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# International Solidarity Movement: A case study in volunteer tourism for justice

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**ABSTRACT** • This paper examines the currently under-explored niche of volunteer tourism, ‘volunteer tourism for justice’ — a form of alternative tourism that has the potential to be impervious to being co-opted by mainstream tourism. One important facet of volunteer tourism for justice is the undertaking of solidarity tours to visit communities at the front-lines of injustice and human rights abuses. A case study of an organisation that is representative of volunteer tourism for justice, the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), is presented. Through the ISM, international volunteers travel to Palestine to support the Palestinian resistance to occupation for two main purposes, providing protection and supporting the Palestinian voice on the issues confronting the Palestinian people. This case study analysis provides insights into the potentials and limitations of volunteer tourism as a tool for achieving justice and respect for human rights.

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**KEYWORDS:** tourism, justice; volunteer; alternative tourism; International Solidarity Movement.

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## Introduction

At a time when human impacts on the natural environment through activities such as consumerism and mass tourism are generating greater concern, volunteer tourism and other types of alternative tourism offer the possibility of doing things differently. Wearing has championed volunteer tourism as a type of ‘de-commodified tourism’ that provides ‘experiences that make a difference’ (2001). Volunteer tourism attempts to bring humanistic and ecological values into focus and thus it may serve as a challenge to the dominant neo-liberal paradigm that currently holds sway. However, since its development, volunteer tourism has moved from a specialised niche market of alternative

tourism, to an activity embraced by the mainstream tourism sector and as a result stands accused of being co-opted by the commercial tourism industry (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008).

Following an examination of volunteer tourism, this paper will outline a new development in alternative tourism labelled 'justice tourism' which may be more impervious to tourism industry usurpation. One facet of justice tourism is the undertaking of solidarity tours to visit communities at the frontlines of injustice and human rights abuses. This paper offers a case study analysis of a movement which could be characterised as volunteer tourism for justice, the International Solidarity Movement. This group enables solidarity activists to join and support Palestinians in their nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation. This unusual and extreme case of volunteer tourism will be critically analysed in order to attain greater understanding of the potentials and limitations of such efforts to use tourism for the attainment of vital humanistic and ecological goals, including justice and human rights.

### **Volunteer tourism**

Stephen Wearing was the first to comprehensively analyse the phenomenon of volunteer tourism which he labelled 'a new form of alternative tourism' (2002a: 257). Wearing sets out to firmly distinguish volunteer tourism from both tourism and volunteering for its ability to contribute to transformation of self through the volunteer tourism experience (2002a, b, 2004). He defines volunteer tourism as applying to those tourists 'who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment' (2002a: 240). From this definition, it is apparent that volunteer tourism has the potential to address significant environmental and social problems that result from globalising capitalism.

Examples of volunteer tourism include such undertakings as Earthwatch tours (McGehee, 2002) and Youth Challenge International (Wearing, 2001). Study of this phenomenon has increased significantly since Wearing's first analysis (2001), including a special edition of *Tourism Recreation Research* (Wearing [Ed.], 2003) and an edited volume by Lyons and Wearing (2008). This paper cannot review and critique the growing literature on this topic, but will instead focus on recent work on volunteer tourism's contribution to activism and new social movements before then describing a disturbing trend in the phenomenon.

Nancy McGehee (2002) made a valuable contribution to our understanding of volunteer tourism and volunteer tourists through her study of

Earthwatch tours. Utilising social psychology and resource mobilisation theory, she found that participation in volunteer tourism experiences leads individuals to heightened consciousness of political and social issues and, as a result, to join new social movements and support activism (McGehee, 2002). This was followed by research by McGehee and Norman (2002) and McGehee and Santos (2005) which expanded on this work and confirmed the capacity of volunteer tourism experiences to foster social movements. In particular, McGehee and Santos conclude: 'The findings reinforce many volunteer tourism organization's claims that expeditions improve "global citizenship" and participants become involved in changing the world' (2005: 775).

It is clear that volunteer tourism stands out as a special form of tourism that seeks positive social and environmental benefits for the places and people who receive these tourists and it may have important impacts on shaping the social and political consciousness of its participants. However, volunteer tourism is not unproblematic.

Wearing was the first to recognise the limitations that volunteer tourism suffers as a 'consumer' activity of the privileged when he suggested volunteer tourism may provide 'another source of consumption which will only endanger the very communities and environments that the volunteer tourist seeks to protect' (2001: 15). Trends are underway that suggest that volunteer tourism is being co-opted as a lucrative niche market as travel agencies jostle to attract the privileged volunteer tourists. Volunteer tourism has been partially corporatised as some organisations sell these experiences to potential volunteer tourists as CV-building opportunities. For instance, a website for Travellers Worldwide proclaims: 'A-Level Results!! Didn't get the results you wanted? A Year Out doing a voluntary project will look great on your CV and impress University admissions officers when you re-apply' (Travellers Worldwide: n.d.).

There is also evidence that volunteer tourism is evolving into more mainstream tourism. For instance, the British government has reviewed the potential of volunteer tourism to serve diverse ends<sup>1</sup> and recently allocated £100 million to support gap year<sup>2</sup> experiences for its citizens (Gap years, 2005: 7).

- 1 Such diverse ends might include addressing youth unemployment, obtaining youth training, assisting charities, reducing government welfare spending by securing provision of community services through the voluntary sector and if involving developing countries, claimable as development aid assistance. A report entitled *Next steps on volunteering and giving in the UK* (Her Majesty's Treasury and the Home Office, 2002) is helpful in understanding this new policy development.
- 2 Gap year is the term the English use to describe the extended period (often, but not always, a year) taken from full-time education following the completion of secondary school before returning to education at college or university, or also between college or graduate school and professional work. Some students spend the time travelling while others include work in their

At an event convened by Tourism Concern in 2005 entitled 'Gap years: The new colonialism?', volunteer tourism undertaken during gap years was subject to critical scrutiny. Tourism Concern advocated 'more accountability in the way that volunteer tourism and the gap year sector is developed' (Gap years, 2005: 7). Of critical concern was that the fact that support for gap year volunteer experiences could be packaged as development aid for developing communities when according to Tourism Concern 'aid should focus on the needs of local people rather than those of tourists' (Gap years, 2005: 7).<sup>3</sup> Such a situation would also supply the private sector tourism industry with valuable opportunities to service this sector.

As has occurred with other forms of alternative tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008), volunteer tourism is in danger of being usurped by the corporatised tourism industry in the pursuit of new sources of profit from privileged young tourists. In this process, alternative tourisms such as volunteer tourism become decreasingly alternative and increasingly corporatised. This discussion will now turn to another form of alternative tourism which may be able to sustain its integrity despite, and perhaps even because of, globalising capitalism.

### Justice tourism

Alternative tourism originally inspired high hopes, with some suggesting it might become 'the tourism in the promotion of a new order' (Lanfant & Graburn, 1992: 92). The niche of alternative tourism most obviously conducive to such a task is justice tourism. Holden's description of justice tourism is 'a process which promotes a just form of travel between members of different communities. It seeks to achieve mutual understanding, solidarity and equality amongst participants' (Holden cited in Pearce, 1992: 18).

Scheyvens (2002) provided the first academic analysis of justice tourism. She describes justice tourism as 'both ethical and equitable' and says it has the following attributes:

- builds solidarity between visitors and those visited
- promotes mutual understanding and relationships based on equity, sharing and respect
- supports self-sufficiency and self-determination of local communities
- maximises local economic, cultural and social benefits. (p. 104)

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travel by undertaking an international working holiday or a volunteer tourism experience.

3 Thai and Maasai representatives at the event charged that volunteer tourism advertising perpetuated negative stereotypes about the developing world's capabilities and Maasai campaigner Resiatio Martyn claimed 'volunteer tourism is just another colour bandage on the wound of tourism' (Gap years, 2005: 7).

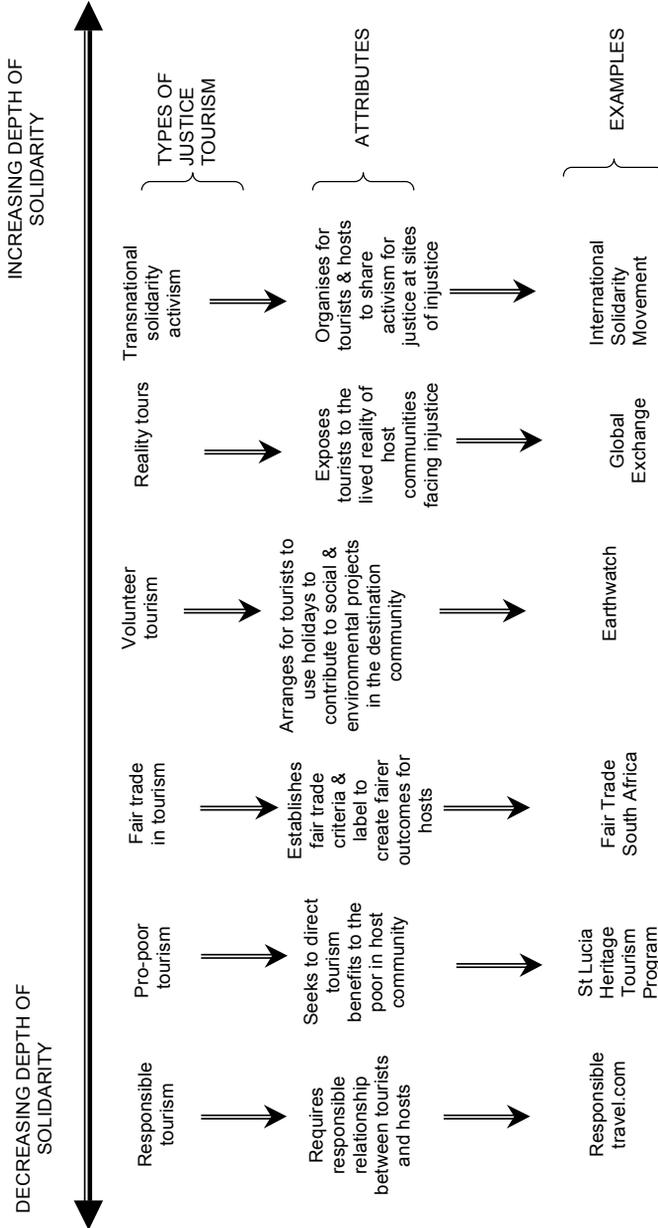
An even more comprehensive listing of key attributes is found in Scheyvens' extensive quote from an Australia tour agency called Just Travel which outlines 'just travel' from the point of view of the traveller as providing:

- the knowledge that s/he is not an agent of oppression but is attempting to participate in the liberation process
- a travel experience that will offer genuine possibilities of forming meaningful relationships with people of different cultures
- an opportunity to experience firsthand what other people are doing to create new life possibilities for themselves and others
- adequate preparation for their travel. (Wenham & Wenham 1984, cited in Scheyvens, 2002: 104)

Scheyvens outlines five forms of justice tourism which include the 'hosts' telling their stories of past oppression, tourists learning about poverty issues, tourists undertaking voluntary conservation work, tourists undertaking voluntary development work, and revolutionary tourism, providing some examples and a critical evaluation of each (2002: 105–119). Kassis (n.d.) adds that at the global level 'justice tourism is a social and cultural response to the policy of cultural domination as reflected in the globalization of tourism'.

A preliminary survey of the parameters of justice tourism suggested it may foster an alternative and more just form of globalisation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). However, justice tourism still requires clearer definition and theorisation. From the foregoing work, it is apparent that some of the characteristics attributed to justice tourism overlap with what has been called 'responsible tourism' and that different perspectives are yielded from looking at the phenomenon from the viewpoints of the tourist, the host community, and the NGOs and agencies that arrange these experiences. It may be helpful to view justice tourism as a continuum ranging from responsible tourism on the more moderate end of the spectrum to transnational solidarity activism on the more extreme end (see Figure 1). What we see in the case of the latter is an emphasis on active partnerships in overcoming injustice and a view that transnational solidarity is required to overturn the unequal power situations evident in the global community. Globalising capitalism and the social and ecological injustices that follow in its wake, are crystallising a global resistance movement that has as its basis transnational solidarity and activism which seeks to overturn exploitative globalisation and to usher in a more equitable and sustainable system. The presence of this movement is felt at world economic gatherings such as the recent London Summit of the G20, the civil society meetings of the World Social Forum, and more locally, at

Figure 1. Continuum of justice tourism



sites of resistance such as Chiapas, Mexico. It is also evident in Palestine. This paper offers a case study of the Palestinian-led International Solidarity Movement as an example of transnational solidarity justice tourism or what could also be called volunteer tourism for justice.

## International Solidarity Movement

The activists put their bodies where their politics are. (Struck, 2004: 62)

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) is committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestine through the use of nonviolent, direct-action methods. Founded by a small group of mostly Palestinian activists in August 2001, ISM organises for international solidarity volunteers to visit Palestine and through their presence support and strengthen the Palestinian popular resistance by providing the Palestinian people with international protection and a voice with which the Palestinian narrative on the Israeli occupation can reach the world.

International volunteers are the key to the ISM strategy. According to the ISM, they provide:

1. **Protection:** An international presence at Palestinian civilian actions can ensure a degree of protection for Palestinians engaged in nonviolent resistance.
2. **Message to the mainstream media:** The Palestinian struggle is not accurately reported by the mainstream corporate media . . . People from all over the world that join us can reach out to their respective media and help dispel this notion.
3. **Personal witness and transmitting information:** International civilians joining Palestinians can bear witness and return home to talk to their communities about what is happening.
4. **Break isolation and provide hope:** The occupation isolates Palestinians and cuts them off from the rest of the world and from each other. International civilians coming in, despite restrictions, send a message to the Palestinian community — ‘we see, we hear and we are with you’. Hope that people acting together can change things is a cornerstone of our philosophy and message. (About ISM: n.d.)

The ISM is a Palestinian movement which seeks the support of international activists as a strategy to support its resistance to the Israeli occupation. The reason that Palestinians have sought the support of international solidarity activists is well explained by ISM co-founder Ghassan Andoni:

We think that having Internationals with us will provide a better platform to defy the Occupation and to report the truth of what is happening here and to urge the international community to think more about the need to protect Palestinians when brutal war is being waged against them. (2004: 13)

Another co-founder, George Rishmawi adds: ‘Our goal is to help Palestinians do nonviolent resistance because when they do it without international accompaniment they are met with terrible violence . . . When the army sees that they’re watched, they are less free-handed in how they treat people’ (2004: 7).

However, while the international volunteers are integral to the ISM strategy, the ISM makes it clear that Palestinians lead the movement. ‘ISM are not in Palestine to teach nonviolent resistance. Palestinians resist nonviolently ever day’ (About ISM: n.d.). ISM volunteers support the Palestinian resistance through:

- **Direct Action** — challenging crippling checkpoints and curfew, confronting tanks and demolition equipment, removing roadblocks, participating in nonviolent demonstrations, accompanying farmers to their fields and protecting families whose homes are threatened with demolition.
- **Emergency Mobilization** — escorting ambulances through checkpoints, delivering food and water to families under curfew or house arrest, assisting the injured or disabled to access medical care, and walking children to school.
- **Documentation** — documenting and reporting to local and international media about the daily life under occupation and the countless human rights and international law violations by the Israeli military. (About ISM: n.d.)

In addition to these smaller scale actions, ISM has claimed involvement in two of the biggest confrontations of the second Intifada. ‘In April 2002, with help from Palestinians, international activists were able to outmaneuver the Israeli military during two of its biggest military operations, entering and providing support to those trapped inside the Presidential Compound in Ramallah and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem’ (About ISM: n.d.).<sup>4</sup> Another key

<sup>4</sup> These were two of the most important events of the second Intifada. In the siege of the Presidential Compound in Ramallah, when Israel effectively sidelined Yasser Arafat, Arafat and the 300 Palestinians with him were under serious threat by Israeli forces and the ISM volunteers that joined them at the compound believe that their presence offered Arafat a measure of protection by forcing the Israelis to restrain their actions in the siege (Struck, 2004: 62–64).

focus of ISM activity since 2002 has been opposition to the building of the separation barrier, or the Apartheid Wall as activists call it, which is creating 'open-air prisons' and resulting in 'the largest land-grab since 1967' as it 'secures Israeli control of almost one-half of the West Bank' (Jumma, 2004: 191–92).

The ISM describes itself as a movement, not an organisation. The main base is in Palestine as Palestinians lead the activities on the ground. This is supported by numerous ISM support groups around the world<sup>5</sup> which disseminate information, conduct fundraising activities, and recruit and train volunteers to join the ISM program. Three principles guide the ISM movement: the movement is Palestinian-led, all actions are nonviolent, and all work is carried out in teams (Training: n.d.).

Organisationally, the ISM describes itself as non-hierarchical. George Rishmawi explained:

The ISM is today a Palestinian-led, nonviolent movement. It isn't that Palestinians are the commanders. We have a consensus-based structure, with a core group that meets once a month but with the details left to the affinity groups. We have regional coordination, and a decentralized structure that depends on the local communities. (Rishmawi, 2004: 7)

The ISM and its support groups fundraise from supporters around the world in order to finance their activities in Palestine and offer subsidies to some of the internationals who want to join ISM; it receives no funding from states or governments. International volunteers join the ISM on the understanding that they are responsible for paying their own travel costs and covering all their expenses in Palestine.

In order to ensure that the international volunteers are capable of adhering to principles of nonviolent resistance and are prepared for the challenges and dangers they face in their confrontations with the Israeli forces of the occupation, the ISM offers a two-day training program to ISM volunteers. Whether this preparation is enough for the conflict zones that ISM volunteers enter is a matter of some concern.

It was recognised at the outset that volunteers joining ISM risked critical injury or even death as they faced the Israeli military and other forces imposing occupation on Palestinian land. As George Rishmawi stated: 'When Palestinians get shot by Israeli soldiers, no one is interested any-

5 There are currently ISM support groups in Australia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, including numerous sub-chapters in different US states.

more, but if some of these foreign volunteers get shot or even killed, then the international media will sit up and take notice' (cited in Kalman & Castle, 2004).

One of the most well-known ISM activists is Rachel Corrie, because she was a youthful American killed by an Israeli 'Defense' Force bulldozer while trying to prevent it from demolishing a house in Gaza in March, 2003. Her diary provides a useful insight into the way ISM activist witness Palestinian suffering and then share their insights with others back home (Corrie, 2006). On 7 February 2003, after just two weeks in Palestine, she wrote:

I still have few words to describe what I see. I don't know if many of the children here have ever existed without tank-shell holes in their walls. I think even the smallest of these children understand that life is not like this everywhere . . . Nothing could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here. You just can't imagine it unless you see it. And even your experience is not at all the reality: what with the difficulties the Israeli army would face if they shot an unarmed US citizen, the fact that I have money to buy water when the army destroys wells, and of course, the fact that I have the option of leaving . . . I am allowed to see the ocean. (Corrie, 2006: 29)

Three other ISM volunteers were shot shortly following Corrie's murder, including Tom Hurndall who was shot in the head by a sniper while trying to walk two Palestinian children to safety. As a result of the bad publicity that these events caused, the Israeli government cracked down on ISM in April 2003. As Hammer (2003) reported:

During the following weeks, Israeli troops rounded up a dozen foreign activists; several were deported. Soldiers raided the Beit Sahour headquarters on May 9, detained three people, seized eight computers, and 'trashed the office', according to an ISM spokesman. The activists are now banned from travelling into the Gaza Strip, and several who've landed at Ben-Gurion Airport have been refused entry into Israel. The crackdown has all but ended ISM's role as frontline observers.<sup>6</sup>

Hammer claimed that ISM volunteers had undergone a psychological toll and were traumatised by these events. He cited a representative of Human Rights Watch: 'They don't have the support structure, the ability to cope.

6 ISM itself claims that ISM volunteers have been detained, beaten, arrested, and deported and the ISM offices raided as a strategy of curtailment instituted by the Israeli government (Sandercock et al., 2004).

They've seen their colleagues shot in front of them. They've underestimated the danger that faces them' (2003).

Since this time, action has been undertaken to lessen the impact of ISM's advocacy, including a shadowy internet campaign called 'Stop ISM'.<sup>7</sup> More significantly, Israel has accused ISM of supporting violence and suicide bombers. For instance, the Israeli government justified its 2003 crackdown on ISM as a 'security risk' accusing them of meeting with two British suicide bombers before they attacked a Tel Aviv café, despite the order for the crackdown on ISM being issued two weeks before the attack actually occurred (Huggler, 2003). ISM activists have also noted that the Israeli army have labelled them 'terror tourists' on their official website and denounced their activities (Aziz, 2004: 149). In an effort to block access to one of the most contested areas, the Israeli government began requiring all foreigners entering the Gaza Strip from May 2003 to sign a waiver 'absolving the army from responsibility if it shoots them' and also a declaration that they are not associated with the ISM (McGreal, 2004: 262).

These difficulties have not deterred ISM volunteers from travelling to Palestine, continuing to support Palestinian nonviolent resistance and risking their lives. Recently, ISM volunteer Tristan Anderson was critically injured after being shot in the head with a tear gas canister while supporting residents in the village of Ni'lin (American citizen critically injured, 2009).<sup>8</sup> Despite the dangers and hardships recounted here, thousands of North American, British, European, expatriate Palestinian, and even Israeli activists have volunteered to support Palestinians in their nonviolent resistance through ISM. This must represent one of the most extreme forms of volunteer tourism on the planet and demonstrates the ultimate lengths to which committed people will go to turn their travel and tourism choices towards achieving justice for others in the global community. This paper will now turn to a discussion of some of the implications of this unusual form of volunteer tourism.

## Discussion

While ISM clearly represents an extreme and rare form of volunteer tourism, an analysis of its dynamics can illuminate some possibilities for other

7 This website was located at [www.stoptheism.com](http://www.stoptheism.com) but it is currently unavailable. Another website called 'Aish.com' has also criticised ISM accusing it of supporting terror. It describes itself as 'the world's largest Jewish content website, logging over 3 million monthly user sessions with 200,000 unique email subscribers'. See: [http://www.aish.com/jewishissues/middleeast/Solidarity\\_With\\_Terror.asp](http://www.aish.com/jewishissues/middleeast/Solidarity_With_Terror.asp)

8 The villagers of Ni'lin have staged a weekly peaceful protest against the building of the Apartheid Wall which is taking away significant amounts of their agricultural land. They have been met with frequent violence from the Israeli Defence Forces.

forms of volunteer tourism. Firstly, ISM provides an exemplary case of host community-initiated and -led volunteer tourism. The Palestinians founded the ISM and they control its policy and actions. For volunteer tourism to retain its integrity, ensure self-determination and self efficacy for local people, and avoid being patronising, local control is essential. However, this aspect is rarely explored in the literature to date. Without this local agency, there is a danger of external 'do-gooders' imposing their views of what should be done on local communities, whether it be imposing methods of nonviolent resistance in this case study or environmental conservation in other volunteer tourism projects.

The effectiveness of ISM volunteers in meeting the objectives of the movement is open to debate. They are clearly unable to impede or overturn the occupation in any meaningful way when the forces confronted include what is described as the fourth strongest army in the world. They are more successful in forming bonds of solidarity with Palestinians, so that they do not feel abandoned in their suffering. Perhaps the volunteers' most successful tangible impact is in the dissemination of their experiences through their letters, journals, videos, public presentations, and the website testimonials, through which they raise awareness of the Palestinian situation under occupation. The impact of Rachel Corrie's diary and emails, which were made into a book (2006) and then performed as a play, is still reverberating.<sup>9</sup> Similarly British comedian Jeremy Hardy joined the ISM and made a film called *Jeremy Hardy vs. the Israeli army* in 2003, which was released internationally. These activities of ISM volunteers support McGehee and Santos's argument that volunteer tourism may improve 'global citizenship' and its participants become involved in 'changing the world' (2005: 775).

But even ISM activists, with their commitment to solidarity, cannot entirely escape their status as white, Western people of privilege. This is evident in the quote from Rachel Corrie cited in the previous section. Mahrouse's analysis (2008) alerts us to examine this phenomenon with a critical eye. She has researched transnational solidarity activists similar to those of the ISM and she characterises them as 'white/Westerners as mediators of the Other's suffering' (Mahrouse, 2008: 89). Here she argues that these activists, in their role of making people back home aware of the injustices suffered by communities like Palestine, act as mediators. She uses Arendt's theory of compassion

9 The play was first staged in April 2005 at the Royal Court Theatre, London, and it went on to win the Theatregoers' Choice Awards for Best Director for Alan Rickman and Best New Play. It has since been staged in several cities of the United States, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. One off-Broadway run in New York was 'indefinitely postponed' after the theatre manager polled Jewish leaders, who opposed the play's performance. See [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/28/theater/newsandfeatures/28thea.html?\\_r=2&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/28/theater/newsandfeatures/28thea.html?_r=2&oref=slogin)

versus pity to assess whether these activists are successful in their efforts to act against injustice. As Mahrouse states:

The important distinctions between the two centre on the relationship to the sufferer. In Arendt's view, a relationship of compassion is more or less an equal one and implies a sharing of suffering. Relationships of pity, on the other hand, re-enact the power differentials between the viewer and the sufferer, rather than disrupt them. (2008: 98)

Mahrouse found in her research that when activists return home and tell of the suffering of people like the Palestinians, because the teller and the audience are both white/Western people of privilege, the teller potentially becomes the object of the compassion of their listeners, while their narrations only evoke pity for people like the Palestinians. Thus the activists' goals are potentially thwarted by the very power differentials their actions are attempting to address. While not nullifying the validity of the enterprise, it does problematise the effort of seeking justice through transnational solidarity activism in a context of global inequities and chasms of injustice. Landy's research on other activist tourists in Palestine reported:

One interviewee working in Palestinian tourism was sharply critical of activist tourism. While recognizing the good intentions behind it, she characterized it as a disempowering activity — a means for activists to portray themselves as heroes and then walk away from the situation, leaving locals to feel that political action is a seasonal foreign-orientated activity. (2008: 198)

This alerts us to the fact that volunteer tourism is not unproblematic. By its very nature, the tourism encounter is fleeting and the solidarity it can engender is more limited unless conscious efforts are made to upset the power equation. This presents a lesson for volunteer tourism participants to think beyond a commitment to a one-off, feel-good volunteering experience to a more sustained effort supporting justice and sustainability in their everyday lives. As an expression of 'international solidarity', this is in fact what many ISM volunteers do. As Edward Said noted:

What Rachel Corrie's work in Gaza recognized was the gravity and the density of the living history of the Palestinian people as a national community, and not merely as a collection of deprived refugees. That is what she was in solidarity with. And we need to remember that kind of solidarity is no longer confined

to a small number of intrepid souls here and there, but is recognized the world over. (2004: xv)

The ISM is a facet of the transnational solidarity movement which is galvanising for justice and human rights in localities around the globe. It is the significant failure of the international community of nations to secure just and sustainable international relations which necessitates people placing themselves on the frontlines in this way. Or as the ISM explains its stance for justice:

A large powerful army continues to use its military might on a civilian population, largely unarmed and struggling for its freedom and independence. The international community fails to meet its obligations to protect the Palestinian people. Israeli colonial policies continue to strip Palestinians of their human rights and deny them human dignity. The International Solidarity Movement has been witness to war crimes and is expecting more of the same, WE NEED YOU to come stand with us against this injustice. (About ISM London: n.d.)

While some volunteer tourists may be criticised for the ephemerality of their commitment, most ISM volunteers cannot be so easily challenged. Since the death of Rachel Corrie, no ISM volunteer working in Palestine can truly be sure they will be able to walk away from the situation unscathed. They do indeed put their bodies where their politics are.

## Conclusion

*You are all invited to Palestine. When they see internationals who have come, Palestinians feel hope, that others have come to share their hardship. Hope is very important for a people who feel their pain ignored, their voice unheard, their land taken away every day.* (Rishmawi, 2004: 7)

In this era of the 'global village', expressions of transnational solidarity are increasingly evident. Groups such as the ISM have harnessed the capacities of tourism and travel to connect people suffering oppression with the outside world and to work together to overturn situations of injustice. While these efforts are not unproblematic in a world with gross inequities and divisions, they do represent a clear commitment to move beyond the selfish materialism and indulgence that characterise much of tourism to date and to establish bonds of solidarity beyond one's national borders.

As this paper has argued, justice tourism can be viewed as a continuum and this transnational solidarity activism is on the more extreme end (see Figure 1). At a time when volunteer tourism appears to be increasingly co-opted by a

rapacious tourism industry, the ISM and other rare cases of volunteer tourism for justice demonstrate the ultimate promise of volunteer tourism's capacity to connect the peoples of tourism, the visitors and the visited, through bonds of solidarity. While this is a narrow niche of the tourism phenomenon, its numbers may belie its potential impacts.<sup>10</sup> Remembering Wearing's warning that volunteer tourism may become just 'another source of consumption which will only endanger the very communities and environments that the volunteer tourist seeks to protect' (2001: 15), this analysis suggests volunteer tourism analysts should begin to look at the phenomenon with a more critical perspective and to explore the margins where the ultimate capacities of the phenomenon may lie. Numerous questions are opened by this research, including:

- How does volunteer tourism become co-opted by globalising capitalism and how can this be prevented?
- In what ways can transnational solidarity activism such as that of the ISM contribute to the formation of new social movements and is this contributing to a new cosmopolitan consciousness?
- What are the ethical and moral dilemmas of transnational solidarity activism and how can these be managed?

These young (and not so young) volunteer tourists for justice of the ISM demonstrate a commitment to forging a new global society based on justice and human rights. Their example presents a challenge to proponents of volunteer tourism to ensure that the integrity of the movement is maintained and that volunteer tourism delivers on its promise to contribute to the development of a more just and sustainable world.

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<sup>10</sup> If one considers Che Guevara as the quintessential volunteer tourist for justice prototype, we can see how volunteer tourism for justice might 'punch above its weight'.

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