel, they have found that it helps to set up a separate entity to manage their CSR or responsible tourism functions. William Niemeijer, Founder of Khiri Travel shared the reasons behind doing so:

The thing is we first had our corporate sustainability statement on our website, we felt that it was getting a bit of the water head of all these projects that we were doing, without too much focus either. Because no matter how you turn it, we are a business so we are there to make a profit, we want to do it in a nice way and we want to help and support, but in the end of it, your focus, my focus as a entrepreneur as well as the focus of our sales people is the numbers, hitting the targets and things like that. And we were not very happy with that, that it is like, it was always playing second fiddle to everything else that we're doing, but the enthusiasm and it was still living in our hearts, so we thought we should give it its own brand, its own platform, so we gave it in the terms of Khiri Reach (interview, 11 Jan 2010).

In my fieldwork period, I also had the chance to act as a consultant to Exotissimo Travel Group in their initial efforts of setting up the Exotissimo Foundation, and one issue that was highlighted as a key area to resolve before going forward, was how Exotissimo as an organization can and should manage its various responsible tourism projects on the ground. Anne Cruickshanks, Group Product and Marketing Manager, for example, wrote this in an email detailing key areas to discuss in a meeting with the Managing Director and CEO of the group - "Our previous donations, RT [responsible tourism] and CBT [community based tourism] have all been a bit haphazard. While this has not been a problem, we should consider streamlining our policy and procedures to ensure that we are maximizing our funds and resources" (email, 11 Dec 2009). During the meeting, it was apparent that the head office in Bangkok does not prescribe what is to be done for individual projects, and many of these were somewhat left to evolve on their own accord after the initial set up support:

**Me:** For the existing CBT projects, like the Akha experience or Orchid Trek, are we still supporting them? Or how does it work?

[All laughs]

**Oliver Colomès, CEO:** Good question.

**Anne Cruickshanks**, Group Product and Marketing Manager: I know we were paying the salary of one of the Orchid Trek people [CBT in Laos] for a while, I'm not sure if that was done this past year or not. Like it was basically, that was going to be part of our support for you. It was to pay for one full time staff for whatever throughout the year, you'd have to double check with on exactly what we're doing. But that sort of thing is a good way to be involved in a CBT project.

**Hamish Keith**, Managing Director Thailand: But normally when we come into the project it's not to support the project.

**Anne Cruickshanks**: Yarh, we help develop it, sure.

**Oliver Colomès**: Yarh, but that's the major, as far as I know, that's a major concern for NGOs, like GTZ, that after launching period of say 2 years, they have to make this project sustainable, they cannot remain involved in the project forever, so they need to rely on partners like us for example, like the point of the camp, the base in Northern Laos, not that it's completed the action there, but they would like someone like Exo to take up the project and make it sustainable.

(meeting, 14 Dec 2009).

The meeting then concluded with the above participants agreeing that some sort of centralized reporting was necessary going forward (so that when the Exotissimo Foundation is set up, it will be easier for reporting purposes and to ensure transparency), and it was tentatively decided that they will task one employee in each of the countries' main office (e.g. in Phnom Penh in Cambodia, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam and so on) to monitor a simple spreadsheet with donation, RT or CBT projects' details. This document will then be sent to the head office in Bangkok at regular intervals throughout the year. Emphasis in meetings and discussions were often more with regards towards how to manage this amongst other concerns, such as what legalities were involved in transferring funds collected in one political jurisdiction and disbursing them in another, or whether the company needs to hire dedicated staff to manage its CSR and Exotissimo Foundation. Anecdotes from other respondents also reflected similar preoccupations and concerns, where oftentimes, ideals and philosophies behind what should be considered responsible or not seemed to be taken as given, despite many instances of conflicting responsibilities in practice (see section 6.5).

#### **6.4 More responsible than you are**

Yet on the other hand, it is easy to observe that respondents who pride themselves as being responsible tourists or corporations sought to differentiate themselves. Indeed, it

was most apparent as many lapsed into both a critical and competitive stance towards ‘others’ in tourism – whether this was the stereotypical ‘mass tourist’, tourism businesses that seemingly do not pay attention to their social and environmental responsibilities, or in fact, even towards other companies and tourists who *do* proclaim themselves as responsible (but are considered to be not good enough).

A quote from the interview with Thivagarán Kesavan, General Manager of Alila Cha Am, for example highlights this:

Today’s world, the eco world, it’s not a critical part. Because the knowledge is not there. *Like for me I understand, to me it’s critical*, try to reduce the amount of plastic in the property, try to make sure you separate the garbage, it makes a lot of difference... I’m very conscious of it. *I’m a person who don’t like wastage also, it’s very clear for me, and through my priorities*, the staff is seeing it and also many things around. But look, during such pressing times, it’s different, *it’s not enough knowledge coming out to the people on the street* (interview, 30 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

Here, whether consciously or subconsciously, we can see a clear delineation that is consistently being made between ‘me’ – who is “conscious” or who “don’t like wastage”, and ‘others’ – “people on the street” who many not have enough knowledge about these matters. Such underlying judgments peppered many conversations I had with different respondents, and at times, what other companies do as CSR could be criticized as well, as Sammy Carolus, Executive Assistant Manager (Marketing), Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, expresses:

some companies use it [CSR] for marketing gimmick, yes. To promote their products, to promote their companies... It’s a karma, so it is in a way, it will bite you back. But that’s why we don’t do marketing gimmick, that’s why you don’t see our CSR in our website. Because we think that this is our responsibility, you don’t have to promote it, you have to do it anyway. It’s your own moral responsibility right? If I do, personally if I do good things, like I’m giving my used clothes to the needy people, one of the farmer in a rural area, I don’t have to let the whole world know. It’s only me and them right? Why you have to promote that, picture taking, in Bangkok Post whatever. So it’s publicity stunt (interview, 14 Dec 2009).

Unlike what one might assume, notions of being more responsible than ‘others’ – oftentimes conflated with ‘locals’ – were not opinions exclusive to foreigners working in Thailand.<sup>50</sup> Many Thai nationals themselves also express such opinions and

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<sup>50</sup> Thivagarán Kesavan is of Singaporean nationality while Sammy Carolus is of Indonesian nationality.

differentiation. For example, Supanit Vimooktanon, Assistant Managing Director of MBK Hospitality Management Co., Ltd, said,

Many local company, they just expect some return in PR and say. But for us, we never expect anything, we just want to educate people, to realize and understand the meaning of the environment. This is what we are trying to do, it is just like I am Thai, I am the Buddhist people, so giving people I never expect anything to come back, I never want to be the PR man, I just believe that this is part of the social that we have to make responsible (interview, 26 Jan 2010).

Herein lies the contradiction – while criticizing other local companies (who are presumably Thai since this interview was done in Bangkok, Thailand) and highlighting the difference of how “we never expect anything”, the respondent also attributes his behaviour to being Thai and Buddhist – now seemingly making a distinction between himself and ‘others’ who are not Thai or Buddhist. These examples therefore highlight precisely how fluid the notions of the ‘self’ and its associated attributes are, and are key in illustrating how responsibilities in practice are indeed constantly subject to such manoeuvring, even as respondents may not realize it themselves.

At the same time, a number of respondents in the line of tour-leading, while expressing their misgivings towards NGOs and development agencies’ plans and policies in the region,<sup>51</sup> have also emphasized the importance of their roles as businesses in the attempts to use eco or community based tourism as a means of improving economic situations in rural areas across Southeast Asia. Willem Niemeijer, Founder of Khiri Travel, for example suggests that,

*a development agency by its own by core, is not interested in making itself sustainable. I think they get money, they get money every year and they have to disburse off the money, and that’s not to say that they are not doing a great job, but I think that’s not the way forward, and I think they realize, talking to the some agencies, they realize that, especially now they have to get people actually engaged, the people they want to help, must be engaged. And to do that is basically to make them responsible for themselves. Well they are not set up for that. I think they are learning in a different way, they are set up in many good ways, in follow through,*

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<sup>51</sup> For example, many respondents refer to ex-colonial countries’ international development agencies like *Agence Française de Développement* (French International Development Agency), and Department for International Development (United Kingdom International Aid) and their funding projects in various parts of Southeast Asia.

follow ups, in communications with communities, they are great in that, and the private partnership, the private entities are not that well set up for that. We are supporting a community tourism project for what I'm just been developing a website for, they are great with communicating with the local community, and identifying who has the capacity within the community to take things up, because that's what they can do, but to come up with an idea that's a business idea that will become sustainable thing that it comes after one year and now runs on its own, they have no experience with that. *But that's what we do in a private industry, we do that, that's entrepreneurship*, we'll see like oh, there's money there to be made, and then we try this (interview, 11 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

Here identifying the differences between entrepreneurs like themselves and others like development agencies has taken place in a way such that there is a angle for mutual benefit since each is said to be built to achieve different aspects of what makes a successful community tourism project. In another interview, the respondent was less reserved in his criticisms – Luzi Matzig, CEO of Asian Trails Ltd., very candidly stated that he thinks

NGOs often live in a cloud cuckoo land. Nice to be idealistic about things, but still we have to pay salaries of our staff. We don't live on support by some government in Wacaduckoo who give them 100,000 dollars every month. And then they spend it and waste it. We create income, we support people. It has to be financially feasible. Not everybody can live on donations like most NGOs. That's the real pie in the sky mostly (interview, 22 Dec 2009).

Inherent in these opinions then, is the idea that as businesses, they are better equipped to practise responsibilities, as they are more in touch with 'reality' and the practicalities of economic development. As such, respondents see themselves as better able to understand the pragmatic aspects of the market economy, and profit and loss, and can hence "do development" in ways that work – unlike NGOs and international development agencies who are just driven to "disburse off the money".

#### **6.4.1 Escaping everyday irresponsibility**

Interviewing tourists on the other hand brought up interesting aspects of time in the practice of responsibilities. While many did criticize other tourists for not being responsible, what is perhaps more peculiar of note is that many respondents expressed that they may be more responsible during periods of travel. This runs contrary to existing research that has assumed that travel and tourism revolves around the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and leisure, and that it is precisely because of this trait in tourism that makes it

irresponsible – tourists are often assumed to float along in a happy bubble and hence do not desire to be made aware of or take responsibility for the realities or hardships of locals or environments under threat. However, instead of suspending and escaping everyday responsibilities – such as from work, family or societal norms, tourists interviewed highlighted the opposite. Most admitted that in their day-to-day lives at home, they might hardly give a second thought to issues of ethics and responsibilities, but this comes to the foreground and can be one of the stated aims of travel, positioned almost in the same way as activities or attractions in any other tourism destination (see also section 7.2).

For example, switching on the air conditioner, something which might not even cross the minds of many tourists, became a typical issue that was discussed between respondents. As outlined in Chapter Four, tourists that were interviewed in this research were volunteers at an elephant camp for the Elephant Mahout Project. All respondents had signed up for this through the project's online advertisements, either on [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com), Go Differently's website (based and managed in UK), or the Elephant Mahout Project's website (based and managed in Thailand). As such, most respondents (except one that was a repeat volunteer) expressed initial surprise that air conditioners were available in their accommodation. Many (including myself during a preliminary fieldwork visit) had come to the camp expecting to live in a village set up, and were highly surprised to find that accommodation was instead provided in two-storey bungalows within a gated community that was a five minute drive from the elephant camp. Having come mentally prepared to live in 'rustic' accommodation with very basic amenities, some felt that it was 'wrong' to switch on the air conditioners. Also, one of the bungalows was personally owned by two of the Thai hosts, which meant that tourists were living in homes rather than hotels. As Helen highlighted,

you're living in somebody's house, you don't want to just throw your things on the floor and just make things very messy, and room service will come and clean it, because now it's someone that you actually know. You know that the person who come and clean your nonsense, it's not a faceless hotel staff that you can just avoid (interview, 26 Nov 2009).

Olivia, also added that if she was in a regular hotel she would probably have no qualms about turning on the air conditioner. During her two weeks at the Elephant Mahout Project however, she had kept the air conditioner off almost every night and in her own words this was simply because she was "trying to be responsible tourist" (interview, 30

Nov 2009). Lucy, on the other hand, suggested that it was all the more important to be responsible, possibly more so than when one is at home, because,

I mean you see people travelling and you are embarrassed, oh my god, they [other badly-behaved tourists] are English, oh no! But I don't ever [say that] I'm a great eco thinking person, oh I mustn't travel and things like that. But I'll try and yeah. Go and enjoy yourself and have a good holiday (interview, 11 Nov 2009).

Indeed, to some, being a (responsible) tourist also clearly included an element of surveillance while on holiday. Those who booked their trips on [responsibletourism.com](http://responsibletourism.com) for example, would receive an email requesting tourists for their feedback once the trip has concluded, and of the four simple questions that are asked, one is “Did you feel that your holiday benefited local people, and minimized impacts on the environment?” Most tourists interviewed are in fact familiar and aware that such reviews were expected of them after their trips, and much like how ethical consumerism campaigns advocate that consumers to use their powers to ensure their products they buy are made in a responsible manner, tourists interviewed also show an awareness towards their role in scrutinizing what is practised in the name of responsibilities in tourism destinations (even though this in itself brings up further contradictions as will be discussed in 6.5.3). For example, Box 6.1 shows a post on Facebook from Emma, the British coordinator of the Elephant Mahout Project joined the tourists at the Elephant Camp for a trip to the Surin Elephant Festival (from the perspectives of both an informed tourist as well as a coordinator at an elephant camp).

**Box 6.1: Emma's Facebook post about the Surin Elephant Festival**  
**Date: 24 November 2009**

We went to the Surin elephant festival this weekend and it was a very mixed experience. It was a joy to see so many elephants, and there were many that were obviously loved and well cared for. On the first day around 250 elephants gathered and were given a feast to eat after floats made up of suitable elephants foods were judged for beauty and originality and then dismantled and the foods (bananas, pineapples, watermelons, sweet corns, carrots, apples...) were spread along tables for the elephants to eat. This was a real celebration of elephants. However we did also see very young elephants (the youngest was just 11 months old) being walked around the streets and this continued into the evening for a few. Elephants were also giving rides and, whilst for the majority this was controlled and they gave a few short rides I did see some that were continuing to give rides into the afternoon, so in hot sun, on hard, concrete roads....all things that I'm trying to stop with the [Elephant Mahout] project so it was very difficult for me to see and not be able to do something about. We also saw one female mahout get on to an elephant and

just hit the elephant hard on the head for no apparent reason. This was particularly upsetting for me as the elephant was, up to then, being looked after by a mahout that I know and have worked with and I know that he treats elephants well. The second day was even worse and a day that I found particularly upsetting - I did expect this and knew that I would not be having a good time! We went to a stadium where elephants were paraded and made to perform - initially it wasn't so bad as the elephants were just paraded. They then showed the Pa-Kam ceremony (a ritual ceremony performed by mahouts where offerings are made to spirits) and a ceremonial dance that used to performed hundreds of years ago when wild elephants were captured, I'm not so keen on the capturing of wild elephants, obviously, but the historical/ritual element was interesting. Then, however, it got really bad...elephants being made to stand on their hind legs (they naturally carry 60% of their weight on their front legs so you can imagine the effort of this - I don't need to even mention the indignity of performing I'm sure) and sit on stools, elephants throwing darts at balloons.... There was a tug of war with members of the army and a bull elephant - not too distressing as the elephant just walked (but again you have the performing aspect) and, of course, the elephant won! The elephants then played football which, when left to their own devices and given a football, many would do naturally, especially the younger elephants, but here they were being made to run and take part. The worst part for me was a re-enacting of elephants being used during ancient wars; they let fireworks off to represent gun fire which understandably scared and unsettled the elephants, in particular a bull elephant near to us who then had a chain around his ankle yanked hard so that his foot was lifted off the floor and he could not move.....

*My thoughts on leaving Surin were that I am even more determined to keep on doing what we are with the project and how necessary it is. Many of the elephants at the camp in Bangsaray have been made to perform in tourist shows, some have been used to beg on the streets and we are providing them with an alternative, better life. Yes they are still giving some tourist rides but much less than they would under other circumstances/at other camps and they are all well cared for, have adequate food, shelter, medical care, grazing ground and water for drinking and bathing. We will offer to take volunteers to the festival again as I do think it is important from an educational point for people to see the reality of how many of Thailand's elephants are treated and to see our elephants in comparison. I have posted some photographs from the festival too.*

Here we can see that Emma clearly thinks that tourists can and should see irresponsibility in tourism for themselves (parts in italics) and that it would then be clear how different things were at the camp she worked in (even though quotations in Chapter Four and Section 7.3 and 7.4 suggest that 'responsibility' in the elephant camp was indeed at times questionable too). She also highlights the desire (that is at times shared with other tourists interviewed) and necessity to change the way tourism conducts its businesses, much like how consumers are tasked to do so in ethical consumerism campaigns. This post however also brings up a number of contentious issues regarding what exactly is considered as responsible or not, and again reinforces the argument that this thesis makes – that in order to critically discuss 'responsibility' one needs to bear in mind that differing and at times

conflicting ideas are continually weaved together into an uneven patchwork of what becomes practised as responsibilities.

## **6.5 Conflicting responsibilities in practice**

I think the most interesting aspect about responsible tourism is the different aspects of it and how on earth you manage to achieve the balance between those factors, when very often they are in conflict, so the conflict within responsible tourism, between the social and economic, and cultural, to me is the most interesting thing about it because that is the most complex, and you know, if you would find any projects that would achieve successful balance between those conflicting demands... and it isn't easy (interview with volunteer tourist, Hana, 25 Nov 2009).

As highlighted in this response from Hana, a volunteer tourist at the Elephant Mahout Project, most respondents recognize that negotiating ethics and responsibilities in tourism involves the complex nature of balancing at times conflicting demands, whether these are done as a tourist or when representing a company involved in tourism.

At the same time, as shown in the previous section, there is a tendency to portray oneself as being more or *really* responsible as compared to others who may or may not (appear to) hold similar standards towards ethics and responsibilities in tourism. It is precisely this ambiguous nature of what and how one can be responsible in tourism that creates both vast opportunities to improve the often criticized as unsustainable practices in tourism, and also causes numerous instances of inconsistent practices of 'responsibility' on the ground. This section therefore explores some of the most pertinent issues as highlighted by respondents, and hence problematizes issues of giving and expectations of tourists, within the larger contexts of differing notions of responsibilities and the partial nature of practising responsibilities.

### **6.5.1 Giving – *It's not so simple***

One of the most basic and direct manners of practising responsibility that is frequently mentioned amongst respondents is simply to give, whether this was done in their personal capacity or as corporate philanthropy. Examples of giving abound – Exotissimo Foundation for example, was set up specifically to manage donations from their tourists and the company's pledge to donate US\$1 per tourist, and how such funds should be disbursed to the various projects they support. When asked how their companies were socially responsible, many respondents, including Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok,

Pathuwan Princess Hotel, Sukhothai Hotel, Conrad Hotel, Accor Group and Dusit Thani Bangkok, also immediately responded that they provide monetary donation or various gifts such as stationery, or food items to various rural communities in Thailand. Exotissimo Foundation and the Elephant Mahout Project's websites both encourage tourists to donate to their causes:

As a non-profit company restricted by budget *your donation can assist the camp enormously*. However large or small your donation will help to maintain the camp, and allow the elephants to be cared for in a safe environment. As donations grow so will the camp offering more elephants and mahouts sanctuary and a way forward (Elephant Mahout Project website,<sup>52</sup> my emphasis).

However, the seemingly simple and straightforward act of 'giving' is not always innocent. In the course of the fieldwork at the Elephant Mahout Project, many issues regarding monetary gifts emerged. First of all, it appeared that Lek, the Thai coordinator of the project was of the impression that donations from volunteer tourists were made to the British coordinator, Emma's personal bank account, and this was not actually given to the project or the mahouts as volunteer tourists intended. As Lek elaborates,

you can open the Elephant Mahout Project [website], Emma writing about the donation in her account in England. [But] Money never come. I know Emma now, because I try to read and learn and learn but she think I cannot reading English... before in the Elephant Mahout Project have Emma, me, Khun Ser work together, but [now] cut out all, only her name [is on the website] (interview, 25 Nov 2009).

This claim is of course denied by Emma, who clarified that

More seriously seems to be an insinuation that I kept project money... I do definitely want to say to you that, if that is what she [Lek] said/hinted it is absolutely untrue, I have devoted the past 3 years of my life to the project and that includes using up my savings to create the project initially and to fund myself (and the project) on a daily basis (email communication, 20 Oct 2010).

While I am in no position to verify or make judgments on what exactly happened between the two coordinators and their management of funds donated by volunteer tourists, what remains worrisome and unclear, especially to volunteer tourists who do wish to donate, were the discrepancies presented on what actually happened to donated funds. As Box 4.1 had earlier elaborated, even the amount of money each mahout received for their

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.theelephantmahoutproject.com/donation.php> <Accessed on 14 July 2011>.

participation in the project was in doubt – with Emma and Deborah (from Go Differently, the British travel agent partner for the Elephant Mahout Project) both requesting not to answer the question, while Lek and Ellie separately claiming that mahouts were paid 4,000 and 1,200 baht per week respectively. Ellie also disputed Deborah’s claim that “money is also paid into a general fund which helps to cover food and medical expenses for the elephants, along with any other incidental costs such as transporting new elephants to the camp, building houses, shelters etc” (email communication, 17 March 2010), and instead said that,

I've heard Emma and Lek say that the project pays for food and medication for the elephants - to my knowledge that has never happened. An elephant died last year and all the families had a whip-round for them as they'd lost their livelihood (and a member of the family), didn't heard of any contribution from the project to help them out. Individual volunteers have helped families though (communication via Facebook, 14 March 2010).

While this is but one example and cannot be considered as representative of the norm, it highlights the existence of cases in which while tourists are promised that their travels are ‘responsible’, what actually happens behind the scenes are much more contested than they might realize. At times, the integrity of such ‘responsible’ initiatives comes under question, but rather than attempting to ascertain which project or scheme is ‘responsible’ or not, this example once again points towards the varied understandings of responsibility and how when practised on the ground, abstract notions and ideals encounter real difficulties. At the same time, decisions about responsibility (‘giving’ in this instance) are not always made with the broader picture of responsibility in mind. Making donations was clearly deemed as an act of responsibility by many respondents, but when little is known or maintained about how donations are managed, handled and used, the outcomes may be less than ideal as this example in the Elephant Mahout Project shows. Simple instructive do’s and don’ts hence comes to mind – why do guidebooks, websites, and even tour guides and tourists often assume that donations will do good, and are best given to a school than to an individual in a rural community? Or why should giving an old t-shirt or a box of pencils to ‘locals’ you encounter in a trekking trip be typically mentioned as what responsible tourists should do? Was this necessarily what ‘locals’ themselves deem to be the ideal or responsible gift?

Again using the example of the Elephant Mahout Project, tourists interviewed revealed how such ‘easy’ ways to associate with and gift responsibly to ‘locals’ are not quite as simple on the ground. What was most frequently brought up in private discussions at leisure and meal times amongst volunteer tourists was how they battled with differing ideas towards what constituted suitable gifts to their mahout hosts. On Go Differently’s brief provided to tourists before their trips to Thailand, it was suggested that,

Whilst gifts and donations are not expected of you when you take part in The Elephant Mahout Project many volunteers like to contribute further and offer thanks to their mahouts/guides by buying gifts. Whilst we understand that you may like to offer *a personal gift to your mahout we ask that you keep this offering quite small – a t-shirt maybe or a small tip. We ask that any ‘major’ contributions are made to benefit the camp as a whole* (my emphasis).

Indeed, Emma was regularly advising volunteer tourists that cash gifts were generally a no no, as this might create problems within the community. On the other hand, Lek was telling all volunteer tourists that mahouts would prefer cash to t-shirts, photos and all sorts of souvenirs, as cash was the most practical and useful gift for them. Amongst the six volunteer tourists interviewed at the Elephant Mahout Project then, three eventually gave cash to their mahouts before leaving (amounts varied between 1000-5000 baht<sup>53</sup>), while the other three chose to give simple presents instead. Peter, elaborated on why he chose to give presents:

we were advised a gift would be nice but keep it small. Give something for the school or the village... so yeah I just gave some gifts. Some games, two games, one for the school... Jenga and then the other game for the kids and then [I] give him [the mahout] a torch, a wind-up torch. It was an ethical present, well its environmental (interview, 19 Nov 2009).

However, the dilemmas and considerations are apparent in Helen’s responses,

I know Emma tells us not to give money, and I think it might be bad too. Who knows how they see us, and I wonder if volunteers will become nothing but cash cows in the end. The other day when Linda left my mahout told me that she gave her mahout a few thousand baht. That is a lot of money for them isn’t it? But not a lot to us. I was undecided for a very long time. It’s hard to figure out who is right and what is best. But then it feels stupid to go to the supermarket and buy something expensive and impractical when they can do more with cash instead. You know, like paying for their children’s school fees. So in the end I bought huge tins of

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<sup>53</sup> Approximately US\$33-167 at US\$1 = 29.95 Thai Baht. Source: xe.com. Accessed on 25 Aug 2011.

cookies and also gave some cash. Olivia wants to buy a Thai-English dictionary for her mahout right? I think that's a cool and practical gift. But you know that's like 800 or 1000 baht! I don't even know if they earn that much in a week (interview, 26 Nov 2009).

Indeed, there was usually little consensus and each tourist would eventually make up his or her mind and act on it. The examples this section brings up hence highlight the contradictory and sometimes difficult decisions encountered in giving, where little is certain on the eventual impact of gifts – even as much commitment and contemplation are invested in how best to be a responsible tourist (or travel related company). The everyday partiality of what eventually makes 'responsible decisions' is also highlighted. As the following section will detail, tourists and corporations make active choices about what to give and who to give to, precisely because it is not possible for one to be responsible to, and for all possible contending issues/parties, at any one point in time.

### **6.5.2 *Choosing responsibilities***

Indeed, the limitations of scarce resources committed to doing responsibilities necessarily means that all respondents, whether tourists or representatives of companies, have to make choices of who to sponsor, what school, village or NGO to support, or what cause to promote. That is to say that, although doing responsibilities in tourism and all sorts of ethical consumerism campaigns has lauded the importance of not favouring 'selves' or what is close and proximate over distant others (Silk, 1998, 2000, 2004; Smith, 1998), and extending the sphere of responsibility beyond what is most immediate (England, 2007; Massey, 2004, 2005), the practice of responsibility still remains partial. All respondents were fully aware that they have to choose who or what to support, and in that process have necessarily neglected another party that could be just as, or even more deserving of the support they rendered. And indeed, fieldwork highlighted that such choices are often made on the basis of personal judgments or convenience, rather than through thorough understandings of what impacts one's practices of responsibility might have. For example, Emma from the Elephant Mahout Project shared that the elephant camp they chose to partner was near Pattaya as a result of numerous reasons outside of responsibilities:

I often think that [why are we in Pattaya]. I think mainly because, one because Lek is kind of settled here and this was where we were and we kind of know the area, but then we've kind of also got the best of both worlds in the sense that we're so near the beach as well, I think we can

offer people a lot of things, we're easy access from Bangkok, this was one thing they looked into lots of different places you could go and we were a really good location, we're two hours from Bangkok, really easy access, you've got Pattaya near, if you want the tourist attractions, and being five minutes away from the beach. Because a lot of people that come have to make that choice, do they want the relaxing beachy type holiday or do they want the volunteering holiday, and some people can do both, and they can travel around, but a lot of people either don't have the budget or the time. You know they might only have 2 weeks off work or something, so here they kind of can do both (interview, 16 Nov 2009).

As this example shows, the choice of site – in this case in Pattaya, was due to all sorts of reasons – Lek (the Thai coordinator)'s personal attachment and investments in the area,<sup>54</sup> the proximity of Pattaya to the airport and beach – a factor considered mainly for the convenience of tourists and marketability of the project as a tourism destination.<sup>55</sup> While the attractiveness and accessibility of the project to tourists is an important factor in ensuring that the project does make money for its mahouts, little consideration however, was observed about how mahouts and elephants in the project are all in fact migrants from Surin or Buri Ram provinces in Northeastern Thailand. In fact, the 'village' and 'local community' that volunteer tourists work in is simply a collection of mahouts who typically have left behind wives and children in their hometowns in Northeastern Thailand. That fact elephants were not native to beach environments and Pattaya was also seldom mentioned. Indeed, this example shows how the practice of responsibilities often involves choices to be made, and such choices are necessarily partial, or in fact often made for reasons over and beyond responsibilities.

Such observations apply to many other respondents as well. For example when queried on how they decide on which project or community to work with for the CSR, Accor Group, Alila Cha Am, Asian Trails Pte Ltd, Conrad Bangkok, Dusit Thani Bangkok, Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok, and Novotel Siam Square Bangkok, all explained how they "chanced upon" particular opportunities. Chitpaong Venu-Athon, Corporate Human Resources Support Manager for Accor Group, for example, described the process of

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<sup>54</sup> Lek's daughter and friends own three houses in a cluster housing development in Bang Sare. These houses are rented as accommodation to volunteers at the project.

<sup>55</sup> See also Chambers (1983; 1997) on how the locations of development projects and NGOs are also influenced by aspects of accessibility rather than because of the needs of the 'poor'.

setting up their main CSR project, Yim Kids Foundation (initially known as A Tree for A Child Foundation):

So what we do we announce to all the staff in Thailand, and then ask them to propose to us which village do you think that we could develop. So we received a lot of proposals, more than ten of them, and then with the pictures with descriptions of the villages, so we found out and we chose two out of ten. And *these two villages are of course home towns from one of our staff in Huay Pha in Chiang Mai, this is one of our staff for Mercure in Chiang Mai* (interview, 29 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

This was similar to what Nelson Hilton, Director of Marketing at Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok said, that donations were given to

*the community from which our director of engineering is from. They've reached out to us, so we look at who's reached and so this school needs it. We respond, we get asked ten times a day, but we, we respond to all of them, but we don't give to all of them* (interview, 14 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

In both examples, what is evident in these accounts is that support tended to be given to those that had personal connections with the company (both staff at the companies) who happened to have approached them for support, and that respondents were in a continual process of choosing what to support. The partial nature of doing responsibilities is indeed an underlying but yet little mentioned aspect, and this echoes what is argued in section 2.3.4, where there is a need to acknowledge partiality in doing responsibility, and to explore responsibilities not as an abstract and comprehensive moral whole, but as a plural and multiple domain in which people, states and organizations make active and partial choices with practical reasoning (see also Clarke et al., 2007; Woon, 2007).

### **6.5.3 To please tourists (or not)**

On the other hand, the popularity of responsible tourism has meant that more and more such options are increasingly available to tourists, and especially in the case of tour-providing companies, or niche destinations such as the Elephant Mahout Project, companies compete with a large range of other similar tours/destinations. For example, even within my limited knowledge, tourists wishing to participate in a similar elephant mahout training programme can easily do so in other projects, such as The Thai Elephant Conservation Centre, Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp, Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary, Maesa Elephant Camp and the Elephant Nature Park (at varying prices). This sense of competition, together with the fact that tourists are the vital people to please to

ensure profits since they are the primary paying parties, creates a situation in which companies may or tend to seek out responsible practices towards one party – such as the locals in tourism destinations, or elephants in this case, but this is done largely because of the company's desire to appease another party – tourists or consumers.

For example, during the internship with Exotissimo Travel, I assisted Hamish Keith, Managing Director of Exotissimo Thailand, to prepare his presentation at a training workshop, “Integrating Business Skills into Ecotourism Operations”, that was held in Phnom Penh (17-21 Jan 2010), and it was evident that marketing was a key area covered. This workshop was aimed at NGO participants wishing to harness tourism as a pro-poor strategy, and indeed the areas covered were: Exploring the ecotourism *potential* of a site; Making the most of the *market context*; Ensuring sustainability; Focusing on *Health, Safety and customer care*; *Marketing* your ecotourism business (my emphasis). In this example we can observe that not only is marketing to tourists a major component of ecotourism development, there is also seemingly a generalization of what tourists may or may not be interested in during their travels.

Luzi Matzig, CEO of Asian Trails Ltd, also shared that they had set up programmes that combine cruises on the River Kwai together with visiting and giving donations to schools run by the border patrol police because,

People [tourists] like to have a contact to the locals, because usually they are just being carried around here is a temple, here is a museum, here is this. They don't interact. So at least to a small extent they can interact, talk to the teacher and things like that.

He added that,

*We don't want to go to the same place [school] all the time, then it gets, then the students don't pay attention anymore. So our guides can choose which schools they like and which schools they go to visit once every time. Wherever it is. But here on the river, we don't have too many clients on these cruises, so let's say we have 400 clients a year, a school can handle that over 52 weeks. Every week, not too many, 10 a week they can handle (interview, 22 Dec 2009, my emphasis).*

In this anecdote, it can be observed that visiting and giving donations to schools are perhaps done not so much based on whether such acts benefit locals (those we ought to be 'responsible' for) but rather because tourists like such activities. Also, what is practised on the ground – which schools to visit and how often – is instead dependent on whether

students will pay attention to tourists. This is to say that in situations where visiting tourists are less of a rarity, students may not pay them any attention, and tourists may hence be disappointed with their ‘less authentic’ experience. However, it should be safe to assume that regular visits from tourists would be beneficial from the point of ensuring continued and predictable income from tourism (both in donations and from spending when for example a home stay is involved), even though the social impact of more regular visits would be hard to predict. The need to balance between the welfare of locals versus the experience of tourists has in this case been tipped in favour of tourists’ expectations, and while this is but one example, in practice, similar situations were also discussed in a number of other interviews, such as with Jean-Yves Paille, Product Manager, Exotismo Travel Laos, and Peter Weingand, Managing Director of Arosa Travel Service. The skewed power to assume responsibilities is hence highlighted here – not only is the voice of those “we are responsible for” notably absent, it is as Kant suggests, that “to hold that someone does not qualify as a responsible agent represents an extremely serious deprivation of social status” (1793(1960)). Responsible tourism, as in academic literature and popular ethical consumption campaigns, needs to be clearly aware of the unequal agency it places on different groups of people, and how this distorts responsibility as practised on the ground (see also Noxolo et al., 2011; Raghuram et al., 2009).

Interviews with Michael Kwee, CSR Director of Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, and Srichan Monrakharom, CSR Representative of Six Senses Evason Hua Hin Resort, present another side of this story. As corporations who pride themselves and are well-known for their commitment to CSR, they discussed instances where tourists had objected to particular practices or rules put in place in their facilities. Michael Kwee shared that guests have complained about how Banyan Tree sets the thermostat of air conditioners in the villas and other common areas to 25 degrees Celsius, but that,

People will always complain its human nature to complain. We’ve had complaints on one side and then we’ve had equal complaints on the other side. You know we had a complaint about, in Bintan, somebody was saying that somebody gave them too much cold water, that they shouldn’t have given them so much water. That it was wasting resources to give them, but then if you don’t provide good service, quick service, pre-emptive service, then there will be complaints about that... So it’s tough balance to achieve (interview, 10 Feb 2010).

Srichan Monrakharom also said that they often

have to be very firm on what you are doing, because the surrounding is different, you have to maintain really what you are. Because if you don't maintain, you're going to lose everything what you have done in the past. So that's why even when the market use more plastic, use more things, we don't. We don't import water, and we really have to stick with it, we got complaints [from tourists] yes, because we don't sell Perrier, not water from France...because it [Perrier and Evian] is a popular brand right, you can find everywhere, every resort in the country, but when you come to Six Senses you don't have it... At the moment we sell Schweppes soda, the reason [is] because it's local. It's I think from Bangkok, [or] Ayutthaya... We still buy some still water, Singha water. The reason why we choose Singha water, you know what's the reason? Because Singha water their factory is closest to the resort (interview 31 Jan 2010).

In these instances, tourists are *not* interested in being responsible, and the divergent attitudes towards such matters can possibly bring tourists and corporations into conflict. How this is addressed or resolved can vary from case to case, and shows as the next section will elaborate, that conflicting notions of responsibility often exist and needs to be actively negotiated between parties involved.

#### **6.5.4 Differing notions of responsibility**

As discussed in the earlier sections, the numerous parties involved in ethics and responsibilities in tourism means that at any one point, what is practised is indeed negotiated through different individuals' perspectives of what exactly constitutes responsibilities. While there are many showcases of win-win partnership in popular media, there are also many instances where notions of responsibilities can differ greatly, and some of the most prevalent ones are discussed in this section (see also section 7.4 on the differences between mahouts, tourists, and coordinators' ideas of responsibility).

The case of whether it is responsible or not to conduct tours to Myanmar, for example, shows the differing opinions on what truly matters and constitutes responsibilities. Until very recently, many (especially Western) tourists had actively avoided visiting Myanmar because of its political situation, and Aung San Suu Kyi has once famously said that "Burma will be here for many years, so tell your friends to visit us later. Visiting now is tantamount to condoning the regime" (Interview with Burma Campaign UK, January 1999, cited in Tourism Concern<sup>56</sup>). The validity of this opinion was questioned time and

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/index.php?page=san-suu-kyi-on-tourism>. <Assessed on 1 Sept 2011>.

again by those respondents who do conduct tours to Myanmar and fundamentally disagree with the notion that doing so was an irresponsible behaviour on their part. Peter Weingard, Managing Director of Arosa Travel, for example, stated that,

I know what that controversy is about, it has been for many years. But it comes out of the fact that some of the big shots over there in army position or whatever position, they also are investors in the tourism, they own hotels, they are co-owners of airlines, they own this and that... *So that is one angle of course*, but when I send the tourists to Myanmar they are so, like that same in Thailand and any other countries, they go and eat in small restaurants, they go and use a minivan which we rent from somewhere and then the driver has the job. So it also filters down, and you cannot say just because some generals also own the hotels or whatever that you cannot send, that the whole let's say a client pays you 2000 dollars to go to Myanmar, the whole 2000 dollars is not benefiting the military. I would say the major part of it is benefitting the little community here and there. Again it helps. *To not send people there because the country is under a regime which you cannot support is nonsense.* [Intrepid Travel] maybe they were under great pressure in their home country, England.... It's actually a question of how you explain it, and if you can properly explain it and maybe even prove you know like half of the money each tourist goes into the small channels feeding families and small communities, then it is nonsense not to send tourists there. Even if you don't send any tourists to Myanmar anymore, the regime doesn't change. They have enough other income (interview, 12 Jan 2010).

Luzi Matzig, CEO of Asian Trails Ltd, adds that,

Now she [Aung San Suu Kyi] changed her stand, now she welcomes. But for 10 years she was very misguided, didn't help her people at all, actually hurt her own people. Just to try to get her way... you are hurting the people, you think you hurt the generals? They don't care, they have enough sources of income from cutting trees and exporting minerals and all that. There you have the poorest population of all the countries around here, in Burma. Because of these stupid boycotts... I mean, honestly, totally misguided. *We have nothing to do with the Burmese government, we are 100% private enterprise. We employ lots of people, without us they wouldn't have a job and their children wouldn't have food... we can't change the generals from one to another, but the more you open up tourism, the more free information flows in there... So then, if tourists flood the country, if they do have prisoner working the new roads, then they will make them disappear because they don't want the tourists to go and see the chain gangs. So it will help... As long as you have all these pressure groups who don't care for the people, who only care to promote their idea and think they are the only ones who are right, nevermind the people suffering. Then people actually believe it, that's the worst. They don't see it* (interview, 22 Dec 2009, my emphasis).

The question on whose definition of responsibility should one follow is constantly challenged within these anecdotes, and this highlights what Barnett et al. critiqued about existing research:

What policy – and governance-oriented research seems unable to acknowledge – unable to hear – is the degree to which their research subjects are able to articulate sceptical questions about just *whose definition* of responsibility has come to dominate public discussion and insinuate itself into their own practices through diverse mediums of the ethical problematization of everyday consumption (original emphasis 2011: 119).

Another division also commonly expressed amongst a number of respondents was the opinion that the ‘locals’ that they are trying to be responsible to, or who would benefit from their efforts in introducing responsibilities, are in fact the same people who do not understand the importance or significance of what was being done. For example, Luzi Matzig, CEO of Asian Trails Ltd, shared his views that ‘locals’ are often the weakest link in ensuring responsible travel:

I mean *Thais produce waste, think nothing of throwing things away*. Nothing, and the *tourists are much more responsible in general* I think the Thais can learn from the tourists in general... the whole school system here, people are not very well educated, most of them very simple very basic. They don’t even know how to drive, so how would they know about environmental policies (interview, 22 Dec 2009).

Jean-Yves Paille, Product Manager at Exotissimo Travel Laos, also said that,

this is the problem that we met sometimes, is that some guides they want to satisfy the clients first, and sometimes the client could ask something that is not responsible, and the guide will be agree to make the client happy. And the consequence will be negative (interview, 21 Dec 2009).

And such statements are not only made by *farang* (Westerner) respondents, as Thai tour operator, Khun Eng, Director of Let’s Tour Bangkok, also agrees that,

They [‘locals’] destroy thing, but mostly it’s *lack of knowledge*. If for example, either ignorant or don’t have the knowledge that will be a problem in the case of local people, but the tourist they sometimes come and they know how to clean garbage and sometimes wasting things, but after that some hotel they don’t know how to manage as well. They dump it somewhere not good. I will say that it’s the local people. They don’t have money to manage that and the government doesn’t manage that, it’s too hard (interview, 19 Jan 2010).

These responses highlight the common perception that ‘locals’ do not understand due to the lack of knowledge, but fails to take into account what locals then consider to be responsible or not. Instead of labelling locals as irresponsible as many respondents and popular media have, perhaps it should be noted that locals do often have a myriad of existing practices of responsibilities, and these may or may not be in line with what is accepted as the norm in typically Western standards. For example, while Emma, coordinator of the Elephant Mahout Project thinks that mahouts involved in the project may not actually know what ‘responsible tourism’ is (a valid suspicion as section 7.4 shows), she highlights that contrary to opinions of earlier respondents, there are many aspects whereby the mahouts’ were more environmentally responsible:

I think [it is their] lifestyle and just the way growing up, and also a necessity, again coming down to the financial thing, and then just a general attitude and way of life, that they always try to recycle, reuse, rethink ways that you can reuse things as well (interview, 16 Nov 2009).

Indeed, almost all Thai respondents highlighted that philanthropy and regular donations (whether on an individual or corporate level) are understood and implicit within the Thai society, as Buddhist concepts of merit making are commonly accepted as the norm. Sukich Udindu, VP CSR of Minor International, for example, elaborated that,

You know Buddhism, the religion of Thai people is Buddhism, so the philosophy of Buddhism is to do good thing. And you have several life reincarnations... So if you do good in this life, the next life you will be better. So people are giving through the religion, and believe that next life will be better than this one, if you do bad thing, the next life will be down. *So people want to do good things, that is the deep in the philosophy, and Thai people are really very caring.* In the old times, Thai people have hierarchy, and we have a rule that the higher hierarchy have to take care of the small one. So this kind of thing, they have a hierarchy of responsibility... So that is the thing that they have to take care. So Thai people give a lot, but mostly to the religion, now we can, giving to charitable organization but very small (interview, 26 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

As such, perhaps it is worth noting that rather than assuming that one is responsible or not, it is rather often that differing notions of ethics and responsibilities exist (see Noxolo et al., 2011; Raghuram et al., 2009), and together with the often neglected existing practices of responsibilities, it is not always easy to judge one aspect as more important than the other.

## **6.6 Concluding remarks**

This chapter highlights that there is no, and possibly cannot be, a conclusive statement on what responsibility is in practice, or what should or should not be considered as responsibilities. It critiques existing works both in classical moral ethics and in the geographies of responsibility that has focused too much on the moralization of the subject – i.e. the ethical consumer, responsible corporate citizen and so on (c.f. Barnett et al., 2011; Barnett and Land, 2007; Clarke et al., 2007; Foster, 2008). This draws attention to how a binary between what *is* or *is not* responsible has inadvertently been set up, and argues that such a point of view has not been helpful in understanding what doing responsibilities is really about. Indeed, tours (or other tourism-related services such as hoteling and transport) are not ethical or not, but rather, there is an implicit morality in all forms of consumption, where “consumers do not choose between ethical and unethical consumption, smart and stupid shopping; they instead negotiate multiple and sometimes contradictory moral demands” (Foster, 2008: 225). This chapter therefore brings to light the importance of contextualizing responsibilities rather than discussing them in abstract terms. Examples and discussions put forth here highlights the fact that practising responsibilities is necessarily partial, never perfect, and always in-the-making (see also Barnett and Land, 2007), and that both academic and popular literature has presented ideals of responsibility as an abstract and given whole for too long, where what is lacking amongst these is a critical exploration of why certain practices in tourism – for example ‘going local’ is necessarily responsible after all.

At the same time, what has been observed in this research reflects a mix of entrepreneurial and reactive processes that invokes different forms of responsibilities. In some instances, especially with corporations like Six Senses Resorts and Banyan Tree Resorts where the business strategy is exactly to provide responsible options (that is otherwise limited) in tourism, it is highlighted that being ‘responsible’ has meant introducing processes that are not only innovative, but also profitable. Banyan Tree’s anecdotes of using biodiesels filtered from used cooking oil in Seychelles is an example of how thinking out of the box and challenging existing practices, while sometimes difficult to overcome, can potentially produce win-win results that benefit both the environment and the corporation’s bottom line. More common however, are reactive processes – where corporations, tourists, and locals react to contexts and situations such

as natural disasters like Cyclone Nargis, or changing societal norms that expects, for example, a stronger role of corporate social responsibilities. This chapter highlights numerous examples of such behaviour, where corporations, for example, typically react and respond to appeals for donations, rather than have a comprehensive strategy on what, who or how to support in their CSR projects. Many respondents in this research have indeed reflected that while they tend to put aside certain budgets for corporate donations or sponsorships, they have also come to expect the ‘unexpected’ natural disaster, and have become ready to react to and commit responsibility (usually in terms of donating money and items) as and when such natural disasters strike. In other instances, respondents from corporations also share the mounting pressures that they face, and the increasing need to perform responsibilities in reaction to tourists’ expectations. Philippe Le Bourhis, General Manager of Novotel Siam Square Bangkok, for example, shares his prior experience working at Novotel Bali:

quite a few, especially Australians they were quite... concerned about the environment in Australia, especially water saving. There is no water in Australia nowadays, it is really tough there. The [Australian] government does a lot of advertising in wasting water and so on and so we had some customers [that were] really concerned about the, for example they hang the towel [up to indicate this did not need washing] and the staff washed the towel, I would get complain. So quickly I would know that, oops I am having problems and [I need to] go train [my staff] (interview, 15 Dec 2009).

On the other hand, reasons for why responsibility is considered, as expressed by key actors interviewed in this research, suggests that these were not arrived at through comprehensive thought towards morals and ethics in the broader society, or because they hold positions of power as key decisions makers in larger corporations, but more often as a result of individual preferences, knowledges, ideas and experiences. For example, Four Seasons Bangkok hosts a yearly cancer charitable run to raise funds for research on cancer, but this has got less to do with Four Seasons hotel being a responsible corporate citizen within the larger contexts of Bangkok and Thailand’s economy, but rather because of the personal motivations of the Chairman of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. Nelson Hilton, Director of Marketing at Four Seasons Bangkok, elaborates on this: “it is because our chairman’s son passed away from cancer, it is a personal charity, it is a personal goal of all of our hotels to give to this cause” (interview, 14 Jan 2010). In another example, when asked whether he thought tourism development was beneficial to Thailand, Peter

Weingand, Managing Director of Arosa Travel, said, “of course [I think] it is good, I wouldn’t be doing what I do, if I find that it wouldn’t be good. My conscience wouldn’t be clear, so of course it would be good” (interview, 12 Jan 2010).

While entrepreneurial and reactive processes, or individual agency and ‘systemic positions’ are not mutually exclusive and all showcase commitments towards being responsible, it should be emphasized here that the motivations and origins can affect the ways in which responsibilities play out. Also, they represent two ends of the spectrum in how ideas of responsibility and irresponsibility are governed and regulated – on one end, being responsible appears to be passively about reacting to situations that calls for responsibility; on the other end, being responsible means actively getting down to questioning existing practices, rethinking and remodelling the ways we do even the most mundane tasks to make these more responsible. Stating the different ways that responsibilities are envisioned does not in any way assume or suggest that one way or the other is superior, rather, the opposite holds true – both continue to co-exist within the framework of how responsibilities and care plays out in practice, and rather than assume that there is a ‘correct’ way of being responsible, it is vital for critics and academic researchers alike to acknowledge such varied starting points, and recognize the practical concerns, individual beliefs, and organisation capabilities that often dominate in the highly dynamic and complex situations in which ethics and social or environmental responsibilities are but one element in the mix when actual (and often pressing) decisions are made. What this chapter argues for then, is to acknowledge such limitations – that it is difficult to practise responsibilities, that varying idea(l)s and realities of doing responsibilities exist, and that there are people who do already desire to be responsible (or in fact are competitive in being so). Such accounts are often lacking in academic and popular literature, thereby creating an illusion that there is a ‘perfect’ way to be responsible – and in turn creating a space for those who criticise efforts simply because these are not yet ‘perfect’, or those who turn away from trying simply because it is not possible to be ‘perfect’.

While emphasising the need to understand corporation’s role in practices of responsibility in tourism, this chapter also highlights the limits and constraints CSR has in addressing issues in tourism. With little consensus on what exactly responsibilities are, and the lack of central accreditation like organic or fairtrade certifications, together with the varied

nature of businesses that are deemed to make up the ‘tourism industry’, means that it is difficult to rally the industry’s corporations together to collectively address certain aspects responsibilities in practice, or to make broad-based structural changes towards how the industry is organised. Corporations’ efforts tend to and are likely to remain largely individualised and patchwork, even though financial means and powers often skew towards corporations (as compared to, for example, local governments in debt situations and NGOs that are mostly dependent on funding, donations, and ‘goodwill’). The fact that corporations in a capitalist society were made to compete with each other for scarce resources and profits, rather than to cooperate puts further obstacles to CSR addressing issues of responsibility in tourism as an industry. Thivagarar Kesavan, General Manager of Alila Cha Am, for example, shares that while he is impressed with what Six Senses Resorts have accomplished in terms of social and environmental sustainability, he does not think it is appropriate for him or Alila to approach Six Senses to gain knowledge of and possibly duplicate its practices in Alila properties, nor does he think Six Senses will be willing to share such information with a competitor resort (interview, 30 Jan 2010). If ‘responsibility’ is the differentiating (and perhaps selling) factor for corporations like Six Senses and Banyan Tree that adopts broad-ranging practices in line with this, then it should make business sense for such corporations to discourage adoption of responsible practices by other corporations – to ensure that they continue to stand out. Notions of such competition are alluded to in section 6.4, and once again highlights that being responsible is not at all simple or straightforward.

Inherent in these anecdotes is also the ordinariness of day-to-day practices and performances related to responsibility – similar to what Barnett et al. (2011) argue about the politics of the ordinariness of consumption – when people ‘do responsibilities’ (for example, selecting a suitable school to support for corporate philanthropy), they may not necessarily have ‘responsibility’ in the foreground of their minds. Instead, all sorts of practical and possibly mundane considerations like who will oversee the logistics of collecting donated funds and items seem to dominate. Such observations, together with the noted bias in power and agency given to tourists and corporations over those ‘we are responsible for’ highlights the complex and plural nature in which responsibilities play out on the ground, and stresses the importance of taking such into consideration – something that has been neglected for far too long.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Responsibilities in and through Places**

## 7. Responsibilities in and through Places

### 7.1 Preamble

And it seems that people have come to Thailand to fall in love...  
Some fall in love with the country,  
Some with the elephants...  
And then there are some others... it seems that they fall in love with the  
people...  
(Field Journal, 29 Dec 2009).

Somewhere in the midpoint of my four month long fieldwork stint in Thailand, I was inspired to write this in my field journal – it seems that people, foreigners/*farang*, or tourists in most instances, have come to Thailand to fall in love. Perhaps “falling in love” may not be the best way to describe this, but so many of my respondents have used the word ‘love’ to describe their experiences – “I love Thailand”, or “I love how we get to really live with and know the local Thais”, or “*Boon Mi* [the name of an elephant] is the love of my life! I could sit here and watch her all day”. And while responsibility, rather than love, remains the focus of this chapter and thesis, this chapter deliberates on how especially in the case of tourism, while notions of responsibility, like love, is intangible, its practices are grounded in places. Indeed, as the following sections will detail, love (or the various understandings of what love is) are intricately tied in with how responsibilities are imagined and therefore carried out in places.

This chapter therefore uses three separately presented but interrelated sections to critically look at responsibilities in places<sup>57</sup> – Section 7.2 looks at how responsibilities in tourism can inscribe notions of poverty and hence responsibility on particular places, and at the same time also create ‘places suitable for doing or observing responsibilities’; Section 7.3 discusses the tricky situations of enacting responsibilities of tourism in a domestic space; and Section 7.4 considers the Asian elephant as a site of responsibility. These suggest that responsibilities in tourism are continually produced-consumed-and-reproduced by various parties in a fluid and dynamic process, many times resulting in real and actual practices observed on the ground.

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<sup>57</sup> This is not to say what was discussed that previous chapters were not grounded in places. Instead, this chapter brings place to the foreground to enable a deeper discussion.

## 7.2 Inscribing places with notions of (ir)responsibility

Saying that practices of responsibilities in tourism happen in and have consequences on real and actual places is perhaps nothing surprising. What this section aims to put forward however, is the idea that responsible tourism can (and at many times does) inscribe and replace geographical imaginations of its destinations with notions of poverty and destitution, or with romanticized ideas of untouched natural or social environments. On the one hand, places that fulfil particular stereotypes are often easily categorized as those suitable for tourists and tourism to practise and enact their ideas of responsibility. On the other hand, it appears that with an increasing demand for responsible tourism, such 'suitable places' could very well be created spaces for the observation of responsibilities on the ground. This section therefore highlights and dwells on the uneasy balance and practical concerns of 'placing' responsibility, and suggests that the issue of place is often neglected much to the detriment of practising responsibilities in tourism.

Indeed, as already alluded to in Chapter Five, a casual glance at [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) that collates and hosts the largest number of responsible travel options within one site, shows how certain places, such as Cambodia and Lao PDR, are favoured in responsible tourism, or at least have a larger representation with more numbers of tours provided. For example, although Thailand leads amongst the Southeast Asian countries with 141 options listed on the website (see Table 7.1), this needs to be considered against the large scale of Thailand's tourism industry, where 15.94 million international tourist arrivals were recorded in 2010 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand, 2011). In comparison, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam have a higher representation on [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) at 76, 50 and 101 options respectively, when one considers that these countries only received 2.4 million, 2.5 million, and 5.9 million international tourists in 2010.<sup>58</sup> Most distinctively, countries like Malaysia and Singapore, while receiving 24.6 million and 11.6 million international tourists in 2010, only pulls out 36 and 3 options respectively on [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com). While relying on [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) alone cannot be argued to provide a conclusive picture of the state of responsibilities in tourism in these respective

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<sup>58</sup> Myanmar can also be considered to have a 'large' number of [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) options, considering that the country only receives 0.31 million international tourists in 2010. However, the situation in Myanmar, as discussed in various sections throughout this thesis is generally considered to be unique because of the political circumstances, sanctions and embargoes, and is thus not discussed in similar ways with countries like Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam in this section.

countries, since the access and take up rate of tourism companies in these countries may differ greatly, it does provide a snapshot of where responsible tourism options are typically found, as well as how easy it is for tourists<sup>59</sup> to find and use responsible tourism options when they visit these countries.

**Table 7.1:** International Tourists Arrivals and ‘Responsible Holidays’ options in Southeast Asian countries.

Country	Number of international tourist arrivals in millions (2010)	Number of “responsible holidays” options on responsibletravel.com	Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (2009 in current US\$)
Brunei	0.16 *	1	27,390
Cambodia	2.4	76	706
Indonesia	7.0	34	2,272
Lao PDR	2.5	50	940
Malaysia	24.6	36	6,902
Myanmar	0.31	9	No data
Philippines	3.5	9	1,836
Singapore	11.6	3	36,573
Thailand	15.94	141	3,893
Vietnam	5.9	101	1,130

\* For year 2009 as data for 2010 is unavailable.

(Statistics derived from: Brunei Tourism, 2009; Index Mundi, 2010; Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand, 2011; Ministry of Tourism Cambodia, 2010; PATA, 2010; Singapore Tourism Board, 2011; The World Bank, 2010)

The reasons for such concentrations on responsibility in tourism in particular places are the focus of section 7.2, highlighting where such places are (mostly within the context of Thailand), and what sorts of issues arises from inscribing such places with notions of responsibility.

### 7.2.1 *Seeking the poor and untouched*

Looking back again at Table 7.1, we begin to here wonder why some countries – namely Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, are favoured as places to practise responsible tourism. Jean-Yves Paile, Product Manager at Exotissimo Travel Laos offers some suggestions:

<sup>59</sup> Assuming they rely on the internet as a primary source of information.

Many, more and more tours [in Laos], I would say *70 percent involve at least one component [of responsible tourism]*... [Laos is] one step ahead if you compare with Cambodia, or more if you compared with Vietnam, and definitely even more compared to Thailand... First the country has less tourism, less tourists than the neighbouring country, even if you compare with Cambodia, it's something like 2 million I guess, and Laos is 1 million... So it's quite less so it's easier for Laos to have access to the nature, to the trips, the fact that there is not so much, it's easier. The fact that when we spoke about natural landscape or history or heritage, everybody will think about Angkor Wat for heritage, and Halong Bay for natural, or you would think about the beaches in Thailand, Laos is not, and when people come here it's more for to escape the mass tourism, to escape standardization as well, in crowded area like Bangkok, Hanoi (interview, 21 Dec 2009).

Embedded within this short quote then is not only how Lao PDR is more suitable and more in need of responsible tourism, but also how responsible tourism is conflated with an “escape [to] the mass tourism, to escape standardization as well, in crowded area like Bangkok, Hanoi”. Indeed, much of what is typically considered as responsible tourism tends to be positioned as a means to seek out the ‘untouched’ – whether this refers to local communities or ‘natural’ environments that are “not yet spoilt by mass tourism”. Lao PDR is here considered the new frontier, or the outback of tourism in Southeast Asia, a sentiment that is echoed not only by Paile, but also by other respondents who conduct tours across Southeast Asia, such as Luzi Matzig (CEO, Asian Trails Ltd) and Willem Niemeijer (Founder, Khiri Travel), and as such, it is also most suitable for responsible tourism initiatives. Considering, however, how Laos PDR received 1.23 million international tourists in 2009 and doubled to 2.5 million by 2010 within the span of a year, it becomes questionable about whether responsible tourism has a lighter footprint, or if it is just the start of mass tourism not unlike what has been argued about backpacker tourism.

On the other hand, when one compares countries in Table 7.1, what stands out sharply is that countries like Malaysia and Singapore are not particularly known for or deemed suitable for responsible travel. This is not to say the tourism in Malaysia and Singapore is irresponsible, but rather, that what the tourism industry does in these countries is hardly ever marketed and sold as being ‘responsible’. Indeed, Singapore in particular is often considered as highly ‘developed’ and ‘wealthy’ as compared to its Southeast Asian

neighbours and Table 7.1 clearly shows the vast differences the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita between the selected countries.

In the same interviews, respondents cited above have suggested that the perceived state of wealth and development makes some countries and places easier to market as destinations of responsible tourism, and others – like Singapore, and to a lesser extent Thailand, not quite as suitable. During my internship at Exotissimo for example, Hamish Keith (MD Thailand) and Anne Cruickshanks (Group Product and Marketing Manager) mentioned more than once that Thailand does not have as many responsible tourism related products, or that limited work has been done in Thailand in terms of philanthropic giving. Exotissimo (at the point of fieldwork) has several well-marketed responsible or community-based tour options in Lao PDR, and even within the management, there is a sense that profits generated from general tours in, for example, Thailand, should be redistributed towards ‘poorer countries’ they work in – such as Lao PDR and Myanmar (interviews, Dec 2009 – Jan 2010). In this respect, practising responsibility in tourism is often conflated with addressing developmental goals such as ending hunger and poverty as set out in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, where tourists and tour companies or hotels seek out the ‘untouched’ or ‘local’ in a way resembling what is popularly imagined as the work of international development agencies. Willem Niemeijer, Founder of Khiri Travel, for example, highlights the trend to work with, and work like development agencies:

there is a lot of interests from our clients, both our private clients, the passengers that we handle, as well as the corporate clients that we handle, to see that wow if you can do this we have money as well, and we provide all the infrastructure and services to get whatever people give, we give it to the project that they want to give to without any money lost. So if you want to give 100 dollars, we make sure that 100 dollars gets to, without any overhead costs or anything like that. We have offices everywhere so... The interesting thing now is we are getting involved in the professional agencies, development agencies, like the German development agency, and the Dutch development agency, those are also looking for private partnership and we are getting involved in that and I think, it's a great development (interview, 11 Jan 2010).

Many respondents, as well as travel guidebooks and websites surveyed, also highlight that within the context of Thailand, some places, notably in North and Northeastern Thailand, or Kloeng Toey area near Bangkok, are also often considered as sites suitable for

responsible travel. Chitpaping Venu-Athon from Accor Group, for example, stated that Accor has set up the Yim Kids Foundation with the aim to,

help the young needy child in Thailand, for example if you heard about this district Kloeng Toey in Bangkok, it is part of poor, the Kloeng Toey Slums... and part of it we're also helping 2 villages, one in the North and one in the Northeast. [We chose Huay Pha village in Chiang Mai] Because this village is very very far from the city, it's 8 hours drive, and it's part of Karen village up in the mountain, *it's quite a rural area, remote area, electricity is not there yet*, they have to use solar cell (interview, 29 Jan 2010).

This is perhaps unsurprising, as parts of North and Northeastern Thailand are typically considered the poorest and most rural areas in Thailand, and when tourists and tour companies or hotels set out with Millennium Goal like developmental ideals in mind, there is of course a tendency to subscribe to similar ideas and terminology – in this case, for example, by addressing issues of absolute poverty – which as determined by the United Nations would be “people whose income is less than US\$1.25 a day”. While not all tour options and CSR by companies in Thailand would be working with those that are classified as in absolute poverty (which also explains why Cambodia and Lao PDR are often considered to be more suitable for responsible travel since there are more ‘poor’<sup>60</sup> people there), there is a tendency that responsibilities in tourism need to be practised and targeted towards the “poorest of the lot”. Yim Kids Foundation supposedly chose Huay Pha village precisely because of its remoteness and associated poverty and lack of amenities.

This trend is also observed in guidebooks, where Northeastern Thailand, or *Isan*, is often mentioned as the place of poverty, and at times, because of this, a good destination for tourists:

This [Isan] is the least-visited region of the kingdom, and the *poorest*: some seventy percent of Isaan villagers earn less than the regional minimum wage of B148-170 a day. Farming is the traditional livelihood here, despite appallingly infertile soil and long periods of drought punctuated by downpours and intermittent bouts of flooding (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 491).

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Poor’ is here referred to in inverted commas as I reflect upon the problematic binaries such classifications creates, as well as acknowledge all sorts of issues not easily captured in such statistical definitions – for example, accessibility to basic needs, unequal social status, income disparity, and the differences between absolute and relative poverty.

The broad and relatively infertile northeast plateau that is Isan is the least developed region in Thailand... Many young people from Isan work in Bangkok, many of the men as taxi drivers, and the girls in bars... Other than potash mining and subsistence farming, the region has enjoyed little economic development (Shalgosky, 2008: 16).

The northeast of Thailand has the lowest inflation rate and cost of living. *This region is generally poorer than the rest of the country and doesn't get too much tourism; therefore it offers excellent value for the traveller and is well worth a visit* – a lot of good silk-weaving is done in the north-east, for example... (Cummings, 1984: 12, my emphasis).

Isan is hence portrayed time and again as the poorest region of Thailand (which in terms of typical statistical observation such as GDP per capita is indeed very true), but at the same time, as *Thailand. A Travel Survival Kit* (an early edition of the Lonely Planet) suggests, because of this poverty and hence low cost of living, it “offers excellent value for the traveller and is well worth a visit” (Cummings, 1984: 12). While there are few who will directly express the link that remote and poor, and hence typically ‘untouched’ places make good travel destinations, much of what is typically seen as marketing material for example for community-based tourism does play up this aspect greatly (see also Section 5.4). In a meeting between Hamish Keith (Managing Director of Exotissimo) and Bill Tuffin (World Wildlife Federation Consultant) to “assess the potential of community-based ecotourism in several wetlands sites in the Northeast of Thailand [where] WWF is interested in helping communities in these wetlands site generate funding for conservation activities freeing them from dependence on donor funding” (Tuffin, interview, 8 Dec 2009), Hamish Keith expressed the following:

I think we're definitely looking at, it's an interesting area for us, because it's a sort of *new* Thailand, a sort of cultural Thailand... so we are really on the lookout for more interesting things to see and do in Isan so we can incorporate it into the products that we're offering... a home stay now is almost an integral part of Isan programme... it's really part of what they are looking for... it's real people, stay in their house, and be with their families, that's really the essence of what they are looking for (interview, 17 Dec 2009).

Tourism in general's consistent enamour towards ‘untouched places’ (see for example, Cloke and Perkins, 1998; Cohen, 1988; Farbotko, 2010, as well as numerous tourism marketing materials) together with responsibilities in tourism perhaps having been positioned too much along the lines of international aid and development, brings about a problematic reemphasizing of places as poor and destitute. While such initiatives in

tourism are potentially good avenues for income generation and rural livelihoods sustainability as argued in many pro-poor tourism resources (Ashley et al., 2001; Hall, 2007a; Roe and Urquhart, 2001; Scheyvens, 2007), the next sections will explore some of the pitfalls observed on the ground.

### 7.2.2 *(Ir)responsible places*

First of all, when there are destinations one ought to visit as a ‘responsible traveller’, the necessary flipside is that there are also destinations one ought to avoid. In some instances particular places are classified outright as places no one should be visiting – for example, while ‘going local’ and appreciating culture is often encouraged as an aspect of being responsible in tourism, many guidebooks have openly criticized the Union of Hilltribe Villages that feature Thailand’s (in)famous ‘Long-neck women’.

Also, as discussed in section 5.5.1 (‘Green’ places), at the same instance where ‘newer’ and less visited destinations like Krabi are recommended for a visit, it follows that such destinations are compared to ‘older’ and more commercialized places like Phuket or Koh Phi Phi. Similarly, many established tourism hotspots in Thailand – such as Pattaya and Bangkok are often depicted as tourism gone wrong. The comparisons of places abound in guidebooks, for example as quoted in section 5.6.3 (Overdevelopment), Frommer’s authoritatively tells its readers that “The town beach, along Pattaya Beach Road, is polluted and not recommended for swimming... If you are serious about finding a really great beach, move on to nearby Ko Samet; but for convenience, Jomtien is the best in the area” (Levy and McCarthy, 1994: 146). Such notions are also often reflected in practice as seen in interviews with volunteer tourists, where Olivia said:

[Pattaya is] pretty gross... yeah... it’s just kind of busy and there’s stuff everywhere... mess and junk and like ladyboys and prostitutes and... it’s just my friend described it to me before I came here as an older men’s town and really it’s an older men’s town yeah...

I feel like it’s a massive contradiction, the first half of my trip, I’m doing this responsible travel thing [at the Elephant Mahout Project] and like spending very little but trying to give back as much as I can, but as soon as I finish here I’m going to be spending heaps and like being a real tourist and going on tours and eating out and sorts of stuff [at Koh Samui] (interview, 30 Nov 2009).

In Olivia’s case then, we can see how places like Pattaya are imagined as irresponsible, and indeed, how she also feels guilty for visiting established tourism resorts like Koh

Samui since she is “doing this responsible travel thing”. In this case, going to Koh Samui appears then to be an irresponsible behaviour as a (real) tourist. While I have to agree with Frommer’s verdict of the Pattaya town beach as polluted and not recommended for swimming and that the beach in Ko Samet is infinitely cleaner, or with Olivia’s description that Pattaya (town beach and walking street) does appear very much to be an “older men’s town”, what this subsection highlights is the problematic approach of moving on to an alternative, less visited place, or indeed creating ‘new’ travel destinations to *be* responsible.

Similarly, I am also not saying that “human zoos” that are exploitative of Paduang women should be visited, or that it is wrong of guidebooks to inform their readers of such exploitative situations. In fact, guidebooks’ sense of responsibility to include such aspects of the ills of tourism, rather than to conceal or condone them, should be lauded. However, what is less clear is – where do we draw the line? While we can potentially agree that tourists should not be supporting such camps or villages set up specifically to showcase and exoticize particular cultures since it is to the detriment of those exhibited, how do we define whether such is the case or not, especially with, for example, community-based tourism or all sorts of other ‘culture villages’ typically of various ethnic minority groups one can easily find across Southeast Asia (see also section 7.3 on tourism in domestic spaces). On this issue, Frommer’s advice is less clear, and now includes all sorts of “remote villages inhabited by poor hill-tribes”:

Thailand’s mountainous jungle terrain in the north has become a haven for trekkers. At the same time, human rights organizations have highlighted the damage this does to sustainability in remote villages inhabited by poor hill-tribes – where the places visited have become no more than paying human zoos. Choose your operator carefully and look out for NGO-led projects where the local people reap benefits from your visit (Shalgosky, 2008: 48).

It has been argued that as consumers, tourists can choose not to visit such exploitative camps, so as to reduce profitability and hence pressurize companies to shut down such camps. But one has to wonder – what then become of the families who were already based in such camps? Could they potentially be worse off without such camps and tourism opportunities?<sup>61</sup> And also, would tour companies not create newer and what may

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<sup>61</sup> Many Paduang people, for example, do not have legal rights to remain in Thailand outside of such ‘camps’ as they are considered political refugees from Myanmar.

appear to be less exploitative set ups that do not offend the sensibilities of the new ‘responsible tourist’, even though much of what happens behind the scenes remains similar?

Indeed, at times respondents also reflect that Thailand as a country has not been typically seen as a ‘green destination’ – “you’re not coming to Thailand as a traveller to always stay in an eco green hotel that is always giving back to a school. You are on vacation, you’re coming for the heat, the beach, the city, the food, the culture. You’re not coming for a green thing” (Nelson Hilton, Director of Marketing, Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok, interview, 14 Jan 2010). Does this then mean that when there are ‘responsible’ places and ‘irresponsible places’, then ‘irresponsible places’ like Thailand as a whole, or Phuket and Pattaya in particular, should and could go on with business as is without considering issues of social and environmental responsibility? Such careless binaries and classifications in how places are portrayed as suitable targets for responsibility or not, could potentially derail whatever successes responsible travel has achieved, and highlights again the importance of looking at the imaginations of places created in the process of doing responsibility in tourism.

### ***7.2.3 Creating spaces/places to observe responsibility***

At the same time, fieldwork in Thailand brought up an important factor – that ‘responsible places’ can and are indeed created. For example, success stories of rejuvenating areas were shared by both Banyan Tree Global Foundation and Anantara Resorts:

This was previously a tin mining site, so the tin mining process had taken out a lot of mineral, and then leached back a lot of toxins in the soil... the UNDP called it the toxic waste land, the tourism authority of Thailand issued a report, both in the late 70s, saying that this site, Bang Tao Bay was unsuitable to support sustained development, but no efforts should be spared in trying to do so... So when they bought the land, they read that and realized they had an opportunity to do something... [and it] became what is now [Laguna Phuket] 6 resorts employing about 3,500 people... *they cleansed up the lagoons, they imported fresh top soil, replanted trees... we create something, build a brand based on quality experience, with this type of mindset, we try to do something here, transform this toxic place into a lush tropical garden where the migratory bird come back.* That is something that is meaningful and can give a higher meaning to guests who are staying there, whether they are coming because of that experience, or because they think of the individual pool villas (interview,

Michael Kwee, CSR Director, Banyan Tree Group, 10 Feb 2010, my emphasis).

The [elephant] camps were started in 2005 when the [Anantara and Four Seasons Golden Triangle] resorts were launched. At that time because we had the land, we were like what are we going to do with this. So Bill Heinecke, our CEO, had the idea of creating the camp. We have land, we have 160 acres, what can we do with this. *We can do something which gives back to the community, and it is the natural home of elephants which are no longer in the region. So it was an opportunity to do some good, and then as soon as we got on our feet we launched our own programme* (interview, Marion Walsh, PR Director, Anantara Group, 18 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

Within the examples is a strong sense that there happened to be an opportunity – in both cases, the ownership or access to land – and hence the idea of creating an environment that was responsible came to the minds of the founders of Banyan Tree Group and Anantara Group. At the same time, Banyan Tree’s example of rejuvenating a tin mined “toxic wasteland” into what is today a successful resort complex clearly shows the fluidity on the ground – where an ‘irresponsible place’, in this case environmentally damaging tin mining activities in the Bang Tao Bay area, can be transformed into ‘responsible place’ where tourism yields both economic and environmental gains for the locale. However, as most tourists visiting the Laguna Phuket resort complex may not be aware of the responsibility initiatives taken up by Banyan Tree Group, this area may not be readily imagined as a site of responsibility. On the contrary, the elephants at Anantara Golden Triangle are indeed an anchor ‘responsible’ attraction for visiting. This runs in line with the potential of such created spaces as places to observe responsibility, and becomes even clearer for instance with what is observed with community-based tourism. For example, Willem Niemeijer, Founder, Khiri Travel shared his company’s ethos in choosing what projects to support:

one of the criteria that we have now is that we would like to have a project that our passengers could actually visit if they wanted to. They could actually see it. And the thinking behind that is, if they are interested in for example, providing solar energy into villages that are off the grid in Laos, which is a new project that we’re been doing, that *they could actually go and have a look at how it works, and actually say wow, this is nice, I am going to provide it as well, so they get really involved in the projects*. That is our strategy behind it, trying to get people involved in it (interview, 11 Jan 10, my emphasis).

Indeed, while this thesis has so far suggested that mobilities as observed in tourism disrupts our notions of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ in traditional CSR or responsible consumerism campaigns through the process of bringing the tourist and the ‘recipient’ of his or her responsibilities together into the same place, this subsection highlights that many of such encounters do increasingly present themselves in a controlled and created environment, and at times these can simply be ‘responsible places’ as deemed by tour providers and so on. Much as how the tourist gaze (Crang, 1997; MacCannell, 2001; Urry, 1990; Urry, 1992) has long been argued to be guided by all sorts of directives coming from tour guides, travel marketing materials, and national tourism promotion boards, the gaze, or perhaps involvement or practising of responsibilities in tourism is also directed by similar sets of authorities that claim understanding and expertise over what should or should not be considered responsible or not. As already discussed in Chapters Five and Six, what should be considered as responsible or not is often presented in a unquestioned manner (for example through ‘going local’ even as it remains unclear how going local is necessarily responsible), and the creation of such spaces to observe or practise responsibility again brings to mind such doubts about the potential consequences of what has been argued to border on voyeurism on poverty (Scheyvens, 2007; Selinger and Outtersen, 2009). The images of poverty and dire need hence tend to run in line with what are typically used as images to encourage consumer responsibility in tourism<sup>62</sup> and become further reinforced in such created spaces. I have elsewhere argued that underlying principles of responsibility in tourism always sets apart the privileged as ‘giving’ or being responsible for the less privileged, thereby reifying the rich-poor divide, where “both volunteer and host actively perform their respective identities... [And there is] a possibility that locals in host-communities needed to appear “needy” to attract volunteer tourists... [or] suitable for caring relationships according to the terms set or imagined by volunteer tourists” (Sin, 2010b: 990). Herein lies the dilemma – attempts to be responsible and ‘empower the poor’ once again reduce ‘recipients’ of such responsibilities to a passive state, where responsibilities are assumed to come (only) from a ‘First world’ and privileged perspective, and hence continue to deprive the ‘others’ power and agency in being responsible (see Noxolo et al., 2011; Silk, 2004).

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<sup>62</sup> And indeed in many other ethical consumerism and CSR campaigns.

On the other hand, the popularity of responsible travel has meant that the creation of such spaces to observe responsibility is becoming more common place, and such places do not always equate to places where tourism is in fact responsible. Indeed, as discussed in Box 4.1 in Chapter Four, what appears upfront as a responsible tourism venture may indeed hide contradictory opinions as to whether the Elephant Mahout Project does fulfil its advertised promises of responsible tourism. And the fact that neither tourists interviewed nor I were aware of the underlying tensions brewing at the same time that we were at the Elephant Mahout Project does suggest that there is a high likelihood that when packaged appropriately, if a tour-providing company or hotel so chooses to conceal such conflicts in its practices of responsibilities, it is often highly difficult for the tourist to find out about it. Again using the Elephant Mahout Project as an example, within such created environments are in fact also numerous aspects that can be easily controlled, for example, including but not limited to controls over mahouts' wages (and hence resulting in an unfair power balance) and language barriers limiting access through interpretators between the Thai-speaking mahouts and English-speaking tourists. Such language barriers are typical in many community-based tourism or volunteer tourism in rural parts of Southeast Asia, where English is not commonly spoken by locals, while tourists do not speak the local language. While this is in no way suggesting that the examples brought up above in this subsection are necessarily irresponsible because they occur in specifically created spaces to observe responsibility (and indeed, the notions of responsibility are far more complex than such simple binaries present), it does highlight the skewed power structures in many such places which guidebooks, websites and all sorts of responsible travel marketing material claim to be responsible.

### **7.3 Responsibilities in domestic spaces**

It is in this section that love becomes more apparent – as we explore what happens in one aspect of responsible travel – when responsibilities in tourism enter the domestic arena. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, a key component of how tourists and tour providers envision what makes good practices to be responsible in tourism involves 'going local',<sup>63</sup> and many times this means that entering domestic spaces through visits, home stays and all sorts of community-based tourism programs. The popularity of home stays is already

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<sup>63</sup> Even as I note as in earlier chapters the uncertainties on whether going local necessarily means tourism is being responsible.

noted in Section 7.2.1 where Hamish Keith shared that “a home stay now is almost an integral part of Isan programme” (interview, 17 Dec 2009). In that same meeting, Soontarut W., Product Manager of Exotissimo Thailand, provided more details on what a home stay involves:

[the home stay takes up] one night in our one week program [to Isan], people get to stay there and enjoy the local people and their activities like get to have local dinner together and they take them to go trekking in the jungle, and they provide local meals. And whatever activities the local family do, all the clients get to participate, do the cooking, do the food preparation, and learn about school kids and how they live in their daily lives (interview, 17 Dec 2009).

Such an itinerary, whether in Isan or other parts of Thailand (mostly found in Northern Thailand), is typical of interactions locals have with tourists in domestic spaces, as shared by other respondents from Asian Trails Ltd, Khiri Travel, or through looking at what is offered in Thailand on [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com). While this type of tourism still remains a niche<sup>64</sup> compared to the millions of tourists who visit Thailand annually, it appears to be gaining popularity according to respondents interviewed and observations on the ground.

Research in tourism has however traditionally identified the differences and boundaries between what is considered as the “front stage” and the “back stage” (Goffman, 1959; MacCannell, 1976) and home stays often represent (or at least are marketed as) an opportunity for tourists to transcend such boundaries and enter into spaces where one can be part of the “real lives” of locals. Work for those involved in this type of responsible travel then, can literally be said to be coming closer to home, and represents exactly how tourists and locals (those whom tourists and tour companies claim to wish to be responsible towards) are brought into the same locale, unlike the distance observed in other sorts of responsible consumerism campaigns. Using interviews and participant observations at the Elephant Mahout Project,<sup>65</sup> this section highlights various aspects in

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<sup>64</sup> Actual statistics on the number of such tourists are not collated by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand.

<sup>65</sup> The Elephant Mahout Project typically involves 3-10 volunteer tourists (at any point in time) staying for 1-4 weeks at the elephant camp or at the Thai coordinator’s home in a cluster housing development near the camp. While many examples of responsible tourism in domestic spaces can be observed in Thailand, what is presented in this section is sourced predominantly from fieldwork at the Elephant Mahout Project. This selection is made purely because it was the only example whereby I had the chance to actually have in depth interaction and extended time at a site where responsible tourism occurs largely in locals’ domestic spaces, and should in no way be seen as representative of all home stays or community-based tourism.

which enacting responsibilities in tourism in the domestic arena complicates matters, namely that heightened responsibilities may occur precisely because they occur in domestic spaces (section 7.3.1), responsibility as hospitality (on the part of locals, section 7.3.2) and what should be considered as ‘good’ and ‘respectful’ engagement between tourists and locals, and indeed, what not (section 7.3.3).

### **7.3.1 Responsibility because of domestic spaces**

While going local is presented as a way of being responsible in tourism as discussed in Chapters Five and Six, what is less typically discussed, is how tourists may indeed be(come) more aware or assume more responsible behaviours because tourism now occurs in domestic settings. A quote from an interview with volunteer tourist, Helen, for example highlights this:

[in other holidays] I do more things because it is all within my time and my control, if I want to go and sit on the beach for all day I can go, and then suddenly I want to jet off and have a coconut I can, so that’s a typical kind of holiday right, you do your own thing, you go to your own places, you decide what you want to do for the day, but then for this it’s a bit different because it is a holiday *but you still feel like you know you have a commitment to the people, fulfil certain duties and to behave in certain ways*, to be appropriate and not to be irresponsible and annoying and just irresponsible I guess... *because you have actually know the people and you know little bit of the predicament they are in and it makes it, and because you have this kind of connection with them already, it makes it harder for you to be a very careless person and to just do things without considering what will happen to them and how they will think*. It’s not like when you go on normal holidays you can just jet off and you can just change your mind suddenly, but here you have to make sure that ok, you don’t want to give people trouble, you have to understand that there are other volunteers as well that maybe they don’t want to do what you want to do, you’re living in somebody’s house, you don’t want to just throw your things on the floor and just make things very messy, and room service will come and clean it, because now it’s someone that you actually know. *You know that the person who come and clean your nonsense, it’s not a faceless hotel staff that you can just avoid* (interview, 26 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

Embedded within these anecdotes are again as suggested in section 7.2 that there is a tendency for tourists (and indeed tour providers and hotels) to distinguish between places to be responsible, and places where it’s alright to not be as responsible, and in this instance because tourism here occurs in the domestic setting, it is deemed to fall into the

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What is presented here is thus some of the key issues as observed at one particular site, and further research comparing other sites with what is here discussed is greatly encouraged.

first category, where as Helen says, one has “to be appropriate and not to be irresponsible”. The idea that it was difficult to be “careless” because it was not just a “faceless hotel staff that you can just avoid” is similar to much ethical consumerism and international aid campaigns (Clark, 2004; Ethical Consumer, 2007b; Ethical Marketing Group, 2002) – where images of especially women and children from Third world countries are often used to appeal to the emotions of target subjects (i.e. privileged consumers in First world countries) through placing real people at the centre of such appeals.

The sort of smiling interactions and ‘authentic’ experiences with a local family are further exemplified in rituals and routines at the Elephant Mahout Project, where as seen in Plate 7.1, volunteer tourists participate in a ‘farewell ceremony’<sup>66</sup> usually held on the last day of their stay.



**Plate 7.1: Volunteer tourists and mahout family at farewell ceremony**

(Source: Author)

In Plate 7.1, we can see the intimacy between the mahout’s (man on the left) wife (lady on the right), and the two volunteer tourists (seated with hands stretched out on the table). Part of the ceremony involves the mahout and other locals that the volunteer got to know

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<sup>66</sup> The farewell ceremony involves giving prayers and offerings to thank the deities for a safe and good time with the elephants that the tourists enjoyed. This was a modified version of the Pa-Kam ceremony (See <http://www.theelephantmahoutproject.com/pakam.php>).

personally tying a twine string around the volunteer's wrists as a symbol of the volunteer leaving the camp with good fortune and their good wishes. During the course of my stay at the camp, it became such that the longer-stay tourists (two weeks or more) started having a little bit of a competition going on about who would receive most strings on their wrists when they left as this was taken to be a sign of both popularity and integration within the community. The smiling and sociable tourist is thus placed in the middle of all this, where even though many tourists may not keep in contact with those they encounter after their travels,<sup>67</sup> at the point of their stay, the expectation is that tourists would be social and friendly in reciprocation for locals' hospitality in their homes.

### 7.3.2 *Responsibility as hospitality*

At the same time, while responsibility in tourism (and indeed responsibility in general) have so far tended to be positioned in the context of a privileged 'First world' enacting all sorts of responsible practices and discourse towards the less-privileged 'Third world', Helen's earlier example also highlights another key point – that locals too feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the tourists they host. While this can be argued to be prevalent in any form of tourism, it is especially apparent when tourism enters domestic spaces – and indeed more so with the 'Thai culture' that has often been marketed in tourism with images of amiable and hospitable locals ready to receive tourists in "Thailand, the land of smiles".

Interviews with mahouts at the Elephant Mahout Project clearly show this hospitality, as my questions of what they thought responsibility in tourism is, was always met with simple and straightforward answers<sup>68</sup> – that it was about making volunteer (tourists) happy and safe during their holiday in the elephant camp, or to chit chat and exchange knowledge about elephants or English, and most reflected how they saw volunteers as parts of their family. For example,

she feel volunteer come is means *like a family, happy life more than. She say because she don't have daughter, so everyone come become her daughter...* For every mahout, want to be give very good thing for the volunteer... when people come 4 week, 3 week, she very love because feel

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<sup>67</sup> Although repeat volunteer tourists are rather common – one of the respondents I interviewed was indeed on her second two week stint in the camp.

<sup>68</sup> Responses are in third-person as this was translated by Eka, or Lek, the two Thai coordinators in the camp.

like the same family. Together long time. When stay together helping together and watching all the time for not dangerous and how to make them happy together with elephant (Meh, interview, 25 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

When the volunteer come they [mahouts] want to make every volunteer happy... when the volunteer come, like you come volunteer [with] Meh [name of mahout]. You eat with Meh. You sleep and talk with Meh. That will be the best (Ma, interview, 25 Nov 2009).

He want to take care volunteer because when volunteer come is one week, two week *like a friend, like a family*... If they have a lot of problem or need some help, he can help them (Nort, interview, 26 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

He very happy to take care them and to give knowledge for volunteer. Like when you study in school, your teacher teaches you. And he said when volunteer come here *he like a cousin, like a family come here* (Jai, interview, 30 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

These interviews shows how mahouts typically regard it as their responsibility to make sure that tourists are safe and enjoy their visits and many would go to great lengths to make sure tourists were happy. Referring back to Plate 7.1, the scene was such that the mahout's wife was speaking in Thai to the volunteer in the forefront of this plate – telling her that “her mother in Thailand will miss her when she is gone, that she will dream of her in her sleep, and wait for her to come back to see her family” (observation, 28 Nov 2009). Indeed, it was common for mahouts and their families to refer to their relationship with volunteers in familial ties – as seen both in the account behind Plate 7.1, and the quotations from interviews.

At the same time, mahouts tended to be full of praise towards volunteers' attempts to ride their elephants, and while lunch and dinner was usually catered for at a small eatery next to the elephant camp, mahouts tended to invite volunteers to join them at their homes for meals. In my own experience, if and when I decided not to join my mahout's family for lunch, this would be met with a genuine look of disappointment. In comparison, Plate 7.2 is a photo of me, the mahout I was attached to, and her husband in the typical scenario of a happy lunch together, even though conversation was often limited and stiff due to my inability to converse fluently in Thai, and their generally scarce command of English. This experience is also reflected in volunteer tourist Lucy's interview:

I really liked eating with them [mahout's family] tonight... erm... and they try really hard to teach me some Thai and take me into their house and

everything like that which is really nice but I also feel... I feel a lot more comfortable by myself because I'm aware that they are constantly trying to be... yeah to be hospitable... and also it must be difficult for them... and his wife as well... because they can't have a conversation in Thai because they think I would feel left out and then when they do have a conversation in Thai... I'm paranoid and think they are talking about me... it's very difficult... erm... but its... it's what I wanted, I wanted to be thrown into the deep end and experience all these things... so yeah... I don't know (interview, 11 Nov 2009).

Indeed, in these instances, tourism in domestic spaces complicates what is typically imagined as practices of responsibility in tourism, as while we as 'First world' tourists wish to enact our idea(l)s of ethics and responsibility in and towards such 'Third world' subjects, what is here observed is that we are also in a large part dependent on locals' hospitality and perhaps take much more than we give. At the same time, as Lucy's response suggests, the willingness to please and hospitality offered by mahouts also complicates where to draw boundaries when tourism occurs in their domestic spaces.



**Plate 7.2: Lunch with mahout family** (Source: Author)

### **7.3.3 *What is considered good and respectful engagement with locals – and what is not?***

Beyond issues of giving as discussed in Section 6.5.1, responsible tourism in the domestic sphere also brings about several rather touchy issues, whereby what is seemingly mundane and banal can become concerns and issues to navigate between tourists and

locals. In bid to provide a more in-depth discussion within the limited scope of this thesis, I will lay out two occurrences observed in fieldwork, namely sharing meals (and drinks) in this section, and romantic and sexual relationships between locals and tourists in section 7.3.4.

As mentioned above, many tourists, like Lucy, often said that sharing meals with the mahouts was a highlight of their experience in the Elephant Mahout Project (and indeed their holiday in Thailand). However, a common conversation topic amongst tourists when we were not with the Thai mahouts or coordinators, was their concerns with having meals at the mahouts' homes. First and foremost, tourists were concerned if they were adding a financial burden to the mahouts' families and whether having the mahouts entertain them at lunch and dinner times was considered extra work or 'overtime' on the part of mahouts' families since the official schedule for the mahout training program had arranged for tourists' lunches and dinners to be catered at the volunteer house, outside of the elephant camp (see Veijola, 2009 for a discussion of tourism as work). Also, as some tourists stayed for longer periods, they became acquainted with different families in the elephant camp, and were increasingly invited to have meals with families other than the mahout that they were assigned to.<sup>69</sup> For example, Hana, who was at the elephant camp for four weeks, shared that

sometimes you feel like you're treading on eggshells, or I have, like in the temple this morning, 'cause I went with Joy [her mahout's wife]... and yet Meh [a lady mahout at the camp] was saying come and sit and eat with her, and if I go over there then I'm offending Joy... And she says you're my family while you are here, but yet they [Meh] have invited me here [to the temple] and you're thinking shit... it's exaggerated because you don't speak the language, you're a foreigner, it's a small community... and within this community it's only 80 people, everybody knows everything ... the balance could so easily be knocked out and they've... to work out together how they are going to achieve that balance cause I think the minute they have different views... I mean people here work and live seven days a week, there's no escape from that, we fly in and we fly out again, and absolutely we could be knocking balls around without realizing (interview, 25 Nov 2009).

Hana's anecdote here shows how something so simple as choosing which family to share a meal with (which in this case then means declining the invitation of another family)

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<sup>69</sup> Each tourist is pre-assigned to work with one elephant and its mahout throughout the course of his or her stay. Mahouts were assigned on a rotating schedule managed by the British and Thai coordinators.

could potentially be as treacherous as “treading on eggshells” for her. While of course perhaps the situation was not as tense as Hana imagined, existing research has suggested the importance of social events like sharing meals in Asian contexts, as well as how Thailand’s ‘middle-income peasants’ often desire to draw parties of assumed power (in this case, a foreign-speaking and foreign-looking lady) into mutually beneficial transactions (Walker, 2012), especially in spaces (e.g. the temple) where such relationships can be seen by others in the larger community. The blurring of work and non-work boundaries bothered tourists – even though when asked, mahouts and their families had insisted time and again that they welcomed tourists and that they did not see having meals together as ‘work’.

What some mahouts’ families did complain about though, was that when many tourists at the Elephant Mahout Project stayed late or overnight at the elephant camp, dinner is usually followed by an offering of alcoholic drinks. Staying overnight at the camp is not unheard of, and is in fact a highlight offered by the project – this usually happens for only one or two nights weekly for tourists to fully experience what mahouts’ lives are like. Tourists will typically join mahouts to cut and collect grass or pineapple leaves for their elephants the following morning at 5 a.m. However, as the existing system (at the point of research) was such that tourists could opt to stay in the camp or the volunteer house as he or she wishes, there was a sense that unhappiness was brewing amongst certain parties in the camp, over rowdy behaviour of tourists and mahouts after drinking. An interview with a mahout, Pan, for example highlights such sentiments expressed by several mahouts and their families in the camp:

Oh, very noisy. He cannot sleep, everyone cannot sleep. Every men say no problem because they understand she [referring to a previous volunteer tourist] come here to holiday and party. But wife have to be wake up and every wife go complain to Khun Vit [Thai manager of the elephant camp]... if the volunteer come one week and have a song and have dinner one day ok. But that time is not one day. Every day (interview, 25 Nov 2009).

Eka, the Thai coordinator of the Elephant Mahout Project, also shared a particularly stressful experience she had when volunteer tourists threw a birthday party for her at the

elephant camp in early 2009.<sup>70</sup> She shared that she was initially hesitant to have a party as she thought that the camp is not her home and it is not her right to hold a party and disturb other people there. However, she could not bring herself to say no when she saw how eager and excited two volunteer tourists were about having the party. Eka was also very concerned about who to invite or not as she thought it would not be nice to miss out anyone, but at the same time, she was worried that those she invited would have to spend money getting her a present. To complicate matters, one of the volunteer tourists ended up being hit in the eye that night when he tried to stop a fight between two drunken mahouts (Eka added that they could just be playing around). While drinking and drunken rowdiness is perhaps not exactly an effect of tourism itself (some of the younger mahouts will gather around for booze every night whether or not tourists are staying in the camp), there was a sense that such behaviour was encouraged by the actions of tourists – Lek asked me on more than one occasion “the people in England drink beer in the afternoon? Many? More than one can a time?” (interview, Nov 2009). Such questioning is usually followed with statements of how Thai people do not drink so much, or that drinking was only done in celebration of special occasions like New Year, *Songkran*, or weddings. It was also suggested that mahouts in this camp were drinking so regularly after they observed what was done by *farangs* like Emma and Ellie (who stay in the camp) and other tourists when they stayed in the camp.

This discussion on sharing meals and alcohol drinks in the elephant camp therefore brings up the delicate balance between responsibility and irresponsibility in tourism set in domestic spaces – the ordinariness of mundane actions, in this case enjoying a meal or an alcoholic drink (something very typical and not unexpected for a tourist to do), can at times become contentious ones, especially when it becomes easy to attribute ‘poorly behaviour’ to ‘foreign influences’ from tourists. At the same time, what this section highlights is that awareness or desire to be ‘responsible’ on the part of volunteer tourists does not always equate to action (Barnett and Land, 2007; Noxolo et al., 2011), especially since actions in this case involves mundane and everyday performances and practices that one may not necessary deem to be related to responsibility at all.

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<sup>70</sup> Verbatim not available as this was shared during a meal out and not in the setting of a formal recorded interview. Respondent is however aware of my research and that what was shared can be used in research writing.

#### 7.3.4 *Love and sex*

I would totally make out with xxx [name of mahout withheld] if not for the fact that Lek and Eka keep telling us who had sex with who. I mean, he is hot, and he seems game. And it's not a big deal if this happened at home. But it's just weird with all these scandals. You know, I don't want to be one of those stories too (volunteer tourist, name withheld on request, interview, Nov 2009).

Another issue that was constantly brought up by coordinators of the Elephant Mahout Project were the 'scandals' and gossips about the intimate relationships between certain mahouts and volunteer tourists that continued to circulate in the camp long after the tourists left. In the course of the interviews with mahouts for this research, it was mentioned on several occasions that mahouts' families had noticed that there were times in which a young male mahout had spent nights alone in a room with a young female volunteer tourist. In Eka's words, "some people don't like it because in the camp everyone will know and in Thai culture it is not accepted for a boy and girl to be alone at night before marriage" (interview, 30 Nov 2009). While such could be one-off situations and not at all reflective of the norm of tourism in the elephant camp (and indeed, none of such situations arose during the period I was at the camp), such stories and 'scandals' were repeated time and again by different parties throughout my stay at the camp, and one has to wonder about why this was done and what are the social impacts of such occurrences. At the same time, this account suggests that the quoted volunteer tourist may have had no qualms about "making out" or "having sex" with a mahout at the camp, but had stopped herself from doing so because she felt uncomfortable about how the Thai coordinators may talk about her after she is gone. On the one hand – tourism as it plays out in domestic spaces opens one to all sorts of 'opportunities' to be romantically or sexually involved with locals, while on the other hand, the close relationships with people in the community, such as Lek and Eka, also pressurizes the volunteer tourist to behave in ways deemed appropriate according to the expectations and standards they hold.

An interview with John Roberts, Director of Elephants, Anantara Golden Triangle, highlighted that similar issues were concerns at their elephant camp as well:

That's very harmful, it's one of the reasons we stopped, even with our volunteers, we stopped, because two years ago, we used to go down... and we let the volunteers go down at night, and then we have young boys [mahouts] and we have young girls [tourists], and to me it was something

that we should have learnt better... because yeah it's harmful, because the young boys have a funny idea and then maybe there's one young boy who gets all the girls, and another young boy starts getting drunk and starts jumping on the girls 'cause he thinks that's the way the other guy's, and then... it can be sexual molestation... but the mahouts they don't know that, they get a funny idea about Western girls coming in that all western girls like to sleep with mahout... and the other problem that we have is of course mahouts are all married, and their wives are there as well... I consider that socially harmful, not only for the young girls who are coming in as volunteers... So we used to play the fun image, then as it got more and more hair raising I just stopped doing it. And it's corporate social responsibility, it should not encourage teenage girls to flirt with married mahouts! ... if the young girl and young boy just want one night together and that's the mutual understanding then that's fine, the problem is when it comes to sex and alcohol, that's rarely the mutual understanding... (interview, 26 Jan 2010).

Indeed, it was perhaps the lack of clarity and control at the Elephant Mahout Project that was an issue, as volunteer tourists add to the differing opinions:

Lek has actually said to me, it's ok for you to stay Hana, 'cause you're an old lady. I thought, arh, bless. But you know... yeah it's brutally honest, you've got to hand it to the woman, but I know what she meant, because especially some of the younger ones, you know how it is like with any young kids, you know, 19, 20, there is very few people who are your age here, you're the constant stream of attractive young volunteers who may not be you know understand about the culture, they might be drinking they might be partying, they might be encouraged by the young mahout to do that, and before you know it the whole dynamic has changed, the older people start to resent it, the wives start to resent it, and you've got conflict. And I can really understand Lek's concern... On the other hand, it seems difficult to say to some people, well you can be and you can't, so how the hell do you get over that one, and I don't know what the answer is (Hana, interview, 25 Nov 2009).

These expectations [towards how tourists behave] will have to be better managed rather than you know when they are not very used to seeing outsiders and then when outsiders come and they see how they act, they see how they behave, and they get very easily influenced (Helen, interview, 26 Nov 2009).

I think maybe some cultural guidelines or something can be provided on what is acceptable and what's not but I think if it's a different culture and so I don't really know how locals would react to it but pretty much I think the volunteers that are coming here that are over 18 and they are considered adults and so if they choose to go make out with someone, that's their choice. I don't think anyone else needs to know about it or discuss it (Olivia, interview, 30 Nov 2009).

Embedded within these negotiations then is the key question – if ‘going local’ is seen as a way to be responsible in tourism, and this was to be enacted in the domestic arena of ‘locals’ homes, how do issues observed in this section factor into consideration? What indeed are the boundaries of ‘responsibilities’? Too often, the drive to ‘go local’ misses out the intricate details of how ‘responsibilities’ are enacted in places, and the complications that intimacy – while seen as a positive thing in some accounts (see, for example Conran, 2011), can potentially also bridge into questions about whether it still remains ‘responsible’ if ‘love’ and sexual intimacy was involved (see also Franklin, 2003; Jacobs, 2010; Malam, 2008). And indeed, would it be fair then to compare what was happening at the Elephant Mahout Project – where particular volunteers were said to have had sex with mahouts, to other forms of sex and tourism that most volunteers scorn in the nearby Pattaya city? The varying understandings and expectations towards what was the ‘cultural norm’ and what was ‘acceptable’ as ‘responsible encounters’ is inherent here, and while ‘love’ (and the lack of an exchange of cash) was often given as the differentiating factor between what was happening in the Elephant Mahout Project versus sex tourism in Pattaya city, one cannot deny the social impacts – and the nervousness surrounding Lek, Eka, and the ladies in the camp like Meh and Joy – every time young female volunteers had a little too much to drink and stay overnight in the camp.

#### **7.4 The Asian elephant as a site of responsibility**

It is almost impossible to be a tourist in Thailand without encountering the Asian elephant. Whether ‘responsible’ or not, a short ride on the back of an elephant is often considered as what is a ‘quintessentially Thai’ experience for tourists, and elephant camps offering these activities and all sorts of elephant performances are littered all over Thailand. A search on indexes of guidebooks analyzed earlier in Chapter Five pulls out numerous excerpts about elephants in Thailand – from special inserts talking about the plight of elephants in Thailand, to all sorts of references on where tourists can find themselves the opportunity to have some contact with these ‘gentle giants’. The elephant is also typically celebrated as a symbol of Thailand, and is made into souvenirs in every imaginable form. The role of the elephant in tourism in Thailand is without doubt significant, and this section therefore uses the elephant as both an object and a site of responsibility to tease out the tensions and dynamic situations in actually doing responsibilities. It acknowledges significant works done on elephants in other contexts

(Lorimer, 2007, 2009, 2010; Lorimer and Whatmore, 2009; Whatmore, 2002) and builds upon what is suggested as a nonhuman charisma of elephants, while also bringing up the thorny situations of tourism's dependence on domesticated elephants (versus the conservationists' mentality of elephants that are 'born free'), and highlighting the state of affairs in Thailand where elephants are also a lifestyle and livelihoods for many.

#### 7.4.1 *Seeking more-than-human encounters*

Everyone loves elephants. When friends or family ask me what my PhD research is about, it usually draws a blank look when I say my research is about “ethics and social responsibilities in tourism”. This changes radically if I tell them that my research is about spending time at an elephant camp getting to know mahouts and elephants. The look of awe and wonder and the fascination with elephants often gleamed on their faces, and this definitely transcends many spheres – academics, fellow PhD students, friends of various professions, and even my mother or a friend's nine-year-old daughter – they all love it when I tell them all about elephants. And I have to admit, I like it too. A particular scene (Plate 7.3) often comes up when I recall such fascination with elephants – at the Surin elephant festival, the entire city's kindergarten children marched out of their schools and lined the streets to watch the elephant procession. Armed with self-made elephant visors, they sat in neat rows and waited eagerly, and when the elephants finally appeared, the children broke into an excited chorus of “*chang chang chang*” (elephant in Thai).



**Plate 7.3: Kindergarten children lining the streets to see the elephant procession at the Surin Elephant Festival (Source: Author)**

Embedded within this fascination, and indeed what draws many tourists towards opportunities to work with elephants in Thailand, is as Lorimer suggests, the partiality towards mammals like the elephant, where a “nonhuman charisma [of elephants] is a multivariate property comprising the ecological and aesthetic properties of an organism and the diverse affective responses these engender in encounters with humans” (Lorimer, 2010: 7). Put simply, the ‘love’ people have for elephants is often drawn out of various real and imagined encounters with elephants, and the desire to volunteer with programmes like the Elephant Mahout Project and the Elephant Conservation Centre is perhaps less configured by rational notions of whether these are indeed ethical or responsible, but rather with “affective logics” (Lorimer, 2007, 2009, 2010).

When I asked a respondent (via email) who had previously volunteered at the Elephant Mahout Project, on why she was so interested in elephants,<sup>71</sup> her straightforward answer surprised me somewhat:

Dumbo? Babar? Horton? Who knows? They [elephants] have just a lot of blatant cuteness, not to mention intelligence. Solutions for their problems are relatively easy - stop killing them in the wild and/or put them in sanctuaries - getting to those goals is the problem, not to mention that evil exists in the world (Victoria, email, 19 Dec 2009).

This respondent’s answer not only highlighted the honest opinions of what fuelled tourists’ fascination with elephants (“blatant cuteness”) and their desire to have a ‘real’ experience with elephants, but also the simplistic assumptions towards what are “solutions for their problems”, or that “evil exists in the world”, which we will come back to again in sections 7.4.2 – 7.4.4. That elephants are intelligent or that it was possible to have a personal relationship with a particular elephant was also often brought up by volunteer tourists on what made their experiences special or ‘real’:

When you really look at the elephant you know that there’s something going on in their heads, they are really really clever animals. Erm... I just, I really wish I can have a good conversation with my mahout about the elephant cause its really annoying... I really want to talk about them and speak to someone... and have an intelligent conversation about them... apart from you know... elephant eats... I’d love to talk to somebody who works with elephants all the time, it’ll be so good to have a real intelligent conversation with them (Olivia, interview, 28 Nov 2009).

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<sup>71</sup> This respondent had set up several Facebook activist groups championing the rights of elephants worldwide and regularly posts news and updates on these issues.

I think the elephant definitely recognizes me... I think they smell and hear more than they see... this is what I heard someone say today...that they can recognize us by our smells. Lek said that Boon Mi [name of elephant] would recognize Linda when she visits next week even though it's been a year since she was here. Maybe Boon Mi will remember me next time if I come back too (Lucy, interview, 11 Nov 2009).



**Plate 7.4: Volunteer tourist ‘greeting’ a baby elephant (Source: Author)**



**Plate 7.5: Researcher at the Elephant Mahout Project (Source: Author)**

The appeal of many touristic opportunities in Thailand, whether this was labelled ‘responsible’ as was the Elephant Mahout Project, or in numerous elephant camps offering rides, performances, or the chance to pet and feed elephants – most of which do not explicitly consider issues of responsibility – is perhaps also the emphasis on touch or haptic encounters with elephants over a substantial period of time. As Plates 7.4 and 7.5 show, typically treasured<sup>72</sup> photos of volunteer tourists often features them touching the elephants or in a confident pose despite the physical encounters with the elephants. Plate 7.4 for example, often drew comments from newer volunteer tourists: “oh, you look so comfortable on the elephant; I can’t imagine myself lying down like that. I must try it tomorrow too” (Olivia, interview, 28 Nov 2009).



**Plate 7.6: Tourists taking photos with elephant at Surin Elephant Festival (Source: Author)**

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<sup>72</sup> These photos were taken by the researcher and viewed by other volunteer tourists and the British coordinator at the camp on my laptop. Photos like these were often considered ‘good ones’ – the volunteer tourist featured in Plate 7.4 for example, promptly requested for me to send the soft copy of the photo to her via email and Plate 7.5 was used in the Elephant Mahout Project’s Facebook group pages.



**Plate 7.7: Korean tourists feeding elephants** (Source: Author)



**Plate 7.8: Korean tourists taking a 20 minute ride on the elephants** (Source: Author)



**Plate 7.9: Volunteer and mahout showering the elephant in the river** (Source: Author)

The desire to touch elephants is also observed amongst other tourists, as shown in Plates 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8. Plate 7.6 shows tourists at the Surin Elephant Festival taking a photo with an elephant in the standard pose – with one hand touching the trunk of the elephant, while Plates 7.7 and 7.8 shows what Korean tourists at the elephant camp will do – have a 20 minute ride on the elephant followed by feeding elephants coconuts.

What differentiates volunteer tourists at the camp is both the longer time they spend to form one-to-one relationships with the elephants they are attached to, as well as their closer interactions with elephants, for example, through washing elephants (Plate 7.9). The following quotations also stress this element:

We spend time with the elephants, we wash them in the river...to me it's just being able to sit right very close to the elephants and being able to see their mannerisms and see how they react to each other and when they get cross and when they are happy and when they are tired... (Linda, interview, 27 Nov 2009).

I was initially a bit worried at the start that we won't going to be allowed to wash the elephants in the river and that would have been slightly disappointing ... if it had been too controlled I would have been disappointed but it wasn't. The day people [tourists who went to the camp only for 20 minute rides] reminded me of how lucky we were and how glad I was that I did choose to do this and I have to say I have no regrets about it (Peter, interview, 19 Nov 2009).

### 7.4.2 'Born free'

At the same time, despite this innate desire to have personal touch and contact with elephants, embedded within many interview responses, as well as within guidebooks and websites analyzed, is the idea(l) that elephants are beasts of the wild, and that domesticated elephants or those simply in captivity are exploited or ill-treated. A common theme amongst respondents were complaints or unhappiness about how elephants in Thailand were made to do 'unnatural acts' – for example performances for tourists (including playing soccer as depicted in Plate 7.10), carrying passengers on their backs, begging in the streets of cities like Bangkok, Pattaya or Chiang Mai, and so on. Lucy, for examples said that

I would never see that [Nong Nooch Garden elephant show] because it's just not natural what they are made to do there.. like riding a bicycle.. it can't be comfortable...they are not designed to do that and I think humans weren't originally designed to ride bicycles but bicycles were designed for humans...we don't make the elephants do anything they are not meant to do apart from having a chair on them.. apart from that, they eat they walk they sleep, they have a shower, you know, that's pretty much it... if there was an option, I would say they are much better off in the, I would rather elephants were in the wild but you've got poachers to think about and at least they are safe here and they are looked after... and yeah... all animals that are locked away in some sort of chain or cage or whatever are better off in the wild but realistically you have to think realistically it's not going to happen (interview, 11 Nov 2009).



**Plate 7.10: Elephants playing soccer at the Surin Elephant Festival** (Source: Author)

Indeed, Lucy's opinion runs along the lines of the growing international opposition towards keeping large mammals like elephants in captivity (although this has tended to focus on circuses and poorly managed zoos) (see Clubb and Mason, 2003a, b; Clubb et al., 2008; Morgan and Tromborg, 2007). Whether informed by conservation science or popular television programs like Animal Planet, volunteer tourists at the Elephant Mahout Project typically discussed the poor welfare of elephants in captivity, even though varying standards of what constituted ill-treatment or not was often observed:

**Emma**, British coordinator: That's [Nong Nooch Gardens] not a good place to be, there they are kept in concrete pens the whole day... Well I saw it and it was heart breaking.

**Jason**, volunteer tourist: 'cause of the training?

**Emma**: Yeah, one you just see the elephants where they are, it's all concreted, and they've got metal bars all the way round and they are just in this pen all day and you can just see how despondent they are. The only time they get let out of that is to go into the circus ring and they are riding tricycles, they've got them wearing dresses, dancing. It's also damaging, because what they are doing, they are making the elephant wear dresses and have them stand on their hind legs and dance. And an elephant carried 60% of its weight on its front legs, and to stand on its back legs they are actually doing things that are damaging.

**Hana**, volunteer tourist: Well horses, it can be damaging when they race but they actually seem to enjoy it when they race. But the bigger issue is say how they are looked after, and how they are trained to do that. And that's the issue.

**Emma**: Because the way they get them to do these things they are completely unnatural, probably painful for them to do, is with hooks [ankus].

**Peter**, volunteer tourist: They've got marks. I've discovered why she [the elephant he was working with] wears the girth in front. It's because she's got a sore behind... a wound about the size of a penny.

**Emma**: And they chain the elephants' legs there. It's not brilliant, you can imagine you know if you had your two front legs chained together... your legs are going to be in the same position all the time, it's not going to be very comfortable that you can't move around.

**Jason**: I don't want to support it [Nong Nooch Garden] and if I go there they get money.

(interview, 16 Nov 2009)

There was also recurring tension about the use of the ankus (elephant hook) by mahouts as this was deemed to be a violence towards the elephants as detailed in Lorimer's work on the elephant as a companion species:

Dominance outweighs affection in the traditional practices of mahoutship in which the mahout establishes himself at a higher rank than his target elephant. Captured elephants are first 'broken' with ropes and drugs and are then disciplined with an ankus (elephant hook) to obey a range of (more than 100) oral commands and the deft touch of a mahout's leg upon their neck. Becoming and being a captive elephant is often a traumatic, painful and boring process... The poverty of elephant captivity stands in stark contrast to the captivation of those who view and pay to bestride them (Lorimer, 2010: 7-8).

Similar observations were made by volunteer tourists at the Elephant Mahout Project:

I don't know, I understand that they need to use it, it's just the way they've been trained and they do it a lot less than what they used to I've heard... but I wouldn't use it because I couldn't raise my hand to an animal ever, I couldn't hurt an animal, that's one of the reasons why I was vegetarian... (Lucy, interview, 11 Nov 2009).

I found it really upsetting to see the elephant being beaten with a stick [ankus] particularly with no reason and there did seem to be an element of that... The boy [14 year old mahout]... it seem more just... adolescent sort of posturing more than anything else. Trying to inflict his will on another animal which you see bullying and all sorts of other things. The adults was more annoying for me or this old guys seemed to be beating the elephant for no clear reason (Peter, interview, 19 Nov 2009).

This disdain and critical stance towards elephants in captivity however, is highly contentious as it highlights the contradictions of tourists (and various self-stated not-for-profit set ups like the Elephant Mahout Project) who hold notions of responsibilities towards the *wild* elephant, while working with the *domesticated* elephant in Thailand. As section 7.4.1 has already established, the key part of the experience for many tourists is the chance to come up close and personal with elephants, to ride, touch, shower and feed them, and indeed as observed in this particular elephant camp, to form a one-to-one relationship with a particular elephant. Such relationships however, can hardly be considered 'natural' or easily be achieved when elephants are indeed out the in wild as tourists and conservationists imagine them to be.

This dissonance can also typically be seen in how respondents positioned what they do and the reasons they give for working with domesticated elephants even though they

often have severe misgivings towards whether this is indeed responsible at all. They stressed how ‘this’ (the Elephant Mahout Project) is potentially better than the ‘other typical tourist elephant camp’. As Lucy’s response had earlier shown, the key explanation given for working with domesticated elephants is the need to “be realistic”, because elephants in the wild – “realistically it’s not going to happen”. Such opinions indeed reflect the situation at large – in 2001, it was estimated that there are fewer than 1,000 wild elephants in Thailand, while approximately 3,000 domesticated elephants can be found in the country (Lohanan, 2001). As cited in Chapter Five as well, a feature on Elephant Hills in Thailand in *Clean Breaks* expresses the following:

Elephants and tourism have typically presented an uneasy mix in Asia: riding elephants is a unique experience but many visitors are understandably uncomfortable about seeing these mighty creatures reduced to pack animals... *While most people would prefer that these creatures were truly wild, for two-thirds of the three thousand Asian elephants left this isn’t currently feasible: they have worked in the logging or tourism industries all their lives and wouldn’t survive independently...* For now, however, for anyone wanting to see more than the back of a pachyderm’s head, Elephant Hills offer the best and most humane experience in Thailand (Hammond and Smith, 2009: 300, my emphasis).

Such a positioning as the best option or way out in an otherwise plain irresponsible situation is echoed by respondents:

So it’s kind of whilst a lot of people don’t agree with this and that I’m doing, and a lot people that I know [say]... you should just have the elephants running wild, and I’m like I would love to do that, but unfortunately I can’t, so *I’ve got to try to find that compromise*. Sometimes I get fed up with it and it feels like I’m not achieving anything with it, but I have to remind myself that *it’s better than what they have before*, and so as long as it’s making a bit of an improvement. *And compared to other camps the difference here is massive*. You’ve seen, literally the elephants here just all morning, are just eating constantly, and that’s because then they can eat all morning and then they can go and do a few hours’ work in the afternoon (Emma, Coordinator of Elephant Mahout Project, interview, 16 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

In my standpoint, in today’s world there is no real reason to have domesticated elephants. *The problem is we have domesticated elephants, and there ain’t no way you can put them back in the wild because there aren’t enough wild*. So the questions is how do you look after it, and how do you keep it (John, Roberts, Director of Elephants, Anantara Golden Triangle, interview, 26 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

The first time we went to Chiang Mai, I saw an elephant show which I wasn't comfortable with because the elephants were performing... I don't like to see animals do that particularly, whereas here its more natural really, more relaxed... I mean they still have to do rides but *I think you have to accept that's life and the mahouts have to earn money and that's the way the world goes isn't it?* But I think when you see the elephants, they looked well cared for and you can look at their heads and their bodies and they don't appear malnourished and they are not all covered in marks and things like that (Linda, volunteer tourist, interview, 27 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

The question put forth here then is not so much whether it is more responsible to have elephants domesticated or in the wild, but rather what should be done with a large number of elephants that are *already* domesticated in Thailand (and in neighbouring countries like Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar). What happens then is that issues on two very different scales are conflated and addressed within the same context, and hence contradictory notions of responsibilities are simultaneously employed – in such manner, it is indeed impossible to be responsible to the *wild* elephant while working with the *domesticated* elephant. Rather than perpetually presenting domesticated or captive elephants as the wrongful or irresponsible behaviour of mahouts/zoos and so on, both academic and popular literature needs to better acknowledge that not all elephants can be wild, and what then does it mean to adopt responsibilities towards these elephants that are not 'born free'.

#### **7.4.3 Elephants as lifestyle and livelihoods**

On the other hand, what has often been neglected is how elephants are indeed a lifestyle and livelihood to many mahout families in Thailand. As soon as one realizes that elephants in the picture are not wild but are instead domesticated elephants, then the responsibilities one holds toward elephants then becomes complicated with responsibilities one holds towards 'locals' – an aspect that surfaces time and again but not yet sufficiently brought to the foreground of discussions. In fact, herein lies the reasoning behind the naming of the Elephant Mahout Project, where the coordinator shared that she believes they are positioned differently from other elephant camps:

I think that is a big difference that we're also about kind of looking after the families as well, and I think we're about the only one that's kind of bridging that gap as well, the kind of I don't think there's anywhere the elephants are still part of the working, you've either got the extreme of it's a tourist camp, and the elephants have been overworked, or they are made

to do tricks, or you've got the sanctuary type where the elephants are almost kind of wild<sup>73</sup> (Emma, 16 Nov 2009).

That elephants are part and parcel of a greater social network is also recognized elsewhere, in Sri Lanka (see also Jayewardene, 1994),

Elephants have been trained for warfare, irrigation, forestry and religious processions. Complex cultures and assemblages of panikkan (elephant capturing) and mahoutship (elephant management) have developed that require a sophisticated attunement to elephant behaviour and social dynamics, assorted technologies of restraint and modes of embodied communication (Lorimer, 2010: 7).

What complicates matters here is that mahouts and their families fall into similar categories as those 'locals' that tourists and tourism should be responsible towards. When comparing the typical mahout family with those 'locals' in community-based tourism and rural home stays, there are numerous similarities. Many mahout families are relatively poor<sup>74</sup> (hence the need to be responsible towards them), and live in a more 'traditional' and less-urbanized manner that is deemed to be of interest to tourists.

Mahouts however, are typically portrayed as the evil perpetrator of animal cruelty towards elephants, the 'evil' that exists in the world as mentioned by a respondent in section 7.4.1. Such sharp criticisms towards mahouts is also seen in the earlier discussions – in places like Nong Nooch Garden and other elephant camps where elephants are pictured as abused victims, land owners and mass-market tourism operators are considered the 'evil' exploiter, and mahouts are not spared from this categorization as well. Emma, for example explained that at the Elephant Mahout Project,

what we also want to try to do is try to show the mahouts that there is another way that they can treat the elephants. *Because many of the mahouts have been brought up to believe that aggression is the way of controlling the elephant*, and so a lot of them have been trained to use their sticks, to use their hooks [ankus], and we are pretty lucky here that none of them actually mistreats their elephants, but sometimes they get a little bit lazy and then they use the hooks out of laziness, so *we're also just trying*

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<sup>73</sup> This is the personal opinion of Emma as indeed there are several similar set ups in Thailand, and "mahout training programmes" are first initiated by the Elephant Conservation Center in Lampang, and also adopted in the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp.

<sup>74</sup> Although 'poverty' itself is a problematic concept – most, if not all Thai rural folks will probably declare themselves to be considered 'poor', even though with income from tourism, mahouts do typically have a higher income than many agriculture-based 'peasants' in Thailand.

*to re-educate them* with that as well, and say you don't have to do this (interview, 16 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

Here, mahouts are seen as either ignorant or lazy, and for such reasons elephants are not treated for their best welfare. The case of the 'exploitative mahout' becomes clearer in the case of street begging elephants in the cities of Thailand:

It's tourism, it's money and they don't regulate it. They [the government] are starting to get a little bit better. But they just seem to go about it the wrong way. They are doing this to get the elephants off the streets of Bangkok, but what they are doing is they are going and buying elephants from mahouts, so basically all the mahouts that have old elephants just want to take their elephants to the streets in Bangkok, get the money, so they can go and buy another elephant. It's crazy (Emma, Elephant Mahout Project, interview, 16 Nov 2009).

[with the government crack down on street begging elephants] now the elephants they just live further out, I think the elephants are now out in Nathonburi or wherever, and now they have to hire a truck that drives them closer into town where they can get off and then walk into town. So now instead of just the mahouts, the elephant has to support his mahout and pay for the truck (Marion Walsh, PR Director, Ananatara, interview, 18 Jan 2010).

At times, mahouts can be depicted in ways similar to greedy capitalists who have no respect for the welfare of their employees – in this case the elephant. However, what is missing from many accounts is the voice of the mahouts and their families – how do they see their own relationships with elephants? Indeed, interviews with mahouts show that mahouts are in a much more complex situation, where the choice of being a mahout and living with elephants is due to a combination of factors with economic and personal motivations. For example, as expressed by Mel, a mahout at the Elephant Mahout Project,<sup>75</sup>

**Me:** Why do you want to be a *kwan chang* [mahout]?

**Mel** (translated by Eka): *Rak chang, rak mak mak* [love elephant, love very much] *rak chang* is love elephant... Before he mahout, he work about farming...

**Me:** Why be a mahout and not a farmer?

**Mel:** He would like to change experience and change job. Yes. But neighbourhood is have elephant and they are interested in take care

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<sup>75</sup> All mahouts referred to in this thesis were involved in the Elephant Mahout Project at the point of research.

elephant... he said when he saw them love elephant, he also like. Like appreciate for some people [tourists] come here... they just fly here very expensive for ticket, and booking, just to take care elephant and love elephant, same like him, he is very happy.

**Me:** So sometimes some volunteers come and they think that you should treat elephants differently, like maybe like Hana thinks that you cannot hit elephants?

**Mel:** when volunteer come here and see some mahout hit elephant, he said should be tell volunteer for understand for another elephant is different, like people, this elephant like this, this elephant like that. *When they hit also normally all of them also love elephant.* They buy [elephant] very expensive and take care every day, but if they don't hit for good, is mean maybe for danger for mahout, for volunteer for anyone yes. Like mum and daughter, teach you have do this do this, don't do this is mean not good... Oh, he said just example, example, not real. If I come too close her [Dok Rak, their elephant]... if she don't know me before, if I just come here first day... But if I go close, maybe if she is not feel good... But if know together then ok. Because elephant is wildlife.

**Me:** Do you want Am [his son] to be a *kwan chang*?

**Mel:** He said he *chop* [like] 'cause... he have his own elephant can train. If Am don't have free time he train. Am stay here, he also can rest and take care, like train together. So he can work together with Am... Like he is very old, sometimes he is tired (interview, 2 Dec 2009).

Embedded within this anecdote are the many real and lived aspects of being a mahout – rather than the faceless, feeling-less and exploitative mahout commonly depicted in criticisms typically hurled towards mahouts. Here, we see that in Mel's case, being a mahout has got to do with loving elephants, loving the nature of the job as a mahout, appreciating and enjoying the interactions with volunteer tourists like Hana, and also the (financial and labour) investments they put in for their elephant. At the same time, Mel's opinion that the elephant is a wild animal is echoed in many interviews with other mahouts – that although he has worked with elephants for many years, and has a good understanding especially towards Dok Rak (name of his family's elephant), one still has to be careful around the elephants, and more so when she is introduced to new people she is not familiar with. Training or hitting the elephant and the use of an ankus is thus understood in these terms – that it is not an aspect of cruelty towards animals, but rather a necessary part of how to live in such close proximity with elephants. Indeed, his examples of how an elephant is like a child to mahouts and at times parents need to discipline or

train their ‘children’, where “like mum and daughter, teach you have do this do this, don’t do this”, is an aspect also brought up in a number of other interviews:

[Referring to elephant performances] Nong Nooch [Gardens] have to people to *teach the elephant how to be clever*, because not every elephant can do, just only some elephant, ok for show (Lek, Coordinator of Elephant Mahout Project, interview, 18 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

I think I think Emma [British coordinator of the Elephant Mahout Project] loves elephant, but don’t think anything, just only love. *Like a baby, when you have baby you have to teach* one, two, three, good. Have result. And some, like when they have children, when his son no good work, he also have to teach same. Not just I love you, I love you, but *when they make wrong have to teach* ((Lek, Coordinator of Elephant Mahout Project, interview, 25 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

Nam Oi [a five year old elephant in the camp] is clever boy, Yon train him. He can do many things, tourists like. Yon is good man, good mahout, take care of Nam Oi from Nam Oi is baby (Meh, Mahout, interview, 25 Nov 2009).

He [referring to another mahout] hit Boon Chok [elephant’s name] because Boon Chok is not his own elephant. He only take care sometimes, not his own, so he don’t love Boon Chok like his own children. *If Boon Chok his child he will not hit so hard* (Boon, mahout, interview, 23 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

in Thai proverb, we have a proverb that if you love the cow, in the old days the cow is the number of wealth, you should tie it, tie the cow with the rope underneath of your house. *And if you love the children, you need to hit them*. This is the way that we have idea that we should train them, after the Western culture come, like in my age, you know when we are in school, it’s ok for the teacher to hit to cane the student if they do something wrong. But now it’s not, within like 20 years, the culture has changed. I don’t know who’s right or wrong, the Westerner try to push thing like that into the society, in term of train elephant as well. You can look at this 2 side of the coin, you can consider as a cruel thing because you train to be like that. But in the Thai, we can look as a normal thing that happen. So it’s very hard, it’s something that they both make a living. It’s so funny and it’s entertain people, if you don’t like it, just walk away. That’s what I think. *I don’t think this is a matter of responsibility, it could be a matter of conflict, cultural conflict in my opinion* (Khun Eng, Director, Let’s tour Bangkok, 19 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

Indeed, these examples highlight that differing notions of what constitutes good parenting comes into play, as responsibilities in tourism involve not only the different opinions of what is considered ethical, moral or responsible practices in tourism, but also underlying

values and cultural norms – in this case what a loving parent should do, and whether hitting a child (or an elephant) to discipline him or her is considered acceptable or not.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, mahouts interviewed expressed that as members of the family, elephants need to be gainfully employed and contribute to family income – just as children do. Also, many mahouts spoke about the hardships of logging in forests with their elephants and walking elephants in the streets. While much has been said about the hardships and ill conditions of living for elephants who worked in logging or walked the streets of cities in Thailand, oftentimes, little mention is given to the mahout who is indeed living in the same less-than-ideal conditions, and that mahouts too care for and feel upset when their elephants are put in difficult situations:

Because for long time before he [mahout] came here and came first camp, in the past not have elephant camp, now he is 47, but long time ago when he young, don't have any camp. They like camp better. But in the past cannot, no elephant camp about this. That's why they sell banana [in the streets]. When he know some camp, he move here better, don't want to sell banana, but in the past, have to sell... *Don't want to sell, but necessary for, because they just love elephant, don't want to leave elephant and go anywhere* (Yen, Mahout, interview, 2 Dec 2009, my emphasis).

*Mai chop Lamba* [don't like logging]. *Lamba* [literally 'lumber' be used to describe logging activities] is mean not comfortable for elephant and for him [mahout], because he [elephant] don't like to pull very heavy... *Very tiring, hard work for elephant and for him too. Have to control, elephant don't like, so difficult to control* (Kon, Mahout, interview, 30 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

He said *Song san*. *Song san* is mean like if you see elephant pull very heavy, oh, is like see and heart feel very pity... scared she [elephant] tired, scared she not happy about this, *song san* (Jai, Mahout, interview, 30 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

Finally, a strong aspect of being a mahout is often how they 'grew up with elephants', that their families have always been mahouts, or as Yen said, that he "love elephant, don't want to leave elephant and go anywhere". When asked why they chose to be mahouts, many respondents answered that they have been mahouts since they were very young, and older mahouts in the camp were often proud and eager to share the numbers of years they have been mahouts (most for more than 20 years, while one claimed to have been a

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<sup>76</sup> This anecdote reminds me of the controversy stirred by Amy Chua's book entitled *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mum*, where it was suggested that discipline and strict parenting was the secret of Chinese children's successes. This was compared to 'Western' parenting styles and it was suggested that "Chinese mothers are superior" (see Chua, A., 2011a, 2011b).

mahout for 40 years – since he was 7 years old). To them, elephants are not only a source of income, or a livelihood, but indeed a way of life:

because Thailand many elephant and her family, and her husband family many many elephant long time ago, yes for like grandma, grandpa always have. Like for heritage of the world, for Thailand is many many elephant, all of the world is know. That's why they love elephant, because all of family have. Like for relationship, like when I, when your daughter, and your daughter, son of your daughter. Link, link. Tradition, continue. Because they love elephant too, because when they were young, they see elephant (Jew, wife of mahout, interview, 25 Nov 2009).

This, together with the strong associations Thais in general have with the elephants, means that the (domesticated) elephant is part and parcel of a greater national imagination about what it means to be Thai, and as John Roberts, Elephant Director at Anantara Golden Triangle, puts it,

it is also part of Thailand's culture to have elephants, it's ingrained... I think... we have to maintain the population of [domesticated] elephants, in which case somebody should decide how many and for what purpose, and take it from there. But that's not my job, I can suggest, but *I can't stand up before people who really feel it in their hearts that they should have elephants and some Thai folks certainly do* (interview, 26 Jan 2010, my emphasis).

Indeed, similar sentiments are often expressed in travel guidebooks discussed in Chapter Five, where it is typically accepted (and perhaps even applauded) that “[t]o Thais the elephant has profound spiritual significance, derived from both Hindu and Buddhist mythologies... The practical role of the elephant in Thailand was once almost as great as its symbolic importance” (Ridout and Gray, 2009: 366).

While this thesis does not attempt to establish whether it is responsible or not to domesticate elephants, or whether whose ideas of how elephants should be managed and treated is right or wrong, what it does set out to do, is to highlight that at least within the context of Thailand and this research, elephants are and will continue to be implicated in the livelihoods of mahouts, and the greater symbolic value attributed to elephants in the country. To neglect this aspect and always portray or imagine elephants as wild and born free would necessarily mean a disconnect between idea(l)s of responsibility, and what it means to practise responsibilities on the ground. Looking at the Asian elephant as a site of responsibility therefore shows the complex situations one has to consider and negotiate while practising what Victoria (volunteer tourist cited in 7.4.2) suggests are ‘relatively

easy' solutions for elephants' problems in Thailand (and the world), and that indeed solutions since suggested again been partial to elephants while neglecting mahouts.

### 7.5 Concluding remarks

Using the separately presented and often interconnected issues of placing responsibilities, domestic spaces in tourism, and the Asian (domesticated) elephant as a site of responsibility to flesh out in depth discussions of responsibilities in and through places, this chapter has highlighted again that practices of responsibility have very real implications on places. In some instances, this meant transforming particular places (whether this refers to a particular location in Thailand, the domestic spaces in rural villages, or the elephant) into ones inscribed with notions of responsibility or not. At the same time, these examples challenge the underlying assumptions in both academic and popular literature that ideas of responsibility are universal or at least can be unproblematically imposed regardless of where it is intended to take place. Instead, it highlights that the fluid and often malleable nature of who considers what to be responsibility relates to an ever-changing way of practising it (see Bremer, 2008; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; McFarlane, 2006; Sharp and Briggs, 2006).

While referring specifically to elephants, the dilemmas and conflicting notions of responsibilities volunteer tourist Hana shared can indeed be said of many real life examples in the world:

*if you are an animal welfare responsible tourist, then you say that's not good enough, what we should be doing is in encouraging them to not take tourist rides and just reintroduce their elephants into the wild or whatever, well you can't do that, they are domestic elephants, but you know what I mean, get them to do nothing. Well, the elephants might be bored, I don't know enough about the psychology of elephants but there's a tremendous dilemma, so to be responsible economically means that you're pleased when these tourist buses come, and because it means that the mahout can sustain their way of life, they can feed their elephants, they can feed their families, they can support their families back home and that's great, and our money helps them to do that as well. But if you took away the tourist ride and just depend on volunteers, you would actually be destroying the mahouts' way of life, because this is what they do, so you've got a tremendous tension there between, well actually coming in here as a volunteer I change the dynamics, I make a difference, I alter things, and how do I ensure that I alter things in a way that, how do I pick my way between these dilemmas, 'cause I don't think there is any answer...I think for some, they are very very genuinely concerned about being responsible*

but *being responsible in one area could mean that you're being irresponsible knock on effect*. And it's just a complex interaction of factors (interview, 25 Nov 2009, my emphasis).

What this chapter (and thesis) sets out to do then, is indeed not to provide any conclusions on what is or is not responsible in tourism, but instead to open up many more such Pandora's boxes as greater shifts within the tourism industry (especially that of tourists originating from 'developed' or 'privileged' parts of the world) veer towards the idea that tourism can and should be(come) responsible. And indeed, perhaps it is with such critical interrogations that tourism can ever possibly be(come) responsible.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Critical Reflections and Concluding Remarks**

## **8. Critical Reflections and Concluding Remarks**

### **8.1 Preamble**

The process of doing this PhD research has often left me highly insecure in, well, basically doing just about anything in life. Should I be resisting turning on the air conditioner when the weather gets too hot, or the heat when the weather gets too cold? Am I too distant and aloof to the locals that I encounter in my vacations? Shouldn't I be 'going local', appreciating their culture, and being warm and friendly to express my respect for them? Or perhaps what I should be writing right now ought to be a strongly worded letter to my local government to petition for the weekly collection of recyclables rather than (or on top of) this thesis? The torrents of images and messages of civic and responsible citizenship I encountered is perhaps much more than what a lay person would be subjected to – after all, I did quite ask for it by doing research in this field – but to those who look (and indeed even to those who try to ignore), the 'ethical or responsible self' is part and parcel of modern living, something that even 'going on vacation' no longer offers an 'escape' from. But yet, does buying fair trade coffee or signing up for a 'responsible tour' make me a responsible person? As much as we may like to wish so, I do not think the correlation is so simple and straightforward. Just as how practices of consumption are embodied and enfolded in all sort of rationalities over and beyond 'consumption' itself, being 'responsible' or not, whether one is a consumer, corporation, or 'local', is also constantly enacted in spite of what one thinks one is doing or not. How does research begin to appreciate and encompass such messy and incongruent processes of *being* responsible then? Indeed, like what was attempted in this thesis, we can only (but cannot fail to) try. This concluding chapter therefore acts not only as a summary of the research findings and contributions presented through this thesis, but also as a space where we can dwell and muse about social responsibility in tourism – what exactly is it? Why are we so increasingly enamoured by the idea? And indeed, what lies in the future for responsibility in tourism?

### **8.2 Social responsibility in tourism**

What is it in tourism then? As an industry typically shouldered with the perception that leisure and recreation as seen in tourism is but a hedonistic pursuit of self-interest and

pleasure – sometimes at the expense of or ignoring the ills caused to locals and the environment – this study highlights not only the important and emerging trends in the demand for ‘responsible travel’, but also the disruption such mobilities of people and idea(l)s present when tourism is involved. When one encounters face-to-face what one is supposedly ‘responsible’ for in tourism, it is much harder to assume that being ‘responsible’ is as simple as buying a particular brand of coffee that is labelled as ‘fair trade’. In the many instances brought up in this research, respondents – whether these are tourists or corporations all express such dilemmas and uncertainties, and on the ground, the partial nature of practising responsibilities and the biased location of power is not lost on those interviewed. And yet, while tourism has tended to be seen as an extra-ordinary part of life differentiated from the mundane and day-to-day living, what this study has highlighted is also the very ordinary decisions and banal actions that continue to pervade how ‘responsibility’ comes to play – people can attempt to be ‘responsible’ (e)specially in their tours and travels, but yet they remain entrenched in all sorts of ‘irresponsibilities’ both consciously and subconsciously. And the same can be said of all sorts of social responsibility within or beyond tourism – one is always simultaneously and continuously responsible *and* irresponsible – and only when academic and popular literature acknowledge and appreciate this, and move beyond such binary presentations, can we begin to truly comprehend that *being* responsible is a process rather than an end product. Responsibility is thus argued in this thesis to be always in a process of becoming – much like sustainable development, it is something that one is always in the motion of doing and working towards, and yet we can never be wholly responsible, because decisions we make are always partial and complicit in all sorts of other irresponsibilities that we may fail to appreciate or choose to ignore.

At the crux of this research then, is that it is not at all simple or easy to be ‘responsible’. Rather, we can learn a lot about ‘our responsibility’ and yet continue to have difficulty pursuing a course of action that is deemed to be suitably ‘responsible’. Here, I argue that existing works in both popular media and academic literature too often hold the assumption that increasing awareness is the key to changing behaviours towards adopting responsibilities. This starting point is flawed. In each of the chapters, such notions of ‘easy responsibilities’ were challenged: Chapter Five highlights the inconsistencies in the ways that responsibilities are presented in guidebooks and websites, beckoning one to

question, for example, if seeking a ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ Thailand necessarily means that one is being responsible in his or her travels; Chapter Six, on the other hand, draws attention to actual practices of ‘responsibility’ on the ground, and suggests, amongst other things, the limitations, difficulties, and most importantly the partial decisions one needs to make when one decide to ‘do’ all sorts of responsibilities in tourism; finally, Chapter Seven points out how the notion of ‘place’ is often neglected in responsible tourism – is it the same to be responsible in Thailand or elsewhere, in for example, Singapore? How are responsibilities specific and tied in to ‘place’ – whether such ‘place’ refers to different geographic destinations, domestic spaces, or indeed the elephant as a site of responsibility? What happens when we ‘place’ responsibilities? And what does ‘responsibilities’ in tourism do to places? The disjuncture between discourses of responsibility (presented both in academic and popular literature as easy) and what actually happens on the ground when one practises responsibilities is thus highlighted in this thesis, as I continue to wonder what is the role of us as academics to bridge this gap and provide a more useful understanding of responsibility.

Theoretically then, this thesis sets to critique and debunk abstract binaries presented in existing literature – whether one looks at it from geographies of care and responsibility, ‘responsible’ tourism, ethical consumption, or corporate social responsibility – there is often an underlying assumption that one can or has to be ‘responsible’, or not. The lack of a halfway mark, or indeed a comprehensive discussion of how one *becomes* ‘responsible’ – including what sorts of difficulties and decisions one needs to make, what one concedes and gives way to practical concerns, or what sorts of triumphs over logistical hurdles or otherwise – inevitably presents an intangible view on responsibilities: we all know it’s ‘good’ to be responsible, but nobody seems to know what being responsible is really about.<sup>77</sup> Through focusing on such accounts shared by respondents, this thesis highlights the ordinariness of many decisions and actions, and hence suggests that while ‘awareness campaigns’ may have had a vital role in the early days of encouraging corporate and consumer responsibility, it is now appropriate for us to rethink such an approach.

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<sup>77</sup> And despite this, guidebooks and websites will still go ahead and tell potential tourists ‘everything’ they need to know about being responsible in tourism, even as such advice is typically laden with inconsistencies and uncertainties as Chapter Five has highlighted.

At the same time, this research has pointed out a vital theoretical shortcoming in how responsibility has since been discussed – where the valorisation of the moral subject as universal or fair has failed to take into account that when people practise responsibility, this is necessarily partial. One cannot possibly be responsible to the multitude of potential issues one can take up in the world. Whether one is a tourist or a travel-related corporation, to support orphanages in Thailand would mean that there could perhaps be orphans in Laos that you are neglecting. Or to work with Asian elephants may mean that the funding you provide is directed away from Asian tigers that may be just as worthy a cause. Although calls for universal justice in the geographies of responsibility has indeed opened up many possibilities (see, for example Popke, 2003: 300), the furtherance of academic debate has to acknowledge the partial nature of enacting responsibilities in reality, and move on to explore ‘responsibilities’ not as an abstract and comprehensive moral whole, but as a plural and multiple domain in which people, states and organizations make active and partial choices with practical reasoning (see also Clarke et al., 2007).

To this end, I would like to challenge academics to acknowledge that it is no longer enough to pursue an awareness campaign towards responsibility – and instead focus on thinking and talking about responsibility in a nuanced manner that bring in notions of difficulty, limitation and partiality, while recognizing that we are simultaneously responsible and irresponsible at all times. Earlier research has highlighted our complicity as consumers and agents in this globalized economy and stressed the dangers of being indifferent (and hence perpetuating unfair social norms and patterns) (see Cloke, 2002). While this was a powerful intervention that did truly open my eyes when I first encountered such ideas as an undergraduate Geography student, now I wonder – yes, of course we are complicit in the irresponsibility of our existing global social and economic structure. But when are/were we ever not complicit? Realizing this may mean that we have to continually address such irresponsibility in every aspect of our lives. But I suspect that for many people, the opposite is also true – since we are complicit anyhow, perhaps we can give up trying not to be. This thesis therefore intervenes at this point, as I suggest that when we as academics begin to think of and talk about responsibility beyond binaries and position it as a process of becoming, perhaps we can inspire the popular media to follow suit – we need to first speak of responsibility in such nuanced manner for it to be

understood in the same way. And then perhaps guidebooks and websites will begin to present their dos and don'ts in ways which recognize that responsibilities in tourism cannot be reduced to a universal set of instructions despite contextual situations.

At the same time, this research observes and emphasizes the location of power in talking about, practising, and placing responsibilities. It is highlighted that while we seem to be concerned about those we are responsible to (for example, 'locals' in poor or marginalized positions, the 'environment', or threatened wildlife), the strongest voices that emerge, and the focuses of too many campaigns, are instead on the consumer or corporation. The question of who defines and decides what are considered 'responsibilities' worthy to be taken up is brought forth time and again throughout the thesis, and this is presented in stark comparison with how the 'local' is often deemed as passive or quiet. Tourists and corporations too often see it as their responsibility to teach, educate or change the ways locals do things. In for example, the case of elephants and mahouts, it is almost as if (responsible) tourists and tourism holds a special right to teach mahouts about how they should take care of elephants – and this is in spite of the obvious lack of relative expertise over the subject matter. In instances as such, responsibilities in tourism can potentially reek of colonial arrogance, where the 'First' or 'developed' world assume that together with the privilege and wealth comes a moral high ground at which they can instruct the 'Third' or 'developing' world on what is right for them. Indeed, amongst criticism towards responsible tourism, and especially towards volunteer or just tourism, is the concern that the 'Third world' is increasingly becoming a playground for 'First world' tourists to get involved in what they think is responsibility. At times, set upon a pedestal that, as responsible tourists, they are the change agents to make tomorrow's world a better place (or at least so claim numerous [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) advertisements as discussed in Chapter Five), responsible tourism may inadvertently naturalize the idea that it is alright for any other 'First world' tourist to instruct a 'Third world local' on what he or she should do (with their lives).

Situating this research empirically in Thailand was hence an attempt to decentre the notions of responsibility from such a Western centric 'First world' perspective, thereby highlighting the dynamic nature of responsibilities as it is practised outside of the 'First world'. And yet, Thailand is not just 'outside of the First world' – as section 7.2 highlighted, Thailand is somewhere in between traditional conceptions of the 'First'

world and the 'Third' – not quite rich and privileged enough to be considered 'developed', but also not quite far down in the poverty scale to be considered as the 'exemplary' destination for all sorts of 'pro-poor' tourism. The tensions of enacting responsibilities in such a context in Thailand are hence brought up throughout this thesis, with pertinent questions of what and why one should be responsible at all, and how underlying many calls for 'responsibility' are indeed problematic subtexts that puts countries and destinations into their respective places on the First-to-Third world scale. The tendency and ability of locals then to 'act poor' in a bid to fulfil stereotypes of tourists/tourism's ideals of responsibility from the First-to-Third world as discussed in this thesis hence highlights its problematic nature – to continually attract responsible tourists, a destination and its locals should never become better off. It is here then that discussions in the earlier part of this section ties in: if we can think and talk about responsibilities in a manner that goes beyond the binaries of what is a suitable place to be responsible or not, then perhaps tourists and tourism can stop seeking out only the most desperate and poor, while at the same time rejecting places that are somewhat in the process of getting 'richer'.

Future research is therefore envisioned in further explorations of how places are constructed as suitable to practise responsibility or not. In particular, one area of further research might be the role of and interactive use of social media such as TripAdvisor or Facebook in relaying notions of how to travel 'responsibly' in particular places. How does this affect development and practices of responsibilities on the ground, especially in contrast to more static forms of travel media such as guidebooks and websites studied in this research. The advent and take up of newer technologies, such as podcast tours, or Iphone apps that replaces functions that were traditionally provided by travel guidebooks, beckon further questions on how these may or may not alter the experience of tourism. Research in these areas can therefore be juxtaposed against what is already discussed in this thesis.

Also, in the course of this research, I have encountered a number of travel-related corporations who express firm support for being responsible in tourism. An interesting aspect that emerged from these interviews, is how such companies will do what is within their means to ensure that tourists are 'responsible', at times in spite of tourists themselves. Banyan Tree for example, has its chambermaids follow the policy of turning

guestrooms' air conditioning to 25 degrees Celsius every time the room is cleaned, or when the beds are turned down in the evening. This sort of 'enforcement' of responsibility is also related to the European Union's current troubles in imposing a carbon tax on the aviation industry as part of its Emissions Trading Scheme (see, for example Nichols, 2012; Watts, 2012). Further research can therefore consider the implications when responsibility in tourism is increasingly set in policies and laws, rather than encouraged through ethical consumption or responsible tourism awareness campaigns.

Finally, in this conclusion, I have yet to address what suggestions I put forth in terms of practising responsibilities. How should we be approaching responsibility in practice when this is said to be partial and beyond binaries, while acknowledging that it is in fact a process? On the one hand, I would suggest that it is beyond the scope of this research to suggest how to solve the many difficulties of practising responsibility, and that such an endeavour can be an extension of future research to pursue. On the other hand, this research deliberately refrains from putting forth ideas on how to practise responsibility (and have instead stopped at how to think and talk about responsibility), because it does not wish to fall prey to exactly what it criticizes – the lure of stating yet another set of responsible dos and don'ts that will inevitably be taken out of their contexts.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

I revisited the Elephant Mahout Project in January 2012, two years after my fieldwork for this research. I wonder, however, if what I did should be considered a *re*-visit, or is it really a first-time-encounter with the *new* Elephant Mahout Project. Of the three coordinators I met and interviewed, only Lek remains involved in the project. Eka had gone home to work in Chiang Mai, while Emma was no longer involved in the Elephant Mahout Project as she had a baby not long after my fieldwork period and had since returned to the United Kingdom. The other bigger news is – Tai Tai Elephant Camp (where the Elephant Mahout Project was situated at the time of my research) had closed down. The plot of land originally used for the elephant camp had been taken back by the banks as the land owners have failed to pay the instalments for their bank loan. As such, Tai Tai could no longer rent that plot of land. Khun Vit, the manager of the camp, had managed to relocate operations to a new site about two kilometres away, and combined

with a much smaller elephant camp already on site, the new camp was now called Tai Tai Seaview Elephant Camp. Volunteer tourists I met at the new Elephant Mahout Project were visibly disappointed in the new site. Lek told me the difficulties that they now face: there was no water supply at the new camp, and as such a truck delivered water to the camp three times a week. Unlike the time during my fieldwork where the elephants could be showered three or four times a day when the weather got immensely hot, in this new camp they had to conserve water for drinking, and elephants would be showered at most once a day. The area was also much smaller and had limited adjacent forests for elephants to graze in. There were also few shaded areas for the elephants to rest as compared to the old camp, and this exacerbated the problem of limited water supply.

The new camp was also too small to accommodate all the elephants and mahouts from the old camp, and as such mahouts that I had interviewed in this research are now scattered across various elephant camps in the vicinity. Some of the mahouts like Ma, Pan and Jew were at the new Tai Tai Seaview, but I could only identify eight of the 18 elephants and their mahout families at this new camp. Meh and San Noi, the mahout and elephant I was attached to in the time of my fieldwork, were now at another elephant camp in front of a tourist attraction called the Khao Chee Chan Buddha Mountain. When I visited her, I found that at least four other families had moved here from Tai Tai. Ellie, Mel, Am and their family had of course moved out before this happened (their story of being evicted from the Tai Tai was cited in Box 4.1), and I had later heard from Ellie that several other families joined them in their camp when Tai Tai closed down. Jai and the only baby elephant from Tai Tai moved to another camp called the Camp Chang (Thai for elephant), while Kon, his father and village chief at Tai Tai had ‘retired’ from mahouting – his four elephants are now rented to Nong Nooch Tropical Garden, while he and his wife have set up a stall at the Pattaya Floating Market, selling of all things, ivory souvenirs to tourists. Nop and his family, whom I never interviewed for this research, was no longer in touch with Lek – not long after my fieldwork period, Nop was arrested by the police for peddling drugs in Pattaya City. His family went back to their hometown in Buri Ram in Northeastern Thailand, and Lek was uncertain how they were getting on.

Recounting these changes at the conclusion of this thesis serves two purposes – first, it is a stark reminder to readers that fieldwork and research presented in this thesis is indeed an episode in time. The changes at the Elephant Mahout Project, and the fact that Tai Tai

Elephant Camp as discussed in this research no longer exists, does not mean that what is here presented is no longer relevant. Instead, it highlights the fluidity on the ground, where rather than holding on to abstract notions of responsibility, one can learn more from appreciating the continual changes as they evolve in tourism.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, these changes once again point towards the sorts of difficulties, limitations and constraints one faces in practising responsibility in tourism. Perhaps we can be tempted to simply brush off the new Elephant Mahout Project as yet another 'responsible tourism' product that is not at all different from any regular elephant camp, and that it is not at all 'responsible'. Or perhaps we can conclude that responsible tourism is itself a marketing gimmick or green washing of tourism as it always has been. But embedded within what has happened at the Tai Tai elephant camp are aspects beyond the control of the elephants, mahouts, and coordinator at the Elephant Mahout Project and also for Go Differently, their British partner for marketing responsible tourism. It reminds us instead, that there is and will never be an ideal utopian world where all elephants are wild, chicken are free range, vegetables are organic, income inequality does not exist, and 'locals' are empowered. Instead, limitations, constraints, lack of knowledge, and lack of access to resources, pepper such decisions about responsibility, and negotiations between various parties continually produce, consume, and reproduce idea(l)s of what responsibility really is about. And indeed, it is in its fallibility that the Elephant Mahout Project reminds us - We can never be entirely responsible, but that does not mean we are irresponsible, or that we are not in the process of trying.

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## Appendices

## 10. Appendices

### Appendix A: Profile of respondents

Name	Organization	Position	Date of interview
<i>Tour-providing companies</i>			
<b>Bert Van Walbeek</b>	The Winning Edge	Director	15 Jan 2010
<b>Khun Eng</b>	Lets-tour-bangkok.com	Director	19 Jan 2010
<b>Luzi A. Matzig</b>	Asian Trails Ltd.	CEO	22 Dec 2009
<b>Patranuch Sudasna</b>	Creative Destination Management	Director	14 Jan 2010
<b>Peter Weingand</b>	Arosa Travel Service	Managing Director	12 Jan 2010
<b>Willem Niemeijer</b>	Khiri Travel	Founder	11 Jan 2010
<i>Hotels</i>			
<b>Chitpapong Venu-Athon</b>	Accor Group	Corporate HR Support Manager	29 Jan 2010
<b>Cynthia Yen</b>	Dusit Thani Bangkok	CSR Project Manager	20 Jan 2010
<b>John Roberts</b>	Anantara Golden Triangle	Elephant Director	26 Jan 2010
<b>Manfred Pieper</b>	Conrad Bangkok	General Manager	8 Dec 2009
<b>Marion Walsh</b>	Anantara Group	PR Director	18 Jan 2010
<b>Michael Kwee</b>	Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts (Singapore)	CSR Director	10 Feb 2010
<b>Nelson Hilton</b>	Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok	Director of Marketing	14 Jan 2010
<b>Philippe Le Bourhis</b>	Novotel Siam Square Bangkok	Hotel Manager	15 Dec 2009
<b>Sammy Carolus</b>	Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok	Executive Assistant Manager - Marketing	14 Dec 2009
<b>Srichan Monrakharom</b>	Six Senses Resorts & Spa (Evason Hua Hin)	Environment manager	31 Jan 2010

<b>Supanit Vimooktanon</b>	Pathuwan Princess Hotel	General Manager	11 Jan 2010
<b>Sukich Udindu</b>	Minor International	Vice President of CSR	26 Jan 2010
<b>Thivagaran Kesavan</b>	Alila Cha Am	General Manager	30 Jan 2010
<b>Wannapa Rakkeo</b>	The Sukothai Bangkok	Director of Business Development	28 Jan 2010
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
<i>Travel website author</i>			
<b>Michael Holland</b>	thailandforvisitors.com	Editor and author	25 Jan 2010
<i>NGO facilitator</i>			
<b>Bill Tuffin</b>	World Wildlife Fund	Project consultant	17 Dec 2009
<i>Exotissimo Travel Thailand</i>			
<b>Anne C. Cruickshanks</b>	Exotissimo Travel Group	Group Product and Marketing Manager	8 Dec 2009 – 12 Feb 2010
<b>Hamish Keith</b>	Exotissimo Travel Thailand; Exotissimo Travel Group	Managing Director Thailand, Director of Business Development	8 Dec 2009 – 12 Feb 2010
<b>Jean-Yves Paille</b>	Exotissimo Travel Laos	Product Manager	21-22 Dec 2009
<b>Oliver Colomès</b>	Exotissimo Travel Group	Chief Executive Officer	8 Dec 2009 – 12 Feb 2010
<b>Soontarut W</b>	Exotissimo Travel Thailand	Product Manager	8 Dec 2009 – 12 Feb 2010
<i>Elephant Mahout Project (EMP)</i>			
<b>Emma</b>	EMP	Coordinator (British)	8 Nov 2009 – 15 Feb 2010

<b>Lek</b>	EMP	Coordinator (Thai)	8 Nov 2009 – 15 Feb 2010
<b>Eka</b>	EMP	Coordinator (Thai)	8 Nov 2009 – 15 Feb 2010
<b>Deborah</b>	Go Differently	Owner	April 2009 – March 2010 (via email)
<b>Vit</b>	Tai Tai Elephant Camp (TTEC)	Manager	20 Nov 2009
<b>Am</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	2 Dec 2009
<b>Boon</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	23 Nov 2009
<b>Boon Chuay</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	27 Nov 2009
<b>Don</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	26 Nov 2009
<b>Ellie</b>	EMP/TTEC	Wife of mahout (British)	Feb – Mar 2010 (via Facebook)
<b>Jai</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	30 Nov 2009
<b>Jew</b>	EMP/TTEC	Wife of mahout	25 Nov 2009
<b>Ma</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	25 Nov 2009
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
<b>Meh</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	25 Nov 2009
<b>Mel</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	2 Dec 2009
<b>Miao</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	27 Nov 2009
<b>Wan</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	27 Nov 2009
<b>Nort</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	26 Nov 2009
<b>Pan</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	25 Nov 2009
<b>Poon</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	26 Nov 2009
<b>San</b>	EMP/TTEC	Wife of mahout	30 Nov 2009
<b>Kon</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	30 Nov 2009
<b>Yan</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	23 Nov 2009
<b>Yen</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	2 Dec 2009

<b>Yon</b>	EMP/TTEC	Mahout	23 Nov 2009
<b>Hana</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	25 Nov 2009
<b>Helen</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	26 Nov 2009
<b>Jason</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	16 Nov 2009
<b>Linda</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	27 Nov 2009
<b>Lucy</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	11 Nov 2009
<b>Olivia</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	28 Nov 2009
<b>Peter</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	19 Nov 2009
<b>Victoria</b>	-	Volunteer tourist	19 Dec 2009

## **Appendix B: Aide Memoire for interviews with travel-related companies, and respondents at Exotissimo and Elephant Mahout Project**

### **History and background of Company**

- How the company was set up?
- Why was it set up and is there any special meaning in the name of the company?
- What was your involvement in this?
- What is your position in the company and what do you do in the company?
- Any additional background/history to the company?
- Is there any special reason why you joined the company?

### **Structure of Company**

- Numbers of – staff, tours, tourists, offices, revenue figures etc.
- How is the work divided up – are there different offices in charge of different sectors? What is the general management style?

### **Clientele**

- Who are the main clientele of company? Breakdown in terms of age group, nationality, single-couple-families-groups, type of tourists, etc? Any changes in the clientele over the years?
- What do clients expect when they use services from this company? Are they looking specifically for responsible products? Does this company take the lead in providing these?
- Why do you think people choose this company over other tourism choices? Elaborations?

### **Impressions of tourism development in Thailand in general**

- What are your impressions of tourism development in Thailand in general? What's good, what's bad?
- What your view on ecotourism/sustainable tourism etc? What do you think of Thailand's ecotourism/sustainable tourism initiatives? Are there any particularly good ones? Or any particularly bad ones?
- How about responsible tourism? Do you think there any difference between responsible tourism and eco/sustainable tourism?
- How do you think "responsibility" as a notion in Thailand developed? Are there any links with:

- Buddhism
- Western influences (especially influences from NGOs etc)
- Do you think responsibilities in tourism are a concern only for Westerners?
- How about other activities – like ecotourism, gap year, backpacking etc? How do these compare to responsible tourism?

### **Company's "green" standards**

- "Responsible" tourism – what is this company's definition?
- Do you have any initiatives to introduce responsible tourism?
- If yes:
- What's the impetus?
- Who's idea?
- Any personal stories about who/what you are that made you keen to go "green" etc?
- What has been done, what are the plans?
- How does this company see itself going forward? What do you think this company can achieve?
- How do you ensure such responsibilities are achieved in your company? Anecdotes?
- Any difficulties in this process?
- Does this company have particular responsible tourism packages, charitable activities, or is introducing responsibilities into its main line products & management?
- If no:
- Has company considered it?
- Any particular reason for not going into it? E.g. lack resources, do not see a need to, not good for business, etc?
- Will company go into it in future?
- What does company think of other companies doing it? Do you think it is a trend that company has to consider? Or do you think it is just a fad that does not concern the company?
- What is the company's position in relation to the rest of the tourism industry in Thailand/SE Asia?

**Responsible tourism products/planning (if any)**

- How are these identified and planned?
- How does the company ensure these are “responsible”?
- How do you communicate with other parties involved?
- Does the company collate responses and feedback from customers? Does this affect their products/practices?

**Responsibilities in tourism (not specific to your company)**

- Ask what respondent thinks should be considered as responsibilities in tourism and check against typical choices listed here:
  - Nationalism – showcasing Thailand
  - Pro-poor
  - Environment – including elephants
  - Safety of tourists? Hospitality? Good quality tours? Disaster relief?
  - Rights for particular groups
  - Women (including prostitution)
  - Children & education
  - Ethnic minorities
  - Providing Healthcare (including AIDS)
  - Heritage/authenticity
  - Back to our nature – idealized village life (especially in the North). The need to connect to nature
  - Tourism enables the continuation of rural livelihoods.
  - Others?
- Have you encountered any contradictory responsibilities? Any stories to share? How do you decide what to prioritize if there are any conflicting sides?

**Who’s responsibility for what?**

- The role of private corporations versus government, individuals, tourists, NGOs?
- What is this company’s role?

**Marketing and business (if any)**

- Does this company do any marketing about responsible tourism to 1. tourists, 2. potential sponsorship partners. How is that done?

- Visual – representations of responsibility (as in websites etc)? Why do you choose certain pictures and what do they mean to you (or to your intended audience)?
- How does being ‘responsible’ affect their business? How does this relate to profit levels?
- Do you think responsible tourism is different from other responsible products like Body Shop/ Fair trade coffee etc? Why?
- Some people say that responsible tourism is just a marketing gimmick – what’s your view on this?

**General remarks about responsible tourism/CSR/tourism in Thailand?**

## **Appendix C: Aide Memoire for interviews with volunteer tourists at the Elephant Mahout Project (EMP)**

### **Background and motivations**

- Tell me a little more about yourself, where you're from, what you're doing etc? Any personal stories about who/what you are that made you keen to volunteer etc?
- Why did you decide to volunteer at EMP?
- How did you get to know about EMP?
- How did you make your choice about coming to EMP and Thailand (amongst many options)?
- What attracted you to EMP?
- What was your impression of EMP/Thailand before coming?
- What did/do you think you can achieve by volunteering? How do you think what you're doing can make a difference (or not)?

### **Notions of responsible tourism**

- What do you think of responsible tourism? How would you define it?
- Is EMP considered responsible tourism to you? Why?
- Do you have any other experiences with "responsible tourism"? Give examples.
- How does EMP compare with your other experiences (if any)?
- How does EMP compare with your other travel experiences (not specific to responsible tourism)?
- How about other activities – like ecotourism, gap year, backpacking etc? How are these in comparison to responsible tourism?

### **Impressions of tourism development in Thailand in general**

- What are your impressions of tourism development in Thailand in general. What's good, what's bad?
- What your view on ecotourism/sustainable tourism etc? What do you think of Thailand's ecotourism/sustainable tourism initiatives? Any particularly good ones? Or any particularly bad ones?
- How do you think "responsibility" as a notion in Thailand developed? Are there any links with
  - Buddhism
  - Western influences (influences from NGOs etc)

- Do you think responsibilities in tourism are a concern only for Westerners?

### **Experiences at EMP**

- What do you think of your experience at EMP in general? Any specific experiences to share?
- What did you like and what did you not like?
- Did EMP fulfil your expectations and imaginations about responsible tourism? Give examples.
- Any changing points in your experience? (Related to travel as a life-journey or sojourn?)
- Did you achieve what you had intended to do – i.e. your original motivations?
- What do you think is EMP's position in relation to the rest of the tourism industry in Thailand/SE Asia?
- Do you know how EMP ensures it is 'responsible'? How are responsibilities identified and planned?
- Do you know how/if EMP communicate with the various parties involved (e.g. mahouts etc)?
- Do you think responses and feedback from customers is captured by EMP? And are these incorporated with their products/practices?

### **Elephants**

- How much did elephants factor in your decision of coming to Thailand?
- Would other volunteering/animals do too?
- What were your impressions of elephants before coming to EMP?
- What do you know about elephants?
- What do you think of elephants now that you've volunteered here?
- Any changes?
- E.g. do you think you're more likely to champion their rights etc in the future? Will you be more concerned about news relating to animal/elephant rights and treatment etc?
- What do you think you will do after your experience here at the EMP?

### **Locals/Mahouts**

- How much did local Thais factor in your decision of coming to Thailand?

- Would other volunteering do too?
- What were your impressions of locals before coming to EMP?
- What do you know about locals?
- What do you think of locals now that you've volunteered here?
- Any changes?
- E.g. do you think you're more likely to champion their rights etc in the future?  
Will you be more concerned about news relating to Thailand etc?
- What do you think you will do after your experience here at the EMP?

**Any other motivating factors/responsibilities mentioned**

**Other volunteer tourists/tourists**

- How's your interaction with the other volunteers and tourists?
- How much did other volunteers factor in your decision of coming to EMP?
- What were your impressions of volunteers/tourists before coming to EMP?
- What do you think of volunteers/tourists now that you've volunteered here?
- Any changes?

**What do you consider as responsibilities of tourism (not specific to EMP/yourself)?**

- Ask what respondent thinks should be considered as responsibilities in tourism and check against typical choices listed here:
  - Nationalism – showcasing Thailand
  - Pro-poor
  - Environment – including elephants
  - Safety of tourists? Hospitality? Good quality tours? Disaster relief?
  - Rights for particular groups
  - Women (including prostitution)
  - Children & education
  - Ethnic minorities
  - Providing Healthcare (including AIDS)
  - Heritage/authenticity
  - Back to our nature – idealized village life (especially in the North). The need to connect to nature

- Tourism enables the continuation of rural livelihoods.
  - Others?
- Have you encountered any contradictory responsibilities? Any stories to share? How do you decide what to prioritize if there are any conflicting sides?

**Who is responsibility for what?**

- The role of private corporations versus government, individuals, tourists, NGOs?
- What is your role?

**Marketing and business**

- What do you think of the website and other marketing material by EMP?
- Visual – representations of responsibility (as in websites etc)? Are you particularly attracted by certain pictures and why? What do they mean to you?
- Can you share any photos which you think is particularly meaningful to you (especially related to how these represent responsible tourism)? (Can show me again the next day etc) Why are they meaningful? Can I have a copy of them?
- Do you think being responsible affect's EMP's business? Would you be more likely to take up a tour that supposedly responsible?
- How do you establish if it is indeed responsible?
- Does responsible tourism differ from other responsible products like Body Shop/ Fair trade coffee etc? Why?
- Some people say that responsible tourism is just a marketing gimmick – what's your view on this?

**General remarks about responsible tourism/CSR?**