The emotional labor of former street children working as tour guides in Delhi

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Abstract: In Delhi, former street children guide tourists around the streets they once inhabited and show how the NGOs they live with try to resocialize current street children. The "personal stories" they perform implicitly advocate simple solutions that conveniently fit the limited engagement of the tourists, whose ethical position is thereby validated in relation to the NGO. But this uncomplicated exchange of guides' emotions for tourists' capital is in the guides' interest, because it allows them to set boundaries for the emotional labor of performing their past suffering. The guides are thus incentivized to work within a post-humanitarian logic, selling their stories as commodities, which then incentivize the tourists to act as consumers, who have little choice but to frame their declarations of solidarity with the children as acts of consumption.

Keywords: Delhi, emotional labor, humanitarianism, India, narrative group identity, slum tourism, street children, poverty tourism

"What happens when the poorest, most powerless people of the world start thinking of their self-representation as work?"

Slum tourism is a growing industry worldwide with an estimated million tourists (Frenzel et al. 2015) annually going on tours in informal, urban areas on the edges of the megapolises of the Global South, such as Cape Town, Mumbai, or Rio de Janeiro. They thereby facilitate a very large number of organized face-to-face encounters between representatives from the Global North and South, in topoi characterized as the homes of the latter. The workers employed in tourism industries of the Global South—such as drivers, waiters, and cooks—often live in these areas, or

are at least situated within the same wage bracket as those who do, and the difference between slum tourism and other forms of tourism thereby is not that rich and poor encounter each other much more on slum tours but rather that the socioeconomic differences between them are consciously explored there. They constitute a rare space of self-representation for the poor and powerless of the world, curiously facilitated by an industry that usually aims at invisibilizing the effects of global poverty, as well as the part it plays in sustaining it.

The case of this article is a "city walk" (CW) facilitated by the NGO Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT) in Delhi, India. SBT resocializes street children and employs a group of their former charges (ages 18–21) to perform a version of their precarious childhood for tourists on the CW to generate funding for SBT. These performances of past suffering are conceptualized here as acts of "emotional labor" (Hochschild 1983), which is to say, the labor of managing the emotions circulating in the co-performed space of the CW. The article finds that the guides are presented with a series of contradictory demands they must balance, and while these do not directly restrict what they can and can't say, they create an incentive structure that indirectly curb the space of self-representation allotted them.

The first contradictory demand is that the guides must offer tourists an emotionally engaging tour while still protecting themselves from reliving the traumas of their childhood in front of complete strangers three times a week. To achieve this, the guides edit what they say and how they say it. They edit their personal stories so that only certain types of past suffering are represented, namely the types that might be alleviated by SBT, supported by donations from tourists. Lingering traumas are omitted, along with reference to problems of a systemic nature, which no amount of donations from individual persons might solve. Furthermore, the stories are sometimes performed in a deliberately callously lighthearted fashion, which then translates into a similarly ironic representation of how problems of the Global South influence the lives of street children generally. By including the events and emotions they only utter in private moments, the guides could construct stories that are less callously happy, but they have no desire to do so, first, because the emotions these stories would elicit in the tourists might affect the guides emotionally, as hearing of past suffering makes the tourists sad. Second, if the omitted parts of the stories undermine SBT's position as a legitimate reliever of suffering, then they simultaneously undermine the moral position of the tourists, who are positioned as relievers of suffering because they donate to SBT, which might add anxiety and guilt to the sadness they project.

The second contradictory demand is that the guides must perform the CW in a way that works within three different logics of exchange characterized by business, charity, and political engagement, respectively. Most slum tours aim to facilitate encounters between representatives from the Global North and South, and most slum tour operators therefore make a show of donating to the community they produce as a sight on the tour. Some even frame themselves as NGOs dedicated to this end, while others, like SBT, start out as NGOs long before they venture into tourism. This means tourists are situated simultaneously as consumers buying a slum tour as a commodity from a tour operator within a tourism economy *and* as potential donors presented with an appeal for donations from representatives of an NGO within an economy of charity.

The edited version of the personal story works well within this dual framework, as the problems narrated in the personal stories are only those that might be solved by the market or individual donations. Furthermore, if the co-performance of the CW is understood as work (i.e., an act of emotional labor sold on the market to tourists), then it is legitimate for the guides to set a limit on their emotional involvement and/ or discuss it in relation to the remuneration they receive. This performance, however, blocks an understanding of the CW as an act of political engagement, where the problems experienced by representatives of the Global South are exposed in all their terribleness, causes are found, responsibility is assigned, alliances are forged, and solidarity might emerge between them and representatives from the Global North. Tourists looking for such an experience are met with edited stories, ironic performances, and appeals for money rather than solidarity, and the only way they might make solidarity relevant is to insist that the guides have other, more painful stories to tell and other, darker feelings to project, which would amount to a forcible transgression of the emotional boundaries set by the guides.

The article will proceed from a theoretical framing of emotional labor in tourism, charity, and political encounters toward an analysis of how this labor is performed on the CW. This analysis explores how the personal stories performed on the CW are shaped, rehearsed, and edited; what purpose these stories serve; what events are omitted; and how they in the end constitute a narrative group identity shared by the guides, which they perform for a living.

Emotional labor on slum tours?

Emotional labor as a concept was first theorized by Arlie Hochschild (1983), who studies how workers cultivate and manage their emotions so that they become aligned with the "feeling rules" of their workplace and society at large, and she concludes that emotions are thereby an important

part of the labor the workers sell to the employers, who then commodify and market it to the consumer. To Hochschild, this commodification takes on sinister overtones, as it pertains not only to what Erving Goffman called "surface acting" (a form of professional pretense) but also "deep acting," which are self-induced feelings that are felt as "real," though forcibly aligned with the aforementioned "feeling rules" (1983: 35).

Since 1983, three interrelated shifts in perception seem to have changed how emotional labor is viewed theoretically. First, the Foucauldian shift toward a conceptualization of the subject as "empty" has resulted in a blurring of the Goffmanian separation of the "identity" of the subject and the roles it plays. This means the "deep acting" of an emotional laborer is a performance that is perhaps constitutive of one or more of the subject positions that make up the laborer's identity, rather than some external artifact such as a "role" the laborer plays. This development is also visible in later studies of emotional labor (e.g., Ashforth and Tomiuk 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003), and it opens up for an analysis of acts of emotional labor as the performance of work-related identities situated within power relations that structure how they might be performed.

The second shift deals with how emotions are widely theorized as inherently social. Hochschild's study of how flight attendants and funeral directors each in their way work toward making their clients feel in certain ways takes this point of departure implicitly, but the affective turn of the 2000s has explicated the theoretical basis of her analysis, perhaps most eloquently in Sara Ahmed's (2004b) phenomenology of how the subject/body is constituted affectively and in recent studies of "affective attunement" focusing on how individuals in groups become emotionally aligned (e.g., Timm Knudsen and Stage 2015). This contextualizes the assertion not that tourists' emotions are external to CW guides but rather that affect (and thereby emotions) circulates between bodies in economies (Ahmed 2004a), where the circulation itself intensifies the force with which they are felt. Based on this framework, the article theorizes CWs as spaces of affective negotiation co-performed between guides and tourists, where affect and capital circulate parallel to each other. The emotional labor of CW guides thereby consists of facilitating the co-performance of this space by balancing the flow of affect and capital in relation to each other, and while I outlined the result of this balancing act earlier, the next analysis will concentrate on how it is performed on the CW.

The third shift in how emotional labor is perceived has been identified by, for example, Eleanor Johnson (2015) and is perhaps a consequence of the first shift toward the empty self.

The Global North's labor markets tend to view a workplace's feeling rules as an identity the laborer is expected to adopt. If this identity is then naturalized as simply who the emotional laborer *is*, rather than a subject position the laborer decides to *perform,* emotional labor is no longer viewed as work for which emotional laborer's can expect remuneration. Ethically speaking, this problematizes CW guides' emotional labor in two opposing ways: the circulation of affect between guides and tourists is treated as a commodity ought by the tourists, which is problematic because it encourages guides to misrepresent their past to protect themselves and thereby validate the system that employs them. But it would be equally problematic if CW guides were expected to facilitate this circulation of affect without remuneration, based on the argument that they were basically "being themselves" on the CW, because they had adopted the identity of the "former street child" so completely that no competing identities could be conceived of.

While the relatively new research field of slum tourism studies (Freire-Medeiros 2009, 2013; Frenzel et al. 2012, 2015; Ma 2010; Steinkrüger 2016) is largely silent on the issue of emotional well-being of workers in the industry, neighboring fields seem to have identified paradoxes similar to the ones discussed here. A series of studies of voluntourism (Guiney 2017; Guiney and Mostafanezhad 2014; Reas 2015) theorizes the emotional transactions taking place between tourists and children at Cambodian orphanages as a type of emotional child labor, where the children are encouraged to perform certain emotions connected to vulnerability, which volunteers and visitors can then alleviate with physical affection. The dynamics between visitors and guides resemble this article's case, but the critique articulated in these studies is largely predicated on the children being underage and thus not in a position to choose for themselves whether they want to participate. As this article's object of analysis is how 18-to-21-year-olds reenact their childhood, the CW guides don't engage in child labor in the legal sense (though they do commodify their childhood), so arguing that they should receive remuneration for their work is not as ethically indefensible as in the Cambodian cases.

But why do tourists feel this emotional exchange is necessary in the first place? One answer is provided by studies of voluntourism (Crossley 2012; Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011), which seem to suggest that voluntourists expect to enact a series of emotional "scripts" in their interaction with representatives of the Global South they have volunteered to help. These scripts entail an emotional attachment predicated on a fantasy of a one-way relationship between the helping North and helped South, which is gradually deconstructed in the actual interaction with those they seek to help. Furthermore, tour operators, volunteer-sending agencies, and NGOs increasingly attempt to *sell* the ability to meaningfully help as if it were a valuable commodity to both slum tourists and voluntourists. Both groups are thereby situated within a

logic of exchange in which business and charity go hand in hand, which, as argued earlier, often obscures the problems that cannot be solved within this framework.

To ideologically place this link between charity and business, we might turn to studies of how humanitarianism as such has been reconceptualized within the global aid industry in the past 30 years. Analyzing mediatized campaigns, such as celebrity-driven aid shows, telethons, and online aid games, Lilie Chouliaraki (2006, 2012) identifies what she calls a "post-humanitarian" approach to aid, stemming from a disenchantment with solidarity-driven development and emergency aid as the solution to prevent future global suffering. Instead of playing on strong emotions of anger, disgust, or grief at the injustices of the world, aid campaigns increasingly appeal for temporary, emotionally measured, or even ironic responses to distant suffering, in ways similar to how brands try to engage consumers. Again, the pleasurable feeling of being able to help becomes the commodity on sale. Slum tours might thereby be theorized as a new type of post-humanitarian aid show, where the spectator/donor/tourist and the sufferer/receiver/guide are not separated by screens as in mediatized aid campaigns but rather co-perform the slum tour in a face to-face encounter. The proximity between the participants is important, because it alters how the guides perform the emotional labor of facilitating the circulation of affect in relation to capital. The measured, sometimes ironic, response to suffering not only persists in the face-to-face encounter but seems to become a coping strategy for everyone concerned.

Performing emotional boundaries

> *I only get sad when [the visitors] get sad.* (Interview with Kabir)[1]

> **TE:** What do you do if the visitors start to cry?
>
> **Rishaan:** We say, "Don't worry, we'll give you a tissue paper."

Each year, thousands of Indian children run away, get lost from their families, are abandoned, or are simply sent away from a life in rural India marred by starvation, violence, and few prospects. If they board trains in the states east of Delhi, chances are that their train

will terminate at New Delhi Railway Station, where they disembark onto an uncertain destiny. Many are below the age of 10, while some, accompanied by older siblings, are as young as 3 or 4. If they are relatively lucky, they encounter a social worker from one of the many NGOs that work for Delhi's 51,000 street children.[2] One of these is SBT, and while most of the children encountered are reunited with their parents, 637 children are presently accommodated in SBT's five shelter homes—two for girls, three for boys. SBT raises these children, and each year two to three start training as CW guides at the age of 15. When they turn 18 and move out of the shelter homes, they are hired on a three-year contract as guides. The CW program members thereby consist of six to nine trainees who are gradually hired as guides, and an equal number of guides who are gradually retired and moved on to other jobs.

From 2011 to 2014, I engaged in three periods of fieldwork, for a total of five and a half months, where I stayed in a volunteer flat provided by SBT. I followed the CW, mapped out its route, recorded its content, worked with the CW guides on improving their English proficiency, worked alongside SBT staff in envisioning changes to the CW, and facilitated an evaluation of how the guides perceived their working environment. A large body of observations and interviews conducted in relation to this work became the empirical basis of a PhD dissertation and later a monograph (Holst 2018), but the material selected for this article is narrowed down to a series of recordings of the guides' personal stories, performed at the end of each CW, along with a series of interviews with the guides. The quotes above are taken from these interviews, and they pertain to how the guides use the personal stories to set emotional boundaries for the type of involvement they are willing to entertain. Before delving into this topic, I will briefly explore the performative context the stories appear in.

The CW has a set route and script that mirrors the typical life journey of a street child who enters the care of SBT. It begins outside New Delhi Railway Station, where the guide tells of the many children who arrive unaccompanied by adults. The CW then proceeds via narrow streets to a "recycle shop," where street children sell recyclable materials they mostly scrounge from the station. The next stop en route is one of SBT's 12 "contact points," where street children usually encounter SBT for the first time. This one is situated in the station's parking lot and is particularly busy, as it not only offers medical care, food, and informal schooling to street children but is also part of an outreach program, where social workers enter the station, contact the newly arrived children, and encourages them to join SBT.

The CW's route ends at SBT's headquarter, the somewhat dilapidated Aasra shelter home for boys. It is the smallest of SBT's shelter homes and functions as a halfway station for up to 50 boys at a time, who, within six months, should ideally be either reunited with their families or

accommodated in a shelter home with more facilities than Aasra. Once inside, the visitors are encouraged to interact with the boys for 15 minutes—the language barrier makes for a prevalence of physical games like pat-a-cake or drawing—and are then led into a small office where the guide elaborates on SBT's work and challenges. As a visual aid, they refer to posters with pictures of young men and women who have "graduated" from SBT and are either former guides or success stories. Finally, the guide tells their personal story of how they made the journey from the street to SBT, mirrored by the CW route. The CW visitors fill out a feedback form, proceed to a separate office to pay their mandatory donation of 200 rupees ($3) (though many donate much more), after which they are escorted back to the railway station and disperse.

For tourists, the testimony of the personal story resonates with what they have just experienced on the CW: the Aasra children (some as young as six years old), the chaotic informal urbanism of Paharganj, and the emaciated street children hanging out at the contact point. The performance of the personal story thereby has the potential to evoke strong emotions in the tourists, especially in visitors who have children of their own,[3] and the quotes above speak to this fact. Kabir says he has acquired so much distance to his past suffering that he gets saddened only by the sadness of tourists, while Rishaan goes even further to state that he'll tell tourists he has a tissue paper ready for them when they start to cry, implying they, not he, will need it. He thereby insists on performing a professional identity as a laborer managing the circulation of emotions he is not touched by, even though they are elicited by his own story.

During my fieldwork, Rishaan developed from being a cheeky young trainee into an adult guide, bored with his job of self-representation. The following example is a performance of his personal story that was recorded shortly before his three-year tenure was up in 2014, and it provides a hyperbolic example of the distancing techniques the guides employed to delineate the boundaries of the comfortable, affective space of negotiation the tourists might move within when co-performing the CW.

> **Rishaan:** So, friends, now I am going to tell you about myself, are you interested?
>
> **CW visitors:** Yes!
>
> **Rishaan:** What is my name?

> **CW visitors:** Rishaan!

Remembering someone's name is crucial if a space is to be established where confidences might be comfortably exchanged, but guides' names are generally unfamiliar to most visitors, so they tend to be forgotten between the first introduction and the narration of the personal story 105 minutes later. The quiz is a cheeky reminder of the CW's touristy frame and communicates to potentially emotional visitors that excessive emotions will not be welcome. He continues:

> **Rishaan:** Good, so my name is Rishaan. When I was five years old, I left my home because my father used to beat me a lot, and my mother always support my father. One day, my family get separate. The consequence was: me and my other brother take with my father and my small sister when with my mother. I stay with my father for a few days, then he realize that I can't earn money for him, so he left me at the market.
>
> CW visitor: Uh!
>
> **Rishaan:** I was very [noise on recording], but he didn't come back again. While I was waiting for him, I met a couple of people who told me, "I am your aunty and uncle," and "Your father will never come back again." Just because of that, I ran [to] their home and started working for them. They always beat me, and sometime they put chili in my eyes.
>
> **CW visitor 1** [sounding incredulous]: They put chili in your eyes?
>
> **Rishaan:** Afterwards, I thought, "If this is life, I don't want this life anymore." I planned to run from there.

The story is one of betrayal, abandonment, deceit, violence, and, finally, desperation, prompting the narrator to escape to an uncertain future at the age of five. Yet, it is told in a matter-of-fact way, with pauses that leave space for the visitors to interject exclamations, and proceeds with a comical reference to the fact that the visitors might get "Delhi belly" (diarrhea) if they tried eating the discarded food he was forced to eat while surviving on his own. Though a horrible detail, it receives laughs all around, and soon he is back with yet another quiz, this time about

which movies he likes: Hollywood or Bollywood? They guess wrong, as his favorite movie is the Hollywood production *The Pursuit of Happyness* (Muccino 2006). And, true to that statement, the story has a happy ending teleologically situated in the future, and the CW visitors suspend disbelief in this happy end with these departing words:

> **Rishaan:** So, is there any more question you have about my life?
>
> **CW visitor 2:** Just that we admire your . . . but your English is quite good actually.
>
> **CW visitor 1:** We admire your guts.

As CW visitor 2 cannot decide whether to compliment the guide on his guts or his English proficiency, he ends up doing both clumsily, though CW visitor 1 finishes the statement. Though this performance is almost a caricature of detachment, it illustrates a distancing technique common to the guides of inviting the CW visitors to affectively attune themselves to a lighthearted atmosphere by frequent invitations to laughter, using jokes and quizzes. At a deeper level, however, the CW visitors seem to accept these invitations because of how the personal story is structured, and I will therefore next focus on how the guides' individual stories are conceived, shaped, and edited in a collective process that usually stretch over many years.

The shaping of the "personal story"

During my fieldwork, I collected the personal stories of nine male guides and two female trainees, and the structures of the stories are sufficiently similar to be analyzed as fitting within a "master narrative" (Pandey 2012) that serve several contradictory functions. As stated earlier, it must be emotionally engaging, while not excessively so, and create a logic of exchange where the roles of SBT, guides, and tourists mutually validate each other ethically. Furthermore, it must link the narrator to the collective identity of the former street children working as CW guides, in a way that authenticates the narrator's position as someone who legitimately controls how affect and capital might circulate and be exchanged for each other on the CW.

The CW program's structure is well suited to constructing, editing, and performing a personal story. Trainees who join the program are presented with three goals to be achieved by the time they become guides: (1) learn to speak and write English, (2) memorize the CW script, and (3) construct a "personal story" to be told on the CW. In practice, the voluntourists attached to SBT help the trainees achieve these goals within the same didactic frame. English proficiency is taught via the example of the CW script, which in turn holds general information about the lives of street children. Together, these give a language and a context for the trainees' initial attempts at a personal story to be narrated at the end of the CW. Simultaneously, trainees play the role of co-guides on the CW, where they follow more experienced guides around and listen to their performances of the script and story. This provides inspiration for the narrative format of the trainee's personal story, and a "personal order" (Wetherell 2007) of life events gradually emerges with each iteration of the personal story, told within the didactic frame of English lessons and the CW. This personal order can be identified as a series of plot points in the master narrative of the personal story, and I will give a few examples of how they function.

The most commonly replicated plot point among the stories is the ending. A story's end, understood in narratological terms (Brooks 1992; Sarbin 1986), is where the original conflict is resolved, and this point is always reached in the personal stories when the guides have become "success stories" like the young men and women on the poster in the SBT office. Joining SBT is therefore always included in the stories as a pivotal moment of redemption, because that is the event that allows them to concentrate on this journey toward success, whereas the ending of the personal story, such as Kiaan's, is situated after the time of telling, in a teleologically constructed future where goals formulated in the present have been achieved: "Now, I complete my high school and I complete my graduation from Delhi University [Department] of Commerce, and after I have graduated, maybe I will [inaudible] or get a job in tourism industry." Kiaan can enumerate his past, present, and future degrees and careers, and he thereby performs his own future internalization of the discourse of resocialization-through-personal achievement that is the basis of all the "success stories" posted on the walls of the office where the story is narrated. He is linguistically unable to speak of his future self in the future tense, but since he hasn't achieved his goals yet, that is OK, and, besides, his imperfect English points to his street credentials if not his education.

The conflicts established in the beginning of the personal stories are much more diverse than their resolutions. What they consist of largely depends on what has in fact transpired in the narrator's life, and since the guides had quite different lives from each other before encountering SBT, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, there are similarities, because the first

part of any personal story always explains how the narrator came to be in a position where SBT could play its redemptive part, so the conflict needs to be constructed as something that can indeed be resolved by that act. This opens up for the necessity of "plotting" (Brooks 1992), and as the guides become increasingly adept at this, their personal stories begin to be *about* something more than themselves and hold more than a mere description of the suffering they have personally endured and how they were saved from it.

They thus "theme" the conflicts of their personal stories, and Hanuman's story is an example. It starts in Mumbai, where he is separated from his parents and sent 1,700 kilometers north to the city of Patna, where he is enrolled at a children's home, which he escapes from. The story then concentrates on ways to survive on the street until he gives up that life and joins SBT. Here, he is talking about the "fake drinking water trick": "I saw it happened in station that some street children were filling water bottle from the tap and selling inside train station, sometimes the kind of water you tourists get sick from. We also filled our own bottles from a tap." This, however, does not provide a secure life, so when a gang contacts Hanuman, he at first refuses:

But they started telling me, "If you live with us, you cannot find the problem from the police issue and local public." I started living with them and joined the gang, and I learned how to pickpocketing. I was the youngest pickpocketer in that group. Like eight and a half. Slowly, slowly, I became a professional pickpocketer living on the street.

The gang then goes to Delhi to "earn more money," and though he encounters several social workers who encourage him to join them, the idea that apparently moves him to leave the gang and join SBT is the dream of having a steady job as a train conductor, though this is later supplanted with dreams of being in the tourism business. The title of the story could thus be "Resocialization: From Scallywag to budding Citizen." The narrator's shifting affiliations illustrates the impossibility of surviving by yourself on the street for any length of time, and encountering SBT offers him a way out of this life.

As a contrast, we might turn to the personal story of Ahmed, who, like four of the seven guides, decides to run away from a poor, abusive, dysfunctional home.

My father used to play gambling a lot. He lost all our money in gambling, and his addiction made us a poor family and caused trouble almost every night at home. So, one day, I did a small mistake and for that I was beaten very badly. That time, I realized: Why should I live here? He always trouble my whole family, and he always beat me. Then I planned to run away from home. Like one night, I took out 3,000 rupees out of my father's pocket. In morning time, I wore my school dress, put some clothes into my school bag, and I told my parents that I'm going to my school, but I instead took a bus for the railway station and I came to Delhi by train. I was about nine and a half years old.

Later, Ahmed's story also focuses on shifting affiliations as a means of survival and the punitive measures of the police, but unlike Hanuman's story, the conflict here is constituted by the loss of a home, and redemption can therefore only be achieved by finding a new one, and this "search for home" is another common theme in the personal stories.

Despite the diversity in the conflicts portrayed, a certain "point of no return" can be traced from the earliest personal stories told by guides in 2006 to four of seven stories in 2013: The sequence of events starts with a description of living in an abusive family followed by a monetary theft and an escape via some mode of transport, usually a train. Including the theft in the narrative serves a double purpose. It explains how it is practically possible for the narrator to leave; like Hanuman's selling of fake drinking water or pickpocketing, Ahmed's theft explains children's acts of petty crime as their way of surviving in an adult world. But it is also inserted as an act of dramatic betrayal that would make it hard for the narrator to return to their family without suffering a severe dose of the treatment that drove them away in the first place. It is a figurative bridge burning in the background, as the young protagonist makes their way toward an uncertain future, and as such is a compelling motive found in many stories where children—mostly boys—strike out on their own to meet their fortune, from Dickens's (1841) *Oliver Twist* to Adiga's (2008) *White Tiger*. As we shall see, it is also something of a simplification. To sum up, the similarities in the narrative structures of the personal stories indicate that trainees borrow themes, details, plotlines, and endings from the older guides, thereby contributing to the continual production of a narrative group identity as "former street children," which then provides them with a position they might inhabit in relation to both SBT and the CW visitors. Moreover, the endings of the personal stories are situated somewhere in a not too distant,

unequivocally happy future, which is facilitated by SBT, and the encounter with SBT social workers is therefore represented as a pivotal moment of redemption for the guides.

Excluded events and emotional boundaries

Some of the narrative elements not included in the official personal stories were passed on to me in private moments by SBT staff, longterm volunteers, former guides, and the current guides themselves. As I collected and ordered them into alternative narratives, they opened up for the possibility of other plotlines, themes, and endings, which situates the guides differently in relation to both SBT and CW visitors while complicating the relation between the guides and the street children they claim to represent.

One type of alternate version of the master narrative of the personal story complicates the narrators' compartmentalization of subject positions and the narration of the transitions between them as concrete and irrevocable. The narrative model for how the guides stage their escape with its "point of no return" is challenged by the fact that most of the guides—indeed, most street children—run away in stages. Some have "false starts," where the transportation they thought would take them to the city brings them only some of the way or in the wrong direction. Others are caught by authorities or members of their family before they reach Delhi, and even if they reach Delhi, most children are returned to their respective homes, while only a minority remains "runaways," largely by refusing to give up their families' names and addresses. One clear indicator of this is that many of these guides, who initially position themselves as orphans in their personal stories, contact their parents and siblings once their position within SBT is secure and they trust they won't be sent back to live with them in the countryside.

Similar reasons seem to be behind the very name "street child," as SBT staff confided in me that when runaways first encounter SBT social workers, they typically start referring to themselves as "street children" because this is the category of children the organization has a mandate to work with (Hodges 2011). There is thereby a circularity in the naming of a "street child," which seems to persist when they move on to the subject position of the "*former* street child"—a useful claim for guides, because it enables them to convincingly represent the current street children they attempt to speak for on the CW while also representing the NGO that is trying to resocialize them. The category thereby exists in a protracted state of liminality where the

subject is perpetually *becoming* resocialized by SBT while never actually attaining it before their time as guides is up. The circularity of children labeling themselves "street children" and telling a "street child's story" to gain access to services offered by organizations such as SBT can be read as an example of their agency, but while it serves their needs, it also validates the NGOs working with street children, because it frames them as a separate group that might meaningfully be helped. This separation then helps the CW visitors connect emotionally to the children they meet within SBT, as opposed to the children they encounter outside, whom they are told they cannot help by randomly donating to them.

This distinction is undermined by the fact that most children run from poverty and hunger rather than individualized abuse, and even if the latter occurs in other personal stories, the frequent mentions of poverty and hunger means it cannot be separated from the socioeconomic context it exists within. The 250,000 farmer suicides in the 1990s and 2000s (Sainath 1996, 2011), as well as India's 60 million malnourished children (Gragnolati et al. 2005: xiv), are poignant examples that vast areas of rural India suffer from conditions of deprivation usually found in disaster or war zones. This means the guides are a part of a much larger group of children, most of whom are not helped and whose problems are too big to be solved by NGOs. But because NGOs like SBT rely on a logic of exchange that see no difference between business and charity, they restrict themselves to representing problems that can be alleviated by fees/donations, rather than, say, a larger political engagement, and by adopting the master narrative in the shaping of their personal story, the CW guides follow suit.

Another category of alternate versions of the personal story excludes shameful and/or illegal activities that stigmatize the narrator excessively. These include sexual abuse, as well as crimes committed that, unlike the "fake drinking water trick," don't fit the figure of the Dickensian scallywag, such as stories of serious gang fights or muggings, where opponents or victims have been left in uncertain circumstances, which might result in jail time for the narrator, if it is ever publicly known who perpetrated the violence. Again, the emotional boundary performed by the guides coincides with the logic of business/charity as the added trauma of admitting injuries inflicted rather than injuries born coincide with the difficulty of framing cruelty to others as minor impediments on the way toward a "happy future." Within the logic of the master narrative, villains don't get happy endings, but on a more profound level, these events allude to the disastrous socioeconomic contexts the guides have escaped but that still left their mark in terms of the actions it made them perform and that still trap the guides' families (especially siblings) and friends made while on the street.

Crucially, the interviews about the personal stories revealed that at least some of the guides thought tourists might guess what they omitted. The following interview started with Ali showing me a new tattoo on his wrist that inexpertly covered a scar from a wound, which looked like a suicide attempt. He asked me what I thought of the tattoo, and I told him was nice, even though it drew attention to the scar rather than covering it up. Perhaps it served the same function as the personal story? A sign to strangers that they should leave the scar underneath alone?

> Talking about when we were on the street and how we struggle, talking about struggling life, what we really face. But we can't say everything what happened to us. And people [the guides], they don't feel happy to say everything I don't think so, it is required, you know, and guide will also not feel good to say everything, because, you know, maybe they can be very emotionally— again, they have to come again in depression and think it about that, so that is not good for the guide as well.

Concluding remarks

The master narrative behind the individual personal stories performed on the CW supports the affective attunement of CW visitors toward a callously lighthearted atmosphere of jokes and quizzes—not by omitting hardship altogether but by including only that which serves as initial impediments on the way to a happy ending situated teleologically in a not too distant future. Similarly, it invites the guides to portray the transitions between different subject positions they inhabit as concrete and irrevocable in ways that support their separation from the social context they have escaped. The guides, visitors, and SBT thereby enter a circular ethical validation, where it is in the mutual self-interest of all three parties to pretend the larger context of suffering is beyond the scope of their actions. SBT has adopted a logic of exchange where business creates funding for charity, and the master narrative of the personal story supports this model, as it includes only problems that are solvable within this framework, while visitors situated as both consumers and donors are validated through SBT's actions. For the guides, belonging to the collective identity of the "former street child" in a system of charity has its benefits. It partly destigmatizes their experiences by providing a platform for the narration of a version of them, but it also rewards them for representing themselves as victims of a type of suffering that SBT has alleviated. Similarly, there are benefits to being situated as an emotional laborer in a

tourism industry, because it allows the guides to treat the performing of that collective identity as a job. When Ali talks about what is "required" in terms of self-representation, he is speaking within this logic of exchange.

Evidence of the problems this model cannot address presents itself to the visitors in myriad ways, but, like a tattoo across a scar, the function of the personal story is not to cover up inconsistencies and traumas but to point to the mutual interest of the guides, visitors, and SBT to pretend they aren't there, as well as to the emotional frailty of the guides performing a bearable version of their own past suffering. The emotional labor of guides thereby consists in persuading visitors to stay within the boundaries of the comfortable space of affective negotiation marked out by them, and they attempt to do so by performing an implicit plea to the visitors to at least pretend to suspend disbelief in the personal story and its lighthearted callousness.

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Notes

1 All names of guides and trainees are pseudonyms.

2 The figure varies greatly, but this conservative estimate comes from Bhaskaran and Mehta (2011).

3 For an in-depth analysis of tourists' responses, see Holst (2018).

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