

**Volunteering in the Neoliberal Subjectivity:
Repackaging Problematic Narratives of the Past**

by

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyze how Western volunteers today justify their experiences in Africa despite being aware of criticism. Outlining key moments in the history of English and American Philanthropy, this thesis seeks to investigate how volunteerism has become conceived of as such an important part of Western communities and identities. The research focuses on fieldwork in Taroudant, Morocco that investigates the ways volunteers describe their experiences in order to further understand this rationale. By identifying key characteristics of the millennial generation, this research has shown that the ways of rationalizing are constructs of a specific neoliberal subjectivity. This includes the coupling of pragmatic approaches to humanitarian issues with an argument that compassion is an imperative part of this activity. With specific focus on individual skill, and belief that compassion constitutes a type of skill, the neoliberal subject justifies that their presence is helpful to the communities in which they volunteer and that the experience can help strengthen personal skills. This neoliberal subjectivity has largely taken shape guided by influential narratives of the past that, for the purpose of this research, focuses specifically on NGO advertisements. This thesis argues that the stories volunteers share today, often on social media, recycle problematic narratives of the past. These reproduced narratives, and the consequent repackaging of the volunteering industry, allow for the maintenance of a hierarchal relationship between Africa and the West.

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Introduction

The stars were so clear in the sky it was like driving into a fairytale. I really did not know what to expect other than what I had read online or heard from other volunteers. In Morocco, people make sure to take their time to greet each other, and I was touched at how welcome I felt instantly. As I did not know Moroccan Arabic, I was asking a lot of questions and attempting to mimic other people's actions to try to adapt to a Moroccan way of life. I have enjoyed great conversations with the team at the Centre Amane. As my culture teacher remarked, these exchanges of knowledge - these small interactions between individuals of different backgrounds - are the stepping stones to better understanding, peace and relations between communities. The value of international volunteering comes not from "saving anyone's life", but from small conversations, friendly interactions and the sharing of values, culture and customs - that can bridge the gap between seemingly distant communities and ways of life. The experience is first and foremost an educational one.

- Gunnarsdottir, Elsa. May 2015

In the summer of 2015, I volunteered with the Moroccan Children's Trust in, Taroudant Morocco. The quote above is combined from an excerpt from a reflection I was asked to write for the Moroccan Children's Trust's newsletter and a reflection in my personal field notes that I wrote during my first month in Taroudant. In this thesis, I will explain how these perceptions changed with the realization that they are part of a typical contemporary rationale that justifies our interventions in other countries. In the beginnings of this project, I was warned by criticisms of volunteerism, yet still intrigued by the many things this experience could offer.

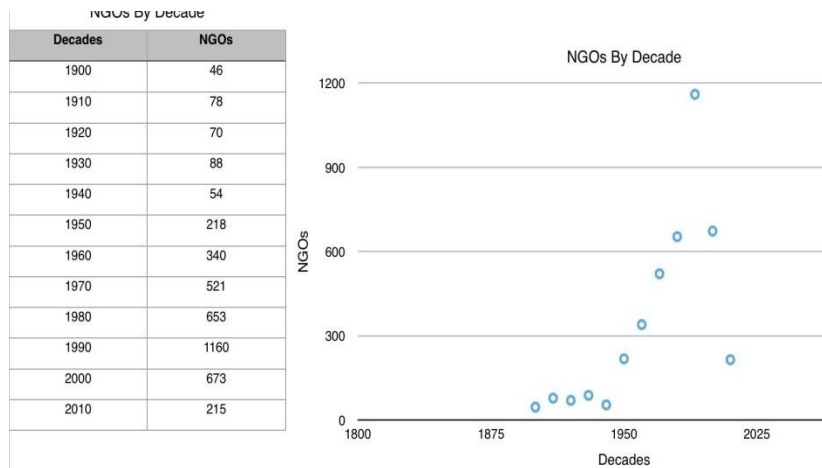
Reading critiques of volunteerism, was what started my interest in this topic, as I wanted to understand more about the problematic aspects of volunteerism. The reason I wanted to understand more is in part because I was unsatisfied with the conclusions of many of these critiques. Most of the critiques merely suggested that volunteers should change their naive attitudes and develop a sense of narrative humility when talking about their experiences. For a while, I bought into this rhetoric and believed that a way to improve the problems of volunteerism was for volunteers to go with better attitudes about the reality of their outcomes, and not using a harmful rhetoric of trying to "save someone's life." To me, this justified

volunteering abroad, by distinguishing “naive volunteers” from “helpful volunteers.” In the summer of 2015, I sought funding from my university to volunteer with the Moroccan Children’s Trust in Taroudant, Morocco. Expecting to encounter naive volunteers I had read about in these criticisms, I instead met volunteers who, to my surprise, were strikingly aware of the criticisms of volunteerism. Before guiding you through the minds of millennial volunteers, I believe it is important to present the criticisms they are confronted with as they begin their experiences. I will therefore start by presenting some critiques in order to provide an understanding of why they have done little to diminish volunteers’ interest in pursuing such experiences.

Although there is an emerging circulation of critiques today, they are far from a modern phenomenon. Early theorists were concerned with questions about volunteering as an act of self-fulfillment. American theologian Reinhold Neibuhr (1892-1971) argued that certain people volunteered in order to elevate their social status, yet that this was only a choice to those already holding a privileged status in society. Neibuhr suggests social hierarchies could be perpetuated by volunteerism, which is indeed many critics still argue today. One of the perhaps most famous critiques of volunteering, is Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich’s *To Hell With Good Intentions*. In a speech delivered to the Conference on Inter American Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1968, Illich urged Western volunteers to stop “imposing their benevolence” on Mexico and called for the “voluntary retreat” of all volunteering activity. He stated that “Intellectual insight into the difficulties of fruitful volunteer action had not sobered the spirit of Peace Corps Papal-and-Self-Styled Volunteers.”¹ Illich speech illuminates that criticisms were prevalent even then, yet that they did little to change people’s desires to volunteer. Indeed - has anything really changed since Illich’s condemnation of the international volunteering industry,

¹ Illich, Ivan. "To Hell With Good Intentions." The Conference on Inter-American Studies. Mexico, Cuernacava. 20 Apr. 1968.

other than the words we choose to justify these kinds of projects? The statistics below suggest the contrary.



Statistics derived from the 1907 - 2015 Union of International Associations²

These statistics show a vast increase in the establishment of NGOs - often the leading facilitators of volunteer work - in the 1990's with the emergence of 1160 new NGOs. In fact, to further confirm that volunteerism is not decreasing, research has shown that volunteer tourism is becoming the fastest growing sector of the travel industry with 1.6 million volunteer tourists per year.³ Volunteer tourism is a modern emerging industry, often referred to simply as "voluntourism." Oxford English Dictionary defines voluntourism as "tourism in which travellers spend time doing voluntary work on development projects, usually for a charity."⁴ In simple terms, a combination of tourism and volunteering. This industry has both received praise and criticism. Sociology instructor Margaret Zeddies explain that in growing postcolonial criticism, a demand for more ethical tourism emerged that focuses on respecting local cultures.⁵ In this

² "Union of International Associations." *The Yearbook of International Organizations*. The Yearbook of International Organizations, n.d. Web. 26 Mar. 2016.

³ Vradi, 2

⁴ "Voluntourism, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 23 January 2016.

⁵ Zeddies and Millei, 100-101

regard, she explains, combining travelling with volunteering can give travellers a sort of moral gratification that alleviates the burdening footprints of tourism. Conversely, journalist Ian Birrell argues that voluntourism may in fact produce more harm than good for the communities in which they operate. For instance, this industry had lead to the establishment of fake orphanages intended to profit of ‘voluntourists, in which children were coerced, bought or rented to pose as orphans.⁶ Though I will not make distinctions between ‘volunteerism’ and ‘voluntourism’, I will show how the name of ‘voluntourism’ as distinct from ‘volunteerism’ allows volunteers to distance themselves from criticisms. They can do so by seeing them as two separate industries; arguing that criticisms apply only to voluntourism and that volunteerism is inherently different.

Many critics have argued that common Western narratives of Africa often paint a problematic picture of the continent as a place of desperation in need of saving by Westerners. English literature specialist Madhu Krishnan argues that the Africa encountered in Western literature is little more than a mythical space that allows Westerners to find self-fulfillment. These types of narratives, which I will discuss further in chapter three, allow Westerners to imagine the need for them and justify their presence in Africa. Many of narratives have, created an assumption that Africans problems are easily solvable by utilizing Western privilege. Culture critic, author and political activist Courtney Martin criticizes Western-lead humanitarian projects by arguing that they fail to see the complexity of social, political and structural issues in Africa.⁷ She argues that volunteers’ assumptions that “others’ problems,” are simple have in many cases leads to more harm than good. Martin concludes by explaining that she understands the desire to volunteer abroad, and argues that people outside of the U.S. should not deserve any less of the

⁶Birrell, Ian. "Before You Pay to Volunteer Abroad, Think of the Harm You Might Do | Ian Birrell." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 13 Nov. 2010. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

⁷Kascak, Lauren, and Sayantani Dasgupta. "#InstagrammingAfrica: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism." *Pacific Standard*. Pacific Standard, 19 June 2014. Web. 10 Aug. 2015.

attention just because they seem more distant. She concludes by listing a set of ‘better’ reasons to volunteer abroad. She urges people to

Resist the reductive seduction of other people’s problems and, instead, fall in love with the longer-term prospect of staying home and facing systemic complexity head on. Or go if you must, but stay long enough; listen hard enough so that “other people” become real people. But, be warned, they may not seem so easy to “save.”⁸

Though she highlighted that volunteers often do not understand the complexities of humanitarian issues, it seems her conclusion equally fails to acknowledge the complex and embedded history of volunteerism. As result, she proposes a solution equally as simple, by suggesting Westerners should “go if they must,” only with a greater sense of awareness.

Considering the growing popularity of volunteering abroad, meanwhile a concurring growth in circulation of criticism, these criticisms have indeed done little to discourage Western volunteerism in Africa. Rather, they have further been able justify their presence by imagining that they are now aware of these problems. In chapter three, I will explain what characterizes this new rationale and why it allows and encourages volunteers to justify their presence in Africa.

Methods

In order to de-naturalize the concept of volunteering, I lay out historical contexts that have shaped and evolved philanthropy and offer different ways of thinking about volunteerism. I do so using historical and scholarly sources that investigate origins and key moments in English and American philanthropy. Despite distinction to the various agendas that have encouraged such actions, I highlight how philanthropy has been seen as a need to maintain peace and social relationships in communities and to construct and preserve an identity. These distinctions are crucial in order to understand my argument that, despite historical and contemporary criticisms of volunteerism, volunteerism is continuously reproduced within different formulations and

⁸ Kascak, Lauren, and Sayantani Dasgupta. "#InstagrammingAfrica: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism." *Pacific Standard*. Pacific Standard, 19 June 2014. Web. 10 Aug. 2015.

frameworks. I explain this by highlighting examples from the English colonization of the United States, the formalization of philanthropy in England and the United States to philanthropic endeavors abroad, drawing on historical books, scholarly works, institutional records and statements by influential political and religious figures. To understand a contemporary rationale of volunteerism, through personal stories and interviews with two volunteers from the United Kingdom and North America, I analyze the ways in which they describe their experiences and desires while paying close attention to how they are shaped, framed and produced by a neoliberal ideology. In the interest of assuring their privacy, I have changed personal details such as names and countries of origin. I admit my own role as one of these volunteers and I do not exclude myself from this argument. By examining and deconstructing narratives of Africa in stories, on social media and in NGO advertisements, I attempt to situate Africa in and problematize what kind of place it occupies within historical and contemporary Western imagination. This analysis not only hopes to deconstruct common narratives of Africa but also to understand what expectations the production of these narratives has constructed for the volunteering experience. This hopes to provide an understanding of how reproductions of these narratives within volunteer stories confirm, perhaps dutifully, expectations of enlightening encounters with Africa, which I attempt to deconstruct and problematize.

Terminology

The volunteers I encountered in Taroudant felt it was important to make the distinction between “volunteerism” and “voluntourism.” Whereas they believed “volunteerism” to be a pure act of helping to alleviate the suffering of others, “voluntourism” was seen as an enterprise concerned with profit that encouraged short-term endeavors combining selfish desires to travel that, with a lack of knowledge and understanding of geopolitics could harm communities. I do

not make such distinctions in my use of the terms, but attempt to rather offer a critical examination of the ways in which such distinctions serve as a form of escapism from the negative impacts of volunteering and humanitarian work. I use the terms philanthropy, humanitarianism and volunteerism interchangeably as understandings of a fundamental principle of helping others without (the motivation of) monetary compensation. Finally, I situate the practice within contemporary framework of neoliberalism and globalization to understand production of narratives and structures have produced a particular understanding of and agenda for contemporary philanthropy.

Influences

To acknowledge influential works that have helped lead to my conclusions about the findings of this research, I have drawn inspiration from a variety of scholars. Kathryn Mathers's research on American travelers and humanitarianism in Africa has provided me with a critical understanding of why Africa is so important to the identity of Americans. Through the lense of her research, I have understood how narratives of the past have produced expectations for the future - that travelers in Africa have been prompted with these expectations and actively seek to reproduce them in their own stories. This has led me to understand that the stories we produce do not always describe our own authentic experiences, but that we instead search for the experiences we have come to expect from past narratives. This indeed is problematic when contemporary narratives actively reproduce problematic narratives of the past. To understand how contemporary volunteers rationalize international volunteerism, I have used the work of anthropologist James Ferguson to understand how a contemporary ideology of neoliberalism has influenced the millennial generation. Through Ferguson's analysis, I will use neoliberalism to describe an ideology that couples suspicion of the state with a growing faith in the free market's

ability to provide social services.⁹ Contextualizing the MCT mission (providing services they see as inadequately provided by the Moroccan government) and millennial volunteers within this framework, I will attempt to understand how the free-market ideology and increased non-governmentalism support the credence in non-governmental actors and individuals as better capable and necessary actors in providing humanitarian assistance. I will attempt to describe how the millennial generation has come to normalize imaginations of the ‘global,’ justified in terms of increased transnational communication and connectivity facilitated by technological advancements. I seek to complicate this term in its uncritical applications to describe how this generation perceives the importance of a ‘global community,’ and how volunteerism fosters these feelings of interconnectedness. Additionally, I use neoliberalism to understand the commodification of the experience of volunteerism in Africa within popular narratives and how affective skills and compassion have become marketable traits. Professor of International Development Matt Bailie and development geographer Nina Laurie explain that volunteering can be seen as a form of ‘global work’ that produces and is produced by flows of ideas in this particular political theoretical framework. I use their argument about professionalization of the practice as a lense to understand how, in a competitive job-market with multiple qualified candidates, volunteerism can serve partially as a testament to empathy as a marketable skill increasingly desired by employers as well as volunteers’ expectations that volunteerism constitutes practicing skill and gaining experience.

Through their varied fields of expertise, these scholars have allowed me a critical lense that I have adapted to create an understanding about the rationale of millennials. The stories UK and US volunteers abroad tell are often reflective of a particular geopolitical environment that

⁹ Ferguson, James. "The Uses of Neoliberalism." *Geographies of Hope and Survival in an Age of Crisis The Point Is to Change It* (2012): 166-170. Web. 15 Feb. 2016.

relates to broader questions about global justice and development and what it means within this particular framework.

Chapter Outlines

The objective of chapter one is to denaturalize philanthropy by providing an understanding of the various rationales that have shaped and adapted its understanding. The chapter offers a critical perspective of the naturalization of this industry within Western communities, through combining a variety of histories of different philanthropic activity. Focusing on of key moments within English and American philanthropy, I will show that philanthropy has been conceptualized in different ways guided by religious values, institutionalization, and economic interest abroad and in creating an image. This chapter offers a lense to understand the larger ideologies of politics, religion and corporate institutions have manifested itself in this industry, and how both proponents and critics have grappled with the concept of helping others through the evolution of different ideologies and historical periods.

Chapter two introduces the subjects of my research and tells the story of the two volunteers I encountered in Taroudant. It tells an illustrative story about the Morocco that tourists and volunteers expect to encounter, and the ways in which this place and their experiences are manifested in their stories. The chapter tells their story of what brought them there as well as the ways in which they grapple with desires to be helpful as well as their awareness to modern voluntourism critiques. It serves as a testimonial to the argument that many volunteers of this generation are in fact critical of desires to “save the world” and aware of criticisms of volunteerism. The chapter aims to describe how they distance themselves from these critiques by rationalizing the purpose and utility of their presence as volunteers. As part of contemporary volunteer narratives, I identified the most important characteristics to be

descriptions of encountering enhancing and utilizing skills, wanting to help and desiring interconnectedness with the local community.

Chapter three attempts to provide an understanding of how and why this industry is possible and what is particularly neoliberal about modern volunteering. It aims to complicate and problematize naturalizations of Western narratives about Africa that have influenced the millennial generation, and offers an interpretation of the ways in which millennial volunteer narratives reproduce agendas and ideologies of this particular geopolitical time. It aims to explain how the production and reproduction of these can be problematic and, in contrast to their desires for interconnectivity, can serve to reaffirm hierarchal relationships. Chapter three revisits particular moments of the stories in Chapter two and contextualizes them within this analytical framework that explains how Western volunteerism continues to exist supported by a neoliberal subjectivity

1. History of Philanthropy

1.1 Introduction

Volunteering is vastly popular today, but far from a modern phenomenon. In fact, one of the reasons it may be difficult coming to terms with the problematic aspects of volunteerism, is likely due to its deep-rooted history in our societies. Although people have criticized volunteerism through history, the justifications for volunteerism has been adapted and repackaged by religion, politics and ideologies of different historical times. Below I will visit key moments in this history that aims to show how volunteering has been conceptualized as an important part of Western societies. This aims to explain why, despite all the problems highlighted above, people have found value in and desire to justify the existence of this industry.

In order to understand the ways in which volunteering is understood today, it is important to understand how it has been conceptualized in different historical periods. Travelling through the formalization of philanthropy in England, the colonization of the United States and philanthropy's relationship with institutions, corporate entities and the state, I will present a variety of ways philanthropy has been encouraged in Western societies, using examples from English and American philanthropic history. This chapter aims to provide an understanding of the various driving forces behind philanthropic activity, from religious values, economic interest to the creation of identity.

1.2 Origins of English and American Philanthropy

Records of philanthropic activity have existed for a long time, taking different shapes and formats and being defined and justified differently through different historical times. Philanthropy has often been understood as initiatives to improve the welfare of others. Yet ways of organizing such activity, and the ideologies that drive them, have not always been

unequivocal. Historically, people have often talked about philanthropy as the privileged helping the less privileged to better their conditions, with the central condition that those who help should not expect any compensation in return. However, both critics and proponents have argued that there are various ways philanthropy can be a form of self-fulfillment. Through time, many people have argued that the activity should be centered on feeling compassion for the less privileged.

Although making judgments about the very origins of volunteerism may be difficult, mapping some important moments in English and American philanthropy may help understand how such activity has been encouraged and enforced in the West and shaped by different values. To understand the driving forces, the guiding principles and institutional frameworks behind this equivocal concept, it is important to map some key trajectories and see it in light of their historical and ideological contexts. I aim to highlight philanthropy's important place in communities and to explain which intricate ideological, social and political values might have shaped desires for citizens of these Western societies to pursue volunteerism.

1.3 Philanthropy and the Colonization of the United States

Focusing on key moments of philanthropy in North America and Europe, scholars have explored the origins of institutionalized philanthropy in England and argued that it has an intricate relationship with the colonization of the United States. Historian Robert H. Bremner argues that current public and private systems and principles of benevolence originated in Europe prior to the colonization of the United States.¹⁰ The institutionalization of United States society took place guided by the first massive migration of people that sought to establish a structured society with a formalized mode of governance. Many scholars argue that a particular

¹⁰ Bremner, 6

philanthropic ideology influenced the foundations of the United States. Regarding institutionalization and philanthropic values as a fundamental part of society lays claim to the embedding and quotidian normalization of volunteer-work. Volunteerism has equivocally passed through historical contexts and thus been shaped by correlating social, political and economic movements. Scholars have argued that English colonization of the United States was shaped by religious values and the recent formalization of philanthropy in England. Scholars have argued that this embedding of philanthropy within the foundation of the United States, within the state, institutions, and constitution has allowed Americans to see philanthropic values as part of their identity.

Mapping the history of American philanthropy, Bremner argues that its origins were based on religious virtues. He explains that European colonizers partly justified the conquest of the United States as an act of benevolence, which they defined as converting the current inhabitants into Christianity and providing land, work and institutions of civilization.¹¹ They aspired to establish communities *better* than those at ‘home.’ English Puritan leader John Winthrop (1588-1649) who took part in the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Company, one of the first major settlements in New England, stated the purpose of their colonizing mission was built on a “Model of Christian Charity.”¹² Winthrop proclaimed that the colonizers should care for the colonizing subjects as equals, yet he held that socioeconomic disparities were divinely ordained and imperative to maintain order and relationships of dependency he saw as necessary in society.¹³ Claire Gaudiani, a philanthropy scholar, argues that “American citizen generosity”, originated from the ideals of early Judeo-Christian colonists of America who were strongly committed to the values of the Good Samaritan and the ideal of loving one’s neighbor as

¹¹ Bremner, 7

¹²Bremner, 7

¹³ Bremner, 8

oneself.¹⁴ Gaudiani similarly traces American philanthropic roots to Christian ideals (such as Winthrop’s sermon on Christian charity). Gaudiani argues that, by implementing potluck meals and merit scholarships for the needy in the newly founded colony, Winthrop built a shared community using principles that many Americans are familiar with today (bake sales, scholarships, and more).¹⁵ This philanthropic motive is an unusual way to conceive of international conquest. Though it is difficult to interrogate these voices of the past, the idea of philanthropy as a guiding principle in colonization could also be seen as a way for colonizers to justify conquest. Given that the histories that Gaudiani and Bremner recount are written within the context of their focus on philanthropy, does not mean that philanthropy was the sole driving force of colonization. Historical embedding of a philanthropic culture may suggest that United States’ relationship with philanthropy was an inevitable and naturalized part of what it means to be an American and what guides the United States’ place in the world. Though this is one of many conclusions we could draw from philanthropy’s role in the founding of the United States, it does indicate that philanthropy is by many imagined as a fundamental part of Americans’ identity (in part guided by the religious principles colonizers subscribed to).

Unlike England, where historians argue that philanthropy went from being religious ideology to institutionalized law, American philanthropy took shape within institutionalization. Bremner argues that the age of colonization of the United States coincided with “one of the great periods of European philanthropy.”¹⁶ The time of English colonization of the United States in the 1600’s, coincided with a time in English history that had just formalized a series of laws that served to aid the poor. Before the Reformation in 16th century England, it was considered a religious duty to uphold the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy. This included feeding the hungry,

¹⁴ Gaudiani, xiii

¹⁵ Gaudiani, 56-57

¹⁶ Bremner, 6

giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, visiting the prisoner and burying the dead.¹⁷ Assisting the poor was mandated by the religious authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. After the Reformation, expectations to uphold these works were no longer formalized within the context of religious virtues.¹⁸ Governing forces made these values obligatory within an institutional framework, likely in order to ensure they were still upheld by citizens. The Elizabethan Poor Law¹⁹ was passed in 1601 and consolidated a series of laws to provide relief for the parish.²⁰ It formalized systems of care for the poor within a legal framework that sought to provide work for those able-bodied, a government-run facility to care for those unable to work and a correctional facility for those unwilling to work.²¹ The same year, the parliament of England enacted The Charitable Uses Act, which placed private charities under the supervision of the state. Governed by the ultimate power of the Lord Chancellor and a supervisory power delegated to bishops, they could specify which purposes should allow allocation of charitable funds and ensure that the purposes specified by donors were met.²² Scholars argue that this era of institutionalization of philanthropy in England normalized institutionalized charity in the United States.²³ This formalization of philanthropy within

¹⁷ "Corporal Works of Mercy FAQ." *Corporal Works of Mercy FAQ*. University of Leicester, 20 Dec. 2001. Web. 01 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.le.ac.uk/arhistory/seedcorn/faq-scwm.html>>.

¹⁸ *The Reformation is said to have begun with Henry VIII decision to divorce his wife who could not bear him a child. Divorce was at the time illegal and thus pushed him in 1534 to denounce the Pope and appoint the King as the Supreme Head of the Church.*

Pettegree, Andrew. "The English Reformation." *BBC News*. BBC, 17 Feb. 2011. Web. 01 Oct. 2015. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/english_reformation_01.shtml>.

¹⁹ Slack, 10

²⁰ *In the Christian Church, the Parish refers to a small community usually governed with its own church and priest or pastor.*

"Definition of Parish in English:." *Parish: Definition of Parish in Oxford Dictionary (American English) (US)*. Oxford Dictionaries, n.d. Web. 01 Oct. 2015. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/parish>.

²¹ Bremner, 217

²² Hall, 2

²³ Hall, 2

American institutional frameworks has been seen to make philanthropic values ingrained in United States' identity.

Having such a prominent place in the foundations of the United States, Gaudiani argues that philanthropy has also been embedded in the minds of individuals, and is an essential part of what it means to be American. She argues that the constitution is a testament of American philanthropic values and serves as evidence of how philanthropy has been manifested in political and social life in the United States. Gaudiani describes the philanthropic words of the constitution as "The American mission statement" that future generations should seek guidance from in production and reproduction of governing laws.²⁴ She explains that the constitution formalized an aspiration to the ideal United States, which she argues envisioned a society governed by philanthropic idealism. Due to this, she argues it is imperative for individuals to uphold these values as part of their American identity. The historical moment of conquest shaped English and United States' relationships with charity, and many scholars have argued that the interwoven philanthropic ideology serves as a structurally unique framework encompassing the historical and fundamental values of these societies. Though it may be contested that American and English societies are grounded on philanthropic values, this view encourages people to believe that carrying out philanthropic activity it is a part of their identity as citizens of these countries.

1.4 Philanthropy and Corporations

The chartering of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913 marked the dawn of modern American philanthropy. Although America's tradition of community service and generosity is older than the republic itself, Rockefeller envisioned philanthropy on a global scale unlike anyone before him. He believed that the relentless focus on innovation and efficiency, which had

²⁴ Gaudiani, 60-61

helped to make Standard Oil the largest company in the world, could also move giving beyond charity to address the root causes of our shared challenges.²⁵

- The Rockefeller Centennial Series. 2013

Considering that the colonization of the United States coincided with institutionalization of philanthropic values, indicates that institutions have long taken an active part in providing social good. Robert Arnove, professor of international studies, argues that large-scale, organized philanthropy and institutional foundations is a uniquely American phenomenon. He argues that “American foundations are the result of a capitalistic system which, contrary to its European counterpart, allowed neither church nor state a monopoly on philanthropic activity.”²⁶ Although many preceding philanthropic movements were guided by religious influences, Arnove argues that foundations in United States, as independent entities, could take the middle ground in philanthropic activity, separate from church and state.

The unique position institutions have in U.S. society has also invited corporate entities to take part in philanthropic activities, although this has led to some controversy. According to institutional historian Eric John Abrahamson, the birth of corporate philanthropy was partially result of accumulation of unprecedented wealth by the rise of large industrial companies in the beginning of the twentieth century. He explains that this wealth created both incentive and opportunity for broadly purposed private foundations, and that these foundations sought to incorporate philanthropy as part of their activities.²⁷ As one of the perhaps best known examples of corporate philanthropy, John D. Rockefeller, founder of the Standard Oil Company (1870), inspired a disparate discourse when he used his wealth to create a charitable foundation. A prominent business man in the Gilded Age as well as a frequent donor to charitable and

²⁵ Abrahamson, Eric J. "Beyond Charity: A Century of Philanthropy Innovation." *The Rockefeller Foundation*. The Rockefeller Foundation Centennial Series, 2013. Web. 02 Oct. 2015. <<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/beyond-charity-a-century-of-philanthropy-innovation/>>.

²⁶ Arnove, 4

²⁷ Abrahamson, 15

educational institutions, Rockefeller was simultaneously perhaps one of the most castigated and praised men of his time.²⁸ Some were inspired by his generosity, while others accused him of attempting to buy public good-will.²⁹ When Rockefeller created the Foundations in 1913 with a mission to “promote the wellbeing of mankind throughout the world,”³⁰ their corporate status caused immediate skepticism among both government and the public. The passing of the Rockefeller bill was not without its controversies or opponents, as there were fears that the Foundations would monopolize public charity.³¹ It was finally passed by the House of Representatives in January of 1913, only to be refused by the senate a few weeks later. However, Abrahamson notes that the political defeat ultimately resulted in less governmental regulation of the Foundation and allowed it to operate mostly outside of political restriction.³² Many, including certain congress members - uneasy about the role of private wealth in the public sector - were skeptical of Rockefeller’s philanthropic endeavor. As a way to get around future governmental restrictions of the foundations, a plea to congress was initiated by Rockefeller’s son and principal philanthropic advisor Frederick Gates that requested setting up the Rockefeller Foundations as a corporate entity in Washington D.C.³³ When in March of 1910 the measure was introduced, the Washington Post featured the headline “Oil King’s Money to Aid Humanity.” The Foundation was finally launched, yet many remained skeptical. Some believed un-deserving charities could take advantage of Rockefeller’s financial resources, while others believed it was a cloaked device that would allow Rockefeller and his partners to accumulate further profit or tax

²⁸ Abrahamson, 39

²⁹ Abrahamson, 41

³⁰ Abrahamson et al., 19

³¹ Abrahamson et al., 35-39

³² Abrahamson et al., 19

³³ Abrahamson, 33

exemption.³⁴ Leading to further suspicion, shortly after the implementation of the Rockefeller Foundation bill, Rockefeller's company Standard Oil was charged with violating the Sherman Antitrust Act (which makes it illegal for a company to seek monopoly on a product) and was dissolved.³⁵ In the following weeks, the Washington Post, in a critique of the Rockefeller Foundation, wrote that its mission "reflected a spirit of egotism and selfishness," and also stated that the "American people as a nation are not in need of charity from Mr. Rockefeller."³⁶ Despite the embeddedness of philanthropy in institutions in the United States as highlighted above, people seem overtly skeptical to the connection of philanthropy and for-profit corporations. It challenges a general conception that profit should be distanced from philanthropy, and indicates that people tend to criticize and question ulterior motives to philanthropic activity.

1.5 American Philanthropy Abroad

However, United States' philanthropic activities abroad may in part have been encouraged by economic interest. Despite popularity today, philanthropic engagement abroad has not always been of great importance to the United States. At the beginnings of World War II, American fundraising for overseas relief was largely unsuccessful. According to Bremner, the events in Europe during the World War II "brought little change in public attitudes except to heighten suspicion of actions that might conceivably endanger the neutrality of the United States."³⁷ The United States, with commonly stated foreign policy neutrality principle, came to face itself as an active participant in global policy when World War II and the consequent economic recessions began to affect American capital abroad. The Neutrality Act of 1939

³⁴ Abrahamson et al., 35-39

³⁵ Abrahamson, 35

³⁶ Abrahamson et al., 35

³⁷ Bremner, 157

recognized that American relief organizations' overseas operations might affect foreign policy and national interests of the United States.³⁸ Previous disinterest in philanthropy abroad seemed to change with the realization that United States' interest was at risk. Following economic recessions in countries around Europe, restrictions were imposed on American economic activity in nations officially declared to be at war. However, the Red Cross was excluded from monthly reporting and registering provisions to the Department of State, which had become a condition for other United States capital in Europe.³⁹ Foreign relief agencies flourished in the years following implementation of these restrictions, and growth of agencies continued in the years post World War II and expanded to multiple countries.⁴⁰ Though there may have been other explanations for this growth, it does suggest that it has been in United States' economic interest to establish and preserve humanitarian organizations abroad.

Following this period of expansion of United States' foreign relief agencies abroad, Americans were increasingly encouraged to serve abroad as volunteers. On October 14th 1960, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy addressed students in an impromptu 2 am speech at the University of Michigan. He wished to challenge students to spend two years of their lives to "help people in countries of the developing world."⁴¹ In March of 1961, shortly after becoming president, Kennedy followed through on this call-to-action by establishing the Peace Corps. The same year, congress approved legislation for the Peace Corps and gave mandate to "promote world peace and friendship." Within 5 years, 55 programs had been established with nearly 15,000 volunteers. Currently the Peace Corps operates in 140 countries (2015). Records at the JFK library indicate that the inspiration for the Peace Corps grew out of Kennedy's hope for the

³⁸ Bremner, 157

³⁹ Bremner, 158

⁴⁰ Bremner, 163

⁴¹ "Peace Corps: 1960s." *Peace Corps*. Peace Corps, 20 Nov. 2013. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

American people to be more actively involved in causes of democracy, peace, development and freedom.⁴² Kennedy stated that The Peace Corps was in part an initiative to counter ideas of Yankee imperialism and the “Ugly American”, which he believed could be achieved by sending “idealistic Americans abroad” to work at the grassroots level in the Third World.⁴³ In addition to constructing a positive image of Americans, he believed this could support larger political agendas such as preventing the growth of communism. Encouraging Americans to volunteer abroad could thus be seen as a way to construct a certain image of Americans, and to limit the spread of other ideologies that could threaten American values. This explicit association with philanthropy as a form of image-building in part foreshadows contemporary critiques about volunteering being overly focused on creating a self-image. Here, they in fact explicitly suggest that volunteering can be a way to counter negative images (without making this a negative connotation).

1.6 Conceptualizing Philanthropy: Past to Present

As these histories have shown, people have given a variety of reasons as to why philanthropy is important within society. Historically, people have been skeptical of activity that suggest that the benefactor may benefit from philanthropic activity. Criticisms today often problematize ulterior political and economic agendas in shaping philanthropy. I will explain in chapter three, volunteerism today often conceals politics in an attempts position itself within this neoliberal ideology that is suspicious of politics. Today, many people choose to volunteer abroad in order to travel, to learn about, feel connected to and help people in other communities. Many young students volunteer abroad as part of their studies, gap years and summers. Young

⁴² "Peace Corps." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, n.d. Web. 24 Mar. 2016.

⁴³ "Teaching With Documents: Founding Documents of the Peace Corps." *National Archives*. National Archives, n.d. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.

volunteers believe this experience can give them an opportunity to build and practice skills, to build their resumes and to “make a difference” in the lives of other people. They are often encouraged by their schools, universities or local communities and see this as an enlightening experience that allows them to feel connected to a ‘global’ community.

In this chapter, focusing on examples from American and English philanthropy, I have shown how philanthropy, guided by different ideologies and historical times, has been conceptualized within many important aspects of Western society. By mapping some key moments in English and American philanthropy, I have shown how philanthropy has been encouraged and justified by religious virtues, politics and different ideologies. I have explained how many English colonizers justified the colonization of the United States as a philanthropic endeavour that would bring good to the new colony, and shown how this has been considered an important part of embedding philanthropy in the foundational structures, systems and culture in the United States. I have shown how philanthropy has been seen as an important way to maintain social order and relationships of dependency. Although many scholars explain that the origins of American philanthropy were guided by religious virtues, they argue that it took a unique shape as the founding of United States’ society was shaped by the new English institutionalization of social values. Despite philanthropy originating within institutions in the United States, I have shown how people have been skeptical to corporations’ involvement in philanthropy. This was often due to people's aversive attitudes to bodies concerned with profit to take a central part in philanthropic activity. Yet, through the growth of American foreign relief agencies abroad, I have explained how philanthropic agencies could in fact be used as a way to preserve economic interest abroad. Due to the awareness that United States’ interest abroad could be directly impacted by philanthropy, I have shown how Americans have been encouraged to volunteer

abroad. In addition, I have explained that this was also part of a political agenda to improve the image of the United States in the world and to limit the spread of ideologies that could threaten their powerful position.

In relating this to contemporary philanthropy, my research has shown that people often use their volunteering experiences abroad in order to portray a positive image of themselves. However, people are increasingly aware that Western-lead philanthropic initiatives have lead to much harm abroad. Many volunteers believe that the rhetoric of “saving a life” is narcissistic and that volunteering should instead be focused on what individual skills volunteers can bring to these projects. In part, as volunteerism today is often focused on skills-building, many volunteers believe that this is a positive way to combine self-fulfillment and to help improve the lives of others. Taking part in efforts to improve the lives of others, has lead many people to see volunteering abroad as an opportunity to feel interconnected with a ‘global’ community and to create relationships built on compassion that they see as essential to ensure peace and stability in an increasingly interconnected world. In the following chapter, I will present stories of two volunteers I met while volunteering with The Moroccan Children’s Trust. Their stories capture contemporary desires to empower individual skill and connect with communities abroad. By highlighting some examples from Moroccan tourism advertisements I will illustrate how the allure of travel, discovery and adventure, combined with personal stories, can lead to an expectation that volunteering invites deeper integration with local communities (which motivates volunteers to pursue such experiences).

2. A Journey through Morocco: Narratives of Contemporary Volunteers

In this chapter I will invite you to Taroudant, a small city in Morocco, to take part in conversations with the two volunteers I came to know at the Centre Amane for Street Connected Children. After being guided through an experience of Morocco, promised in tourism advertisements and manifested in volunteers' stories, you will get to meet the two volunteers, Monica and Cindy, who allowed me to share their stories of how they came to volunteer in Morocco. For two months in the summer of 2015, I volunteered with the UK registered Moroccan Children's Trust (MCT) and lived in a volunteer apartment block with an in-country coordinator. For a long weekend during my first month, Monica, who had been a *Research Support Volunteer* the preceding summer, returned for short visit. During the same summer, for two months in 2014, Cindy had been a *Preschool Support Volunteer*. The following summer, during my time volunteering in Morocco, Cindy decided to return to volunteer for a shorter period of one month. In the time I got to spend with these two volunteers, we often talked about the beauty of Morocco's landscapes, our enlightening encounters with Moroccan culture and the kindness and welcoming nature of Moroccan people. I will therefore begin this chapter by illustrating the place we were promised by tourism advertisements and former volunteer stories, that we encountered and recounted in our stories.

2.1 Welcome to Morocco

“If you want to hit Morocco's highlights, this is your adventure. Wander through kasbahs, spice markets, and cities pulsing with energy on this comprehensive trip. Climb onto a camel and explore the edge of the Sahara before admiring the views from the heights of the Atlas Mountains. Experience the energy of imperial cities as you explore souks stuffed with exotic wares. Then take a moment to appreciate this amazing adventure as you camp under the stars among some of the world's biggest sand dunes.”⁴⁴
- *Highlights of Morocco* Lonely Planet

⁴⁴ "Highlights of Morocco - Lonely Planet." *Lonely Planet*. Lonely Planet, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

Lonely Planet invites the traveler to engage in an adventurous space by describing Morocco as a place that uniquely combines diverse landscapes, exotic food and commodities. These illustrative descriptions are commonly found in online guides and traveler and volunteer stories that come, for a while, to occupy this alluring space. The increasing popularity of sharing online volunteer reflections allows volunteers to create an expectation of what they will encounter in Morocco. This inviting, illustrative narrative is often reproduced in volunteers' reflections about their own experiences in Morocco. Kate, an American volunteering in Rabat through non-profit volunteer-sending organization *Cross Cultural Solutions*, shares her experience online, which she describes as "so different from anything [she had] ever known."⁴⁵ Kate reflection on her first trip overseas captures the enlightenment she felt at discovering a place so different from home.

Once we made it to the site, we waited for the sun to cool then hopped onto the backs of camels for a journey out to the desert. As someone who had never camped before in my life, I found myself in an entirely new environment. Our Berber tour guide led eight of us volunteers on camelback through the desert until we reached the campsite. In her reflections she expresses a gratitude for encountering the warm, welcoming presence of the locals, and a vivid discovery of the Moroccan landscape. In many ways, Kate's story describes Morocco with a similar language used in the *Lonely Planet* tourism advertisement. Many tourism companies create this expectation of what travelers may encounter in Morocco, by promising an opportunity to encounter 'intricate history and cultural richness,' such as the advertisement by *Visit Morocco* below.

With a history as intricate and varied as Morocco's, it's inevitable that over the years Morocco has developed a cultural offering that is both rich and exciting. Whether it's the artistic influences found in Tangier, the medieval streets and buildings of ancient Fez, the laid back towns along the Atlantic coast or the nomadic people in the

⁴⁵ Kate. "It Was so Different from Anything I Had Ever Known." *Cross-Cultural Solutions*. Cross-Cultural Solutions, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

desert towns and villages around the Sahara, the culture of Morocco is hard to define, but easy to find.⁴⁶

Through the language of tourism advertisements, travelers are led to expect Morocco as a space comprising voluptuous mountains, authentic markets, renowned Moroccan food and breathtaking beaches by the glittering North Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, open for the fulfillment of our adventurous desires. These alluring descriptions are in many cases what people can expect to encounter online and in tour guides when seeking to learn more about travelling in Morocco. A growing tourism industry promises to welcome western tourists, and many reports indicate that tourism has led to increasing employment and contributed to improving the economy of Morocco.⁴⁷ With growing concern about ethical tourism, as scholars Wanda Vrasti has pointed out in her research on volunteer tourism⁴⁸ and Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte in their research on ethical consumerism,⁴⁹ travelers are encouraged to believe that tourism in Morocco is beneficial to the country (and can thus relieve guilt for conscious travelers). Morocco therefore is presented as a place where people can fulfill their adventurous desires, and simultaneously feel good about bringing something positive to the local economy. For volunteers, the experience promises to integrate them with the local community and allows them to feel as more than travelers - as a part of daily life. The importance of feeling this interconnectedness with the local community, and in feeling that their presence is bringing something positive to local communities, was particularly manifested in the stories of the volunteers I met in Taroudant.

⁴⁶ Much Morocco, Visit Morocco. *Immrese yourself in Morocco's Rich Culture*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

⁴⁷ "Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2015 Morocco." *The Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism* (2010): 1-18. WTTC. World Travel & Tourism Council. Web. 2015

⁴⁸ Vrasti, 1-2

⁴⁹ Richey and Ponte (2011)

MCT volunteers Cindy and Monica explained that they were intrigued by the prospect of getting to learn about Moroccan culture and to be a part of daily life in the small city of Taroudant. Distanced from many of the more popular tourist destinations such as Marrakech, MCT invited volunteers to feel like more than just tourists, by living close to Moroccans and being separated from tourist traffic. Many volunteer stories illustrate volunteers' desires to show how they truly and vividly inhabit and connect with the space that they are in by using a language full of imagery that captures their emotional journey.

My own field notes are exemplary of this search for this need to describe my emotional attachment to the experience of volunteering in Morocco. MCT volunteers usually arrive at Agadir airport, where they are picked up by local volunteers and driven to the small city of Taroudant in Southern Morocco. The hour-long drive from the airport offers a glistening view of the Atlas Mountains, long stretches of desert and sand-dunes and an intimate look at the clay buildings lined along the largely deserted road towards Taroudant. Arriving on a warm, starry summer night in July 2015, it was a view that I, in the moment, remember making analogous to childhood memories of the cartoon Aladdin. It was here I began crafting my story about my experiences volunteering in Morocco.

At 2 am on May 15th 2015 after several layovers and delays, I arrived at Agadir airport in Morocco. About an hour's drive away, a small city named Taroudant in Southern Morocco was awaiting and would be my home for the next two months. I was picked up by two Moroccan volunteers in the middle of the night. On the drive to Taroudant we were surrounded by desert, palm trees and clay buildings. As a first-time visitor to the North African region, it was a sight that I could only familiarize by comparing to the childhood cartoon Aladdin. At once I could feel the thrill and excitement of the uncertainty and exoticness, that I recalled having read in other volunteer reflections. While approaching the castle-like rampart, I could not help but wonder what on earth I had gotten myself into, while simultaneously trying to preserve the magic of these first impressions and the mystique and exoticness of unfamiliarity. Upon my arrival, I was greeted by the in-country coordinator, a friendly looking young American woman. There was something strange yet comfortingly familiar as she stood there with her big smile and college hoodie. For a moment, it no longer felt like I was on the moon. Having been

awake for over 48 hours, needless to say the next day I was exhausted. I slept in before having some eggs and Moroccan bread for breakfast with the in-country coordinator whom I lived at the volunteer house. That day we had a water shortage in the house, and after some 40+ hours of traveling, I remember thinking that running water is a gift not a given. I brushed it off thinking it would do me some good to be away from the comforts at home.

- May 30th, 2015

As my story began, I would often return to these illustrative reflections that expressed my emotional gratitude at encountering this new space. My field notes, that were intended to tell a story about others - about MCT, Morocco and the volunteers I encountered - ultimately ended up being a story about myself; they captured the expectations and emotions I had deemed imperative to the volunteering experience. For the next two months, my carved position as an MCT volunteer would take shape.

2.2 The Moroccan Children's Trust

Our mission is to support and improve conditions for vulnerable children and their families in Morocco. Alongside our direct work with disadvantaged children and their families in Taroudant, we are working to improve conditions for children in the wider community and across Morocco – drawing on both Moroccan and international expertise in social work, pediatrics, education, safeguarding and children's rights, our work continues to play an important role in shaping Morocco's newly established child protection system.

- Mission Statement of the Moroccan Children's Trust⁵⁰

On their website, MCTs states that their purpose is to provide services that are not currently made sufficiently accessible by the government, with a specific focus on improving children's rights and providing identity papers. At the Centre Amane in Taroudant, MCT works with Moroccan organization *Fondation pour la Protection de l'Enfance* (FAPE) which in translation means the "foundation for the protection of childhood." Volunteers shared with me the internally well-known story of the origins of the MCT-FAPE partnership that started by an initiative of Dr. Christopher Hands. A pediatrician who had travelled Western Africa and

⁵⁰ "Mission Statement:" *Moroccan Children's Trust*. Moroccan Children's Trust, n.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

previously been a part of various volunteer projects, Dr. Hands came to volunteer in Taroudant in 2003. There, he came in contact with Groupe Maroc Horizons which had been started by three Moroccan social workers. This partnership later transitioned to working with FAPE. The MCT website explains that Dr. Hands cultivated the partnership to “provide effective volunteering experiences for both the local community and the international volunteers.” The website further explains that the driving force behind the foundation of MCT was Dr. Hands’s concern for children and young people in Taroudant, after having witnessed the conditions they endured:

Struck by the amount of time he found children and young people spending time in the street as well as the harsh conditions in which he found some of them living, Dr. Hands worked with a local social work team to understand the wider social, cultural and economic difficulties children and their families faced in Taroudant.⁵¹

MCT was registered as a charity in 2008 and in October 2010, following six-month participatory research and three months analyzing and planning, the Street Children Project was launched. Through collaborative and transnational fundraising, the goal of the Centre Amane was to provide a place where children could be during the day while parents were at work, to offer homework support and a safe place to play that could prevent children from ending up on the streets. In its first year, the Centre Amane welcomed 109 children and 52 families⁵² and in 2014, they had assisted over 650 people getting access to identity papers.⁵³ MCT declares that their hope that “Taroudant province will become a model for the rest of Morocco, leading the way to supporting children’s rights all over the country.”⁵⁴ With mission as a politically and religiously independent not-for-profit educational organization providing programs for children in

⁵¹ "History:" *Moroccan Children's Trust*. Moroccan Children's Trust, n.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

⁵² "History:" *Moroccan Children's Trust*. Moroccan Children's Trust, n.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2016./

⁵³ "Securing Children’s Rights." *Moroccan Children's Trust*. Moroccan Children's Trust, n.d. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

Morocco,⁵⁵ MCT-FAPE gradually decided to start sending international volunteers for additional support. At the moment I arrived, the centre consisted of a small team, with few international volunteers and a majority of Moroccan volunteers and social workers. For the first month of my stay, I was the only international volunteer at the centre, and the volunteers I encountered during my stay were all visiting after having volunteered the preceding year.

2.3 Monica

It was a delight preparing for Monica's arrival. The volunteers and team at the Centre Amane helped organize a surprise party at the volunteer house to welcome Monica. Having spent the previous summer as a research support volunteer, Monica was returning for a short visit in the summer of 2015. When Monica arrived, the whole team had gathered at the roof terrace of the clay building that houses the MCT volunteers. We had spent the whole day pressing fresh orange juice and slicing watermelon we had bought at fruit stands at the local market. The "Volunteer mom", as she was often called (a participant in the women's project who now cooks for the volunteers with a fixed schedule and salary), showed us how to prepare Tagine, a traditional slow-cooked Moroccan dish with vegetables and meat or fish, named by the clay pan in which it is cooked. The Moroccan volunteers took charge of organizing the party, explaining to us that they would follow traditions of a Moroccan "hefla," which in Moroccan Arabic means "party." After the whole team had greeted Monica, yelling "surprise" as she arrived on the rooftop terrace - the reception began with Moroccan mint tea and biscuits, followed by multiple courses including salad, tagine, fruit and a customized cake from one of the local bakeries. The evening turned into night with Moroccan music, singing, conversations and our freshly made

⁵⁵ "Our Partner - Groupe Maroc Horizons." *Our Partner - Groupe Maroc Horizons*. AfricaTrust, n.d. Web. 26 Mar. 2016.

orange juice. Finally I was getting to meet the young woman I had heard much about in the preceding weeks.

Monica had a contagious laugh and a smile that never seemed to leave her face. She had a certain glow in her eyes that seemed to exuberate a sense of genuine curiosity and interest in the world and other people. Yet she was determined in her ways. Despite her frequent references to herself as “habila Connie” (‘habila’ meaning ‘crazy’ in Moroccan Arabic), she expressed herself with a certain poise that exhibited her analytical and critical thinking about the world and other people. While she explains that her compassion for people motivated her to volunteer, she had a pragmatic way of explaining how and why she came to volunteer with MCT. During her short visit to Taroudant, she shared with me how she decided to volunteer with MCT:

At the time when I contacted MCT I didn’t know what exactly they had in store for me, cause there’s usually always an agreement between the student and the organization to see what is needed to be done. I emailed Chris, the director of MCT in London and it was the perfect timing, so he replied and said “yeah we actually we are looking for a volunteer researcher for the summer to do some participatory research, a qualitative research with street connected children.” I think that’s exactly what I wanted to do, cause I wanted to do very hands-on practical fieldwork in relation to street children so that was the perfect fit.⁵⁶

Monica applied for a volunteer position with the Moroccan Children’s Trust as part of a two-month placement requirement to gain practical fieldwork experience for a master’s program in International Development. Monica was part of a research team, conducting participatory research to produce a report on street children in Taroudant the summer of 2014. As she explained in our conversation, her reasons why she chose to apply for a placement with MCT were first and foremost the simple existence of a program that connected her interest in children’s rights. The program also gave her an opportunity to work on her French. This she says, connected her interests to her desires to “be of good use.” In order to further understand her

⁵⁶ "Personal interview" Monica. 5 June 2015

motivations and her journey to volunteer with MCT, Monica agreed to share with me her personal story during the time we spent together in Taroudant.

Monica was born in 1988 in a small country, and at 9 years old migrated with her parents and sister to North America. She grew up in a residential area close to a large city. Her parents owned their own company in the import-export industry which they transferred to North America when they moved, though her father flew back and forth about six times a year. As a child she remembers spending a lot of time with her sister who is eight years older, and being active through a wide range of extracurricular activities such as skating, swimming, dancing. She loved the Spice Girls, Backstreet Boys and the TV-show Breaker High. Growing up, Monica spent much time with her family, often visiting the local market and going to church on Sundays.

In her undergraduate studies, she specialized in anthropology. She found the opportunity to learn about a lot of different issues in the world, different groups of people and their culture, to be particularly interesting. In 2014, she began her master's program in International Development in the United Kingdom. She thinks that her history as an immigrant is likely what lead her to pursue studies in this sector, as she was familiar to the experience of navigating different spaces, encountering people and learning about other cultures, which she explains corresponded to themes within this field of study. Monica explained that her university studies led her to develop an interest in issues affecting children, and that she was specifically intrigued by the work that UNICEF does. In 2010 (when she volunteered in France teaching English), she took part in fundraising for UNICEF's efforts for children's rights. In high school, she remembers being part of a collective effort that would visit malls and ask people to participate in a child-sponsorship program. I wanted to understand her interest in this work, yet I could never quite solicit a response that articulated why specifically she was so personally invested in this

type of work. She instead indicated that it was due to her studies and due to the compassion she felt for children who were affected by humanitarian issues.

The day after Monica arrived, the in-country coordinator, the social worker, Monica and I went to a local juice-place which was called *Panorama* - the name of their signature drink. It was made known to me that all the volunteers are either team Panache or team Panorama, meaning the favor either the Panache juice, consisting of a creamy half mixed-fruit and half avocado-milk based juice or Panorama, which is made from avocados and milk to make a creamy consistency, sweetened with dates and sugar. This unusual (to me) combination actually results in a delicious, unique juice that attracted the volunteers to become regulars at *Panorama*. As we sipped in divided groups of team Panache's and team Panorama's, I listened as the volunteers invoked a sense of enthusiasm about community as they talked about the wonderful memories they had and reminiscing on the great people that they met.

Over a cup of tea, Monica and I sat down to talk about her experience volunteering with MCT. She explained that learning about other people and ways of living in other places in the world, in her studies, made her realize that the world is "not just here. It is so much bigger." Monica exhibited a certain desire to experience other places and to connect with people around the world, which she explained, was part of the reason she wanted to volunteer abroad. When I asked her what she, as a volunteer, could contribute to the street children projects, Monica answered: "I do not really have any technical skills, but I do feel like I have a lot of compassion and I am quite good with people." She described these as essential skills in order to be helpful as a volunteer. Monica explains that her studies, her parents and in general, the way one is brought up, and the environment you live in is influential in developing compassion for and interest in

other people. She remembers that her parents sacrificed a lot and did nice things for their friends, which she believed inspired her to do nice things for others.

As I wanted to learn more about the journey that brought Monica to volunteer with MCT, she agreed to meet with me over Skype in the February 2016, over half a year after we met in Taroudant. During this time, she was about to travel to Kenya and Rwanda as part of her work with an international development organization. Despite these visits, Monica explained that she was particularly interested in Africa, but rather “in wherever there is need.” She did not remember learning much about Africa in her studies as she was younger (apart from maybe her high school history class). She explained instead that studying global health issues and ethnographies in university, partially dealt with examples in Africa. Though she expressed that she was enthusiastic about seeing the world, when searching for a master’s dissertation placement, she explained that she searched by organizations, not location. She also looked in Lesotho and Nepal, since she says she had always been interested in going there. However, she did not find any opportunities there and since she only had two months and felt that was a bit far. Her studies required either a comprehensive research project or placement in a related sector. Monica elected the latter and contacted organizations in French-speaking countries in Europe and Africa. When asked, she said that it was not about going to Africa, but rather that MCT offered an opportunity to combine her language and thematic interests.

When we met in the summer of 2015, I remembered that Monica had mentioned that she worked with a voluntourism company, which she had expressed were “doing more harm than good.” During our Skype conversation in February 2016, she agreed to share with me how she distinguished ‘voluntourism’ from her own experiences. Monica worked two years for a cultural exchange company offering voluntourism packages, and recalls going to Belize as part of work

to oversee the projects. She had not participated as a 'voluntourist' on such a project herself before as, in addition to cost, she felt she "was not ready to go to a very foreign country and start helping people." 'Helping', she defined as lending a hand to projects, being useful and assisting with teaching. She explained that "All voluntourism companies are selling the programs for people to go and help, whether it is helping to build something, teaching, to lend a hand." Yet despite these aims, she mentioned that "they do not really do their research and they are not helping." Monica argued that 'voluntourism' was distinct from 'volunteerism' as it was centered on people's desires to travel. Monica continued, "It is a business. They are just making profit out of that," and argued that voluntourism does not focus on the issue at hand, but rather on producing a positive moral experience for voluntourists. She argued that these projects are not helpful to the local communities since the voluntourists and the people running the companies are not qualified to do this type of work. In her experience working for a voluntourism company, she argued that the many of the voluntourists who participated in the projects not mature enough and do not have enough skills or experience. She continues, "you are not really screening the right people to do the right thing. Or you are not even assessing what the needs are in the country. It is just for profit. You have these kids or students who have no idea what they are getting themselves into." Monica explained that when projects do not have the expertise needed to do this certain work; they can "create more harm than good." For instance, she remarks, in the voluntourism company she worked with "none of the managers were in development." She explained that Nobody really "you cannot run a very good voluntourism company if you do not understand what is happening on the ground, what is needed, what the solutions are to address a problem in a local context." She asserted that there is absolutely a lack of research being done and a lack of consultation with the local people. I asked, then, why she believed these projects

could exist. Her answer: “to make a profit.” However, she added that these projects were not motivated solely by profit. She argued that a lot of voluntourism companies are created by people with “good passion and good hearts.” She explained that it ultimately comes from a good place and that people “do it because they want to help.” The reasons why people participate in these projects are neither solely naive she argued, and added that “people see it as an opportunity.” She explained that there is a market for voluntourism, whose creators are motivated by their “love for students and younger people who want to help,” to whom they want to provide these opportunities.

She took care to explain that when she was younger, she remembers identifying with this longing to “travel, and to save a life.” Yet she indicated that her education and her experience working with the voluntourism company has led her to a better understanding of the complexities of volunteer-work in “coming to the realization that it is actually not really helping at all, and probably does more harm.” I wanted to understand how she personally believed that her volunteering experience differed from the ones she had explained. To this, Monica responded that she believed that she was “definitely more mature”, that she knew what she was doing, that she was “not trying to make matters worse.” During our conversation on Skype, she explained that both her personal qualities and the expertise of MCT were better adept to work on humanitarian issues:

I believe at least, and I hope the director of MCT as well, that I had the right skills to do it, in terms of language skills, knowledge in participatory research, and also I was doing my courses in international development. So at least I had that kind of background knowledge. I think that is kind of what made a difference, was having the right skills, attitude and knowledge going into it.⁵⁷

It was important for Monica to note that MCT was not focused solely on providing a positive experience for the volunteer. She argues that they it was important for her to make sure that they

⁵⁷ "Personal interview" Monica. 28 February 2016

did not create this opportunity for her, but that “it was already there, it was already a need.” As she searched for volunteering opportunities, she remembered writing emails to organizations explaining her skills-sets and asking whether they had a pre-existing opportunity. She did not want to participate in a project where people responded that “if she wanted to come, they could come up with a project for her.” She argued that she identified the work of MCT as helpful considering it was “first of all, a local organization, not a voluntourism company.” She believed that their different aims distinguish the work that they do, and their helpfulness to the local communities. “The voluntourism company is to make money. They take about sales goals,” whereas she argues that MCT is not really to make money, but “to help the children and the families in this community.” In that sense, she believed, they are quite different. Does she see a difference between voluntourism and volunteering in general? I asked. “I think voluntourism has this negative connotation,” she said. “You are volunteering, but it is also tourism for you - you are having fun. I have seen students fooling around and just going wild when they are there volunteering.” Whereas volunteering, she argued, is “just volunteering.” She believed that she could still go to Taroudant and have fun on the weekends, yet that it makes a difference going into it with the mindset that “this is serious volunteering, without the tourism part attached to it.” Monica sees it as difficult to integrate with the local community when occupying this space as a tourist, and concurringly a volunteer who is only there for a short amount of time and lacks adequate language skills to communicate. She believes that sometimes the community does not understand why you are there; they do not include you since you do not speak the language. “You would be remaining as an outsider the whole time,” she said and argued that she highly objects to two-week volunteer programs. She concluded that, “If you are not bringing any

expertise to it, you are wasting their time. They have to orient you, train you, for two weeks, and then you leave.”

2.4 Cindy

It was the first week of Ramadan and, being one of only two non-Moroccans at the Centre Amane, the in-country coordinator and I decided to take part in the fasting traditions. The team from the year before, which then consisted of around 5-8 volunteers, had decided to observe Ramadan. This summer, having already tried it once, the in-country coordinator was beginning her second Ramadan experience. Cindy, a young volunteer from the United Kingdom, had been a part of the team from the previous year and was returning now for a shorter month-long stay after having finished her first year at university. During the late afternoon during the third day of fasting, I was taking an afternoon nap after returning from the centre and was saving my energy for the last hours before breaking fast (a meal that is confusingly referred to as “breakfast”, though in the literal sense of the word is accurately descriptive). Cindy and the new, transitioning in-country coordinator had arrived at the same time and took part in waiting for breakfast, which took part every night at around 7.50 pm following the last call of prayer (each day as the sun sets earlier, the end of the fast began a few minutes sooner). The meal would usually begin with water, dates and Harira (Moroccan meat soup), later followed by dinner or a light snack. The next morning, at 3.30 am Cindy joined us as we woke up to have Sahorr, the morning-and last meal before the day of fasting begins. I listened Cindy and the in-country coordinator reminisce on the year before, making jokes about how sleepy they were and nearly missing Sahorr before the first call of prayer, which every morning sounded loudly outside the open windows of the clay house. Slightly sighing at the unintentional timing of her return, Cindy said it would be strange not to take part in Ramadan again, seeing as she already did it once. The

ways they explained their first attempts at Ramadan, suggested that it bonding experience for them, that allowed them to feel connected to the lives of the people in the local community. Later we would talk about the strangeness of taking part in the traditions as outsiders, yet that it would feel distancing to have different routines from our Moroccan friends. Was there any of the two that would be more or less appropriate and considerate - immersing ourselves in the routines of the local people, or upholding our own and thus separating ourselves from their daily lives? Meanwhile, we were encouraged by the Moroccans at the Centre Amane, who seemed both impressed and delighted that we had decided to share their traditions. We went back to bed at four in the morning and slightly sighed about the four hours of sleep we would get before waking up and returning to the centre on an empty stomach.

In the month we spent living together in the volunteer house, I rarely saw Cindy without a smile on her face. She seemed to carefully make sure that anyone felt included and listened patiently as others talked. There was a sort of humility about her, which surfaced in the ways she made sure to be mindful in respecting other people's values and differences. How she used her spare time to carefully plan activities for the children at the centre, exhibited this lingering sense of responsibility and optimism to do something positive for other people. Having skipped the trip to *Panorama* that seemed traditional when volunteers came to visit (considering we could not eat anything until after sunset) Cindy and I sat down on the rooftop terrace of the volunteer house as we awaited the final hour of the fast. Cindy was easy to talk to and warmly shared with me stories from her childhood. As we sat wearily on the terrace in the warm Moroccan sun, Cindy allowed me to get to know her journey of what brought her to volunteer in Morocco.

Cindy was born in a small village with around 400 inhabitants in the highlands in the north of the United Kingdom. As a kid she remembers loving to be outside, "it was so safe, we

could run around the hills, climb trees, swim in rivers in the summers and build igloos in the winter,” she smiled. Growing up around a hostel that her parents ran, she recalled being surrounded in the summers by people from all over the world, speaking different languages. As a child she remembered reading a lot of books, and looking up to or idolizing book characters by “going into their world and wanting to be that character.” Her favorite book as a child was *Journey to the River Sea* by Eva Ibbotson. It is set in the Amazon rainforest, and quite descriptively chronicles the journey of the main character and the friendships she makes there. “Since then I have always wanted to go to the rainforest,” Cindy laughed. As a child she preferred to play outside or play board games inside, and explains that she was obsessed with Abba. “That was the soundtrack of my childhood,” Cindy smiled.

Her first experience volunteering was during high school. During her childhood, she played badminton with her friends in the village, and around 16 years old she decided to set up a badminton club. “There are not many opportunities to volunteer in such a small place,” she explained, so she decided to set up this club herself. She explained that it was simple since they could just rent the local hall which already had the equipment. With her friends, she was a volunteer coaching little kids, a program that continues to run lead by her mom and brother. When asked what inspired her to start this for the kids, she explained that it was in the pursuit of an award open to kids and young students over the entire United Kingdom. In order to receive the award, kids must complete different sections, which include a physical section (where one has to do a sport for a period of time), a skills section, a volunteering section and an expedition (where one has to go out into the wilderness and camp and hike). In each of the sections, one has to state various desired goals to be achieved by the end, which must be approved and signed by a

teacher once completed. “I got bronze, but then you can go on to do silver or gold which is a longer period of time,” Cindy explained.

When she was finishing high school, she decided to leave her hometown because she “needed to see the world”, she laughed. She explained that, as exams for university are completed the preceding year, the last year of high school is optional and can be used to improve grades or get higher qualification. Having the grades she needed for university in 2013, at 17 years old, Cindy decided to go to France for five months, where she attended high school and stayed with some relatives. Cindy explained that none of her friends from the village went abroad, and everyone was quite shocked when she decided to leave school. “It wasn’t really a normal thing to do,” she explained. She added that not many people in her hometown go to university or travel and some have never really left the area. Living so remote from everything, some people “might not have the motivation or courage to do it,” she explained. For some, money might be an issue, and she continues “mine was funded since I worked for three years beforehand. I guess other people would have that option too if they wanted to spend their money on that.”

Cindy explained that her father and sister (who spent five months travelling around the world and volunteered abroad) were likely her greatest influences as she sought out the opportunity to volunteer abroad. And then, she adds, “I guess just the Internet.” Cindy explained that when she took a year off from high school, she originally wanted to volunteer instead of studying in France. She continued, “I have always had it in my mind to do some volunteering, but the problem was I was not yet 18, and a lot of charities require you to be 18. I probably would have gone straight into volunteering somewhere, but I needed to do something else until I turned 18.” At this time, she heard from a relative that she might be able to get her into school in

France. “It was really hard going to French school,” Cindy explained, and after half a year in France, she decided to spend two months living with a family in Spain. “The Spanish family invited me to come along and I thought, cool I will do that,” Cindy laughed.

When she was finally old enough to volunteer, Cindy explained that “Moroccan Children’s Trust was the best charity I found in Morocco.” When I asked why she thought it was the best, she asserted that she “really did not want to go for voluntourism.” She continued, “I just felt like so many organizations were. You pay a large amount of money, and then you go on safari trips, and two days working in an orphanage.” Reading the information on the MCT website, she got the impression it was much more local-based, as they worked in partnership with the local people and that the volunteers’ money goes directly to just accommodation and food. “It was not just a few international people arriving there, doing a bit of work and leaving again”, she said. She also explained that she wanted to make sure that she was investing in a project that would actually help the local community. “A lot of volunteering organizations are very expensive and the money does not necessarily go to the community,” and added that she made sure that MCT pays its taxes before she made her decision. Felicity explained that her ability to distinguish MCT from the negative connotations she associated with voluntourism was in part due to conversations with her sister. She explained that they looked at different articles that were negative to voluntourism, which made her aware to avoid the types of projects they described. It made her sure to avoid projects that were too centered on tourism. She explained, “I was not just looking for a holiday, I was looking to help, to work with local people and to actually make a difference.” Why, specifically, did she want to volunteer, as opposed to just travelling? I asked. “I wanted to help people, and living with local people, it is such a different

side to the country than just travelling in it,” she explained, and continued that her experiences in China were disappointing after having volunteered in Morocco.

I did not really enjoy my trip to China; I just saw it from a tourist point of view. Having lived in Morocco and worked there with the local people - that was a really cool experience. I really felt like I was doing something good.⁵⁸ Cindy said that she booked a group trip to China through a tourist organization that facilitated the trip since attaining a visa was quite difficult. “I just saw the sights. It was really cool, but it was just a tourist view of China, it was not like living in China.” To Cindy, tourism meant that “you generally stay in nice accommodation, you see the sights, and you do not interact with the inhabitants really.” She explained that, as opposed to Morocco (where she at least could speak French), she did not speak any Chinese, which prevented her from really interacting with the locals.

Since language seemed such an important part of Cindy’s life, I wanted to understand more about how language was part of her decision to choose Morocco as a destination. About half a year after we had met in Taroudant, she agreed to meet through Skype, where she shared with me her motivations for going to Morocco and how it was part of choosing the language she wanted to study in university. She said she felt like her first time going to North Africa, Morocco would be a good destination since it was “more similar to other Western countries.”⁵⁹ She added that she had “always been interested in Moroccan culture and food” but that she did not really know much about Morocco before arriving in Taroudant. She explained that when she planned her gap year, she wanted to visit both China and Morocco in order to “compare the two and get a feeling of which language I wanted to study in university,” she said. Though she had originally planned to study Chinese, she saw going to Morocco in the summer as a good opportunity to try out Arabic and see if it fit her. Having visited both Morocco and China, she said she “fell in

⁵⁸ "Personal interview"Cindy. 24 June 2015

⁵⁹ "Personal interview"Cindy. 16 February 2016

love” with the Arabic language and Moroccan culture and hospitality. Since language seemed to be one of her main motivations, I asked her why she thought volunteering would be a good option. “I have always wanted to do volunteering”, she said with a sort of firmness and assuredness in her voice.

I thought here I would be doing more language stuff but the great thing about the Moroccan Children’s Trust is that it really fits your own skills around the role. So since I am really into arts I could organize lots of sessions with the kids, meanwhile using my French.⁶⁰

In addition to be able to practice her skills in French, Cindy explained that the opportunity to learn a new language could be useful to her future career. “I have always wanted to go into humanitarian aid, so I figured one of those would be quite useful,” she explained, although she added “actually, when I left high school, I was considering studying maths or chemistry, then I discovered travelling and thought, this is way more fun.” She continued by explaining that this was part of wanting to do something useful and helpful, both as a volunteer and in her future career. “I want to make a difference,” Cindy said, and explained that language could be a part of that. To why she wanted to make a difference, she answered “I am not sure why, I guess I just feel I need a point to my life. I want to actually do something with my life that helps other people.” She continues explaining that there was not much opportunity for this in her hometown, coming from such a small place, which is why she sought to volunteer abroad. “I thought this was a really good opportunity and I wanted to use or give my skills to help other people.” She explained that both her skills in language and arts could help her be resourceful to the projects, and concluded that her experiences volunteering with MCT could ultimately help her in her future career. “I want to use my career to help people and I wanted experience in the NGO sector. In the future I might want to work with refugees or women or street children,” she said.

⁶⁰ "Personal interview"Cindy. 16 February 2016

2.5 The Naive Voluntourists

In our conversations, both Monica and Cindy were determined that their personal skills were what made them useful to the MCT projects. They asserted that what characterized the volunteer projects they deemed to be harmful was lack of expertise and knowledge and lack of ability to communicate with the local community (language skills). They evaluated MCT as a more helpful organization as it had a specific focus on volunteers' personal skills and that they worked closely with the local community. They made distinctions between helpful and harmful efforts by distinguishing volunteerism from 'voluntourism.'

Both Monica and Cindy, took care to explain their skepticism to 'voluntourism' by arguing that lack of time commitment and training could lead to negative outcomes for the host community. MCT also expresses this concern, as they require volunteers to stay for 2 months minimum and go through induction, which includes an introduction into the work at the center, meetings with their project coordinator, child-protection training with the FAPE director, culture sessions and Darija-lessons with Moroccan volunteers. During my time there, MCT coordinators argued that short-term volunteers could not satisfy these requirements in lieu of the short duration of their stay, thus they don't usually approve short-term volunteers. However, they explained that certain Volunteer Sending Organizations (VSOs) have been persistent on placing volunteers at the Centre Amane. The in-country coordinator indicated that the only short-term projects they are willing to approve are if they involve something really specific, as in someone coming to teach a specific skill (they one time had a circus group come visit and give a show for the kids - even though they were very skeptical to having them in the beginning) or present on a specific topic (ex. health, dental hygiene, etc).

During Cindy's first summer volunteering in Taroudant, the MCT coordinator in Taroudant and the Moroccan social workers had been approached by VSO inquiring about placements for volunteers. The in-country coordinator remembered receiving an email with such a request, but that she did not respond. Despite not having permitted such a stay, Cindy and other volunteers in the summer of 2014 arrived at the Centre Amane one day to find a group of other international volunteers sitting in the classroom where they normally hosted activities for the kids. Confused, they went down to the office and were told by a Moroccan social worker that they would be staying there for one to two weeks. A Moroccan social worker, unaware that they had previously contacted the MCT in-country coordinator, had received the same inquiry and had approved the volunteers. Cindy described that the volunteers mainly sat in the classroom, played with the kids and had brought some coloring books, while making no effort to communicate with them. She explained that what they did bring was coloring books, but that these short-term volunteers created harmful, disruptive relationships with the children, who she argued "need something more sustainable." She also explained that other MCT volunteers (volunteering at the time) felt this was disruptive as they could not carry on with their normal projects/plans. Cindy and the other pre-school volunteer had made plans for the next two weeks in terms of activities but the short-term volunteers arrived with their own activities, and did not invite much collaboration. As Cindy and Monica both had negative experiences with voluntourism companies, it was not strange to see why they might have wanted to distance themselves from these volunteers. Ultimately, it captured how they believed having the right mindset and structure is imperative in order to be a helpful volunteer.

2.6 A Surprising Encounter

During my own time volunteering with MCT, I remember thinking I was more interested in learning than in this idea of making an ‘impact.’ I was influenced by criticism about naive volunteers, and at the time, this desire to learn, to me legitimated the volunteer experience. Perhaps in some sense I felt elevated from the naivety of tourism; I was there to learn, not save anyone. I did not at the time understand that this idea of legitimacy - of volunteering as a fulfillment of personal qualities - were part of a millennial way of thinking, as a result of having grown up influenced by particular narratives about humanitarianism. Being halfway through my application to volunteer in Africa, I started becoming interested in investigating some of these objectives and to attempt to see whether such projects were really doing anything good for the local populations. The questions of that research took a very different turn after I encountered volunteers who surprised me: they deviated from my expectations of naivety and idealism.

The volunteers I encountered working with MCT, seemed aware of the risks and negative aspects of the volunteering industry. They both mentioned reading humanitarian critiques and directly encountering the industry of short-term volunteering and voluntourism. Cindy explained that it was important to her that the charity paid their taxes, that it was more than just tourism and that the project was sustainable and stable for the children involved. Monica was very critical of voluntourism and found it to be unsustainable and potentially harmful. If volunteers today are aware of the risks, why are we still there? What sorts of justifications for volunteerism are a part of humanitarian discourse today, and how might this fit into a broader idea about the ideology of this era, ideas about both individual and collective identity, about global communities and purpose of international engagement? Acknowledging that this is a particular age group and socio-economic class and citizens, a study of them as part of a larger generation is essential to understand the objectives they have as volunteers.

One of the last notes from before I left for home read:

I find myself halfway through my experience in Morocco and frustrated by the idea that I am not making enough impact. Then I realised that it is not the reason for coming here. I started this project hypothesising that international short-term volunteering (specifically concerning young, inexperienced individuals) should not adhere to the goal of having a life-changing, mind-altering impact on the host community; rather, I am coming to realise my purpose here is to be an extra set of hands, for my own learning and cultural understanding, and for cultural exchange. My culture “teacher” mentioned once during our sessions that a stepping stone to better understanding, relations and peace between countries/communities is do the type of exchange of knowledge and culture that begins with small interactions between individuals of different backgrounds - such as our culture meetings, where we discussed traditions and contemplated differences and similarities between different countries. There is value to international volunteering, in my opinion. But the value does not necessarily come from saving someone or changing the lives of people in the community one visits; it comes from small conversations, friendly interactions, the introduction and exchange of customs/culture/traditions that can bridge the gap between seemingly very different communities/people/ways of life. The experience itself is first and foremost an educational one. - July 7th 2015

I thought the story ended there. My search for the naive volunteer had rendered fruitless.

I wondered whether I should have gone on one of those voluntourist trips that had accepted my application within 10 minutes, based on a 5-question survey. That’s where all the naive volunteers must be, I thought. Yet I became strikingly aware that many of today’s volunteers are not unexposed from humanitarian critiques. It is hard not to be these days. So why should naivety be central to the story? In the media and in my classes, I had been introduced to criticism of humanitarianism that had complicated my own ideas about good intentions and what it means to do good in the world. At first, I wanted to understand what it truly meant for people to go volunteer, could it be that these “good intentions” were either misplaced, misinformed, naive or inherently selfish? So I set out to figure out what makes young people go abroad to Africa to volunteer. Instead I encountered different questions. Why do people go abroad to volunteer if they are critical to humanitarianism? Do people distinguish “good” and “bad” volunteerism? Why does Africa seem the continuous space for the fulfillment of good intentions and advancing skills and knowledge? From the exploitation in pursuit of economic prosperity by colonizing

nations, to the active push to develop other nations, Africa has been an exotic destination for the fulfillment of ideals. It is only through my research of attempting to answer some of my questions - through the lense of scholars such as Ferguson and Mathers - that I began to understand that millennials often desire to be both saviors and self-aware. These are questions I will be exploring in the next chapter, as I will argue that this particular rationale allows the industry to remain stagnant despite criticism.

3. The Millennial Volunteers

As shown in chapter two, Monica, Cindy and I were all aware of criticisms of volunteerism, yet we justified our presence in Morocco by distancing ourselves from the critiques. The desire to pursue volunteer experiences has not diminished, but the reasons behind them are now supported by a neoliberal rationale that, instead of associating volunteerism with politics, religion or the state, focuses on what the individual can bring to the project. To our generation, often referred to as millennials, there seems to be a contradiction between a strictly pragmatic and skill-based approach to volunteerism and the notion, still prevalent, that the volunteer is a compassionate individual motivated by suffering in the world. I argue in this chapter that this coupling of skills and compassion is in fact not a problem for but, rather, a logic inherent to the discourse of volunteering in the neoliberal era.

To this end, I will revisit key moments from chapter two and demonstrate how they are part of a particular neoliberal rationale. I will argue that there are three main motivations for millennials to pursue volunteering. In my research, I have identified these as: a desire to be seen as compassionate individuals; desire for interconnectedness with a ‘global’ community; and the importance of sharing this story online.

Growing up in a geopolitical environment that values individual empowerment and asserts that compassion is the main catalyst for social change; millennials have been raised to believe that they can and should be major actors in helping provide aid to foreigners. NGO advertisements, widely circulated both presently and during our youth, have sought to elicit compassion with the suffering African child in order to gain donations for humanitarian issues. Scholars such as Wells and Mannevuolo have argued that these NGO advertisements inspire viewers to feel compassion with suffering others, to believe that they are capable as individuals

of having an impact on their lives and, in this way, to feel connected with a ‘global’ community. These often melodramatic images, I will argue, have played a central part in the production of the desires, expectations, and volunteer stories of the millennial generation.

The problematic narratives of the Western savior and suffering others that NGO advertisements have reaffirmed have, as I hope to show, encouraged millennials to post photos of themselves with African children on social media as a way of portraying that they are compassionate individuals. Since, as research has indicated, employers increasingly desire candidates with affective skills such as empathy and sympathy, volunteering has also become a marketable experience for millennials. Volunteering can therefore be seen as a worthwhile investment for millennials in periods of economic stringency and despite increasing criticism. Drawing on interviews with MCT volunteers and quotes from my personal field notes, I will argue that the increasing focus on individual skills is also a way to *justify* volunteer work. By “proving” that they are qualified, volunteers can distance themselves from much-criticized forms of *naive* volunteerism. My research has found that millennials desire to be seen as compassionate and to feel interconnected with a global community. Typical millennial stories, convey how volunteering allows them to feel compassion and interconnectedness, and sharing these stories allows them to show that this is part of their identity. I will argue that these millennial desires are the construct of particular narratives and events of their youth that have led them to a neoliberal subjectivity that rationalizes volunteering in Africa, despite being aware of criticism.

3.1 The Millennial Generation

The fact is that this generation--yours, my generation--that can look at the poverty, we're the first generation that can look at poverty and disease, look across the ocean to Africa and say with a straight face, we can be the first to end this sort of stupid extreme poverty, where in the world of plenty, a child can die for lack of food in it's belly. We can be the first generation. It might take a while, but we can be that generation that says no to stupid poverty. It's a fact, the economists

confirm it . . . For the first time in history we have the know how, we have the cash, we have the lifesaving drugs, but do we have the will?

-Bono, vocalist in U2. Commencement speech in 2004 at University of Pennsylvania⁶¹

In 1987, historians Neil Howe and William Strauss coined the phrase ‘millennial’ to describe the generation born between the early 1980’s and the early 2000’s and coming of age in the 21st century when the new millennium began.⁶² Millennials today range in age from 18-33 years old and are primarily raised by parents of the baby-boomer generation (mid 1946-mid 1964) and Generation x (early 1960’s-early 1980’s).⁶³ Being part of a generation encompasses, of course, much more than simply being born in a specific time period. In his *Theory of Generations*, Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim argues that people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environments and notable events that surrounds their youth. Generations adapt and form their actions based on the experience of these particular environments and events.⁶⁴

Scholars have associated the 1970’s-1980’s (which gave birth to the first millennials) as the beginnings of the socio-economic and political theory of neoliberalism. This theory is commonly associated with key policies such as a move towards economic liberalization, free markets and government deregulation formed by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. State interventions that became widely unpopular among Western citizens, such as the Vietnam War, lead many to oppose government interference.⁶⁵ This may to some extent

⁶¹ Hewson 2004, referenced in Shah et al. Bono Band Aid and Beyond, 25

⁶² Horovitz, Bruce. "After Gen X, Millennials, What Should next Generation Be?" *USATODAY.COM*. USA Today, 4 May 2012. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

⁶³ "Millennials in Adulthood." *Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS*. Pew Research Center, 06 Mar. 2014. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

⁶⁴ Mannheim,. 276-322.

⁶⁵ Charles DeBenedetti; Charles Chatfield. *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990.

John Hagan, *Northern passage: American Vietnam War resisters in Canada*, Harvard University Press, 2001.

have inspired a neoliberal rationale championing more individual liberty and limiting the role of the state to institutional frameworks charged with international peacekeeping and humanitarian cooperation.⁶⁶ In this regard, advocating greater power to individuals and non-state actors seemed partially a response to a belief that governments are inadequate of maintaining peace between nations and providing social good. The rise of non-governmental actors during this time, suggests a greater confidence in the capability of individuals divorced from government to help better the lives of people. As a result of the neoliberal turn, the millennial generation grew up influenced by an emphasis on the value of individual empowerment and a greater sense of skepticism to governments' capacity to provide social good.

Due to the individual-focused ideology of neoliberalism and the large size of this generation, millennials have found new ways to distinguish themselves in order to be competitive in their pursuit of careers and a unique identity. Howe and Strauss report a rising birth rate from 1986-1988 that boosted a demographic echo-boomlet and made millennials the largest generation in history.⁶⁷ Following the Great Recession of 2007-2009, millennials are experiencing higher levels of unemployment, student debt and lower levels of income than preceding generations did at a similar age.⁶⁸ As young students today face increasing levels of difficulties in securing employment, they are encouraged to pursue experiences that they can use to market themselves positively. An increased focus on professionalism and skills in the

⁶⁶ Ferguson, 2

⁶⁷ Howe and Strauss, 35

⁶⁸ Sandra Baum, "How much do students really pay for college?" Urban Institute, December 5, 2013. And National Center for Education Statistics, Degrees of Debt: Student Loan Repayment of Bachelor's Degree Recipients 1 Year After Graduating: 1994, 2001, and 2009, NCES 2014-011, Washington, DC: NCES

volunteering industry has made volunteering a worthwhile investment for many millennials, and can offer a way for candidates to distinguish themselves, especially in an uncertain job-market.

For Cindy and Monica, the notion of ‘interconnectedness’ and friendship seemed crucial to the volunteering experience. This wish to connect to a ‘global’ community, produced in part by NGO advertisements, is indicative of a general desire often reflected in millennials’ volunteer stories. Listening to the MCT volunteers make inside jokes, talk about their memories in Taroudant and reflect on differences in culture, people and traditions, was something that characterized our days there. These stories both capture their desires to acknowledge their individuality and to feel connected with the community they volunteer in. Millennials associate volunteering abroad with an opportunity to connect with a ‘global’ community by getting to live and work with ‘locals’ and people from different places. Howe and Strauss argue that millennials are the first generation growing up thinking of themselves as ‘global,’ partially as a result of the Internet and satellite news which has facilitated and frequented transnational communication.⁶⁹ Millennials have grown accustomed to hearing and utilizing rhetoric of the ‘global’ to evoke an imagination of community. The term has been utilized by NGO campaigns to inspire a notion of interconnectedness; desires which are often replicated in the stories that volunteers share online.

The rise of social media platforms and their manifestation in millennials’ lives has, according to marketing specialist Leigh Doster, provided outlets to construct and export an identity. Below I will discuss how volunteer-stories and images become an important part of constructing an identity online and feeling connected with a ‘global’ community.

⁶⁹ Howe and Strauss, 16

3.2 Humanitarian Melodrama: Evoking Feelings of Compassion as a Catalyst to Action

I want to use my career to help people and I wanted experience in the NGO sector. In the future I might want to work with refugees or women or street children.

- Cindy, February 27th 2016

Though neither Monica nor Cindy explicitly stated why they were interested in protecting the rights and well-being of children, the African child as a symbol of innocence and helplessness has an important history.

Children need your help



Children worldwide need your help right now. Please donate what you can today.

DONATE NOW >

*UNICEF donation advertisement on their malnutrition pages*⁷⁰

In this UNICEF advertisement, we can see how the innocent stare of the child combined with the phrase that “children worldwide need your help right now,” is meant to inspire the spectator to sympathize with the child in the photograph. A “Donate Now” button suggests that they can make real change instantaneously. By being given a simple way to respond (donating to the cause), they are also given a seemingly feasible and pragmatic way of responding to the issue.

Clinical psychologist Karen Wells explores NGO films use of melodramatic modes to generate solidarity between the spectator and the suffering subject.”⁷¹ Melodrama is a mode

⁷⁰ "Nutrition." *UNICEF*. UNICEF, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

often recognized by drama and exaggerations intended to appeal to viewers' emotions. Wells explains that, through various modes such as music, color and gesture, the films intend to evoke emotional responses to produce a certain level of identification with the suffering subject. NGO advertisements conclude with visions for a future that is different as a result of the spectator's intervention.⁷² Since millennials have grown up with these images, I would argue that NGO advertisements have contributed to normalizing a problematic way of thinking about Africa. In focusing specifically on emotion, these advertisements adopt a neoliberal perspective that divorces politics from humanitarian issues. By evoking an imagination of global responsibility, moreover, NGO advertisements offer an opportunity to feel interconnected with a wider community. This desire for interconnectedness and impact on others' lives became prevalent in my conversations with the MCT volunteers, and I would argue that this desire may, in part, have been produced by these images.

A perpetually recycled image, firmly ingrained in popular culture, the figure of the starving child performs a relentless ahistoric narrative of 'Third World' failure and helplessness that through both de-contextualisation and de-sensitisation, grossly misrepresents suffering and the possibility for its alleviation.⁷³

Nancy Ellen Batty argues that these images have created a problematic narrative that has leads Westerners to think about children in Africa as suffering. It suggests that the lives of African children may be improved by Westerners' intervention, without requiring Westerners to think about the role of wider geopolitical contexts.

In fact, the volunteer role itself does not require any understanding of the political or social problems affecting people in the country. In my conversations with the MCT volunteers, they expressed that their personal motivations centered on desires to help improve the lives of

⁷¹ Wells, 93

⁷² Wells, 279

⁷³ Nancy Ellen Batty (2000, p. 18), quoted in Jefferess, 3

the children, and they argued that their compassion as individuals was, in part, what qualified them to be there. Though we did not discuss NGO advertisements in particular, the MCT volunteers were all part of a project that suggested the inadequacy of the Moroccan government to deal with social problems. From this perspective, the volunteers that worked there were believed to be capable of filling the gaps. Monica explained that, despite her “lack of technical skills,” she was “quite compassionate and quite good with people.” To her this was a personal quality essential for doing volunteer work. Her opinion is supported by the work of scholars such as Wells who argue that, in the context of humanitarian work, politics and compassion are not incompatible. Wells argues that in forming relations of solidarity, compassion for “distant others” may be at least as important as “politically informed understanding of the structural causes of social injury.”⁷⁴ Though Monica’s frequent emphasis on the need for a pragmatic structuring of volunteering projects might seem to contradict her valorization of being “compassionate,” NGO advertisements suggest that these two can and should work together. They do so by suggesting that compassion is a central catalyst to social change, and rationalize it by giving simple solutions.

Wells concludes from her analysis of NGO videos that “the solutions are all simple,” for instance by stating clearly how issues will be solved pragmatically by providing nutrition in order to alleviate hunger.⁷⁵ She questions assumptions that the solutions melodrama presents are “simply moral,” but argues that they are technical and pragmatic solutions to issues in which people are morally invested. Wells sees politics as a rationalizing restriction that defines citizens as separate individuals, whereas evoking compassion directly confronts emotional and ethical questions of what kind of future people desire and connects the subject and the spectator. They

⁷⁴ Wells, 3

⁷⁵ Wells, 10

do so, she argues, by creating awareness of humanitarian issues and eliciting a “visceral response.”⁷⁶ Thus she would argue that compassion and pragmatism can work together, by establishing a compassionate relationship between the subject and the spectator and simultaneously suggesting a simple strategy. The focus on pragmatic approaches by empowering certain individual skills, and the argument that emotion is not necessarily separate from pragmatism, makes it seem as though these issues can be resolved without politics. Divorce from politics that these recycled advertisement images have maintained, has impacted a millennial thinking about volunteering that involves encouraging intervention by compassionate individuals, while distancing the issues from geopolitics. In many ways, this can be understood as being part of a neoliberal ideology that does not think that governments and political institutions are the most capable of caring for citizens. However, Wells does not confront the lack of agency of the suffering subject in this context; the hierarchy of power and privilege reproduced and enforced by this relationship and the authority that the Westerner has to intervene in the life of the African child.

Although Cindy and Monica explained that they were motivated to volunteer by their compassion for people, a complete separation of politics from humanitarian issues is indeed something many millennials see as problematic. Monica and Cindy took care to explain that many humanitarian projects, by not focusing on geopolitical contexts, could ultimately do more harm than good. Monica explained that this is something she came to learn during her experience working for a voluntourism company.

none of the managers were in development. Nobody really understands what is happening. You cannot run a very good voluntourism company if you do not understand

⁷⁶ Wells, 2

what is happening on the ground, what is needed, what the solutions are to address a problem in a local context. There is an absolute a lack of research being done and a lack of consultation with the local people.⁷⁷

Though she did not use the term “politics” explicitly, it is clear that Monica was aware of the importance of considering the wider geopolitical contexts of humanitarian issues. She would likely argue that projects that focus on isolating problems from politics would be harmful to the local community. Her own solution was centered on a pragmatic skills-based approach where volunteers provide the right expertise to issues. Monica defined a successful volunteer project as involving consultations with local people and the contribution of her personal skills in research, language and compassion. The problem with this approach, however, is that it suggests that Westerners are more qualified than Africans to get to the root of issues in Africa. As anthropologist Mary Mostafanezhad argues, “volunteer tourism perpetuates a helping narrative that subscribes to the geopolitical discourse of North–South relations that both depoliticizes and naturalizes global inequality.”⁷⁸

The absence of political considerations in these NGO advertisements is often camouflaged by the image of a suffering child. Mannevu argues, however, that while masked by the auspice of “individual compassion and capacity,” the NGO advertisements allow individuals to imagine themselves as empowered and compassionate. Millennials can thus imagine that they have the power as individual actors in a narrative about sustainable development made possible because of their compassion and engagement. However, playing the hero in a sustainable development narrative is, in fact, unsustainable if the narrative relies on short-term, and often inexperienced, actors to take the role of governing. Millennials volunteer within an ideology that attempts to camouflage and distance itself from political ideas and allows

⁷⁷ "Personal interview" Monica. 27 February 2016

⁷⁸ Mostafanezhad, 117

inexperienced volunteers to see themselves as qualified based primarily on their compassion. Moreover, claiming that Moroccans lack adequate skills to deal with their own issues justifies the maintenance of a hierarchy and enforces the idea that Westerners are needed in order to assure positive development. Thus this ultimately empowers hierarchal relationships .

Though NGO advertisements focus on the *individual's* power to improve the lives of others they can also, according to Mannevu, evoke emotions of shared responsibility and global community. Photographs of starved children, he argues, “are often used to constitute a ‘concerned international community’ with a relationship built on generosity rather than indifference,” Mannevu argues.⁷⁹ They do so by proclaiming that we have the power as individuals to make a difference while also evoking the idea that we can become connected to these children by improving their conditions through donations or volunteerism. Mannuevo explains that “the images of child malnutrition are productive as they create a myth of a world without boundaries.”⁸⁰ She suggests that this myth allows one to imagine an international community constructed on the grounds of moral human concern. While the emphasis on individualism may seem contradictory to collective responsibility, this coupling in fact offers a way to justify that ‘individuality’ and ‘community’ are capable of working in duality. Cindy and Monica’s wish to “live and cooperate with local people” suggests that the desire for interconnectedness seemed an essential part of the volunteering experience. Imagining themselves as being able to improve the lives of seemingly distant others by utilizing their power as individuals may therefore respond to desires for interconnectedness with a ‘global community.’

⁷⁹ Mannevu, 134

⁸⁰ Mannevu, 136

3.3 Recycled Narratives: Social Media

While it has allowed millennials to express their identity, social media has also become an important platform for millennials used to generate a sense of ‘global’ community. Although social media may not have been directly part of my conversations with Cindy and Monica, it has provided me a lense into how other millennials talk about volunteerism. It is important to acknowledge that social media has become a central part of the daily lives of millennials and that, for many millennials, these platforms have been an important part of constructing and naturalizing a way of thinking about volunteerism.

Increasingly, social media has become outlets for various forms of self-expression, including social and political. Millennials use platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to share and discuss social and political topics. “Clicktivism”, commonly described as the use of the Internet to promote social causes by clicking and sharing stories, events or articles, is a very popular millennial phenomenon.⁸¹ Facilitated by the new world of online communication, this generation has taken to the Internet as a medium to mobilize masses and organize activism. One of the most famous examples is particularly relevant for my argument, namely, the Kony 2012 campaign.⁸² Launched by the U.S. based charity Invisible Children Inc., the online campaign titled *Kony 2012* called for the arrest of Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), who has been accused of abducting and abusing children and forcing them into becoming

⁸¹ White, Micah (12 August 2010). "Clicktivism is ruining leftist activism". London: Guardian. Retrieved 16 November 2011.

"Clicktivists - a new breed of protestors". *London Evening Standard* Online. 19 January 2011. Retrieved February 11, 2011.

What Is Clicktivism?" Clicktivist. Web. 10 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.clicktivist.org/what-is-clicktivism/>>.

Another term that describes similar practices is “hashtag activism”, referring to the use of hashtag to share and promote a social cause.[#]

⁸² Morozov, Evgeny. "Foreign Policy: Brave New World Of Slacktivism." *North Carolina Public Radio Foreign Policy*. NPR Foreign Policy, 19 May 2009. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

child soldiers. The campaign went viral as the video was clicked and shared, garnering over 100 million views around the world.⁸³ The campaign portrayed the massive potential of clicktivism to create unity around humanitarian concerns.⁸⁴

However, the actual effects of clicking a share button to promote a cause have been widely contested and the Kony 2012 campaign received its fair share of criticism. Several Ugandans responded with frustration, on YouTube and elsewhere, that the campaign depicted their country as war-torn when in fact the LRA had not been an issue for a long time. Instead of addressing a contemporary issue and bringing people together in a more global community, the campaign reaffirmed Western narratives about Africa as a place of suffering and in need of our help. Utilizing the same social media platforms, Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole, in a series of posts on Twitter, shared his reactions to the video. Cole argued that the structures of this campaign problematically simplifies the issues. In a narcissistic way, he argues, such campaigns capitalize on the suffering of others to reframe and reaffirm narratives of the white savior. In one tweet, Cole wrote that “the banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.”⁸⁵ He goes on to explain, in a satirical manner, that proposing enthusiastic engagement as the only solution contributes to the contemporary cliché that humanitarian issues can be solved simply by utilizing privileged Westerners’ resources and enthusiasm.

Cole’s critique also applies to Bono’s proclamation to the students of UPenn in 2004, where he claimed that the resources exist and all that is lacking in order to conquer poverty is

⁸³ Molloy, Mark (March 7, 2012). "Kony 2012: Campaign Shedding light on Uganda Conflict a Huge Online Success". *Metro*. Retrieved February 8th, 2015.

⁸⁴ A term coined by social media outlets to explain activism or the online sharing of a story or a cause through the use of a hashtag. Herman, Johanna. "Hashtags and Human Right: Activism in the Age of Twitter." *Newsweek*. Newsweek, 11 Dec. 2014. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.

⁸⁵ Cole, Teju (TejuCole). "The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm." 8 Mar. 2012, 12:37 p.m. Tweet.

good will. Bono believed that the knowledge and resources needed existed and that in order to succeed, this generation, (notably millennials occupying the privileged space of upper and middle-class Western citizenship), must simply act. Rather, as Cole argues, forming campaigns focused on motivating “enthusiastic engagement”, and believing that is all it takes to solve these issues, mostly results in fulfilling campaigners’ emotional desires for impact.

Cindy and Monica would likely distance themselves from these types of campaigns and identify them as naive. However, they also explained that their desire to volunteer was in part based on a wish to “make a difference” which underlined the importance of having a significant emotional experience. In many ways, these social media campaigns are part of a millennial desire to have a significant emotional experience associated with engaging in humanitarian issues. In other words, as Cole tweeted, “the White Industrial Saviour Complex is not about justice. It’s about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.”⁸⁶ What clicktivism and NGO ads have in common, then, is that they allow Western individuals to imagine that they belong to a global community and that they have the power to make a real impact and change in the world.

The manifestation of social media in daily lives of millennials has made these platforms an unique part in crafting an identity for others to see. Since the mid 1990’s, the Internet has offered vast opportunities for creating a social world online. According to marketing specialist Leigh Doster (who specializes on teenage identity in social network context) online social networks have offered millennial teens a tool for self-expression which they have utilized to

⁸⁶ Cole, Teju (TejuCole). “The White Industrial Saviour Complex is not about justice. It’s about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.” 8 Mar. 2012, 12:37 p.m. Tweet.

construct and maintain an identity online.⁸⁷ Doster explains that, as teenage years are vital in the formation of identity, an online social mobility and autonomy is an attribute unique to this generation. As a result, millennials have been presented with numerous possibilities to construct a selective identity; to easily access the world around them and in turn choose and discard various elements to construct an uniquely combined identity of their own choosing.⁸⁸ Doster argues that

Individuals gain appraisals from others, in order to aid self-evaluation and situate their identity within their social groups, thus developing their social as well as their individual identity. Impressions are managed by performing consistent and repeated public behaviors in order to communicate a desired identity or image.⁸⁹

She explains that while social networks have facilitated the expression of self-identity, the process of creating an identity is also governed by new pressures of what it means to be a good, interesting or respected human being. The effort it takes to create and maintain an online identity may therefore also be pressuring to millennials, many who have come to consider social media as part of daily life. As I will later explain, millennials use of volunteer images have become an important part of creating an image of themselves as compassionate individuals. While these images can become part of an online identity, they problematically reproduce naturalized narratives about the Western individual and African children. It is important to understand, however, that these stories are not solely reflective of the *naivety* of the individual. In fact, they are in many ways reproductions of narratives and images such as those highlighted in the NGO advertisements above.

⁸⁷ Doster, Leigh. "Millennial Teens Design And Redesign Themselves In Online Social Networks." *Journal Of Consumer Behaviour* 12.4 (2013): 267-279. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 13 Feb. 2016.

⁸⁸ Doster, 268

⁸⁹ Doster, 268

While the examples below are not necessarily representative of the ways the MCT volunteers portrayed themselves online, — they might in fact have criticized them — they do capture a particular millennial way of thinking about volunteerism that, as I have demonstrated above, associates it with being compassionate individuals.

A blog on the platform “Tumblr” titled *Humanitarians of Tinder* is comprised of a collection of photos retrieved from the modern dating app called “Tinder.” On Tinder, users either like or dislike a person’s profile using a swipe to the right (like) or swipe to the left (dislike). The profile consists of a series of photos and a short optional description that the user has composed and put on their personal page. If two persons mutually “like” each other, they can elect to start a conversation. The Tumblr blog has collected photos from a multitude of different Tinder profiles where users have posted photos of themselves with African children, holding hands with African tribal members and with animals on the continent. Considering the objective of this app is to connect with potential love-interests, users believed that posting these kinds of photos of themselves would portray some desirable trait.⁹⁰ The reason these Tinder-users could use these photos to tell a particular story about their own positive traits, is due to the association with African children as suffering and Western individuals as compassionate. When the two meet in photographs, they are imagined as these predetermined subjects due to the naturalization of this narrative, in part reaffirmed by NGO advertisements (as highlighted above). For this reason, these photographs allow spectators to view these images as analogous to depictions of the Western individual’s compassion.

⁹⁰ Tinder profile photo. Digital image. *Humanitarians of Tinder*. Tumblr.com, 2015. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.



A Photo from a personal profile on Tinder, found on the Humanitarians of Tinder Tumblr.

Millennials have grown up with NGO advertisements that portray suffering African children and propose that Westerners have the capability to improve their lives. This allows us to look at the photo above and immediately understand that this is a photograph of “Joey” as a volunteer in Africa. Problematically, following a normalized narrative about the suffering African child and the Western protagonist, it is likely assumed that the boy in this photo is suffering and that ‘Joey’ is there to help. As millennials consider volunteering evidence of their compassion as individuals, this photograph lets spectators imagine that ‘Joey’ is a compassionate person helping better the life of the boy on his shoulders. For this reason, volunteering photographs such as these become an opportunity for millennials to tell a story about themselves. They do not have to state explicitly that they are compassionate people; rather, these images tell that story for them.

The importance, as Doster notes, of crafting a personality online, is affirmed by the popularity of online sharing of images and writing stories about international volunteering experiences. In the satirically titled #INSTAGRAMMINGAFRICA, Lauren Kascak critically reflects on her experiences as a self-proclaimed voluntourist in Africa. She explains how she strategically documented her trip to craft the story she wanted to share with her followers, which she later came to identify as part of a broader problematic narrative that paints volunteers as protagonists to the suffering Africa.⁹¹



*From Lauren Kascak's article #INSTAGRAMMINGAFRICA: The Narcissism of Global
Voluntourism*

The photograph above depicts Kascak at the orphanage where she volunteered. She remembers asking her friend to take a photograph that she intended to use on her personal social media accounts. In hindsight, she explains that this photograph was crucial to allow her to tell a story of herself. Interestingly, Kascak's assumption that this image would implicitly depict her as

⁹¹ Kascak, Lauren, and Sayantani Dasgupta. "#InstagrammingAfrica: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism." *Pacific Standard*. Pacific Standard, 19 June 2014. Web. 10 Aug. 2015.

a protagonist aiding those in need reaffirms a problematic thinking about the relationship between Africans and Western volunteers. This imagined “suffering African child” and “Western protagonist” dichotomy lets the audience see this image of a young Westerner and African children as analogous to a story about suffering and savior. In many ways, this recycles ideas in frequently circulated narratives and NGO advertisements (such as UNICEF’s child nutrition campaign), as described above.

The circulation of such images is increasingly criticized as a narcissistic practice in which Western volunteers seek admiration for volunteering endeavors in Africa. Though we did not talk explicitly about volunteer-photographs on social media (MCT did have a strict rule that we were not allowed to take photos with the children), Monica and Cindy frequently attempted to distance themselves from the naivety they associated with ‘voluntourism.’ In this regard, they would likely see clicktivism, instagramming and Tinder as equally naive. Arguing that voluntourism is motivated by the selfish desires of the volunteer (wanting to travel, and the companies wanting to make a profit) Monica suggested that this took the focus away from the issues themselves. In this regard, Monica would likely be critical of using the volunteering experience to promote one’s own self-image online, such as in the examples above. Considering how NGO advertisements have, in part, produced desires to have an emotional experience, social media has provided for (and expected of) millennials to express that they have in fact had these emotional experiences. These examples capture a particular millennial way of thinking about volunteerism in Africa as an act of individual empowerment mobilized by compassion, that allows them to feel and display (online) interconnectedness with a global community.

3.4 Skills and Compassion: The Solution of Neoliberalism

Many people who go abroad are not mature enough, they do not have enough skills or experience. You are not really screening the right people to do the right thing. Or you are not even assessing what the needs are in the country. You have these kids or students who have no idea what they are getting themselves into.⁹²

- Monica, February 27, 2016

For Monica, a way to counter the criticisms of naive volunteers, was a pragmatic focus on skills. The MCT volunteers, who expressed that they were aware of the criticisms of volunteering in Africa, explained that focusing on skills volunteers can bring to projects is a more helpful approach. Monica and Cindy defined skills as encompassing language-knowledge, research experience and artistic capabilities. Monica argued that having adequate skills is what distinguished her position as a volunteer, and the work of MCT, from relatively uninformed 'voluntourism' projects. Though they both expressed being critical of voluntourism and to be aware of potential risks of volunteer projects, Monica and Cindy have grown up in a system that supports and encourages volunteering endeavors. Not only by moral agenda of helping the less privileged, but also the incentive of gaining and practicing skills. The MCT website places specific emphasis on tailoring the experience to the volunteer's skills. Monica explained that her skills in language, participatory research and international development studies were essential qualifications she could bring as a volunteer. These skills were also outlined as desired qualifications on the MCT website. This emphasis on skills fit reasonably within a system that focuses on a structure of empowering and qualifying individuals as actors in promoting social good. Skills seem to have become a necessity, a common-sense term that supports contemporary frameworks. Affirming that the right amount of skill is both useful and necessary, seems to serve as a counter-argument in order to escape criticism that Western volunteers are unqualified to do this work, as Monica explained in the quote above. Criticism that suggests volunteers are naive and unqualified can be solved if the volunteers are allowed to believe they possess appropriate

⁹² "Personal interview" Monica. 27 February 2016

skills. In chapter two I mentioned that the practicing and gaining of skills personally legitimated the volunteering experience for me. This is in fact something millennials are encouraged to believe by the communities they grew up in. Cindy remembered being encouraged to begin volunteering (setting up a badminton club) in pursuit of an award by completing various activities within sections named volunteering, skills and expedition. The very existence of such an award emphasizes to millennials growing up with it that these are qualities and activities to be recognized. Similarly, Monica was encouraged to pursue volunteering as part of her master's program and I was personally funded by my university.

Studies indicate that frequency which millennials volunteer may not be explicitly distinguished from previous generations.⁹³ However, volunteering today is often marketed as a particularly skills-building opportunity. In addition to allowing millennials to imagine that they are qualified for this type of work, by focusing on an opportunity to develop skills, volunteering can be seen as a worthwhile investment in the future despite economic stringency. The 2008 recession caused a large downturn in employment, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported record levels of sustained job losses in the financial sector, retail and wholesale trade, leisure, hospitality and many other professions.⁹⁴ However, interestingly, research suggests that the number of volunteers in certain organizations increased. British volunteer company Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) and the volunteer placement organization Projects Abroad saw inquiries increase about 60-75 percent in the Fall of 2008.⁹⁵ Smith and Laurie suggest one might expect these inquiries to decline during recession. However, they argue that, should volunteering be

⁹³ Research indicates that more than 50% of Millennials volunteer and a nearly equal amount donate to charity (90% of millennials over 30).[#]

⁹⁴ Goodman, Christopher J. "Monthly Labor Review: Employment Loss and the 2007–09 Recession: An Overview." *The 2007–09 Recession: Overview*(n.d.): n. pag. *United States Bureau Of Labor Statistics*. United States Department of Labor, Apr. 2011. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

⁹⁵ Smith and Laurie, p. 554

considered a “transfer of knowledge and skills to the needy”, it must be understood as a more intricate industry that combines “new forms of multi-sector partnership, processes of professionalization, professional development and global citizenship.”⁹⁶ With an increasing emphasis on skills-building, volunteering can therefore be seen as a way to gain experience for prospective future careers. Smith and Laurie suggest that during the 2008 crisis, many recent graduates and those newly made redundant expressed a desire to escape the crisis and to focus on building a resume. Skills-building could be exercised in the form of learning a new language, completing hands-on practical and participatory work in ways that could, as opposed to pursuing a hobby or travelling, be formulated into a more formal qualification on a resume.⁹⁷

Large quantities of candidates and economic recession that has characterized millennials youth, has lead to insecurities in obtaining a job. Therefore, millennials may feel pressured to distinguish themselves on the job-market. Focusing explicitly on building skills, volunteering may offer millennials an opportunity to market themselves. These skills are not simply defined as ‘practical’; there has been an increasing focus on empathy as a specific skill. Business journalist Geoffrey Colvin argues that employers today are increasingly looking for candidates with empathetic qualities, which he defines as “sensing at a deep level the feelings and thoughts of others.” Colvin explains that an advisory group of executives and educators (on the topic of education reform in the U.K.) found that employers today increasingly desire candidates with affective, non-logical abilities and non-cognitive skills and attributes such as team working, empathy, emotional maturity and other interpersonal skills. Colvin notes that author George Anders retrieved around 1,000 jobs with annual salaries over 100,000 dollars that specified

⁹⁶ Smith and Laurie, 554

⁹⁷ Smith and Laurie, 555

empathy or empathic traits in their online listings.⁹⁸ In light of these findings, empathy and interpersonal skills can in fact be understood as a marketable trait for young job-seekers. As I have argued above, volunteering has often been implicitly associated with individual compassion. Therefore, in the context of finding a job, volunteering experience can provide millennials with evidence of affective skills.

As a formal qualification as part of her dissertation, Monica indicated that she could use her research capabilities and language knowledge to assist the program in Taroudant, and in turn advance her skills in these areas. It seemed important for Monica to note that she was not specifically invested in Africa as a location, but rather that what drew her to the location was that the opportunity existed, that she received positive response from the director and that it was a project that suited her thematic and language interests. She made sure to underline that her contributions were based on skills and experience, not a desire to ‘save’ someone with a lack of understanding about international development. I have to acknowledge that my role as a researcher, stating that my project was about international volunteering in Africa (and considering Monica’s interjections to her particular notion of ‘voluntourism’), may have affected the way she made sure to distance herself from having particular interest in Africa. Perhaps focalizing on skills rather than a fetishization of Africa was a way to distance herself from the naivety she had witnessed in her work with a voluntourism company. She explained that many young people lack skills and experience to complete the work that volunteering requires. In fact, it makes sense within this neoliberal subjectivity that if compassion is coupled with skill, the project can yet be productive and thus be divorced from its perceived naivety.

⁹⁸ Colvin, Geoff. "Employers Are Looking For New Hires With Something Extra: Empathy." *Fortune* 170.4 (2014): 55. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 5 Mar. 2016.

However, a focus on skills as a way to solve the problematic aspects of volunteerism seems only to repackage an ideology about volunteerism while still centralizing on an idea of the Western protagonist that is qualified by the right set of skills. The rationale that volunteers can bring language skills is inadequate considering that local people likely have a much better grasp of their own language. This seems rather a form of escapism from the criticism that volunteers are naive and do not have the right expertise to do this type of work, as it is unlikely that Monica and Cindy would not suggest they are better capable of speaking the language than local volunteers. MCT coordinators implied that research skills was something that many Moroccans lacked, and was a specific skill that international volunteers could bring from their training in universities in the West. However, this further suggests that Western individuals are more qualified to get to the root of issues in Africa than Africans are themselves. Claiming that Moroccans lack adequate skills to deal with their own issues enforces an idea that Westerners are needed in order to assure positive development, which then directly justifies the maintenance of a hierarchal relationship.

3.5 The Story

Chapter two employs a depictive language similar to the NGO advertisements, volunteer stories, and photographs I have highlighted in this chapter. I have argued that these forms of storytelling produce and reaffirm a problematic understanding of Africa and the volunteers' place within it. Crafting a story is in fact often a crucial part of the volunteering experience, and all MCT volunteers are asked to write a short reflection after their first two weeks in Taroudant. This is not unique to MCT as an organization, but often expected of volunteers. In fact, The United Nations has posted an extensive guide on how to reflect about the volunteer

experience.⁹⁹ According to the guide, common reflections should include how to answer questions such as ‘How does my commitment fit into the larger picture?’, ‘What has changed because of my actions?’, ‘Has this been worthwhile?’ Considering the very existence of this comprehensive toolkit published by the UN, underscores the importance of crafting a volunteer story. As the questions above indicate, these stories should depict ideas about what has been ‘worthwhile’ and what has ‘changed.’ This encourages volunteers to focus on the extraordinary and enlightening moments, which seem expected of the volunteering experience. Mathers’s work on American travel and humanitarianism in Africa highlights travelers’ expectations to the “transformational role of travel.”¹⁰⁰ Though the volunteers I encountered were part of a different generation and context, the desire to have an impactful, emotional experience was evoked in the ways they described their time there. Cindy expressed “falling in love with language”, having “always” wanted to volunteer and how living with the local community in Taroudant was different from her “tourism experience” in China. While these might have been interpreted as naivety and exaggerations of the actual experience, these words are in fact all encouraged and common rhetorical devices in frequent volunteer and travelling narratives. Volunteer stories that describe enlightening encounters with different places and different people, as told through photographs, blogs and often shared on social media, have created and reaffirmed a certain set of expectations to this experience. The stories that volunteers tell, and perhaps are expected to tell, lead future should volunteers to expect certain things from their own experience (which they reaffirm in their own narratives). These stories in many ways recycle narratives about the suffering child and the western protagonist, an implicit association created in part by NGO

⁹⁹ "Volunteer Reflection Toolkit." (n.d.): n. pag. *United Nations Volunteer Toolkit*. United Nations Development Programme. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Mathers, 6

advertisements that naturalize ideas about of suffering African children and Western individual's' ability to help.

My own field notes utilize a language that replicates volunteer narratives, as I seek to tell a story of enlightenment and the exceptional, exciting moments of my experience (even if these moments were not exciting, I believed that I needed to craft the story in a form that made them seem exceptional):

What perhaps surprised me (even though I knew before arriving), is how few international volunteers we are. There is the in-country coordinator, an older (50-60's) volunteer with a lot of background in social work, and me (which at times feels displaced, yet excited). I am thrilled at the immersive experience being such a small team can give, though it definitely provides more of a challenge as there are few others that share my situation/experiences. - May 30th 2015.

In some ways, my field notes reflected many of the same hopes and ideas other volunteers had expressed in our interviews: wanting to be helpful and to learn something. I sounded, or perhaps intended to sound, like a well-meaning optimist out on an adventure to see the world and provide some sort of help. Not necessarily because that was my natural unbiased reaction. Rather, in afterthought, I realize I was actively reproducing narratives I had gathered from other volunteer accounts, and strategically searching for these enlightening moments which I had believed to be natural and expected from this type of experience.

Mathers's research on American travelers in South Africa, found that travelers exhibited a certain lack of enthusiasm in the day-to-day experience of travelling.¹⁰¹ Although that is not to say that volunteers should write about everything that goes on in a day, I likewise intentionally focused on capturing moments of enlightenment, or rather moments I could frame as enlightening. In afterthought, I remember being uncomfortable with moments where I was not having feelings of being helpful, and I would actively deny how much time I actually spent in

¹⁰¹ Mathers, 6

my room simply watching movies or reading books. Instead, I actively searched for desire and purpose, or a way to craft certain moments as enlightening or mind-changing, while trying to suppress any moments of boredom, lack of discovery or non-production of any type of worthwhile experience. This was particularly captured in the ways I expressed discontent by not feeling helpful enough and seemingly worried my presence did not have sufficient impact:

Nearing the end of my second week in Taroudant, I am still going through induction and getting settled - figuring out my new environment and learning Darija (Moroccan Arabic), classic Arabic and attending culture sessions. As there is a lot to take in, the days feel particularly long. I have been more tired than usual, likely because there are so many new impressions. I have enjoyed having plenty of time to relax, but also I don't want to make a bad impression should it seem as if I am not useful. The two other international team members (in-country coordinator and social worker) are very busy all the time, and it seems to me that compared to them I am barely doing anything. I am glad to not be overwhelmed with work as I am exhausted from the school year, but I also want to make sure I am actually of value to these projects. The Moroccan social worker who I am assisting is very kind and very independent, and sometimes I feel I am more in her way than helpful. I came to the outing last week, but all I could really help with was taking photos. I assume this is a result of the program transitioning into being run mainly by the women themselves." - June 20th 2015

I was feeling frustrated about the lack of feeling like I had an impact, yet at the same time I remember being frustrated with myself for feeling this way. In the year leading up to my time in Morocco, I had read and engaged with literature about the possible negative impacts of volunteering and voluntourism and critiques of the 'white savior complex' of western volunteerism in Africa. I went to Morocco acknowledging I would likely not change anyone's life, neither was that the goal. However, I could not quite let go of the intrinsic desire to make a difference, which I acknowledge later was an expectation produced by reading other volunteers experiences and pre-imagining volunteering in Africa as a particularly enlightening experience.

Through the volunteer reflections I have studied, as well as the interviews and conversations I had with volunteers, the word 'impact' is one that dominated discussions. The idealistic hope of making an impact, meanwhile the pragmatic realization that one's presence as

a volunteer will not likely “change the world” or “change someone’s life” is one of the greatest contradictions that seem to perpetually confuse the millennial volunteer. As outlined explicitly in the UN volunteer reflections, “what is the goal?” or “what is the purpose?” of volunteerism is a persistent question that continues to drive volunteer organizations, volunteers, critics and myself. Perhaps the question should not so much be about the purpose or an intended goal, but rather the discourse and amendments to the justifications of that goal. We have come to naturalize this need for purpose, yet increasingly criticizing the outcomes of that purpose. The industry has in fact not fundamentally changed nor dissolved. From wanting to help, to learn, understand, experience, save, to adjust the modern understanding of Africa and critically explain the white-savior complex, the ways in which the volunteer industry has remained stagnant on the continent is driven by this perplexing need to justify a goal, such that the justification of that goal becomes more important than the goal itself.

3.6 Why do we do it anyway? Volunteering in Neoliberal Times

While awareness of criticisms of Western volunteerism in Africa and a concurring growth of the industry might seem paradoxical, it does suggest that the ways in which people respond to these criticisms is not by ceasing to volunteer altogether, but rather to justify their presence there in new ways. Considering the seductive, adventurous allure of travel in guidebooks by for instance Lonely Planet, it is not strange to understand the appeal of travelling for many young people today. While Monica was quick to add that likely what many participants in voluntourism desire is an opportunity to travel and do something good for others, the term ‘voluntourism’ itself as rhetorically different from ‘volunteerism’ allowed her to escape the selfishness she associated with explicitly attaching travel to volunteering. While she also expressed a longing to travel, she argued that this was not the ulterior motive of her volunteering

experience, that this was instead an added benefit. In this, she could justify a longing to travel with a notion of contributing something positive.

Volunteer organizations specific emphasis on pragmatic and affective skills, as desirable traits by many employers, choosing to invest time and money in volunteering abroad can be seen as an investment in the future. Associating volunteerism with being compassionate individuals allows the volunteering experience to become a testament to these types of skills. Volunteering allows us to imagine that we are ‘compassionate’ individuals and, by feeling a part of alleviating others’ suffering, we are invited to imagine ourselves as part of a ‘global community.’ As volunteering is a concept with such deep historical roots, it is difficult to lean away from the idea that volunteering abroad cannot at least contribute some good to other communities. Cindy stated firmly that she had “always wanted to do volunteering”, as if the question why she personally wanted to volunteer and what she as an individual could contribute was expected, while what it actually means to volunteer was not addressed. Being asked why we want to volunteer as individuals, what qualities we have, what skills we can bring and what we hope to get out of it, is part of the initial application process itself. What volunteering actually means in its historical context and within a contemporary framework is a concept that never surfaced in our conversations. With the historical stagnancy of the industry, as I have partially explained in chapter one, the problematic and hierarchical framework of volunteerism can continue to exist despite wide circulation of criticism, when it is justified by a neoliberal rationale that suggests a combination of individuals’ compassion and skills can help solve humanitarian issues. Being encouraged by universities, employers and NGO advertisements, millennials are invited to believe that seemingly contradictory pursuits of self-fulfillment (in terms of enhancing skills) and seemingly selfless acts of helping others can be justified as working in duality. As I have

argued above, this problematically divorces politics from humanitarian issues, while it conceals inherent political agendas at stake in Western volunteerism in Africa that allows the maintenance of a global hierarchy. Though the MCT volunteers I met seemed aware that it is problematic to isolate problems from their political context, distancing humanitarian work from ideology or politics works within a neoliberal rationale that emphasizes the value of individualism and believes that compassion is a fundamental part of providing social good.

Conclusion

Neoliberal subjects see volunteerism as an opportunity to satisfy a desire to be considered compassionate, building and practicing skill and feeling interconnectedness to a ‘global’ community. As these aspirations have been created by influential narratives and ideologies through their youth, we can understand how important volunteerism is to millennials’ identity. In this chapter I have highlighted examples of millennial volunteerism that are often criticized as naive and problematic, using examples of clicktivism, instagram photos and Tinder profiles. I have also problematized the ways in which certain volunteers attempt to distance themselves from contemporary critiques. This has been done both by proclaiming that ‘voluntourism’, as an industry motivated by tourism and profit, is fundamentally different from ‘volunteerism,’ which is considered a more pragmatic and helpful approach to humanitarian work. This is justified by an explicit focus on both practical and affective skills. However, as I have explained above, this focus on skills to justify their presence, in order to distance themselves from criticisms of naivety, problematically implies that Western individuals are better capable of dealing with issues in Africa than Africans are themselves. This, in turn, allows for the maintenance of this hierarchal relationship to be repackaged and continue to exist.

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