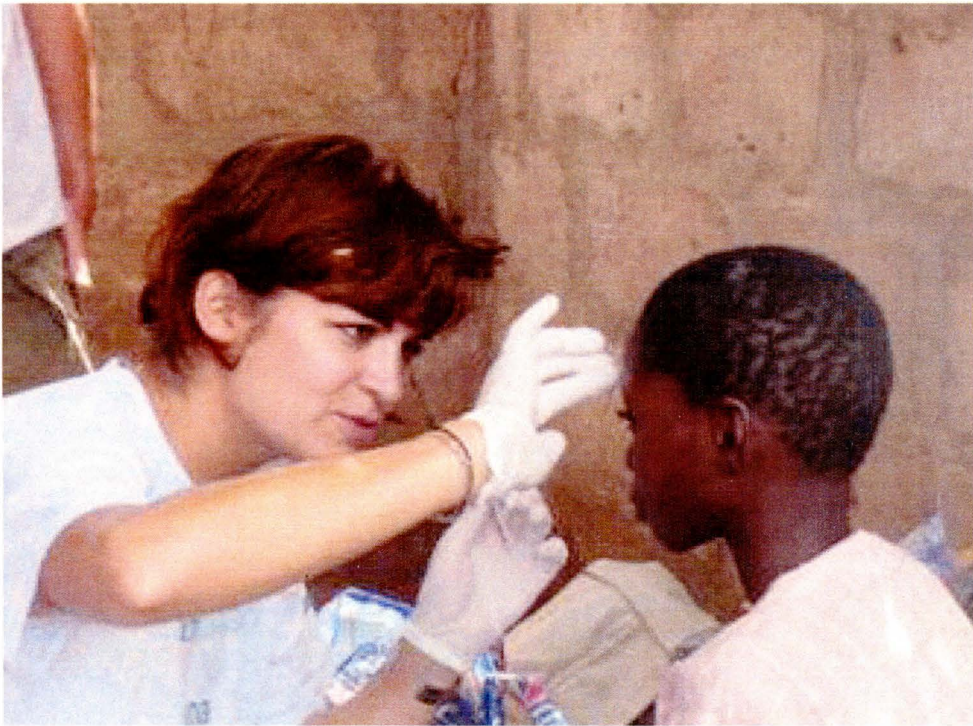


THE SELF AS ENTERPRISE



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THE SELF AS ENTERPRISE:
VOLUNTEER TOURISM IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the increasingly popular phenomenon of volunteer tourism in the Global South, particularly the governmental rationalities and socio-economic conditions that valorize it as a noble and necessary cultural practice. Using ethnographic material gathered during two volunteering programs in Guatemala and Ghana, I argue that, although volunteer tourism may not trigger social change, provide meaningful encounters with difference, or offer professional expertise, as the brochure discourse often promises, the formula remains a useful strategy for producing the subjects and social relations neoliberalism requires. The value of volunteer tourism should not be assessed in terms of the goods and services it delivers to the global poor, but in terms of how well the practice disseminates entrepreneurial styles of feeling and action. Three merits stand out in particular. First, volunteer tourism mobilizes a series of affective competencies and private sensibilities that fit the global logic of capitalism. Second, it represents a new type of moral and technical education that teaches young adults how to operate in multicultural settings and globalized sites. Finally, by virtue of having lived and worked in places the Western imagination believes to be destitute and dangerous, volunteer tourists are better positioned to live fully in the global moment. Together, these effects demonstrate that, far from being a selfless and history-less rescue act, volunteer tourism is in fact a strategy of power that extends economic rationality, particularly its emphasis on entrepreneurship and competition, to the realm of political subjectivity.

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I knew then that I wanted to write about tourism, not only because it was a type of mobility that captured the coordinates of my life better than the concept of migration, but also because I wanted to make sense of the nervous conditions (anxiety, obsession, anger, and guilt) I experienced during my travels. Writing was going to be my personal form of therapy. I remained convinced that travel contained a transformative potential, although that promise was a lot harder to realize than benevolent celebrations of voice and subalterity would have led us to believe. It irritated me to see fellow tourists praise the “cultural richness” of the places they visited and the “poor but happy” attitude of the local people. Their open-minded and magnanimous world views troubled me. Maybe I was jealous of the good (and easy) time they were having. But, more importantly, I was intrigued by the stifling emotional and political consensus that was coagulating around practices of tolerance, multiculturalism, and cultural relativism. There was something disturbing about these sentimental fantasies that I could not quite put my finger on, but which I wanted to explore in further detail.

That was also the time when I first learned about volunteer tourism – a steadily growing sub-sector of the tourism industry directed mostly at young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who wish to spend their holidays volunteering in developing countries (and not only). Popular volunteer activities include teaching English to local children, providing low-skill medical assistance, building public facilities, and working in conservation areas. Most organizations soliciting the help of volunteers do not ask participants to have previous work experience, training and expertise in the field, or local language skills. They do, however, expect a fee to cover program enrolment, accommodation in host families, and local transportation. The idea of travelling across the world to dedicate your own time, energy, and resources to helping distant communities is so seductive that, over the past decade, volunteer tourism has become the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry, consolidating an indisputable moral consensus around its practices. The formula reminded me of the interventionist practices of colonial rulers, on the one hand, and of the coercive labour tactics used in communist regimes, on the other. What is more, the tendency to collapse labour and leisure harked back to the frantic work ethic and the relentless drive for self-actualization prevalent in societies of the Global North. All in all, volunteer tourism felt like an oxymoronic practice with a sticky historicity and potentially problematic implications that intrigued me. I also realized that, because of volunteer tourism’s resonances with colonialism, cosmopolitanism, citizenship practices, modern narratives of work and leisure, neoliberal strategies of government, and many more, the topic would be much more open to politicization – something tourism research has always struggled with.

When I embarked on this research I had very little idea about where it would take me. I did not have a hypothesis to guide me through the messiness of fieldwork. And I did not do a rigorous review of the literature to compensate for this (the few sycophantic pieces written on the topic replicate the logics and ambitions of the hospitality industry). All I had were a series of questions and interests stemming from my voyage through books, conversations, and distant places. In particular, I was curious to make sense of the creative moral appeal of volunteer tourism; I wanted to find out what types of subjectivities and social relations

volunteer tourism calls into being. The project became ethnographic almost by default. What other research strategy is better at tracing intricate theoretical puzzles without the map provided by theory, hypothesis, literature review, or tape recorder, without fearing to lose (its scientific) face? Ethnography, with its method of “deep hanging out” (Madison 2005), self-reflexivity, and polyphony, would not only allow me to take part in volunteer trips (something I deemed crucial for the realization of this project), it would also force me to be honest about the improvisational dimension of turning the everyday experiences of field research into rigorous theory (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007).

For most of the first year of my research – the year I conducted field research – the project remained ungrounded. The limited funding and time I had at my disposal allowed me to enrol in two commercial voluntourism projects. As soon as I had sorted out through ethics clearance procedures, visa demands, travel safety reports, and methodological concerns, I left to Guatemala where, for three months, I planted trees, made compost, and built trails in what was eventually going to become a 1km² conservation park just outside the village of San Andres, Peten. The region south of the Mexican border was once the most sparsely populated in Guatemala, hosting a large part of the Central American rainforest. Today Peten is threatened by the same tragic fate the classic Mayan civilization centuries ago – deforestation and overpopulation. Our work was quite painful considering the heat, sweat, bugs, mosquitoes, and intense physical exercise. We slacked whenever we could. Some days, instead of working, we would go to the lake, the market, or to one of our local cafes. There were not many diversions in the secluded village we were stationed in, but most people loved it nonetheless. The rural landscape, the strong familial bonds, the unhurried pace of life, and the traditional cooking techniques made for the perfect backdrop to volunteers’ fantasies of romantic localism and idyllic community. Although many felt that their presence was superfluous, mainly because the locals were not considered “poor enough” to warrant our charitable intervention (this despite the fact that Guatemalans live on \$4/day), with few exceptions, volunteers fell in love with the friendliness of the people and the rich local culture. For many, this was a well-deserved break from their partly stressful and partly tedious lives at home.

Having volunteered in Guatemala with a small-scale affordable organization (\$350/month), for my second case study I wanted to join a program from the other end of the spectrum to check for demographic variances. I picked a teaching program in Ghana for \$1400/month organized by one of the world’s largest volunteer tourism providers operating 166 projects in 20 countries. To my surprise, the program in Ghana also attracted 18-25 year-olds but, compared to those in Guatemala, they were much more committed to their reasons for being there. The only way young adults could justify paying \$5,000 for a volunteering trip was to make a clear connection between their experiences in West Africa and their future career path. Some of them wanted to get into medical school and were gathering medical experience; others wanted to use volunteering in Ghana as a “gateway” experience for travels in other parts of Africa with NGOs and relief teams; yet others had just graduated from high school or university and were pursuing a life-long dream. As a group, we worked harder, took

longer weekend trips, and were more adamant about why we had taken out loans or raised funds to be there.

Volunteers in Ghana were less enamoured with the local people, place, or culture and more preoccupied with their own reactions to what they called “black Africa”, the lack of modern amenities, crowds, annoying but also hilarious cultural differences, and racial tensions. In fact, over the course of 2-3 months, volunteers travelled a predictable emotional path. At first, their reaction to locals was benevolent, but the longer they stayed in the country the more impatient and frustrated they became. Ghana is renowned for being “one of the friendliest countries in Africa” – as a “yevu” or “obruni” (white person) you are given the best seat on the bus, served free drinks, and allowed to cut in front of the line. Whether you are being treated either as a friend, a role model, or a photo opportunity – all eyes are on you. After a while, however, the attention becomes embarrassing and exasperating to the point where volunteers called it “reverse racism”. There were moments when we were exhausted and confused, and there were other moments when we felt like there was nothing exotic or exceptional about being in Africa. Neither of these moments, however, could have determined any of us to break our trip short. The prize for having volunteered in Africa – a prize for bravery and self-sacrifice – is only earned upon return. It comes from the volunteers’ family and friends, future admission officers and employers, from people who have never been to the continent.

From the very beginning of this project I knew that I did not want to treat volunteer tourism as a sub-section of the tourism industry or a self-enclosed example for the vicissitudes of transnational mobility, development, or imperialism. Static approaches such as these are responsible for most of the flatfooted sociological analyses that currently dominate the field of tourism studies (Franklin and Crang 2001; Hutnyk 2006, 2007). Instead, I wanted to explore volunteer tourism as a *site* where larger processes and contradictions acquired a concrete material and experiential substance. Only after I had returned from my research travels – a time during which I carried out some 30 interviews, kept a rigorous diary, and caught up on my political theory readings – did I begin thinking about what kinds of processes and tensions volunteer tourism might capture. Filtering empirical research into theory is not an easy task. It is a task that includes not only the interview transcripts I collected, but also the diary entries I wrote, books I read, conversations and email correspondences I had, conferences I attended, and the whole messy sum of auto-ethnographic experiences I accumulated during these trips and beyond.

The (re)search for theory projected me back to the beginning of this voyage. I realized that the reason I had (more or less spontaneously) chosen to study volunteer tourism, the reason why it had fascinated and troubled me in the first place, was because it showed how advanced technologies of governmentality contribute to the social reproduction of capitalism – a vast and intricate topic that has been preoccupying me since the beginning of my graduate studies. Although volunteers constantly complained about “not feeling needed”, volunteer tourism entails a positive content: it offers various outlets for enjoyment (e.g., exploration, adventure, education, experience, self-esteem, etc.) which help conceal the fact that the

subjectivities and social relations emerging from this practice remain complicit with the entrepreneurial ethos of flexible capitalism. The volunteers I met in Guatemala had trouble recognizing any material or physical needs that required their assistance. Instead of acting as compassionate or caring benefactors, they crafted a coalition of sympathy with people in positions of radical inequality, which would demonstrate their moral capacities and aesthetic sensibilities. The case study in Ghana could have revealed equally benevolent and capacious sentiments, except that race got in the way.¹ White volunteers were the constant subject of curiosity and admiration: the texture of their skin and hair was inspected, their table manners studied, their smoking habits scolded, even their pictures taken. Whiteness could no longer function as the absent center of humanity (Ahmed 2006). To cope with these tense encounters, volunteers had to focus on the technical benefits of their experience: receiving professional training, living without modern amenities, travelling on their own through Western Africa, being away from home, and so forth. All of these could later be translated into qualities that are “good for business”. The chapters to follow explore these case studies in greater detail, dwelling at length on their implications for international political life and the study of global politics.

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¹ The reason why race was never an issue, a reason for discord, in Guatemala – despite the country’s large *indio* population and the locals’ constant use of the word *gringo* to describe Western tourists – was because no one brought it up. Race (especially whiteness) is not a popular topic of debate unless someone rude or ignorant enough, “a foreigner” for instance (Honig 2003), brings it up.

The editors of that journal were generous enough to allow me to write a rejoinder to that article for their May 2010 issue. The current shape of this chapter has been strongly influenced by these publications. The second chapter of this manuscript is currently being revised for publication in *Theory & Event*. Earlier versions have been presented at the annual convention of the British International Studies Association (BISA) in 2009 and the International Studies Association (ISA) in 2010. Overall, the ideas presented in this study have been greatly improved thanks to a number of journal editors and anonymous reviewers as well as conference discussants and participants.

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The Contentment and Some of the Discontents of Volunteer Tourism

The history of volunteer tourism (short “voluntourism”) is older than the term, which only gained currency over the past couple of decades. “The idea of combining voluntary service with travel” (voluntourism.org) can be traced back to the itineraries of colonial missionaries and educators, religious pilgrims, and aid and development workers. More recently, international voluntary service has its origins in the British-based Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) established in 1958 and the US Peace Corps set up in 1961. The growing popularity of ecotourism, the rise of corporate social responsibility, and the ever-increasing number of school-based service learning programs and study abroad initiatives, since the early 1980s, further contributed to institutionalizing and professionalizing this practice into a “standard requirement for higher education and career development” (Simpson 2005:448). No longer is overseas charitable work limited to eccentric dropouts, skilled humanitarian personnel, and state-sanctioned development initiatives. Middle-class young adults² from Western countries eager “to undertake holidays that might involve [...] alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing 2001:1) now have a variety of outlets to choose from. They can join NGOs, charities, university-based programs, religious organizations, government agencies, or private companies for sojourns that last anywhere from two weeks to two years. Volunteering sites stretch from Buenos Aires to Beijing and include a variety of programs, from education, medical care, and nature conservation to construction work, journalism, and monument restoration.

Although volunteer tourism is not an unprecedented form of travel, never before was this practice so popular and vocal. For the first time, during the 1990s, overseas charity work was made to fit the all-inclusive package formula and offered for purchased by travel agencies, for-profit organizations, and educational institutions. With 1.6 million participants per annum, volunteer tourism is quickly becoming the fastest growing sector of the travel industry (Guttentag 2009:538). A Travelocity poll from 2007 predicted that the number of Americans planning to take volunteering trips abroad over the next couple of years would increase from 6% to 11%. The Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) is even more confident, prognosticating a 28% rise in demand as far back as 2006 (Dalton 2008). In Great Britain, where the gap year is a much more pervasive rite of passage, a University of London review from 2004 counted as many as 800 organizations offering volunteering services abroad (Ward 2007). Although not all volunteer tourism providers are for-profit, travel titans such as Travelocity, Cheaptickets, First Choice Holidays, GAP Adventures, and Travel Cuts have recently jumped on board, crowding out or joining forces with not-for-profit

² Throughout this study I refer to volunteers as young adults, not only because this is the demographic group (high school and university graduates aged 18-26) that I encountered during my travels, it is also the target market of volunteer tourism as a whole, which appeals to the same segment of the population as independent travel or gap year tourism.

organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity and United Way (Dalton 2008). Volunteer tourism in the developing world, which is the focus of this study, represents only a fraction of the gap year industry: it accounts for 10,000 participants a year and rising (Simpson 2005:448). Although there are no official statistics on volunteer tourism and the few that exist offer widely dissimilar figures and should, therefore, be viewed with the necessary caution, there is no doubt that the popularity of this phenomenon is on the rise (Guttentag 2009:538).

To match this commercial interest, there is also a growing scholarly literature grappling with the effects and implications of volunteer tourism. Leisure and hospitality studies like to stress the mutually beneficial aspects of this encounter, while critical approaches in the social sciences and humanities remain sceptical of the imperial power dynamics that volunteer tourism is thought to replicate. Is volunteer tourism a morally laudable endeavour able to counteract the global status quo of injustice and inequality or does it perpetuate old patterns of domination under a different disguise? While I am inclined to side with the latter, this study is neither a technical assessment of the effectiveness of volunteer tourism, nor a behavioural inquiry into the motivations of volunteers and their hosts. Rather than treating volunteer tourism as a sub-section of the tourism industry, I will be approaching this topic as an opportunity to explore the vicissitudes of subjectivity, biopolitics, and capital in neoliberal governmentality.³ In this context, I will be arguing that, notwithstanding its practical and ethical deficiencies, volunteer tourism remains a successful and seductive strategy of government in its ability to produce the types of subjects and social relations necessary to sustain the logic of network capitalism. In spreading various affective and entrepreneurial competencies, volunteer tourism helps young adults from the Global North assume a type of political subjectivity, which in its fidelity to neoliberal injunctions, embodies the new normative ideal.

Despite critical attacks on the moral aspirations of volunteer tourism, to which I remain sympathetic, and various volunteer disgruntlements, which I shared during my fieldwork, this study maintains that volunteer tourism works. The formula may not trigger social change, provide meaningful encounters with difference, or endow volunteers with much-needed professional experience, as the brochure discourse suggests and many volunteers continue to hope, but it continues to perform a vital function in (re)producing neoliberal subjects and forms of sociality in seemingly laudable and pleasurable ways. Using ethnographic material gathered on volunteering trips to Guatemala and Ghana, in the chapters to follow, I explore three interrelated functions of volunteer tourism. First, volunteer tourism

³ Throughout this text I will be using the term “governmentality” to refer to Foucault’s writings on power, subjectivity, and rule, which I shall have more to say about later on. I distinguish the term “governmentality” both from the more colloquial term “government”, which refers to the sum of state institutions and apparatuses, and from “global governance”, which describes a series of International Relations theories concerned with the “sources of rule and order in a context of globalization and the absence of a clear state-based international order” (Weidner 2009:380). This being said, language-wise, it is not always practical to use the Foucauldian neologism. So, throughout the text, I will be alternating between government and governmentality to refer exclusively to Foucault’s writings on the topic.

invokes a series of affective competencies that fit the demands of network capitalism by replacing the material and historical conditions of inequality with multicultural sensibilities easy to capitalize on (chapter four). Second, volunteer tourism represents a new type of moral and technical education for young adults who want to learn how to operate in multicultural settings and globalized sites to better consolidate their entrepreneurial future (chapter five). Finally, by virtue of having lived and worked in places the Western imagination assumes to be destitute and dangerous, volunteer tourists come to acquire a more advantageous form of political subjectivity. It allows participants to extend into and inhabit any space they like, while rendering adjacent forms of life subject to their intervention (chapter six). Together, these effects should demonstrate that, far from being a selfless and history-less act of rescue, volunteer tourism is in fact a strategy of power difficult to refuse, not only because of its subtlety so much as for its pleasurable and empowering stimulus.

To better understand the assumptions and contributions of this project it is important to begin by surveying the contending views on volunteer tourism, as they resurface in leisure and hospitality studies as well as in critical contributions from sociology, human geography, gender studies, and political science. This review will then allow me explore the methodological and theoretical contributions this project brings to the study of International Relations.

Volunteer Tourism in Leisure and Hospitality Studies

Tourism and hospitality studies are almost unanimous in their celebration of overseas volunteering. Volunteer tourism, they argue, is a morally laudable engagement between guests and hosts in that it breaks with the vacuity of traditional tourist practices to foster cultural exchange, social transformation, and personal development (Wearing 2001, 2002; McGehee and Santos 2005; Wearing et al. 2008; *see* Guttentag 2009:537). As Wearing and Neil put it, “[l]iving in and learning about other people and cultures, in an environment of mutual benefit and cooperation, a person is able to engage in a transformation and development of the self” (2001:242). If tourism research, especially in anthropology and sociology, has made a habit of critiquing tourists for lacking basic cultural and ecological sensibility and for spending most of their time abroad secluded in ethnocentric enclaves (Crick 1989), the rise of responsible travel has rendered these comments redundant. In making the eradication of global material inequality and ecological destruction its *raison d’être*, volunteer tourism offers a remedy to the ethico-political emptiness of tourism at the same time that it allows leisure and hospitality scholars to maintain their ties to the travel industry.

Mass tourism has always been better at mirroring the afflictions of modern Western subjectivity, i.e., the sense of historical decline, personal fragmentation, moral disintegration, loss of personal freedom, than at alleviating them (Frow 1997:80). In his seminal article, Dean MacCannell (1973) argues that the ambition of modern mass tourism is to allow people to gain access to an unedited version of local everyday life – the “backstage.” Tourists

experience great disappointment when they realize that what is on view is in fact a *mise-en-scène* of local reality and that authenticity is virtually inaccessible to outsiders. This represents both a semiotic and a programmatic difficulty for tourism in that it betrays the larger discontents of modernity as well as the shrewdness of local tourism providers. In distancing itself from manufactured tourist experiences to enter the realm of “authentic” (i.e., intimate and reflexive) cultural encounters, volunteer tourism can correct these difficulties. It grants access to what mass tourism always aspired to but never achieved: an unedited version of the other people’s version of the everyday, a lost Eden the West has lost in the process of modernization (MacCannell 1973; Cohen 1979; Badone 2004; Bruner 2005). In volunteer tourism, the disease, poverty, and pollution afflicting the Global South are not hidden from sight. On the contrary, these “disturbing” realities are what justify the cost of volunteering trips, which can be two or three times the value of classic relax-and-escape packages (Ward 2007). Second, volunteer tourism promises a series of personal psychological rewards. Those who “utiliz[e] discretionary time and income to travel out of their sphere of regular activity to help others in need” (McGehee and Santos 2005:760) are promised to rediscover a sense of virtue and purpose. Because overseas volunteering is a small-scale, low-impact form of travel that places community development above profit making (Wearing 2001), Western youth are given the opportunity to overcome their proverbial alienation and apathy by “making a difference” in the lives of local people. All in all, putting *travail* back into travel (Lisle 2008) returns volunteer tourism to the 19th century ideal of the Grand Tour (Wearing 2002:243)⁴ and silences the accusations that have turned mass tourism into a derogatory word (Crick 1989:307).

Empirical evidence helps consolidate these exuberant conclusions. There are now a growing number of case studies detailing the “mutually beneficial” success stories of volunteer tourism in Australia (Higgins-Desbiolles), Thailand (Broad 2003), Indonesia (Galley and Clifton 2004), South Africa (Stoddart and Rogerson 2004), Costa Rica (Campbell and Smith 2006), and Latin America (Söderman and Snead 2008). Others take a more general, descriptive approach to reach similar celebratory assessments (McGehee 2002; McGehee and Norman 2002; McGehee and Santos 2005; Wearing 2001, 2002; Wearing and Neil 2001; Wearing et al. 2008). Most of this research, though, takes a behaviourist approach that privileges volunteers’ motivations, attitudes, and experiences. Although this orientation reflects a larger tendency in tourism research to include individual “voices”, it is problematic when all voices are treated equal with no distinction being made based on origin, power

⁴ The Grand Tour was an exclusive 19th century form of travel reserved for the gentile. Especially young men from upper class families embarked on these long exploratory trips after or as part of their studies. The purpose of the Grand Tour was one of education, exploration, and sensibilization to the manifold realities of a much more thinly interconnected world. It was also a way of gaining social status and demonstrating a certain sense of maturity and masculinity (Wearing 2002:243). While modern-day successors of the Grand Tour traveller exist (e.g. backpackers, nomad, pilgrims, drifters, dropouts) (Crick 1989:308), modern mass tourism has democratized and, at the same time, destroyed the mysterious lure of the Golden Age of travel.

relations, and social position (Bayart 2008:199). Just because volunteers are enthusiastic about and satisfied with the holiday of their choice does not mean that the practice as a whole is unproblematic or progressive (Guttentag 2009:540). We also need to interrogate the regime of unequally distributed rights and privileges that allows some to take a cheap holiday in other people's lives. Occasionally tourism research will engage these questions, but inevitably its commitment lies with fine-tuning the industry by making volunteering programs more accountable and sustainable; having longer and better executed trips; including local desires and needs; increasing the transparency of payment schemes; and improving industry credibility (Guttentag 2009; CBC Radio 2009). It rarely questions the ethico-political rationalities that make overseas volunteering necessary and valuable in the first place.

Rather than probing into the discursive or historical conditions of volunteer tourism, leisure and hospitality studies prefer to treat the subject as a purely technical process – a set of transactions between hosts and guests to be assessed in terms of returns, customer satisfaction, best business practices, and regulatory codes of conduct (Hutnyk 2004). The field has been having trouble keeping the unfortunate marriage between the academic study of tourism and marketing research at bay (Allon et al. 2008:75). The best example for this is the tendency in tourism studies to cut up fluid tourist trajectories into static and discreet typologies that correspond to niches and sub-niches of the industry, e.g., all-inclusive tourism, sex tourism, ecotourism, heritage tourism, responsible tourism, volunteer tourism, and so forth. The so-called “trinketization of tourism” is part of a larger move to dissect “all life to mere commodities”, which John Hutnyk (2007) considers to account be the reason for the theoretical poverty of tourism studies. Furthermore, the descriptive and business-friendly tone of this literature has produced “a tradition of flat-footed sociology and psychology”, which is more concerned with providing empirical support and technical advice to the travel industry, than “indulging” in critical theory (Franklin and Crang 2001:6). Not surprisingly, then, much of the academic discussion of volunteer tourism “ignore[s] politics, commodification, inequality and exploitation at the very moment that these matters are the very basis of the possibility of ‘third-world’ tourism in the first place” (Hutnyk 2006).

One criticism that leisure and hospitality research takes most seriously is the “hypocrisy charge.” What if volunteers are not entirely selfless souls, but participated only for personal and professional gain? Media attacks on volunteer tourism only reinforce these fears. For instance, a *Maclean's* article aptly entitled “Helping the World. And Me: Is Volunteer Tourism about Saving the World or Enhancing a Résumé?” notes that “what inspires idealistic twenty-something-year-olds to lend a [helping] hand often has less to do with philanthropy and more to do with ‘personal gain’”, be it in the form of course credit or a contribution to one's résumé (Mendleson 2008). An on-going Dalhousie University study on the implications of voluntourism observes that the most-cited reasons interviewees give for participating in volunteering trips are skills acquisition and career development (ibid.). Responses to this charge are divided. Some choose to dismiss it altogether seeing egoism as a universal trait of human nature: “I think most people would be lying if they didn't say there

was some selfishness in why they were going [to volunteer]” (Wearing 2001:70). Others argue that self-interest, although not the best of human traits, can be excused as long as voluntourism continues to attract a growing number of followers and effect positive social change (Söderman and Snead 2008). Both responses view hypocrisy as the wilful distortion of an otherwise authentic ontological presence. What is at fault here is not the structural or discursive organization of volunteer tourism, but a few bad apples that have co-opted volunteering for their own benefit. The “hypocrisy charge” does not dispute the moral desirability of volunteer tourism. It only urges us to better distinguish between those who sign up for selfish reasons (e.g. jump on a popular bandwagon, enhance résumé, gain social status at home) from those who enrol for noble ones (e.g., get to know another culture, learn another language, provide much-needed help, develop new skills, go on an alternative kind of holidays, or fulfill a dream) by fine-tuning the industry’s recruitment and supervisory mechanisms (ibid. 120).

The biggest problem with volunteer tourism is that, draped in noble aspirations and enthusiastic hopes, it makes anyone who tries to critique it look callous and bad-tempered. As someone once said to me after I had explained the subject of my dissertation: “your thesis is mean.” Due to the magnitude of the phenomenon and its mostly congratulatory coverage in popular and scholarly publications, volunteer tourism has garnered an unfettered moral consensus around its rationale, strategies, and ambitions. Even sceptics are confident that, with enough monitoring and transparency, the industry is bound to fulfil its progressive promise. Very few are those who realize that the very structures that allow some people to extend their benevolence across borders is what renders other people vulnerable to global tactics of regulation and intervention. Critical approaches to volunteer tourism have seized upon this very double-bind.

Critical Approaches to Volunteer Tourism

Using post-structuralist, postcolonial, and critical feminist approaches, a growing number of studies offer excellent discussions of the limitations and complications of exporting benevolence to the Global South. Kate Simpson (2004, 2005), who has done the most thorough ethnographic work on the subject, demonstrates that instead of allowing an “authentic cultural exchange”, volunteer tourism actually confirms the stereotypes and deepens the dichotomies between “us” and “them.” Despite the language of “making a difference” and “broadening horizons”, it is not development nor enlightenment that volunteer tourism is equipped to promote, but the birth of a “professional, self-governing, careerist persona” (2005:447). Nancy Cook’s (2005, 2007, 2008) and Barbara Heron’s (2007) research on aid workers in developing areas also applies. Following in the footsteps of postcolonial feminists and critical race scholars, like Anne McClintock (1995), Ann Stoler (1995, 1997, 2002), Inderpal Grewal (1997), Ann Kaplan (1997), and Indira Ghose (1998), they argue that altruistic forms of travel help reinforce colonial dichotomies between authoritative and autonomous white bourgeois subjects, on the one hand, and their dull-

witted, passive, and oppressed objects of compassion, on the other. Again, the purpose of transnational philanthropy is not to spread development and cross-cultural understanding, but to endow Western subjects with the necessary “cultural competencies” – the tastes, values, sensibilities, and experiences – to perform a “white”, “bourgeois”, and “enlightened” type of subjectivity (Heron 2007:29). John Hutnyk, in his study of charity workers in Calcutta, takes this point even further. Volunteer tourism, he argues, is “the soft side of an otherwise brutal system of exploitation” in that it maintains the “Third World” as the disempowered recipient of our discretionary aid and benevolence (1996:ix). All of these contributions serve to politicize the otherwise “stale, tired, repetitive, and lifeless” study of tourism (Franklin and Crang 2001:5) by demonstrating how areas, which we are used to think of as private or leisurely, are in fact subject to strict governmental intervention.

A more vocal example is Ivan Illich. In an unapologetic speech delivered to a room full of soon-to-be volunteers in Mexico, Illich uses the “hypocrisy charge” as a rhetorical device to show that if volunteer tourism is indeed a deceitful practice, it is because it believes that selfless volunteers can be separated from self-serving ones. This is impossible, he argues, because the “good” volunteer is the truly duplicitous ones. The veritable hypocrite is not the careerist volunteer, but the one who knows that the structures that enable the global passion for compassion are emotionally and libidinally complicit with power, yet chooses to ignore this aporia. If we pull down the hypocrisy mask, we do not find pure and honest volunteers waiting to redress the wrongs of this world, but senile ones who prefer to ignore the forms of inequality that give them the “right [...] to impose [their] benevolence on [the developing world]” (1968:4). An *honest* evaluation of volunteer programs – something which all volunteering organizations should periodically engage in – would show the political amnesia this form of travel is predicated on. They would also reveal the utterly unredeemable nature of this undertaking.

In international studies a serious discussion of tourism has been long overdue (Enloe 2000). Just like anthropology, sociology, and geography, International Relations (IR) “can barely disguise [its] contempt” for tourism (Crick 1989:308). This has a lot to do both with the methodological and the thematic requirements of tourism research. Researchers fear that going into the field and spending extended time in the proximity of tourists will cloud their power of judgement and jeopardize their professional credibility. As Malcolm Crick explains, tourism is a “cracked mirror in which we can see something of the social system which produces [fieldworkers] as well as tourists” (Crick 1985:78). If academic work is governed by a bourgeois value system that maintains a strict separation between work and leisure, researchers who assume the persona of tourist risk violating this code and compromising their claims to disciplinary authority and public funding. This is particularly true for people doing ethnography. Ethnographers have long considered themselves in competition with tourists over the authenticity and credibility of the reports they bring back from foreign lands (Badone 2004:186). To demonstrate their professionalism fieldworkers must act like heroic figures in search for ultimate knowledge, not slackers indulging in journeys of self-discovery and questionable public conduct. These methodological concerns, which are featured

prominently in all social science disciplines, are further aggravated in the case of International Relations – a discipline that is so preoccupied with questions of inter-state security and so deeply entrenched in the legacy of rational positivism that ethnographic research on the quotidian aspects of life is bound to arouse suspicion.

These obstacles notwithstanding, the past decade has witnessed a series of IR books on the postcolonial politics of travel writing (Lisle 2006) and the relationship between tourism and international security (Hazbun 2008), global political economy (Chin 2008), national identity, and global development (Clancy 2001, 2009). One contribution that stands out is Debbie Lisle's Foucauldian analysis of responsible travel (2008). What distinguishes responsible tourism from other forms of travel, she argues, is its ability to conceal its complicity with power. By combining discourses of pleasure and emancipation with regimes of discipline and surveillance, responsible tourism makes subjects "aware of what [they] want and unaware of what is being done to [them]" (Foucault 2007:105). The mechanisms that "bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness and, at the same time, to an external power" (Agamben 1998:5) are hidden in responsible tourism's promise of autonomy and emancipation. Like Foucault, Lisle warns us that every discourse of self-determination harbours new and unexpected forms of regulation. But she also pushes this lesson a step further to show that the more self-esteem and –realization certain cultural practices promise, the more vigilant we need to be of their governmental effects.

If we apply these insights to the example of volunteer tourism, it becomes clear that what should trouble us most about this practice is the force and persuasiveness with which it has come to define what it means to be good. In offering to solve all of the problems of mass tourism, overseas volunteering has come to occupy a (suspiciously) firm moral grounding that *demand*s applause. Equally troubling is its ability to ascribe value (i.e., human and social capital) to anyone engaging in this practice. Because volunteer tourism is thought to be a spontaneous act of kindness in response to other people's needs and suffering, stories about building houses in Latin America or distributing medical supplies in Africa are bound to make volunteers look like experienced, sensible, and virtuous figures. Our task here is two-fold. First, we must problematize the ontological naturalness and moral aura of this practice. Then, we must understand how exactly private life and leisure time are made into objects of rule. Taken together, these parallel concerns can get to the heart of translational social relations and identities.

The Self as Enterprise

In this study, I do not attempt to unveil the hidden motives or underlying nature of individual volunteers. The question of whether volunteers are hypocritical or selfless figures lies in the territory of social psychology and does not concern me. Whether volunteers believe in the normative desirability of their actions (which I believe most of them do) or whether they participate solely to boost their résumés does not do anything to change the fact that this is a practice, which thanks to the normative value it carries, promises participants

future material and cultural privileges (e.g. competence, professional advancement, credibility, mobility, and civility). A more interesting avenue would be to explore the complex governmental rationalities and socio-economic conditions responsible for valorizing overseas volunteering and volunteers in the first place. How do individuals come to understand and conduct themselves as neoliberal subjects during the course of a volunteering trip? What is it about the present moment that requires individuals, especially young adults, “to bring [themselves] to labour in an enterprising fashion” (Kiersey 2009:381)? And why does this ethos of entrepreneurship rely on economic rationalizations as much as on the moral dictums of associational life? These are the questions this study seeks to respond to.

Unlike leisure and hospitality studies, which analyze volunteer tourism in accordance with the marketing goals of the tourism industry, and different from critical approaches, that view alternative tourism as a continuation of colonial forms of knowledge and power, this study reads volunteer tourism as an *innovative* strategy of government that speaks to synchronous mutations in neoliberal rationality and the spirit of capitalism. In the chapters to follow, I argue that the ambition of neoliberal governmentality is to reproduce the logic of capital through biopolitical tactics that subsume all aspects of social life to calculations of power and production. Volunteer tourism is one such tactic. Its biopolitical dimension is evident both in its ability to give rise to new subjects and social relations and in its mission to intervene, inspect, and improve the lives of others. Volunteer tourism is certainly not the only project of this kind. New forms of labour, consumption, community, health, architecture, and aesthetics serve a similar task. Volunteer tourism is, however, a clear example of how even the most seemingly innocuous activities play an indispensable role in bringing about the types of conduct, communication, and sociality that are necessary for sustaining the ethos of network capitalism.

Most of the theoretical inspiration for this work comes from Michel Foucault’s last lecture series at the *Collège de France*, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), where Foucault argues that neoliberal government is neither the ideology of neo-conservative policy-makers, nor a historical period marked by the withdrawal of state power in times of economic globalization. Rather, it is a set of power relations that extends the logic of market relations to all things social, from macroeconomic policies, to public policy, education, labour, recreation, and personal conduct. The market becomes both the power of formalizing state and society and the standard of truth against which these should be measured. The first order of business in neoliberalism, then, is to intervene in the social sphere to make sure that there are appropriate forms of life, action, and sociality in place for a flexible market economy to operate smoothly. This objective does not necessarily require active planning and premeditation on behalf of state agencies and representatives. Something more complicated is at work here. The ideas/ideals of neoliberalism originate in, make up, and go beyond the institutional loci of government across a variety of social spaces, from households to communities, from local to transnational spaces, from exceptional to mundane instances. There is a common confusion at play here. Governmentality, for Foucault, does not represent the sum of legislative and juridical apparatuses in a political unit. At its very core, it is a

“model of social control” that does not rely upon the direct intervention of the state and its agencies of power, but on the ability of individuals to freely govern themselves in light of certain economically viable principles and axioms (McNay 2009:57).

What this suggests is that political subjectivity, in other words, our most intimate and private sphere does not lie “outside” the purview of power, but is intensely governed (Rose 1991:1). This is what Agamben, following Foucault, defined as biopower: “The growing inclusion of man’s natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power” (1998:119). This definition is later modified, in Hardt and Negri’s (2004) post-Marxist reading of the term, where biopolitics is described as a mode of organization that subsumes all social life, including areas formerly external or ornamental to capitalism, to the logic of production. This Marxian interpretation of Foucault takes seriously “the claim that biopolitics is not just about controlling the births and deaths of a population but also about making life live[. W]e need to think not just about the beginnings and endings of life, but also about how the lives that we do have are sustained, nourished and rejuvenated” (Lisle 2010). Biopolitics is present not only in exceptions to the law or violations of our human rights. It also harbours a distinctly normative ambition. On the one hand, biopolitics seeks to optimize the content of our lives by producing a healthy, productive, and fulfilled workforce. On the other, it tries to align capitalism with certain normative principles borrowed from multiculturalism and identity politics, countercultural movements, and associational life (e.g., community, communication, cooperation, charity, compassion, dignity, creativity, and so forth). In effect, biopolitics becomes the social goal capitalism was accused of never having (Jameson 2000:62).

Nowhere is the biopolitical ambition of neoliberal government better illustrated than in the strategies used to encourage subjects to lend their lives an entrepreneurial shape. The so-called *homo oeconomicus* model of action, described by Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2009), encourages individuals to make choices in terms of cost-benefit calculations, assume responsibility for their actions, and treat all those around them as potential competitors in the struggle for human capital (McNay 2009:63). Rationality is a necessary but not exclusive condition to meet these challenges. The rational, rugged, and ruthless entrepreneur championed in classical liberalism is at odds with the normative ambitions of biopolitics. Modernist forms of labour, recreation, communication, aesthetics, and consumption have been discredited for their increasingly anomic and alienating consequences. Hence, it is no longer appropriate for neoliberal individuals to navigate their social surroundings using only instrumental action to the exclusion of all other social and moral considerations. The new entrepreneur is not asked to dispense with economic rationality, only to complement it with competencies which were once ornamental and external to capitalism. Instead of the rational, calculated, and cold-blooded *American Psycho*, the model subject of capitalism is a rather schizophrenic figure, such as the compassionate entrepreneur, the workaholic with a social conscience, the charitable CEO, the creative worker, the frugal consumer, and last but not least the volunteer tourist.

In a sense, this shift in subjectivization strategies can be reason for celebration: it invites more meaningful, rewarding, and humane forms of (inter)action. But it can also be

reason for concern: it introduces new selection criteria for political membership and economic security, criteria which in many ways are more stringent and more ambiguous than ever before. A model of subject formation that takes its inspiration from the principles of economic competition and entrepreneurship suggests that political subjectivity is a scarce and unequally distributed good. Foucault failed to mention that governmentality is never about including or subjecting everyone – it is simply a standard of measurement to assess everyone's ability to live up to governmental injunctions. Only those who live up to historically sanctioned programs, strategies, and technologies of government will come to enjoy full political and economic rights. "The rest of the world" (Pratt 1992) is made up of various degrees of exclusion and marginalization in the form of day labourers, guest-workers, colonial subjects, "illegal" migrants, and many more. In dedicating their time and money to helping the global poor, volunteers display precisely the types of qualities one needs to assume a privileged subjectivity: an ability to operate in distant and diverse settings, a desire for social change, and an interest in experimenting with one's self and the world around it. Meanwhile, the recipients of their charity are excluded from this exchange. The paradox of volunteer tourism is that, although most of it takes place in the Global South, its results and benefits are calculated in terms of the norms and principles governing advanced neoliberal societies. It is "at home" that the mobility, creativity, and emotionality volunteers display overseas are turned into desirable competencies for an economy where credentials and expertise are no longer enough to secure employment and a political regime where territorial belonging is no longer a sufficient condition for full membership.

Method

Using the example of volunteer tourism, this study seeks to deliver an anthropology of the present or a biopsy of neoliberal rationalities of government. To this end, I will be using a dialogical method that goes back and forth between the narrative testimonies and experiences of volunteers and a critical analysis of the governmental strategies involved in their subjectivization. The minute description of everyday practices and lived experience is purely descriptive unless it takes into account the regulatory effects of political institutions, economic regimes, and programs of governmentality. Similarly, an analytics of governmentality remains sterile and abstract without an element of human agency (Ong 1999:3-4). Hence, on the one hand, I use ethnography to get at the unwieldy and dynamic strategies involved in producing privileged subjectivities, while, on the other hand, I employ Foucault's archaeological method to capture the epistemic structures that legitimate that privilege.

For nearly six months I lived the double persona of researcher and volunteer tourist. I googled countless volunteer tourism organizations; wrote information letters and brochures for future participants; read *Lonely Planet* guides in preparation for my trips; made numerous visits to outdoor stores and bought exorbitant equipment I would never have any use for; flew across continents to protect the rainforest in Guatemala and teach primary school in Ghana;

interviewed dozens of volunteers; and spent long hours lounging with friends in exotic settings, talking about our experiences and, implicitly, my research. Writing up these events in an integrated analytical report proved to be a particularly difficult task, which could have only been solved ethnographically.

I use ethnography less as a method for gathering information through interviews and participant observation (although this is clearly part of the process), than a textual strategy of building theory from the disparate events, statements, experiences, dilemmas, and surprises I encountered on my research travels and at home, at my desk, in libraries, and during seminars (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). During my travels to Ghana and Guatemala many of the theoretical assumptions I built at home fell apart. My ethnographic voyage was replete with moments of euphoria and inspiration as well as anxiety, idleness, and confusion. Often I asked myself: Will I ever be able to piece “theory” and “practice” together? Will this research make sense to my dissertation committee, editorial board, and hiring committee? Ethnography appeases the epistemic anxieties that emerge when such an overlap seems impossible. It shows us that research is not about testing hypotheses in the field, but about helping us piece together seemingly incongruent registers gathered from places and books, planned interviews and chance encounters, diary entrances and Facebook messages. Out of the constant to-and-fro between part and whole, experience and text, fieldwork and theory (Cerwonka 2007:15, 19), ethnography is about improvising a theoretical translation of these disparate events. Sometimes the process of knowledge production occurs consciously; other times concepts and links emerge spontaneously, from the most unexpected of places (ibid. 37). Ultimately, ethnography is less a method or a genre so much as a commitment to being truthful about the windy road knowledge travels before it reaches the reader’s eye. This is why nothing can be left out of ethnography without, automatically, taking something away from theory.

Gathering spoken and performative repertoires is not necessarily a novel strategy in international studies research. Feminist, postcolonial, and Marxist writers have long ago acknowledged the scholarly merits of exploring the domestic, the personal, and the everyday. My research differs from these studies “from below” in that it does not rely exclusively on ethnographic material gathered in the field. Interviews and verbal testimonies cannot guarantee access to some unaltered version of reality. The idea that ethnography is the “idiom in which [reality] prefers to be described’ (Geertz 1988:140) has helped rationalize the existence of cultural anthropology and, later on, encouraged adjacent disciplines to embrace ethnography in an effort to solve their epistemological *crises de conscience* (Vrasti 2008). From the 80s onwards, however, it has been made increasingly clear that ethnography cannot create a perfect correspondence between reality and its textual representation (see Clifford 1988, 1986a, 1986b; Fabian 1983, 1991; Rosaldo 1986, 1993; Behar 1996). While this has helped legitimate anthropology’s commitment to radical perspectivism, it has also crippled ethnography’s reputation, which can no longer be used as a self-sufficient mode of analysis. Ethnography can serve as a useful roadmap to field research or a transgressive writing technique. More importantly, it can offer a critique of the pedantic, sterile, and dehumanized

ways in which knowledge is being produced and communicated within the academy (Foley and Valenzuela 2005). But it cannot single-handedly make critical sense of reality because it lacks any political commitment from which to do so. Without a theoretical orientation, ethnography is limited to narration. As Jean-Francois Bayart puts it, “the question of subjectivation is too serious to be left up to the subjects” (2008:199). To grasp the processes through which volunteers become mobile and desirable subjects, I look beyond their verbal utterances and daily actions to Foucault’s archaeological method.

Foucauldian archaeology – also known as “analytics of government” (Rose 1999:15-20; Dean 1999:20-7) – gives us the possibility to analyze the discursive repertoires of volunteer tourists in a way that goes beyond the psychological and sociological manifestations of tourism pursued in leisure studies as well as beyond the “ascribed/described/pronounced subjectivities” highlighted in post-structural and postcolonial analyses (Hutnyk 2007). Archaeology seeks to uncover the underlying rules and forces that enable certain effects and outlaw others, that make certain utterances and performances coagulate into a regime of truth and banish others as instances of illegality and abnormality. Different from historical methods, archaeology does not dig up chronological events and personalities to explain how the past became the present. It does not excavate something buried, nor does it intend to explain a functionally coherent present (Foucault 1991a:56). Instead, it interrogates the rationalities through which the present became materially and historically possible in the first place (Gordon 1980:242). It “examines the conditions under which regimes of practices come into being, are maintained and are transformed” (Dean 1999:21). In this study I will be combining ethnography with an analytics of government to explore how certain technologies of governmentality are being materialized and stabilized into a structural, institutional, or corporeal form (Lemke 2007). Rather than viewing volunteer tourism as either a hypocritical or benevolent practice, I investigate the origins of its urgency, the logic of its constitutive elements, its connection to other itinerant sites and identities, and the tensions that could transform it. By complementing ethnography with an analytics of governmentality I privilege a “not so fashionable materialist analysis” of the power relations that make volunteer tourism a necessary and commendable enterprise (Hutnyk 2007).

Although I travelled to destinations in the Global South to gather information for this study, this remains an ethnography of “home.” The focus remains on the processes involved in extending modernity on a global scale against the backdrop of non-modern or so-called authentic subjects and spaces. As I try to construct an anthropological portrait of privileged subjectivity, I place the problem of “the subaltern” on the backburner. Various considerations substantiate this choice. Both Ghana and Guatemala have a long history of white people coming through to inspect, study, or take pictures of them. Arriving in these communities to “help” locals protect their natural resources, bandage wounds, and educate their children was an imposition that I no longer cared to extend through personal interviews. Moreover, including the testimonies of the *voluntoured* in this study, most of which were dismissive of volunteer intensions and efforts, could have jeopardized their chances to host volunteers in

the future. Logistical obstacles, such as language barriers and difficult rapport, add to this decision. This being said, it is not as if subaltern figures were entirely absent from this text. They are indirectly represented in volunteers' justifications for travelling overseas, their humanitarian ambitions, local descriptions, and cultural encounters. People living on the fringes of modernity have been at the center of critical IR scholarship. The same cannot be said of members of the liberal bourgeoisie, which continue to make up the absent center of our political ontology. It is crucial for international studies to consider the production and articulation of privileged subjects, not only to advance the study of international political life, but also to prevent the discipline from becoming the training ground for white, affluent, and deterritorialized subjectivities.

Contribution

Volunteer tourism is a relevant topic of inquiry for international relations not necessarily because it is a transnational phenomenon with a range of implications for transnational mobility, economic development, policy-making structures, global security, or the environment. More importantly, global tourism provides us with a glimpse of the live encounters that give shape to global identities and relations. As opposed to the study of institutions, policies, and international events, tourism allows us to grasp global politics *in movement*. Certainly, there are various itinerant practices that speak to the transnational focus of the discipline, such as migrant and refugee flows, diasporas and ex-pats, diplomats and footloose investors, military personnel and aid workers. But, while these topics have enjoyed growing scholarly interest, tourism has been relatively neglected for its seemingly apolitical guise. Yet far from being removed from politics, this betrays IR's tendency to define the "international" in opposition to the domestic, personal, and everyday aspects of social life (Davies 2010). Volunteer tourism has the distinct advantage of making the international political dimension of this otherwise leisurely activity visible in a way that is less apparent in other touristic practices. It allows us to explore the larger legitimating structures that give some people the right to find escape in other people's version of everyday life, be it for leisurely or humanitarian reasons (Hutnyk 2006), at the same time that it demonstrates the role of these structures in producing the entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism.

This is not to say that the contribution of this study consists only in filling a gap in the repertoire of international studies. This project should not consolidate the already solid ontological presence of this discipline. To argue that IR is an incomplete area of study, to which new methods, topics of inquiry, and theoretical approaches must be imported from "the outside" can only help validate the idea that international relations is a territorially fixed island of theory and practice, separate from philosophy, domestic politics, economics, societal and cultural processes – a tendency vehemently critiqued by RBJ Walker (1993) and Beier and Arnold (2005). Although this project is written from the perspective of International Relations, it combines methods and literatures from a variety of scholarly fields, including political science, anthropology, sociology, political theory, and tourism studies, in

an attempt to provide a biopsy of flexible subjectivity. This is a question that concerns all of the humanities and social sciences. But in International Relations, in particular, a study of how white middle class identities are formed, articulated, and circulated represents a critique of the discipline's epistemic limits.

IR cannot be accused of having been blind to privilege. In its heyday, the discipline was so deeply involved with the "kitchens of power" (Hoffman 1977:49, 58) that it devoted most of its attention to studying the activities of heads of state, defence intellectuals, bureaucrats, and diplomats. Individuals rarely appeared on the international stage, leaving sovereign states to assume political agency, but when they did, it was mostly these highly placed figures (Jabri 1998:954). It was only in the late 1980s, with the publication of a special issue of *International Studies Quarterly* (1990) on "Speaking the Language of Exile" that a dissident group of the IR scholars (e.g., Richard Ashley, David Campbell, Jim George, RBJ Walker, and Spike Peterson) started to make itself known. Foucault, specifically his theories about power, knowledge, and history, was quickly mobilized to denaturalize the disciplinarity of the field, specifically its overwhelming focus on inter-state problems of security and stability at the expense of questions of domination, inequality, and symbolic violence. Amidst the rise of social constructivist epistemologies in the 1980s and 90s IR began to turn its attention to the ways in which global power happens in the histories, narratives, and experiences of people "on the ground." Suddenly, there was a newborn fascination with the lives and voices of marginal subjectivities (e.g., women, minorities, native peoples, colonial subjects, migrants, and refugees). Within half a century, the disciplinary onus shifted from privilege to persecution.

It is not my intent to belittle these emancipatory efforts. In a sense, my project continues the work laid out in these contributions. I do want to point out, however, that dissident IR has failed to take full advantage of the epistemic possibilities it has itself opened up. There is no question about it: The discipline's relatively recent fascination with exclusions and exceptions has done a lot to repopulate global politics with new subjects and forms of agency. Without these interventions, the voices of women, colonial subjects, racial and sexualized bodies would have never been heard. But there are inherent limitations to this approach. While I can by no means offer a comprehensive review of a literature that stretches some 30 years back, it seems to me that critical IR is enthralled with exceptional and violent manifestations of power (e.g., war, dispossession, incarceration, detention, etc.). In critical security studies, for instance, global biopower manifests itself mostly when democratic politics and citizen protections are suspended. Similarly, feminist and postcolonial approaches prefer to view power as a pejorative concept with inherently domineering consequences. In both cases, there endures a problematic dichotomy between power and people, where the former is a corrupt and ignoble thing while the latter is a repository of autonomy, agency, and authenticity. Neither is there enough of a distinction being made between power and violence, nor are the productive and empowering effects of power fully considered. Violence, Foucault explains, is a force that destroys certain expendable bodies and objects, whereas power is a relation that organizes social life (e.g., communities,

identities, education, housing, finance, labour, architecture, and lifestyle choices) to help individuals articulate their identity and navigate their social landscape (Deleuze 1998[1988]). Power has a positive content: at its very basis it tries to optimize the health, prosperity, and general well-being of the population. In International Relations, however, this rather “normative” ambition of power has been neglected due to the discipline’s ontological preference for that which happens “outside” the state and its populace. The ways in which we organize our economies, cities, households, and private lives has been usually left up to sociologists and anthropologists. This, I argue, is a missed opportunity. The world has become such an interconnected place that investigating the global dimension of everyday life has become necessary. Meanwhile, International Relations has acquired the necessary space and tools for such an examination to become possible.

This project, then, remains committed to the task of repopulating IR with the voices, experiences, and practices of real people – but it does so by focusing on the formation of white middle-class subjectivity. While IR has a long history of studying privilege concentrated in state agencies and institutions, I am interested in how “average” individuals acquire privilege by binding their conduct to certain regulatory regimes. Here, subjectivity can no longer be treated as an innocent realm “outside” of power, and agency cannot be limited to acts of struggle and resistant. The case of volunteer tourism demonstrates that rather than being a limit to power, individual autonomy and agency can also “lie at the heart of [...] disciplinary control” (McNay 2009:62). Perhaps studies that focused on subaltern subjects could neglect these effects, but a study of white privilege cannot. Unless the invisible center of our political ontology is laid bare its violence will continue to haunt us in ways we will not know how to critique or undo.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two discusses the theoretical themes central to this project. It argues that neoliberalism is a mode of social organization that, while using market principles to optimize the productivity, longevity, and security of a population, it also makes the market into the standard of truth against which all institutions, activities, and bodies are to be assessed. Entrepreneurial forms are to be extended across the entire social field, from state agencies all the way to the deepest recesses of individuality. Perhaps the most disconcerting effect of this arrangement is that it makes political subjectivity into a hierarchical and competitive privilege “conditional on conduct” (Rose 2000:1408). On the one hand, individuals must organize their lives according to economic rationality: calculate risks and benefits, rationalize their options, and invest in their future. On the other hand, however, entrepreneurial conduct has also been made dependent on a series of intangible categories, like intellect, affect, and aesthetics. This is where volunteer tourism can provide a competitive advantage. Whether it teaches young adults how to use affective competencies or how to enhance their employability, it represents a potential for a more advantageous form of political subjectivity.

Chapter three outlines the methodological framework of this project. It begins by providing a general overview of the two fieldwork sites covered: San Andres, Guatemala and Ho, Ghana. It then goes on to discuss the reasons for using ethnography in this research, dwelling at length both on the promises and perils of ethnographic production. In international studies, ethnography was expected to provide access to a more authentic version of social reality and communicate that reality in a more accessible language. Although these hopes betray a romantic notion of what ethnography is and does, the ethnographic approach remains useful for engaging the inherently peripatetic nature of subject-formation in voluntourism. The chapter concludes by arguing that, because ethnography lacks a political orientation of its own and cannot, for that reason, deliver a critique of how power is distributed, reproduced, and contested in volunteer tourism, it must be combined with Foucault's archaeological method.

Chapter four traces my convoluted research travels through the Peten region of Guatemala. The volunteers I met in Guatemala did not perceive the local community as poor or appreciative enough to justify the need for volunteer work. As a result, volunteers quickly lost interest in “giving back” and “making a difference”, as I had initially expected, and turned to alternative ways to demonstrate their affective credentials. To avoid feeling useless, they began sightseeing, getting to know the locals, and learning about the indigenous culture. Yet the seemingly benign and benevolent sentiments (i.e., tolerance, sympathy, multicultural appreciation) volunteers shared for locals did more to reproduce “the ideological form of ‘postmodern’ global capitalism” (Zizek 2009:22) than to initiate any meaningful models for justice.

Drawing upon ethnographic data collected in Ghana, chapter five argues that from a governmental perspective, volunteer tourism is an effective strategy for enhancing the employability and work versatility of young adults in an increasingly competitive and precarious economic climate. Even when volunteers do little to improve the life of their hosts or accumulate professional experience, they continue to be admired as responsible and sacrificial figures in the eyes of friends, family, and employers at home. This is because the value of overseas volunteering is not measured in terms of the goods and services it delivers abroad, but in terms of the entrepreneurial competencies it brings back home. The “dark continent”, with all the cultural diversity, material deprivation, and social chaos associated with it, is without a doubt the best place for acquiring these scarce skills.

The concluding chapter briefly discusses how the emotional and entrepreneurial strategies mobilized in volunteer tourism engender hierarchical and uneven modes of political subjectivity. I use Aihwa Ong's work on “flexible citizenship” (1999, 2005, 2007b) to better understand how various “graduated” forms of political subjectivity shape the fields of possibility of our everyday life. The chapter also sets the tone for future avenues of research by responding to a couple of recent critiques raised against Foucauldian approaches to global politics: the concern that Foucault's theories on power, subjectivity, and government could not be “scaled up” to speak of a *global* logic of governmentality, and the problem with using Foucault to launch a critique of (post-Fordist) capitalism. In refuting both of these claims, I

resituate my work in relation to International Relations and demonstrate how greater attention to transnational social relations can further the scope and aim of this discipline.

The Self as Enterprise

Overseas volunteering is usually considered to be a noble practice made necessary through the goods and services that it delivers to the global poor. A rainforest in Brazil is being cut down, a rural school in Bangladesh does not have textbooks, sea turtles in Mexico are on the brink of extinction, and children in Africa are starving. In all of these instances and many more like them, volunteers are urged to donate their time and resources to “make a difference” in the lives of “less fortunate” people. Although cohorts of volunteers sign up in the hope of “helping out” and “giving back”, my research quickly revealed that there is little evidence to substantiate these stories of sacrifice and compassion. During my travels to Guatemala and Ghana I would repeatedly hear volunteers complain about “not feeling needed” and experience the sentiment myself. The places (San Andres, Guatemala and Ho, Ghana) we lived in did not resemble the photogenic poverty shots many of us had seen on charity infomercials and fundraiser posters. There were no visible signs of starvation or malady. Locals did not seem to need or appreciate our assistance. We felt useless and, somewhat, deceived. As one volunteer aptly put it:

They made it sound as if you weren't there, Ghana would fall apart, as if your presence was sought for. They painted a picture that's not in any way correct. [...] I don't think I've helped anyone while I was here. Only I benefited. I changed but I don't think I initiated any change. After I leave I'd have made a difference to myself but not to anyone else. (Patricia, 6 April 2009)

What is astonishing, however, is that these complaints did nothing to perturb the allure of volunteer tourism. Volunteers quickly found alternative ways to make the time go by. They traveled, befriended locals, and explored the local culture. At home, they continued to enjoy the support and admiration of their friends, family, and colleagues. Meanwhile, the industry has been enjoying rising enrolment figures. This is not just the effect of clever marketing. It tells us something larger about the phenomenon: while volunteer tourism takes place in the Global South, its effects are valorized in terms of governmental rationalities and socio-economic conditions of advanced neoliberal societies. Volunteer tourism may not be able to redress the material and ecological ails of the global poor, but in exposing young adults to the adventure and authenticity they believe are missing from their daily lives, volunteer tourism encourages individuals “to bring [themselves] to labour in an enterprising fashion” (Kiersey 2009:381). By living and working in places that are considered to lie “outside” of modernity, young adults learn how to operate in multicultural settings and global spaces, acquire various aesthetic and affective competencies, and expand the limits of their subjectivity by experimenting with “alternative” modes of being. Although it is difficult to measure the actual benefits volunteers gain from the experience (whether volunteers are admitted to higher education programs or obtain better jobs because of having been on a volunteering trip), I maintain that volunteer tourism is a form of cultural behavior that is

convertible into social and economic capital (Ilouz 2007:63). If nothing else, the emotional and entrepreneurial competencies volunteers gather on these trips allow young adults to better navigate their social field, assert a credible professional identity, embody desirable cultural values and norms, and live more fully in the global moment. In other words it helps them manage and expand the “field of possibility“ of their political subjectivity (Foucault 2001:341).

Volunteer tourism is certainly not the only strategy of this sort. An increasing number of programs (e.g., business models, education programs, social entrepreneurship initiatives, workspaces and labour practices, spending patterns, architectural designs, and aesthetic options) aim at creating a similar intimate relation between economic value and normative ideals. For Foucault this was not a surprise: neoliberalism was never supposed to create a society centered on standardization, mass consumption, and spectacle, but one oriented “towards the multiplicity and differentiation of enterprises” (2008:149), where enterprise is not a force that corrupts the spiritual, emotional, and communal foundations of modern society (as the romantic narrative goes) but organizes and recombines these fields in powerful new ways. Leftist writers have noted the same transformation, only from a different angle. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), for instance, comment on how network-based capitalism does not limit individual autonomy and enjoyment but multiplies these precisely by recuperating the resistant narratives of generations past. This is how we end up with the present paradox: a market economy that promises to save the environment, put an end to poverty, lend our lives a deeper meaning, *and* generate profit at the same time (Zizek 2009:34). The present chapter intends to make sense of this predicament: How have we come to this ethico-political confusion? What historical transformations and necessities lie behind it? And where does volunteer tourism fit in all of this? The answers to these questions will make up the theoretical platform for the present study.

The argument is structured in three parts. The first part of the paper clarifies the convoluted meaning of neoliberal governmentality. Following Foucault (2008), I maintain that neoliberalism is an art of government that makes the market into the formative power of state and society. The market is both a fragile construct state and society need to protect and the standard of truth all social life should be measured against. In the second section I turn to the question of biopolitics, which Foucault explored only briefly as the task of extending the entrepreneurial form across the entire social field without constraining the autonomy of political subjects. As I demonstrate in the final section, although neoliberal governmentality offers plenty of room for self-expression and –realization, it does not represent a more “humane” form of government. On the contrary, it extends the principle of competition to the realm of political subjectivity: Only those individuals who are able to respond opportunistically and creatively to the demands of capital are bound to benefit from the present condition. Volunteer tourists are on the fortunate end of this struggle, which is precisely why we need to scrutinize the admirable and pleasurable effects of this practice more closely.

Neoliberal Governmentality

The term “neoliberal governmentality” can generate a lot of confusion. To clarify its meaning I turn to the most obvious of places, Foucault’s latest lecture series at the *Collège de France*, later translated and published under the title *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), where the French thinker made his first foray into contemporary history.⁵ Foucault begins by identifying three misinterpretations of neoliberalism. The first sees neoliberalism as a continuation of classic liberal economic theories. The second views it as the extension of market relations across the entire social body (and inevitably laments the disappearance of more “authentic” modes of sociality). And finally, the third argues that neoliberalism is nothing but an ideological cover-up for a series of socio-economic and administrative reforms. In all three cases neoliberalism is made out to be “nothing at all, or anyway, nothing but always the same thing, and always the same thing but worse” (2008:130). Before we can turn to Foucault’s own definition of neoliberalism as “really something else” (*ibid.*), we need to dwell a bit longer on what seems to me to be only one misreading of neoliberalism: this idea that neoliberalism is the sum of free market reforms introduced by neoconservative governments in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Given the popularity of this thesis, in academic as well as popular discussions, it is important to understand its empirically and methodologically flawed assumptions.

The events that shook the economies of the Global North during the 1970s and their political repercussions led many to believe that *neoliberalism* is liberalism with a vengeance. The story goes like this: The demise of the Bretton Woods system of trade and exchange in 1973 culminated in the removal of capital controls in 1974 in the US and in 1979 in Britain. In response to the pressures exerted by floating currencies and free trade the Reagan-Thatcher Right embarked on a series of de- and re-regulation reforms that corroded the structures of

⁵ Foucault is by far not the only writer noting the mutations described in this section. While political theory and sociology has long adopted and adapted his writings in a long tradition of what we know call “Foucauldian” approaches to power and government (Rose 1991; Rose and Miller 1992; Barry et al. 1996; Lemke 2001, 2007), there is also a growing number of leftist (Žižek 1999; Brown 2003; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Dean 2006, 2008, 2009; Michaels 2008) and, more specifically, autonomist post-Marxist writings (Lazzarato 1997; Hardt 1999; Negri 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004; Virno 2004; Ross 2000, 2009; Bifo 2009) which in the production and reproduction of social fields hospitable to the capitalist logic of accumulation. While the latter groups approach the subject from a slightly different angle, that of post-Fordist modes of production with an explicit emphasis on work and workers as a source of historical transformation, they do not abandon Foucault but rather strengthen his original conclusions on neoliberal government. Whenever I refer to network capitalism, which also been known as communicative capitalism, flexible accumulation, or the new (knowledge) economy, and which describes a form of capitalism that replaces the bureaucratic structure with a more flexible and spontaneous assemblage, I pay tribute to this body of writing. Post-Marxist scholarship has contributed greatly to the archaeology of neoliberalism by showing how much of the present rationality of government is owed to recent mutations in management, production, workspace design, urban planning, and corporate culture.

social democracy and brought about the “end of politics” (Olssen 2006:217; Lemke 2007:16). The public sector was modeled after the private one; educational reforms were introduced to increase competition between higher learning institutions; and new forms of expertise, accounting, and communication emerged to make all forms of social organization leaner, flatter, and faster (Isin 2000:154). (The genius of Foucault’s critique is that it preceded these events: Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979 and Reagan started his first term in 1981). This story entails all the three versions of neoliberalism presented above: the return of a predatory market economy, the loss of more “humane” socio-economic arrangements, and the intervention of state elites. Appealing as this story may sound, it is both factually incomplete and methodologically flawed.

The first of these assumptions is that government institutions possess a coherent volition – and that volition was to diminish the power of government. Just like in a conspiracy theory, the Reagan and Thatcher administrations are accused of opposing liberal democracy *ex officio* and wanting to put an end to it at all cost. Although various neo-conservative regimes have been elected since the 1970s across the Anglo-American space, they did not have a clear and coherent political response to the economic crises of their time. As policy solutions were devised to address problems in finance, capital, and trade, they were codified under the rubric of neoliberal government, which is not so much the retrenchment of the state as the state refocusing its strategies and priorities. Despite severe cutbacks across the public sector, government spending as GDP percentage has been on the rise since the 1970s. “The irony that should not be lost on anyone is that neoliberal regimes have enacted more legislation and regulation than social democratic ones” (Isin 2000:162). Neoliberal government is not about less government, but about governing more efficiently with other rationalities, programs, and means. It is about shifting the focus and priorities of government, not about pushing government out of the equation. The market reforms pioneered since the 1970s onwards produced flatter and faster state organizations, rather than plain weaker ones. Ultimately, liberal democratic states may have regained some of their historic strength as a result of these neoliberal interventions (ibid. 154-5).

The second misconception is a methodological one. It assumes that global economy and national sovereignty are two separate and mutually exclusive sites tied in a zero-sum game: when one is on the rise, the other is on the fall, and vice versa (Sassen 2000:372). Whether the state is viewed as a barrier to economic profit (like in liberalism) or a protector of collective rights and benefits (as in Marxist and communitarian critiques of globalization), the idea that a strong government can either limit or increase the legroom of transnational capital is widely propagated. Hence, all the nostalgic talk about the “retrenchment” of the state under globalization or the vehement critique of “socialist” government after the 2008-2009 bailouts. This is not only an ontologically impossible proposition, it also exaggerates the autonomy of the economic from the political. Globalization notwithstanding, market economy depends upon certain state-sanctioned conventions regarding money, labour power, and the value of commodities. Even keeping state regulation and protection at a bare minimum, free markets depend upon business-friendly fiscal, monetary, and social policies

(which is why in the most recent economic crisis the US government could not help “Main Street” without saving “Wall Street”, Zizek 2009:14) (Brown 2003:3). The ontological duality between national and global space or between economics and politics prevents us from seeing how government stands to gain from creating new zones of profitability and authority that defy the principles of territorial sovereignty and even free market capitalism (ibid.).

So if neoliberalism is neither Adam Smith revisited (classical liberalism with a vengeance), nor Marx reloaded (a generalized market society), and not even Solzhenitsyn on a global scale (the exacerbation of state power) (Foucault 2008:130), what is it then? A very succinct summary of Foucault’s version of neoliberalism is offered by Maurizio Lazzarato:

Liberalism is first and foremost neither an economic theory nor a political theory; it is rather an art of government that assumes the market as the test and means of intelligibility, as the truth and the measure of society . . . By market we do not mean “commodification”. According to Foucault . . . the market is not defined by the human instinct to exchange . . . by market we must always understand competition and inequality, rather than equality of exchange. Here, the subjects are not merchants but entrepreneurs. The market is therefore the market of enterprises and of their differential and non-egalitarian logic. (cited in Weidner 2009:405)

Neoliberalism is not an economic theory (rejecting state intervention into market processes), a political regime (government limited through individual rights and liberties), or a historical period (the age of economic globalization). It is an art of government, which itself is the product of a series of governmental rationalities overlapping and leaning on each other: “[the] art of government according to truth, [the] art of government according to the rationality of the sovereign state, [the] art of government according to the rationality of economic agents, and more generally, according to the rationality of the governed themselves” (Foucault 2008:313). To understand the confluence of these varied governmental programs, it might be useful to take a step back and consider the historical context in which neoliberalism was born. John Protevi’s (2009) overview of Foucault’s later works provides a comprehensive introduction.

Very broadly, the present moment is the result of a succession of various rationalities of government: the medieval “cosmo-theological framework”, where the responsibility of the sovereign is to guarantee the salvation of the people by acting in accordance to natural, cosmic, and divine law; 17-18th century *raison d’état* where the prince has to secure the growth and survival of the state through various means of discipline, such as police, mercantilist regulation, and inter-state stability; 19th century physiocracy and classic liberalism, which introduce political economy as a science to both limit the power of government and ensure the growth and prosperity of the population; and, finally, 20th century neoliberalism, where the state intervenes in the social fabric to secure the smooth functioning

of an artificial and fragile market (Protevi 2009). This progression must not be understood in the strict, linear sense. The present rationality of government is in many ways a principle for developing, perfecting, and strengthening moments past (Foucault 2008:29). Neither, however, should we understand neoliberalism as “a mere ‘repetition’ of classical liberalism after a Keynesian interlude” (Protevi 2009). Neoliberalism is something wholly different.

In classical liberalism the state was expected to keep out of market affairs so as to allow individuals to realize their self-interest through the natural exchange of goods and services. If the state intervened it was only to supervise the smooth functioning of the market or arbitrate occasional disputes. For 20th century neoliberals, however, this idea that good government is about allowing individuals to pursue their interests and instincts freely was a sign of “naïve naturalism” (Foucault 2008:120) (and the recipe for many disasters as the demise of the Weimar Republic and the ensuing rise to power of the Nazi Party in Germany would show). Both German Ordoliberals and American neoliberals understood the market not as a natural given, but as a formalized and carefully orchestrated process sustained through appropriate policy and sociality. In Germany, neoliberalism emerged as a way to establish responsible principles of government which, in pursuing a strong currency, a stable rate of growth, and fiscal discipline, would avoid both the economic disasters of the Weimar Social Democrats and the dictatorial excesses of National Socialism (ibid. 85). In America the roots of neoliberalism are much deeper. They go back to the War of Independence and inform the country’s entire history from the debate around protectionism, to the question of slavery, the status and function of the judiciary, the relation of individuals to the state, and, more recently, the federal interventionism of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, and finally Obama (ibid. 217). In both cases, however, the neoliberal program, developed in the 1930 and finally exported to most advanced industrial nations in the 1970s, charges government with the responsibility to promote social and moral orders that are conducive to entrepreneurial conduct at the same time that it makes the market into the test of these activities and apparatuses (Olssen 2006:218; Foucault 2008:131). In effect, the market becomes the organizing force *and* the standard of measurement for state and society (ibid. 117).

This idea that neoliberalism actually requires government to “accompany the market economy from start to finish” (Foucault 2008:121) might come as a surprise given that in both Europe and the United States neoliberalism emerged as a reaction to the strong state demanded by Keynesian policies, the New Deal, and other social pacts of war of the 1930 (Foucault 2008:79, 216). There is however a great difference between Keynesianism and neoliberalism: while the former intervened in the market to ensure full employment and price stability, the latter intervenes in *society* to create the necessary conditions for competitive markets (Protevi 2009). Government is not supposed to correct the destructive effects of the market; rather, it must intervene in society to produce the types of subjects and social relations a market economy needs. For many people this definition of neoliberalism brings to mind a capitalist dystopia: a world governed by market principles, where every human relation or social ideal is subordinated to a consumerist logic. Science fiction literature is full of these scenarios. But Foucault imagines a different future, one where the guiding principle

of society is not the exchange of commodities so much as the mechanisms of competition. What neoliberalism needs is not a society numbed by goods and products, but a social body that is invigorated, inspired even by the dynamics of enterprise (ibid. 147). In making enterprise coterminous with the energies of social life (e.g., vitality, spontaneity, creativity, communication, intellect, affect, etc.), liberalism not only becomes “a general style of thought analysis, and imagination”, it also acquires the utopia it never had (ibid. 219).

Foucault’s archaeological examination of neoliberalism offers a clear example of governmentality. As Williams and Haahr (2005) explain, governmentality refers to three things: a historically specific form of power that emerged at the end of the 18th century; a rationality of government that tells us something about the nature of the objects to be governed and the proper way to govern them (the authorities in charge, the problems to be addressed, the programs to be pursued) (Rose 1991:42); and a type of power relations aimed at shaping the conduct of others and ourselves. Governmentality, then, is older than neoliberalism. It dates back to the physiocrats and the classic liberals who used political economy as a science to organize the affairs of the state and its populace (Foucault 2007:91-106). What is new or, at least, intensified in neoliberalism are the individualizing effects of governmentality: the conduct of conduct must produce individuals that spontaneously and enthusiastically live up to the principles of market capitalism. This, I argue, is precisely the function of volunteering in the developing world: to produce an adaptable and competent subject that knows how to expertly navigate the capitalist system in a creative and pleasurable way (McNay 2009:56). This is not a program that includes the entire population. As individuals are encouraged to become entrepreneurs of their lives and compete with others for limited human capital (ibid. 63) some will end up with more advantageous subject positions than others. As volunteer tourism demonstrates, neoliberal governmentality implies an unequal struggle for political subjectivity.

Enterprise for and against the Market

It is somewhat disappointing that contrary to what the title suggests Foucault devoted so little attention to the concept of biopolitics in his last course at the *Collège de France*. In the first lecture he announces that the term cannot be explored until “we have understood the general regime of governmental reason” in which it exists: liberalism (2008:21-2). He then goes on to talk at length about the origins and development of contemporary neoliberalism, in Germany and the United States, never returning to “the politics of life” (Senellart 2008:328). Foucault himself is apologetic about this detour. He would have liked to talk about the paradox that lies at the heart of liberal reason: the paradox that, on the one hand, liberalism tries to limit the excessive government of society, while, on the other hand, it makes the populace into the target of constant governmental intervention in order to ensure the cultural norms and social orderings liberalism needs (ibid. 330). But he does not make it this far. Instead, he focuses on liberalism and how, different from prior rationalities of government that took the existence and strengthening of the state as their ultimate goal, liberalism makes

society the principle in the name of which government should be organized and, ultimately, limited (Foucault 2008:318). As such, Foucault leaves us with a compelling analysis of “the condition of intelligibility of biopolitics” (Senellart 2008:128), but not with a theory of the politics of life per se. Although he discusses elsewhere (2007) the strategies and programs designed to integrate biological life (i.e., health, productivity, life expectancy, birth rate, race, and so on) into the sphere of politics, he has relatively little to say about how individual beings are made [and make themselves into] subjects” of liberalism (Foucault 2001:326). A few clues, especially regarding *homo oeconomicus*, can be found in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. But, mostly, the problem of political subjectivity in neoliberalism is left up to our imagination.

Some of that imagination belongs to Giorgio Agamben (1998), who famously defines biopolitics as the moment when sovereign power abuses liberal democratic politics to reduce life to a worthless category. This so-called “state of exception”, Agamben argues, has been generalized to the point where denigrating life has become the original activity of modern institutions (ibid. 6). I take issue with this definition of biopolitics (which is also quite dominant in International Relations and in critical security studies in particular) in that it refuses to distinguish between governmental programs that “protect life and [those that] authorize a holocaust” (ibid. 3). Biopolitics, it seems to me, does not manifest itself exclusively in the absence of the law or citizen protections (Neal 2008). It is also active in producing a healthy and productive workforce, in creating a society that can thrive with only limited government intervention, and in disseminating the rights and freedoms necessary for individuals to give their lives an entrepreneurial shape. This is not to deny the excesses of biopolitics manifested in concentration and torture camps, surveillance and border security practices, and the politics of race and sexuality. In its mundane form, however, biopolitics is not automatically violent. On the contrary, in trying to foster life that conforms to the liberal principles of order, rationality, and responsibility, biopolitics expresses a normative ambition. Biopolitics, I would argue, is more concerned with reproducing life than disallowing it (Foucault, 1990[1976]:138). Foucault’s discussion of *Gesellschaftspolitik* and *homo oeconomicus* supports this idea.

The enduring mantra of Foucault’s last lecture series is not that the “effects of the economy are extended across all of society, rather it is an economic perspective, that of the market, that becomes coextensive with all of society” (Read 2009:32). Market economy is the measure of truth against which all governmental activities, bodies, and authorities should be assessed (Foucault 2008:246) as well as the model of conduct for society at large. Enter *homo oeconomicus* or economic man as the rational (and worthy) subject *par excellence*. In classical liberalism, *homo oeconomicus* was someone who pursued their private interests in a systematic and rational way and whose interests happened to converge spontaneously with those of society at large. There was a natural harmony between the individual interests of economic men, hence the need to keep government out of their affairs (*laissez faire*) (Foucault 2008:270). In neoliberalism this classical conception undergoes a radical shift. With competition replacing exchange as the driving principle of the market, *homo*

oeconomicus changes from a partner of exchange to an entrepreneur of himself (ibid. 226). Furthermore, since competition is considered a historical objective that must be achieved through government support and guarantees, not a natural given to be left alone, economic man must be taught how to generalize the form of the enterprise across the entire social body and his own life – his relation to private property, his education, work, family, leisure time, insurance, retirement, physical appearance, and interior life (ibid. 241). This is what the German Ordoliberals called *Gesellschaftspolitik* and what is perhaps the general purpose of biopolitics: to give individuals the necessary resources and strategies for them to bind themselves to power in voluntary and spontaneous ways.

What is interesting to note about the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is that he is not a purely calculating, cold-blooded, hyper-individualistic figure. It is true that the goal of neoliberal government is to extend market rationality across the entire social body through mechanisms that “foster and enforce individual responsibility, privatized risk-management, empowerment techniques, and the play of market forces and entrepreneurial models in a variety of domains” (Lemke 2007:3; see also Rose 1995, Brown 2003). This does not mean, however, that neoliberalism produces only a series of Patrick Bateman-like figures obsessed with assessing their bank accounts, credentials, looks... and body count. The entrepreneurial model of conduct (and economic rationality in general) is not limited to instrumental action and bureaucratic organization styles. Such a world would quickly become unbearable. There is much more room for emotions (Illouz 2007; Fortier 2010), enjoyment (Holmes 2002; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005), community values (Rose 2000) and even anxiety (Isin 2004) in entrepreneurial conduct than we imagine. In fact, Foucault would argue that this has been part of the original intent of (at least German) neoliberalism. The Ordoliberals recognized from the very start that the “cold” mechanisms of competition had to be embedded in a set of “warm” moral and cultural values that could compensate for the otherwise mechanistic and alienating consequences of economic rationality. For the enterprise form to become a “universally generalized social model” it needed a “society for the market and a society against the market”, a society that could extend the economic grid across the entire social field and a society that could make up for the effects of the market through rewarding and meaningful experiences (Foucault 2008:242).

We see examples of this logic all around us. The network capitalism of the late 20th century has only exacerbated it: in an economy where capital travels through financial and speculative mechanisms, labour is casual and immaterial, production happens just-in-time, and consumption is ready-to-assemble, elements that were once external, if not inimical, to market economy (e.g., creativity, cooperation, self-expression, multicultural tolerance, and responsibility) are suddenly key to the entrepreneurial spirit (Holmes 2002). Using only profit calculations and cool-headed speculation to the exclusion of all social, moral, and affective considerations can actually be “bad for business” as the moralizing stories of Enron, Lehman Brothers, and Goldman Sachs continue to remind us. In their stead, we have seemingly schizophrenic political animals, such as the social entrepreneur, the creative worker, the frugal consumer, and the volunteer tourist. These are presented as admirable characters

which, be it through business innovation, continuing education, charitable contributions, healthy nutrition, physical exercise, or smart consumption, constantly tweak their existence according to social, moral, and environmental ideals. In the following section, I show that despite its “humane” and “pleasurable” appearance, neoliberalism bears no reason for celebration. Not only has it given us a profoundly depoliticized public that is “aware of what it wants and unaware of what is being done to it” (Foucault 2007:105), it has also extended the principle of competition to the realm of political subjectivity thus depriving democratic politics of its most essential requirement: equal subjects of right.

The Struggle for Political Subjectivity

Unlike humanist conceptions of agency, which assume a universal human essence, that is either oppressed by power or liberated through resistance, for Foucault the subject is not given *a priori*, it does not exist “outside” of power, but is produced through historically situated processes of individuation (Bayart 2004:205). Every mode of government “presupposes and reproduces particular forms of sociality and subjectivity” (Read 2003:135). What is distinctive about neoliberalism, as conceived by the Ordoliberals and the Chicago School, is that it theorizes a model of government that shapes individuals – their property, health, profession, morality, household – without violating the “formally autonomous” character of political subjectivity (McNay 2009:61). The individual never has to renounce its interests and aspirations or submit passively to the dictums of consumerism and standardization (as the Frankfurt School suggested), but is encouraged to express itself and realize its full potential as long as this takes an economic shape. Furthermore, the spirit of enterprise is less a matter of conforming to a prescribed model of action, but a product of economic diversification, aesthetic proliferation, and responsible *jouissance* (ibid. 62). The autonomous and non-conformist human subject is “not the opposite of, or limit to, neoliberal governance, rather it lies at the heart of its disciplinary control” (ibid.). Critical scholarship has paid relatively little attention to this mutation.⁶ It is pop sociology that gives us the most astute, if not always the most theoretically compelling, accounts of how cultural and emotional competencies have become pre-requisites for professional advancement, wealth, and other less material forms of privilege.

Returning to the US after a 5-year long absence, David Brooks is confronted with “a series of peculiar juxtapositions” (2000:9):

⁶ Exceptions include Engin Isin’s “neurotic citizen” (2004; *see also* Isin 2000) governed through fear and anxiety, Aihwa Ong’s “pieds-à-terre” (2007b) who enjoy the rights of citizenship the basis of their material and symbolic capital, Fortier’s “affective subject” (2010) and Rose’s “ethopolitics” (2000) meant to recover citizens’ capacity for communal cohesion and interaction, and Illouz’s “emotional capitalism” where “emotional life – especially that of the middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange” (2007:5).

WASPy upscale suburbs were suddenly dotted with arty coffeehouses where people drank little European coffees and listened to alternative music. Meanwhile, the bohemian downtown neighbourhoods were packed with multimillion-dollar lofts and those upscale gardening stores where you can buy a faux-authentic trowel for \$35.99 (ibid.).

In the newly revamped spaces of urban rejuvenation, a new political animal is moving about, reborn from the ashes of antecedent “bourgeois” and “bohemian” class distinctions. Significant changes in professional conduct, leisurely habits, and moral codes during the 1990s have reconciled the rebel and the yuppie. “It is now impossible to tell an espresso-sipping artist from a cappuccino-gulping banker” (ibid. 10). To Brooks’ surprise it is these individuals – who can combine a bourgeois work ethic with a bohemian desire for sensorial experimentation; channel play, pleasure, and passion into productive work; and use information, emotions, and interpersonal relations to generate economic value – that will thrive in the current information and knowledge economy (ibid. 10-1).

Richard Florida, the author of several nightstand bibles for urban designers, public policy makers, and start-up entrepreneurs, dwells on the same phenomenon, when he announces with a lot more glee than Brooks that the rise of the “creative class” is the result of a “big morph” between the Protestant work ethic and the bohemian spirit (2002:192). His bestselling book *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (ibid.) argues that we have entered a new organizational phase, where the main economic driving forces are no longer technological (land, resources, manpower), but human – hence the importance of creativity. Florida gives us a meticulous account of the spending patterns and lifestyle choices of the chosen ones. Still, nowhere does he define the meaning or explain the value of creativity. The little we know about the “creative class” is that it rejects both the austere conformism of Whyte’s “organization man” (2002[1956]) and the conspicuous consumerism of Veblen’s “leisure class” (2007[1899]).

Norbert Bolz (2009) picks up on these pseudo-sociological observations and connects them to the history of capitalism. If 200 years ago, he explains, it might have seemed paradoxical for the author of *The Wealth of Nations* to also be the person behind a *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as capitalism is being re-anchored in social and moral principles, this is no longer surprising. Drawing inspiration from Ronald Inglehart’s post-materialism thesis (1977), Bolz argues that with our economic well-being becoming increasingly secure the white professional classes of the Global North have more time and resources to dedicate to the search for meaning and fulfillment. The effect is a so-called “caring capitalism”, where the greatest economic success is to be enjoyed by those who perform on the market against the market, those who take their business model from non-governmental and non-profit organizations, along with those who discover the profitable potential of social capital and civic virtues. The new elites must also find ways to spend their riches in non-ostentatious ways: they drink water that is as expensive as wine, wear clothes that look leisurely but are made of incredibly costly material, and go on eco-holidays that guarantee they will be the

only tourists for miles around. These sophisticated labour and consumption habits help new elites develop a theatrical relation to themselves (what Bolz calls “*die Kosmetik der Existenz*”) that allows them to, on the one hand, stage their lives as an *oeuvre* and, on the other, cover their wealth in a cloth of simplicity.

As is to be expected, Zizek’s account of neoliberal subjectivity is the most spirited one. What Zizek calls “liberal communists” are individuals who claim “that we can have the global capitalist cake, i.e., thrive as profitable entrepreneurs, and eat it, too, i.e., endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility and ecological concerns” (2008:16). Examples include celebrity figures like George Soros and Bill Gates, who made their fortunes through a stroke of entrepreneurial genius and are now sharing their profits to appease the crises of capitalism they themselves created and benefited from (ibid. 23). “Liberal communists” are the self-negating entrepreneurs from “Porto Davos” who use digital communication, social media, transparency, and networking to achieve increasingly contradictory goals. Worried about “populist fundamentalists and irresponsible, greedy capitalist corporations”, their goal is not to make money by changing the world, but to earn money as an unintentional, almost accidental, side-effect of doing good works (ibid. 20). They are the “radical entrepreneurs” who are “reinventing their work to help save the world” (Moulden 2008:3).

Although (with the exception of Zizek) these texts resemble too closely the self-help manuals and philanthrepreneurial guides of the new-economy era (Peck 2005:741), they manage to describe the new “anthropological type” at the intersection between entrepreneurship and enjoyment. Foucauldian scholars, cognizant of neoliberal modes of subjection, focus too heavily on the rational, responsible, and self-reliant dimensions of such (Burchell et al. 1991; Barry et al. 1996; Brown 2003), while autonomist thinkers privilege the exploitative effects of neoliberalism, paying little attention to the participatory and rewarding elements of post-Fordist work arrangements (Lazzarato 1997; Hardt 1999; Negri 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004; Virno 2004; Ross 2000, 2009; Bifo 2009). Meanwhile, pop-sociology has observed that the parameters of entrepreneurship go well beyond market principles. It is no longer enough for individuals to navigate their social surroundings using only rational choice and cost-benefit calculations to the exclusion of all social and moral considerations (Read 2009; Bolz 2009). As Brian Holmes excellently observes, the artistic critique of the 1950 and 60s – critiqued in Adorno’s *Authoritarian Personality*, Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, Sartre’s “serialized man”, Cornelius Castoriadis’ critique of bureaucratic productivism, and William Whyte’s “organization man” – has been brought into the mix to lend economic rationality the utopian imagination it always lacked (2002:4). As Illouz explains, in neoliberalism “emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing [...] a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behaviour”, which she dubs “emotional capitalism” (2002:5).⁷

⁷ Scholarship on affect (Grossberg 1992; Terada 2001; Massumi 2002; Ticineto Clough 2007), emotions (Edkins 2003; Ahmed 2004; Ngai 2005; Illouz 2007), “structures of feeling” (Williams 1977), “structures of desire” (Brown 1999), and “habits of feeling and judgment” (Connolly 2002) has been sprawling in a variety of directions over the past decade or so. Two of the most prominent roads

This is not to say that ethics and emotions are co-opted and added onto economic rationality. In modern capitalism emotions are integral to economic rationality; they become a type of reason. The Weberian vision of modernity teaches us that capitalism makes it increasingly difficult for us to lead meaningful lives and maintain social relations. Yet this is not entirely accurate. Eva Illouz's (1997, 2003, 2008) work shows that there is no clear-cut opposition between monetary transactions and intimate relations. Far from being entirely rational and calculated, the economy is a primary site for symbolic production and cultural meaning. In the 20th century, with psychology and the discourse of therapy being introduced into the workplace, "emotional life became imbued with the metaphors and rationality of economics; conversely, economic behaviour was consistently shaped by the sphere of emotions and sentiments" (2008:60). This is what Illouz calls the "emotionalization of economic conduct": knowing how to form and maintain interpersonal relations, communicate effectively with people of various backgrounds, take initiative, mediate conflicts and sensitive situations, and control "bad" emotions becomes an integral part of professional identity and competence (ibid.). "Every age in the history of philosophy 'has its own preoccupations' and '[its own] mode of handling problems'" (Illouz 2007:6). Ours happens to be the integration of emotional life in economic conduct. In effect, there is less of a difference between emotion and reason than there is between emotions that are conducive to entrepreneurial action (e.g., autonomy, adaptability, compassion, multiculturalism, philanthropy, and self-fulfillment) and those that are not (e.g., anger, anxiety, boredom, lust, and depression). While the latter must be "treated", the rest can help realign entrepreneurial

taken focus on the distinction between emotions and affect. The former are generally defined as body- and situation-specific consequences of experience, whereas the latter is understood as an autonomous non-corporeal potential for change and variation. Emotions are "sociolinguistic fixings" (e.g. love, hate, envy, pity, etc.) belonging to persons, groups, events, or memory and narrativized through stories and images (Masumi 2002:28). Affect, on the other hand, are virtual impulses that express the transition from one state of being to another (Masumi 1987:xvi). Sara Ahmed (2004) has remained indifferent to this conceptual dichotomy. For her, emotions are circuits or pathways that travel between bodies, connecting, excluding, or "sticking" to them, helping bodies extend into space and change their shape (ibid. 4). Emotions do not reside within subjects and objects; they describe a relation between bodies. The "aboutness" and "towardness" of emotions suggests a world-making quality: emotions help subjects "feel their way" through the world by apprehending and taking a stand to it (ibid. 7). By merging Masumi's conceptual take on affect with the more pedestrian understanding of emotion, Ahmed has made "affective economies" central to social and cultural practice. In her work, emotions are no longer ornamental (like in rationalist approaches to social analysis) or unoperational (like in Masumi's virtual cartography), they become essential and practical tools for understanding how we "become *invested* in particular structures" of power (ibid. 10, original emphasis). That is why, I too use the two terms interchangeably to understand how people use various emotional styles to navigate their social field, communicate their self to others, form relations and networks, handle problems, build social capital and exchange it against more material forms of value, such as career advancement, wealth, political rights etc. (Illouz 2007:66-7).

conduct with principles of social order, intimacy, and autonomy (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

For some, this might seem like reason for celebration. Gone are the rapacious capitalists from Davos. Over are the days of rigid bureaucratic structures. A more equitable and meaningful world can begin. But what seems like a more “humane” form of capitalism is, in fact, the dawn of an economically and politically uncertain future. In a mode of government where the individual is an entrepreneur of himself who constantly relates to others as competitors (McNay 2009:63), political subjectivity becomes “conditional on conduct” (Rose 2000:1408) – an unequal privilege, bestowed only upon those who can respond opportunistically and creatively to the demands of capital (Ong 2005:698).

For Foucault, subjectivity is “not the free and spontaneous expression of our interior truth. It is the way we are led to think about ourselves [and act in the world so as to] police and present ourselves in the correct way, as not insane, criminal, undisciplined, unkempt, perverse or unpredictable” (Mansfield 2000:10). Although subjection – “the work of turning human beings into subjects” (Dean 1994:297) seems to be an inescapable fact of modern power, what Foucault fails to mention is that, just like in the famous *Animal Farm* (Orwell 1946) phrase “we are all equal, but some of are more equal” (paraphrase), some of us end up with more fortunate subject positions than others. Subjectivity then is a type of work: a “good” subject is the result of the many investments individuals make in their own lives, in terms of health, education, exercise, mobility, and productivity. The relentless struggle for a privileged subjectivity extends to other areas as well. Citizenship rights, for instance, are no longer bestowed upon passive beneficiaries of social, civic, and political rights, as in Marshall’s (1992[1950]) classic model (Isin et al. 2009). Individuals become subjects of rights by conforming to sanctioned regimes of truth, such as race, gender, and sexuality, but also autonomy, prosperity, health, security, and ethics (Butler 2005:22). Similarly, the job market is no longer a meritocratic race based exclusively on skill and expertise. The value of labour is intrinsic to the value of the human individual executing it, which is why things such as “human capital” and “emotional intelligence” have become essential for securing employment (Foucault 2008:226). The criteria for becoming subject may have become more exploratory, but they are also increasingly stringent and ambiguous. One can never be certain if the competition for political subjectivity will result in a win or a loss.

For now at least, volunteer tourists are situated on the fortunate end of this exchange. It is a strategy meant to produce subjects and styles of conduct that are congruent with the entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism. While abroad, volunteers demonstrate a desire for social change, an ability to operate in distant and diverse settings, and an interest in experimenting with one’s self and the world around it. All of these are aptitudes necessary for tackling the professional, informational, and cultural challenges of network capitalism. What better way to demonstrate these aptitudes than implementing change in a foreign cultural setting without modern amenities or travelling through a far-away country where you are a visible minority? Possessing emotional and cultural competencies, along with a genuine wish to “make a difference” through self-sacrificial acts of charity and compassion, helps volunteers acquire

the same currency as material or financial capital. They are mobile and desirable, employable and experienced, comfortable and confident, esteemed and assertive. They are allowed to inhabit and extend into space as they like: gain admission to graduate programs, obtain more favourable employment, join relief teams to remote locations and conflict zones, and swiftly cross racial, professional, and spatial divides. Meanwhile adjacent bodies are made to feel at odds with themselves (Ahmed 2006:133). This is especially true for the *voluntoured*, whose lack of ecological, pedagogical, and medical expertise renders them vulnerable to governmental inspection, at the same time that they aspire to the material and semiotic richness of their inspectors.

Importing leisure, affect, and intellect into neoliberalism have not rendered government more “humane” or equitable. On the contrary, it inaugurated a more competitive and hierarchical struggle for subjectivity. While some individuals (quite enthusiastically) organize their lives in accordance with (exceedingly demanding) criteria for entrepreneurship, others are *de-subjectified* – they are excluded at the same time that they become the object of suspicion, compassion, or intervention (Neal 2008:51). This is not to suggest that there are only two types of subjectivity out there – after all, subjectivity remains an abstract heuristic category for something which is inherently elusive and mutable – rather a “graduated” hierarchy with more or less infinite options. As political rights and economic security are made increasingly dependent upon loose moral, emotional, and aesthetic criteria, a new hierarchy takes shape between individuals who find pleasure in their work, combine lifelong learning with leisure, and participate in alternative experiences, and those who are not “creative” enough to keep up with the race for innovation. For the former group, the options of where to live, shop, study, work out, and go on holidays are becoming only wider. For the latter these choices are thin and constraining (Bauman 1998). In addition to the classic divisions between haves and have-nots (educated/uneducated, skilled/unskilled labour, office/domestic work), neoliberalism draws an equally sharp line between privileged subjects who have the capacity or opportunity to embody the normative order of things and those destined to remain suspect or, worse even, abject. As Agamben predicted, biopolitics makes this division mutable and profoundly arbitrary. Anyone can end up on either side of the line at any time.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to make sense of the ethico-political confusion generated by neoliberal forms of government which rather than limiting individual autonomy and enjoyment, as the common narrative goes, multiplies these by recuperating the resistant narratives of generations past. Neoliberalism, I have argued, is an art of government that makes the market into the formative power of state and society, which needs the protection and intervention of government at the same time that it represents standard of measurement for all social life. This goal, Foucault explains, is realized by extending the entrepreneurial

form across all social relations, including even the work of subjectivity. Becoming subject requires individuals to explore various styles of living and engage in a multitude of individuation acts. Yet this does not suggest a more “humane” or libertarian form of rule. In applying the principle of competition to the realm of political subjectivity, neoliberalism entails as many outlets for self-realization as it does for policing and exclusion. Only those individuals who, like volunteer tourists, are able to meet the demands of network capitalism are bound to end on the fortunate end of this struggle.

The question that follows from this is whether neoliberal government describes a global reality. While I discuss the subject of “global governmentality” at greater length in the final chapter, suffice it to say for now that this is not the case. While white middle-class people possess the necessary means to perform “for the market and [...] against the market” (Foucault 2008:242), a great majority of the world’s population has no desire to resist the material and semiotic richness identified with the West. Many of the people living in the Global South as well as the inner city and rural poor of advanced industrialized nations continue to aspire to the status markers new elites can easily dismiss as foolish and tasteless. Speaking of Africa, James Ferguson argues that “most Africans can hardly feel that they are being dominated by being forced to take on the goods and forms of a homogenizing global culture when those goods and forms are, in fact, largely unavailable to them.” If anything, “globalization” has made Africans more aware of the material and cultural gap separating them from the West and has given rise to more inventive ways of imitating the goods and manners Westerners like to deplore as evils of modernization (2006:21). Similarly, in reference to the “Oriental” space, Nevzat Soguk (1993) claims that there are more people who attempt to adopt Western modes of dress, speech, education, professional conduct, and government than those trying to “provincialize Europe” (Chakrabarty 2000). The poor-but-resistant subject, postcolonial theory is so eager to celebrate, is an academic fantasy – it is the new noble savage (1993:368-9). The flexible subjectivity described above may not be dominant in terms of the actual numbers of people involved, yet its logic organizes the rest of the world into either desirable or undisciplined, worthy or dangerous categories. If the enterprise of the self represents a hegemonic condition it is not because its world-wide application, but because it represents a standard of truth against which the entire social field can be assessed.

This project should not serve as a guide for whether people should or should not enrol in volunteer tourism programs. This needs to remain a personal choice, while being fully aware that not even “the personal” lies outside of power. What this project hopes to encourage is a more rigorous (self-)examination of our most intimate normative desires and emotional investments. In thinking that our versions of happiness and fulfillment are of our own making we often fail to notice how these happen to overlap with the disciplinary junctions of neoliberalism (McNay 2009:63). We live in dangerous times: The self as enterprise and the “care of the self” – that is, the ability of the self to remake itself through ethical practice – have become too closely intertwined for the resistant potentialities of the latter to still be credible (McNay 2009). As self-government crosses over into self-care,

economic profitability into ethical responsibility, and entrepreneurship into emotion, there is no longer an “outside” to power. There are no more registers of feeling and action that cannot be used to further the entrepreneurial spirit. It is not as some used to say that we have acquiesced to neoliberalism; rather we have become emotionally attached to it. The case of volunteer tourism should bring us closer to confronting this danger. The more virtuous, enjoyable, and rewarding something seems, the more sceptical we need to be of it.

Research Travels from Ethnography to Archaeology

How does volunteer tourism function as a form of political subjectivization? How can we explain the success and seductiveness of this practice? What can volunteer tourism tell us about the changing relationship between work and leisure, dwelling and travelling, power and autonomy? And what is it about the present moment that requires individuals, especially young adults, to organize their lives, even their spare time, in an enterprising fashion? Finding answers to these questions is a methodological challenge. Some of these queries imply a careful consideration of volunteers' experiences and narratives. Others ask that we go beyond the verbal testimonies of our research subjects and conduct an analysis of their historical, political, and material conditions of possibility. Resolving these questions depends on dialogically combining ethnography with Foucault's archaeological method. The former is particularly useful in making sense of the unwieldy strategies involved in producing subjects, while the latter helps capture the epistemic structures that valorize certain subjectivities while delegitimizing others.

This chapter outlines the methodological framework of this project. It begins by providing a general overview of the two fieldwork sites covered: San Andres, Guatemala and Ho, Ghana. I then explain my decision to use ethnography in this research, paying attention to both the promises and perils of ethnographic production. In international relations, ethnography has been received with relatively open arms since the 1980s in the hope that it might provide access to a more authentic version of social reality and communicate that reality in a more accessible form. These hopes were misguided, I argue. While it is true that ethnography shares some similarities with creative writing and journalism, it is by no means a transparent text, accessible to the uninitiated. Ethnography is as policed by textual and disciplinary conventions as any other scholarly production, which is what ultimately assures its legitimacy within academia. These false promises notwithstanding, I argue that ethnography remains beneficial to this study because, in its effort to recreate the space of lived encounters, it can trace the mobile trajectory of voluntourism as well as the inherently elusive nature of subject-formation. What ethnography cannot do, however, is single-handedly offer a critique of volunteer tourism. Ethnography contains no political orientation or militant program of its own, other than perhaps its (recent) ethical commitment to dialogical modes of textual representation. Therefore, to make ethnography amenable to the study of the distribution, reproduction, and contestation of power on a global scale, I propose to put it in conversation with Foucault's archaeological method. The latter allows for a historical inquiry into the rules and forces that allow volunteer tourism to function as a neoliberal strategy of subject-formation. It also allows for theory to be brought back into the conversation, without necessarily reproducing the anxieties around aloof and inaccessible scholarly texts, but rather by demonstrating the ability of critical theory to act as a hermeneutic guide to the present condition and our role in it.⁸

⁸ Although innovative, this methodological approach is not unique. Aihwa Ong and Nikolas Rose have repeatedly asked for the realities of neoliberal government to be studied through ethnographic

Research Destinations at a Glance

When a Google search for “volunteer vacations” registered 350,000 hits, I knew it would be hard to decide which organization(s) to include in my research. Given the limited time and funds at my disposal, I chose to join two volunteering trips lasting two months each. We are taught in methodology courses that choosing our field sites is a matter of “good” research design. In reality, however, all sorts of considerations, from visa and institutional clearance forms, to the (limits of) generosity and guidelines of funding agencies, and future chances of employment, come into play in deciding where to go. We choose a field site depending on where our “intellectual interests, personal predilections, and career outcomes can most happily intersect” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:11). In my case these intersected in such a curious way that I can only say I “stumbled upon” upon my research destinations. I did not draw them out of a hat, but neither did I pick them according to the purist standards of scientific research. They were selected to fit the logistical and empirical concerns of my project. As such, it cannot be expected for these examples to reflect on the industry as a whole. It is not my ambition to provide a comprehensive survey of volunteer tourism or to offer technical advice to make the formula more efficient and accountable. Rather, I wish to use volunteer tourism as a *site* where the larger processes and contradictions governing our present condition acquire a concrete material and experiential substance. Hence, the ethnographic examples provided here should be viewed less as case studies of voluntourism (as an industry or a trend) than as illustrations of neoliberal rationalities of government.

I wanted to choose two organizations that were as distinct from one another as possible in terms of their objectives, size, pricing, marketing, and everyday operations. Since a comprehensive survey of the industry, its practices and participants, was out of the question, I chose to focus on the extremes. For my first case study I joined a small grassroots operation located in the heart of Guatemala’s most impoverished province that charged what volunteers repeatedly called “the lowest prices online” – \$450/month. For the second case study, I signed up with one of the world’s largest and most reputable volunteering organizations, numbering 162 staff members, 166 projects in 20 countries, 2,500 volunteers per year, and a yearly revenue of \$3.6 million (Ghana Handbook 2008:45-7). In fall 2008 I worked with Volunteer Peten (VP) in a conservation park in Northern Guatemala and in spring 2009 I taught primary school with Projects Abroad (PA) in Eastern Ghana. As anticipated, the work, people, events, and experiences I encountered during my travels in Central America and Western Africa had little in common. The one constant variable was the demographics of my fellow volunteers. (Ironically, this was precisely the variable I thought would change by enrolling in a more expensive programme.) On both occasions, I worked alongside 18-25-year-old high school graduates and undergraduates from the entire spectrum of advanced

approaches so as to infuse Foucault’s analytics of government with an element of human agency (Ong 1999:3-4). Also James Ferguson (1990, 2006) provides an excellent example for how cultural critique can speak volumes if coupled with a political analysis of material conditions.

industrial nations, including the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and South Africa.

Volunteer Peten, Guatemala

San Andres is a rural community of 15,000 people and growing. Every month dozens of tourists arrive in the village attracted by its accessible volunteering projects and language courses (the latter are offered by a separate organization, the Language Eco-Escuela). Some tourists are fed up with the overcrowded “gringo trail”, that runs from Mexico to Panama through key points recommended by *Lonely Planet* guides, and want to “travel with a purpose” to a more “authentic” place instead. Others want to “help and see how local people live.” Some are curious to “see how volunteer tourism works” and if they could use it for a school placement or turn it into a research topic. Yet others just want to “have something to do” on vacation. The fact that San Andres is “a sleepy town” located on the banks of the deep blue lake Peten Itza, where people can easily be described as warm and hospitable, only increases the lure of this place.

Guatemalans also flock to San Andres, albeit for different reasons. Every year hundreds of Guatemalans from the western and southern regions of the country set up their homes on the outskirts of San Andres. The newcomers are usually landless and land-poor peasants forcefully relocated by decades of civil war, a dismal land tenure system, and the colonizing activities of development agencies that administer government land concessions (*ibid.* 391). They live without plumbing, proper sanitation, clean water, or garbage disposal systems. But they continue to come because Peten, the region at the heart of which lies San Andres, promises employment in agriculture and small-scale cattle ranching, as teachers, contractors, and NGO support staff, in sawmills, small stores (*tiendas*), and the service industry. If you buy an older edition of the *Lonely Planet Guatemala*, you will see the largest province in the country advertised as a sparsely populated place with the exception of toucans, iguanas, howler monkeys, and jaguars. But this is hardly the case today. Over the past four decades Peten's population jumped from 25,000 to approximately 400,000 (Sundberg 1998:394).

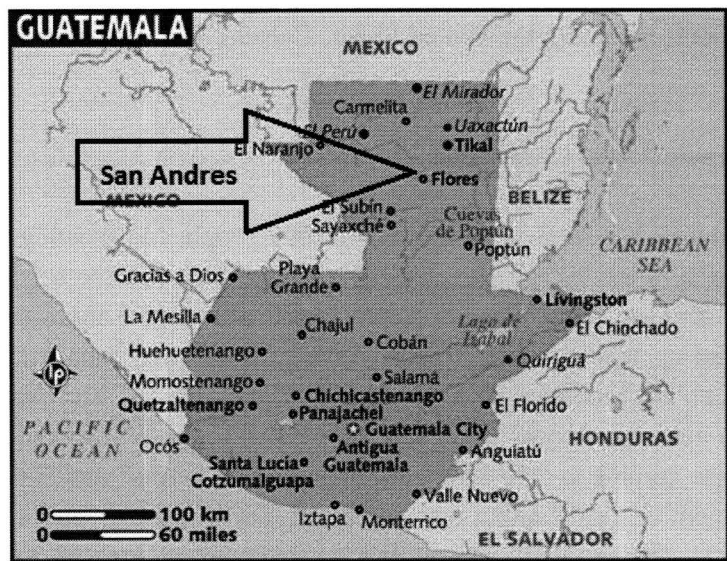


Fig. 1 Map of Guatemala
Reproduced with permission of Lonely Planet. © 2010 Lonely Planet.

The dramatic rise in population does not come without its problems. The 14,000 square miles of Peten have lost over half of their tropical vegetation as a cumulative result of commercial logging, cattle ranching, agriculture, oil exploitation, corruption, drug trade, violent crime, and the enduring strong arm of the military (Mahler 1993:263). Peten is losing its forests at a rate of 100,000 acres per year. The fact that half of the province’s surface has been placed under the protection of the Maya Biosphere Reserve created in 1990 has not helped stall this trend. The Biosphere is an attempt to reconcile environmental ambitions with the economic needs of a population whose livelihood is dependent upon natural resource extraction (*ibid.* 388). In reality, however, the government – along with the Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas (CONAP) placed in charge of the reserve’s administration – lacks both the political will and the economic muscle to protect such a massive and fertile stretch of land in the face of rising unemployment and absent land reforms.⁹

San Andreseños find it difficult to leave. The dismal state of the educational system, where both qualified staff and textbooks are missing, does not allow students to dream of pursuing higher education in the capital or elsewhere. The cost of such education is also beyond the means of most people in San Andres. A vicious cycle of low education levels,

⁹ The approach of the Guatemalan state to the issue of nature conservation foreshadows the more general tension that exists between conservationist discourses and the economic needs of people living in fragile natural habitats. The latter are often ignored or dismissed. “Lack of education” and “ignorance” are seen as the root source of environmental degradation (Sundberg 1998). Whether state- or privately-funded, conservation projects in Guatemala tend to recommend behavioural solutions: if only locals were to change their attitudes or lifestyles, they could escape their condition (Ferguson 1990:58). This detracts attention from the larger political failures to address land reform, tackle corruption, or introduce environmental legislation for foreign investors working in natural resource extraction.

precarious employment, low income standards, no savings opportunities, and little social security ties families to the working place of their employed (preponderantly male) members. Although a few people manage to find seasonal jobs in construction or tourism across the border in Belize and sometimes even in the United States, immigration is an option only for the very few. As the director of Volunteer Peten described the situation in an interview, “[t]here is no electricity, no water, women have to get up at 4 in the morning to grind maize, people have to make sacrifices to send their children to school. [...] Here people make \$4 a day. Does that mean they are not poor? You can have a house, electricity, water, food, basic things, but you can't have any purchasing power, you can't travel anywhere, you can't have a bank account, you can't save any money or plan for the future. In Guatemala 60% of the people are poor. They just make it day by day.” (Mateo, 17 September 2008) But compared to neighbouring towns, like Carmelita, which suffers from an even more dismal economic situation or, like San Benito, which is ridden by violent gang and drug-related crime, San Andres seems like a good place to settle down.

Volunteer Peten speaks to the confluence of these many needs. The organization is the brainchild of Matthew (Mateo) Peters¹⁰, who, at the end his two-year Peace Corps posting, decided to stay in San Andres. In 2003 he founded VP with the financial support of his family and friends. It is a “dude operation”, as one volunteer put it. With no head or branch offices in other countries, the organization boasts a certain aura of transparency and virtuous localism. Today, the organization’s mission extends from conservation to teaching, construction, and community development. Over the past five years, Mateo and his volunteers have built a library and two schools. They have also worked to repopulate a 1km² tract of protected land on the village border with its original flora and fauna species. These efforts culminated in the inauguration of the School of Natural Resources Management in January 2009, a three-year professional school that provides students with hands-on experience and technical expertise in wildlife management, forest management, agro-forestry, agriculture, environmental law and administration.¹¹ Due to its extremely affordable pricing, which covers project participation, accommodation in host families, and three meals a day, VP enjoys a small but relatively steady enrolment rate of 12-17 volunteers/week during peak season from May to August; 10-15 volunteers from December to February; and 4-10 volunteers in the low season from September to November.

Although the organization employs anywhere between 2 and 40 volunteers a week, most of the work is done by Mateo. In the mornings he works in the park, in the afternoons he teaches English at two different schools, and in the evenings he looks after the library. On the weekends he organizes film screenings and helps out with dance parties or live soccer transmissions at the cultural centre (*casa de la cultura*). In addition, he is in charge of his

¹⁰ The respondent has agreed to having his identity disclosed.

¹¹ At the moment, the school’s resources are still limited: teachers are in short supply (Mateo teaches all subjects) and there are not enough funds to cover for textbooks and field trips. This year VP issued a statement that it would waive the enrolment fee for Spanish-speaking volunteers willing to teach at the school – a rare opportunity in the volunteer tourism industry.

own website, paperwork, accounting, and fundraising. He also maintains regular email contact with volunteers, writes a monthly newsletter, and selects host families. Like an obsessively passionate *Fitzcarraldo*, he explains, “[t]his is my hobby. It doesn’t feel like work to me.” (17 September 2008) As volunteers, we used to follow Mateo through *his* workday mostly because, left to our own devices, we would not know where to start “helping.” It was easier to just emulate Mateo’s vision and feed off of his social network. We would dig ditches and make compost in the park during the morning, teach English during the afternoon, and play with children in the library at night. Sometimes we would participate in all three activities, working a total of 10 hours a day, other times we would neglect all of them, taking a day off to go to the lake or the market. Whenever we worked, however, it was always by shadowing Mateo, who remained at the heart of VP, despite his aloof appearance and arm’s length leadership style.

Projects Abroad, Ghana

The first thing that struck me about Projects Abroad, even before I arrived in Ghana, was its competency. This is no ad hoc charity organization run by kind-hearted amateurs, but a serious enterprise with 162 staff members, 166 volunteering projects, and offices and facilities in 20 countries (Ghana Handbook 2008:47): a full-blown “charity factory”, as one volunteer put it (7 April 2009). Everything about Projects Abroad, from our email correspondence to my arrival in Ghana and all the way to my pre-departure satisfaction survey, corresponded to the highest standards in customer service. Compared to my experience with VP, where pre-departure email contact was sporadic and on-site supervision virtually nonexistent, PA made me feel like a valued customer at all times. Both the UK and the Toronto office were diligent in helping me sign up for the trip, sending me information brochures about Ghana and my future host family, and assisting me with visa applications and vaccinations. PA staff was present during every step of the process. This culture of chaperoning, which only continued with greater zeal upon my arrival in Ghana, helps explain the organization’s record high enrolment rates. With its corporate service and trustworthy appearance PA does an excellent job in appeasing the anxieties that usually come with travelling to Africa. Both travellers and their parents can rest assured that, in exchange for a hefty price, volunteers will enjoy a safe and useful experience.

Once in Ghana, I was welcomed by Charles, the regional coordinator for Ho and the Volta region, where I was stationed. He picked me up from the Accra airport, arranged a tro-tro (minibus) ride to Ho. When we got there he introduced me to my host family, showed me around town (the internet café, the grocery store, the local pub), and accompanied me on my first day of work. Charles is a 26-year old Political Science graduate from the University of Accra, who also volunteers with PA as part of his obligatory civic service year. His job is to pick up volunteers from the capital, bring them to Ho, and give them an “initiation tour.” Ho is three hours away from the capital and Charles makes the trip 10-20 times a month. He is neither reimbursed for his services, nor does he receive medical insurance – something he

repeatedly asked for given that road and traffic conditions in Ghana are quite perilous. Preserving a culture of service excellence, however, takes up so many of PA's resources, that there is little left for volunteering projects and local staff. Beyond the introductory tour, there are weekly meet-and-greets, monthly parties, farewell get-togethers, an exit survey, and a complimentary tee-shirt at the end. Charles made himself available around the clock to help volunteers obtain a cell phone, do their banking, organize weekend trips, handle food allergies, and attend to any other medical issues. Should volunteers, however, have larger questions or concerns, regarding their work placements for instance, they could contact PA's national office located in Accra, which employed former volunteers from Canada and the UK. Although Charles repeatedly showed initiative to improve or create new volunteering opportunities in Ho, such leadership skills were discouraged. The multinational and hierarchical structure of PA requires him to act as a welcoming committee and cultural interpreter with no decision-making power of his own. His job is not so much to coordinate or supervise our work (although this did occasionally happen), but attend to volunteers' leisurely, culinary, and emotional needs.

In exchange for these services, volunteers are asked to respect certain rules of conduct to preserve the local authority and credibility of Projects Abroad. The *Ghana Handbook* discourages drunkenness, absenteeism, serious rowdiness, and flirting (2008:42). Any of these can result in disciplinary behaviour, including the risk of being sent home. A "good" volunteer is expected to "[b]ring the energy and enthusiasm that sustains this ongoing volunteer movement. You may be there for a relatively short time, but your efforts and skills are part of a wider, ongoing network that ensures the projects' success" (*ibid.* 45). If overwhelmed by unfamiliar customs, languages, sights and smells, volunteers are encouraged to throw themselves head-first into "culture shock." On the other hand, they are warned to wear proper attire and refrain from smoking if they want to be taken seriously in local society. But these sacrifices are well-worth it because "you have the unique chance of living and working entirely immersed within a very different culture, an experience that you will carry with you always, and one which brings us one step closer to a worldwide community of true multi-cultural understanding" (*ibid.* 45). Strangely enough, *The Handbook* contains no information about the work PA does in Ghana. The brochure has nothing to say about the types of volunteering projects offered or the general impact and value volunteer work has on the local community. The company website, where Ghana is described as a vibrant, colourful, and exciting "introduction to Africa" (<http://www.projects-abroad.org/destinations/ghana/>), offers equally little information. It remains a mystery what exactly is so problematic about the country that requires the urgent intervention of white vacationing youths.

Ho is the capital of the Volta region, which is located in the Eastern part of the country, close to the border with Togo. It is a town of approximately 60,000 inhabitants numbering an impressive number of NGOs, charities, and grassroots third-sector initiatives that attract an ever-rotating population of volunteers, missionaries, exchange students, and artists. The networks and trajectories of these itinerant figures create a maze that is almost impossible to keep track of. (Generally, the main pub, ominously called the White House,

was a good tracking device for the new, the old, and the passing through.) Most visitors stay for at least three months (to justify the exorbitant plane ticket), teaching elementary school, helping out in the health sector, coaching soccer, building infrastructure, or working in orphanages. Others stay for a year to attend school or run medical programs. Still others remain for an indeterminate period of time to manage Christian missions, work in agriculture, or help out with arts and crafts.

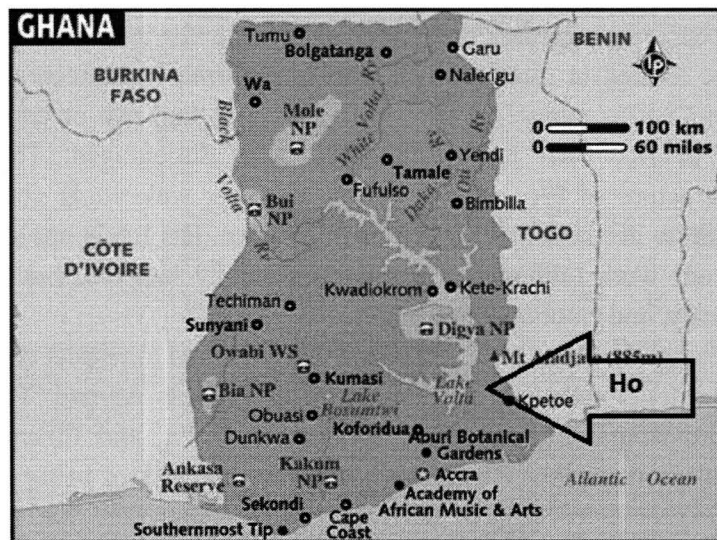


Fig. 2 Map of Ghana

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Although I zig-zagged across the country several times, hanging out with other volunteers, ex-pats, missionaries, and the local comprador elite, sometimes running into the same people in different towns and resorts, I did not meet a single tourist during my stay in Ghana. The independent backpacker, hopping from one hostel to another in search for the next ex-pat whiskey bar, is a trope from a different continent. If Central America has the “gringo trail” and Southeast Asia the “banana-pancake trail”, Ghana has more ambiguous forms of travel. I did meet the occasional roughneck who toured the world in a safari jeep or on a dirt bike, but everyone else had a secondary motive for being in Africa: they worked, volunteered, or did research. Depending on the length of their stay and the type of the work they did, everyone eventually worked out a unique compromise between stillness and movement, boredom and productivity, work and leisure, holiday and residential experiences. For us, PA volunteers, time in Ho was divided in two: we would work in the local hospitals, schools, or day care centres during the week and travel on the weekends. Without anyone to supervise our work, initiate team projects, or assess our progress, the longer we stayed in Ho, the more we travelled and the less we volunteered. Ho was what we considered home (“home sweet Ho” we used to say), it was where our host families lived, where we had our local bars and food joints, and where we knew street vendors by name. But it was also the place where a Sunday afternoon could turn into a suffocating nightmare. Travelling, then, became a much-

needed break from our small-town routine and a well-deserved reward for our otherwise tedious work.

Ghana is the most popular destination advertised by Projects Abroad. It accounts for 40% of its revenues. Each of the organization's five sites – Accra, Akuapem Hills, Cape Coast, Kumasi, and Ho – receives 5-15 volunteers/month. The enrolment numbers can rise up to 25 volunteers/month during the high season in June-August. The reasons for Ghana's popularity are manifold. The country accommodates all types of placements, from teaching to healthcare, construction, sports, journalism, and law. The only programs not represented are conservation (ironic given that Ghana is home to one of the most aggressive forestry industries) and archaeology. Also, Ghana represents the best of both worlds: it is exotic enough to count as part of "black" or "real" Africa (Patricia, 6 April 2009) and, at the same time, it is white enough to still act as a "safe learning environment" for volunteers eager to gather work- and school-related experience (Sandra, 22 April 2009). Like most other PA destinations (e.g., Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Peru, and Bolivia), Ghana strikes a perfect balance between economic need and political security. Although it has a low GDP, a relatively high illiteracy rate, and a preponderantly agricultural economy, it can boast a stable democracy and safe travel conditions. Certainly, we can think of countries with even higher poverty levels and more rampant mortality rates than Ghana, countries where humanitarian aid is urgently needed. But places such as these are either politically unstable, like Sierra Leone, or closed off to foreigners, like Burma, or both.

The brochure literature on volunteer tourism devotes a lot of attention to helping volunteers "pick" the right program, according to the most urgent needs on the planet. In my case, I tried to select programs that would give me access to what I initially (in my proposal) called "the sensitive subject of late capitalism", places and causes that ranked high on the hierarchy of needs. Yet for most of my field research I was afraid that I might have "picked" the wrong ones: How could care and compassion be missing from a practice that required these very emotions? The places where we volunteered were not equipped to solicit these reactions: they did not live up to the pornographic images of misery we had been trained to expect; the local people were not crippled, malnourished, or on their deathbed; and there was generally very little interest in having us intervene in local affairs. It was only much later when I understood that there was nothing "wrong" with the programs I had chosen. Rather, they were quite emblematic of the larger structural impossibility of volunteer tourism. A common mistake is to assume that volunteering destinations spring up naturally in response to poverty and disease, when in fact these sites are carefully *designed* to strike a balance between material need and logistical necessities.

Aside from "something to do", volunteers expect to find minimal accommodation and sanitation standards in their host families, along with safe roads to travel on weekends and speedy telecommunication infrastructure to keep in touch with folks at home (Mateo, 19 September 2008). What is more, volunteers prefer "rich" destinations in terms of nature and culture. Both Guatemala, with its Mayan temples, indigenous arts and crafts, mountains,

gorges, and rainforest vegetation, and Ghana, with its golden beaches, colonial fortresses, and bustling market towns, live up to these expectations. The problem, however, is that too many colour TVs and cell phones render the \$2-4/day living standard invisible to the tourist eye. Abundant modern consumer goods and services make it difficult for volunteers to recognize local developmental needs and deficiencies, which in turn leads to apathy, absenteeism, and boredom. It often happens that, even when volunteers are given responsibilities, the work is perceived as tedious (e.g., admitting patients and taking vital signs in hospitals in Ghana), extremely difficult (e.g., nature conservation in Guatemala), or ineffective (e.g., teaching in schools). For volunteers to feel “needed” a series of conditions must be met: the work must be continuous; it must be satisfying, challenging, and rewarding; it must address local deficiencies; and it must show quick results. This is not an easy task to accomplish for any organization, especially considering that volunteers stay for a relatively short time, they lack appropriate skills and training, and also expect to have enough free time to travel and relax.

Ethnographic Romances

From the very beginning I wanted this to be an ethnographic project. Ethnography, as I initially understood it, would help me obtain first-hand experience of a practice I was not very familiar (or patient) with. My ambition was to gain a holistic *understanding* of the phenomenon by walking (at least for a while) in volunteers’ shoes. Understanding, as opposed to explaining, is an epistemological stance that goes back to Weber’s “emphatic Verstehen” or Hume’s “sensorial empiricism” (Hollis and Smith 1990:78, 81). It is not something International Relations, or political science at large, has been particularly open to or good at given the discipline’s predilection for parsimonious explanation, predictability, and generalization (ibid. 75). Cultural anthropology, in contrast, has always been interested in accessing an “insider” or “emic” perspective, as anthropologists call it, using “thick description” (Geertz 1973) and “deep hanging out” (Madison 2005) methods.¹² The ethnographic myth presenting a lone researcher who spends a long time getting intimately acquainted with local conditions, using a mix of experience and interpretation, empirical observation and theoretical abstraction, sensorial proximity and intellectual astuteness, captured my initial research intentions to a tee (Clifford 1988). The fact that ethnographic detail on volunteer tourism was painfully missing, despite the trend’s growing success, only confirmed the need for an ethnographic approach.

¹² For James Clifford (1986a) and Mary Louise Pratt (1986) ethnography is not a method, but a genre of writing that maintains clear boundaries between itself and related texts like travel writing, personal memoirs, journalism, and creative non-fiction. For Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) ethnography is a logistical answer to how to manage conflicting and overlapping information, commitments, and social roles. They describe ethnography as a multiplicity of intersecting and overlapping temporal coordinates: the times of social relations, historical conditions, daily routines, impending deadlines, events that turn into Events, the endless time of boredom, the light-bolt of epiphanies, the spiral time of the remembered, and the invisible time of the forgotten (ibid. 175).

Secondly, I wanted to defy the highly technical and esoteric language academics like to dress up their theories in and which young scholars need to reproduce if they want to pursue a scholarly career (Foley and Valenzuela 2005:224). Like Cynthia Enloe in political science, I did not want to write exclusively for my dissertation committee (2004:87). And like Ruth Behar in cultural anthropology, I wanted “to be a storyteller who told stories about real people in real places” (2003:16). I hoped that, whatever insights I would gain from my research travels, they would become relevant (and readable) beyond the narrow walls of academia, particularly for the participants, operators, and stakeholders in volunteer tourism, and also for my friends and family. Seeing how the pedantic and highly specialized scholarly lingo maintains an undemocratic grip over theory and knowledge production, I wanted to adopt a more accessible style that could make high theory amenable to political reflection and action. Ethnography, it seemed to me, was the only scholarly texts that could do that. The derogatory observation that, anthropologists are novelists *manqués*, envious of travel writers, journalists, and (non-)fiction authors, contains indeed a grain of truth (Clifford 1986a:4), which also explains why ethnography, especially the more contemporary strands, has remained on the fringes of acceptable academic production. In its readiness to defy the literary conventions of the scholarly genre, ethnography represented a critique of the ways in which knowledge is produced and communicated within the academy (Vrasti, forthcoming 2010).

Armed with these romantic convictions, I left home more or less methodologically unprepared. My plan was to combine two rites of passage into one: that of a tourist entering the “secrets” of another culture and that of a fieldworker penetrating the “inner sanctum” of a disciplinary tradition (Badone 2004:184). Since I was going to write a touring ethnography of volunteer tourism, I thought it might be useful to respect the inevitable messiness of independent travel. I planned for flights, visas, and vaccines, but left lots of room in my luggage for chance encounters and false expectations. But, as my travels would reveal, what surprised me the most was that the promises of ethnography turned out to be untrue. The ethnography I intended to write when I left home became impossible upon my return. Although I occasionally invoke examples from IR literature, most of the criticisms and corrections I advance in this section are directed at my own work. They describe my own ethnographic romances, more than anyone else's.

My interest in ethnography did not come out of thin air. Ethnographic methods and materials have been admired, adopted, and adapted in critical IR scholarship since the mid-1980s onwards. Although ethnography never came to enjoy “the rights of full disciplinary ‘citizenship’” (Beier 2005:62), judging purely by the number of feminists (Cohn 1987, 2006; Moon 1997; Enloe 2000, 2001), social constructivists (Zabusky 1995; Neumann 2002, 2005; Pouliot 2007), postcolonial scholars (Ling 2002; Franklin 2005; Beier 2005), and even political economists (Peterson 2002; Agathangelou 2004; Hobson and Seabrooke 2007; Best and Paterson 2009) interested in researching the political through a detour through culture, experience, and the everyday, we might be inclined to observe an “ethnographic turn” in international studies (Vrasti 2008:279). The same hopes that inspired my faith in ethnography

can be found here: the ambition to capture a more accurate and relevant version of social reality and to communicate it in a jargon-free style. At no point during this romance with ethnography in IR, however, were parallel developments in cultural anthropology taken into account. As Jean and John Comaroff already noted, just as ethnography was “being widely appropriated as a liberating method“ in fields such as cultural studies, social history, and political science, “its authority has been, and is being, seriously challenged from both within anthropology and outside” (1992:7). For ethnography to become the solution to social theory’s epistemological and textual aporias, its tumultuous history had to be forgotten and its textual ambiguities ignored (Vrasti 2008). In what follows, I review the ways in which ethnography has been written and rewritten from anthropological quarters over the past two or three decades. It is not my intent here to impose a purist version of ethnography or to claim that cultural anthropology maintains a monopoly over the correct dispensation of the genre. However, if we want to understand not just the promises, but also the provocations of ethnography, we need to learn from the discipline that has been grappling with its technicalities and textuality for over a hundred years (Vrasti, forthcoming 2010).

For the better half of the 20th century, ethnographic authority was based on experience, on the ability of the ethnographer to get a first-hand “feel” of the exotic cultures s/he was living with (Clifford 1988:35). Experience implied the acquisition of a skill or expertise through unmediated participation (Lash 2006:338). It “evoke[d] a participatory presence, a sensitive contact with the world to be understood, a rapport with its people, a concreteness of perception” (Clifford 1988:37). Yet by the 1970s these objectivist pretensions could no longer be sustained. Suddenly, experience seemed a notoriously vague and potentially totalitarian claim to authority: it is the exclusive property of the observer, its sensorial richness cannot be shared with others, and it is inimical to dialogue. Influenced by the semiotic revolution in parallel disciplines, anthropology embraced interpretation as the alternative to the “now apparently naïve claims of experiential authority” (ibid. 38). Clifford Geertz and his acolytes at the University of Chicago were the first to treat culture, and all its constitutive elements, as a “text” to be read hermeneutically. Culture was understood as a textual corpus, made of performances, events, beliefs, conversations, rituals, and artifacts, which had to be interpreted according to a philological model of analysis (Geertz 1973). For the first time, ethnography was seen as a potentially creative form of writing as opposed to just a method of reporting on realities in the field (Clifford 1988:38).

It was during this experimental phase of the discipline that ethnography came to be defined as the textual transcription/translation of characters, stories, artefacts, experiences, and events encountered during fieldwork in a way that enables theory-building. This understanding of ethnography, which emphasizes writing over being in the field or interpreting cultural realities, is not necessarily a novel insight. Anthropology was concerned with the problem of writing well before the hermeneutic turn in the 1970s. Marcus and Cushman identify nine literary conventions that classic ethnographies used to demonstrate

their authority and credibility.¹³ But if, in the early days of anthropology, ethnographic texts were bound by a series of law-like literary conventions, critical anthropology abandoned this obsession with textual authority arguing that realist techniques of representation betrayed a deeper attachment to colonial forms of power/knowledge. This opened the door to more improvisational but also more ethically responsible ethnographic experiments.

But the triumph was short-lived. Clifford's attention to writing would open a Pandora's box from which all sorts of epistemological anxieties and textual experiments would arise. Critical anthropology, introduced through Clifford and Marcus' manifesto volume *Writing Culture* (1986), acknowledges the centrality of writing for ethnography – “whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experiences into text” (Clifford 1986b:115) – but begs for a “specification of discourses” (Clifford 1986a:12). Instead of allowing ethnographers to maintain a firm authorial and editorial grip on their texts, they ask us to consider who speaks, who writes, where and when, on whose behalf, and under what constraints and obligations. This specification becomes necessary if we consider that, once field research is complete (events are witnessed, interviews are conducted, and data are collected), it is, once again, the fieldworker (the “man on the spot”) who assumes complete authority over the representation of reality. The shift from experience to interpretation, then, has done practically nothing to dislodge the semiotic power of the ethnographer. That is why, during the 1980s and 1990s, a variety of textual solutions – e.g. dialogic, polyphonic, participatory, experimental – sprung up in response to this (postcolonial) provocation. What united them was the ambition to recreate the dramatic milieu of everyday experience without either tempering with the creative process of writing ethnography or reproducing the power relations that come with authoring a text (Clifford 1988:39).

While cultural anthropology was undergoing its own disciplinary *crise de conscience*, adjacent social science disciplines were turning to ethnography precisely for the reasons it was being problematized in anthropology. Standpoint feminists of the 1980s and social constructivists of the 1990s were convinced that the participatory and experience-near qualities of ethnography were going to repopulate academia with subaltern voices and stories from the ground. Prominent feminist figures like Sandra Harding (1987) and Nancy Hartsock (1983, 1987), for instance, argued that first-hand experience could provide access to a more accurate version of reality, the “really real” (Behar 2003:16). Early ethnographic contributions to international relations, such as Carol Cohn's “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defence Intellectuals” (1987) and Cynthia Enloe's *Maneuvers* (1999) and *Beaches, Bananas and Bases* (2001) illustrate this belief. Yet this turn to ethnography tells us more

¹³ These include: 1. A congruence between the part and the whole; 2. The unintrusive presence of the researcher in the text; 3. Replacing individual voices with descriptions of a totality of people; 4. Limiting fieldwork experiences to the preface, footnotes or even a separate manuscript; 5. Choosing to represent spatially and temporally bound situations and events as opposed to face-to-face encounters and dramatized settings; 6. Representation of the native point of view; 7. Formulating general conclusions about cultural processes and formations, notably, social and family structures, rituals and political organizations; 8. Use of jargon to indicate that the text is meant for academic consumption; 9. High competence of native language (1982:31-7).

about the ambition of social studies to resolve the century-long quest for “innocent” knowledge than about ethnography itself.

There is a “redemptive Western allegory” (Clifford 1986b:99) haunting social sciences. It assumes something pure and authentic is being lost when reality is translated into theory (ibid. 118-9). Reality is elsewhere, they claim: it is in the bones, not the text. The real world is the world minus the university campus. Ethnography, with all its participatory and experience-near qualities, will hopefully access that reality and ground scholarly knowledge in a moral terrain beyond jargon and abstraction (Scott 1992:44). I, however, doubt that this is possible. As critical anthropology teaches us, it is not theory, but writing that distorts reality. Regardless of what research method we use or how accessibly we write, simply by narrating reality onto paper some of its original essence is irretrievably lost. Ethnography cannot escape the problem of writing; it can only confront its challenges more boldly. What ethnographic romances have achieved, at best, is to replace the (rationalist, masculinist) objectivism we once had with “three somewhat less objectivist positivisms: working class, feminist and ethnic positivisms” (Lash 2006:336). At worst, they have reinforced a larger anti-intellectual tendency to reduce social and political theory to its problem-solving core (something I will return to later).

It would be exaggerated to claim that ethnographic productions from outside anthropology have remained oblivious to the question of writing. More accurately, it was the promise to convey scholarly research in an intelligible fashion that sparked the fascination with ethnography in the first place. Because of its proximity to non-academic genres (e.g., travel writing, journalism, and creative non-fiction), it was hoped that ethnographic texts would be more democratic and accessible than other academic productions. This thinking speaks to the wide-spread ambition in social studies to make theory useful for political activism, social movements, and everyday life in general. Academics are encouraged to “liberate themselves from the pedantic, technical discourse of their disciplines” in order to break out of their narrow fields of specialization (Foley and Valenzuela 2005:224; Enloe 2004). The growing pressure to monitor and reward the “real life” contributions of social research (e.g., “Framework for Excellence” in the UK) further underscores the importance of communicating scholarship beyond the narrow walls of academia. This objective is not in and of itself condemnable. It becomes problematic, however, when it translates into a philistine attack on dense writing.

Against what common sense might tell us, writing accessibly is not necessarily a matter of “letting oneself go”, abandoning or defying the conventions of academic writing. It is also not equal to spilling one's guts on paper or writing from the heart, as aficionados of ethnography's personalized tone like to think (Behar 2003; Enloe 2004). It is not an undisciplined and uncontrolled activity that happens naturally or which only happens to gifted writers and geniuses. The idea that, writing for the greater public is a simple task, that involves forgetting rather than training, ultimately betrays an elitist attitude regarding popular culture and people outside academia. Making scholarly texts “user-friendly” is, in fact, a lengthy and arduous task, which requires keeping jargon to a bare minimum, learning how to

tell a story, showing (rather than telling) the relevance of theory to everyday life, and doing pedagogy without patronizing the readership. It involves a great deal of political engagement, disciplined commitment, and editing work. In trying to recreate the dramatic milieu of everyday experience, ethnography can, indeed, help us correct the dehumanized (i.e., people-less, story-less, and emotionless) face of social science research. This does not mean, however, that it can represent reality in its original force. Ethnography is not “a safe bet that can resolve the aporias of textual representation, automatically bring about emancipation, or render political scientists reflexive” (Vrasti 2008:82). Rather, it is a lesson in the audacity of writing: if it is writing (ethnographic or otherwise) that distorts the essence of reality, it is also writing that helps us represent that reality in ways that could transform it.

(Re)using Ethnography

Tourism is a mobile subject of inquiry. To capture the peripatetic nature of this practice and the constantly shifting subject positions of participants, we need to adapt our methodologies, concepts, and theories from a fixed (i.e., static/statist) framework to a flexible one (Allon *et al.* 2008:77). Hence, this study will *not* treat volunteer tourism as a question that needs explaining, a fixed point of departure upon which all theories and methods must be applied, or a discourse to be described like a static and cohesive monument of meaning (Foucault 1991a:60-1). What seems to be a fairly clear-cut sub-section of the tourism industry is, in fact, a peripatetic practice that combines holiday and residential experiences, citizenship and touristic practices, work and leisure in new and exciting ways (Allon *et al.* 2008:14). This is not to suggest that volunteer tourists are free-floating “postmodern” subjects. More accurately, they are an expression of our highly mobile global economy where settlement and movement patterns follow the trajectory of capital flows. Instead of talking about tourist typologies, we are better off thinking about tourist positions drifting along a continuum from “travelling” to “dwelling” in search for capital and self-esteem in the global arena (Hutnyk 1996; Allon *et al.* 2008:86-7; Ong 1999:6). Only by moving away from Wearing’s (2001:1) classical definition of voluntourism, as a self-contained, empirically observable practice, can volunteer tourism become the starting point for political analysis, rather than the end point of a stale area of research. A politically engaged study of volunteer tourism is one that does not simply describe volunteer tourism, but connects it to other itinerary sites (e.g. global cities, universities, social media, etc.) and identities (e.g. foreign investors, migrants, diasporas, expats, etc.) to illustrate how it operates as a manifestation of larger socio-economic and cultural circuits.

Furthermore, an analysis of subject formation, that is, an analysis that charts the subjects and social relations that emerge in volunteer tourism must remain attuned to the fact that subjectivity is what escapes representation, not what can be captured in a unified social subject (Papadopoulos *et al.* 2008). Tourism studies are famous for dissecting travel into typologies of movement (e.g., independent travel, heritage tourism, eco-tourism, alternative

tourism, volunteer tourism, etc.) and discreet subject categories (e.g., backpackers, volunteers, ex-pats, etc.). That is why the field has been accused of not being able to go beyond a sociological lay of the land (Franklin and Crang 2001). A similar problem plagues the writings of David Brooks (2000), Richard Florida (2002), and Norbert Bolz (2008), whose astute observations on neoliberal subjectivity come to life only thanks to the anecdotal detail surrounding their otherwise inanimate human prototypes. Instead of exploring the conditions of subject formation, they prefer to use empirical observations and behavioural trivia to present us with an already formed subject, an individual so set in his/her ways and so secure in his/her position that it can only lead to theoretical paralysis. To avoid these all-too-facile traps, this project must focus on the processes that allow subjects to come into being in the first place, on the material and symbolic conditions that make volunteer tourism a desideratum for neoliberal subjectivity.

It is not only volunteers who travel, crossing continents and shifting subject positions. Research travels as well. For my research, I travelled to Guatemala, then Ghana, and back to my desk. The project also travelled through various stages of research, from literature review to field work, back through libraries, field notes, committee meetings, conference presentations, successive writing and endless editing stages. Some of these travels were filled with false expectations and dead ends, others were full of epiphanies and surprises. In all cases, the road research travels from thesis to theory is uncertain and unpredictable. First and foremost, this road map has something to say about my own intellectual travels – how I became interested in the topic, what inspired me, what challenges and doubts I confronted, how I patched up the data into a coherent whole, what I left out and what I chose to dwell on. Making the trajectory of research travels public is not just an exercise in honesty, but also a challenge to what is formally known as “method” – how it is taught, practiced, and written up.

We are taught in methodology courses that research is the result of a “linear and deliberate accumulation” of insight (Cerwonka 2007:37). But the answers to our research questions never await us “in the field.” Often we return home more confused than we were in the first place. It is neither experience nor interpretation, neither methodological virtuosity nor theoretical skill that makes research work, but improvisation (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). Improvisation means travelling back and forth between the part and the whole, experience and text, fieldwork and theory to make sure that one’s theoretical conclusions meet the demands of persuasive and innovative research (Cerwonka 2007:15, 19). There is as much reflection as there is spontaneity involved in piecing these two seemingly distinct registers together. Improvisation makes visible the un-rational work – the anxieties, epiphanies, and surprises – involved in writing ethnography (ibid. 37). Improvisation has nothing to do with “weak” research design or self-indulgent solipsism. Rather, it is an exercise in being truthful about the distance we travel from research questions to finished manuscript: nothing can be left out of our ethnography without taking something away from theory. Also, improvisation is not a matter of giving up on textual authority. Much to the contrary, a text that is aware of “the subtle forms of knowledge found in ineffable moments of

intuition and epiphany” (Behar 2003:23) only acquires a more credible voice. In conclusion, the shifting grounds of volunteer tourism mirror my own travels, from the ethnographic romances I started out with to the multidisciplinary research I ended up writing. Ethnography is suitable for both: it can trace the inherently evasive nature of subject-formation and chart the windy road to “scholarly” conclusions.

Over the course of two months in Guatemala I interviewed 12 volunteers. In Ghana, the program turnout was somewhat higher, allowing me to interview 16 volunteers. With a couple of exceptions, I conducted all interviews on site, not having the resources or the access to do pre- and post-trip interviews. The interviews were not recorded, but transcribed from hand notes and memory immediately after the fact. After about five interviews in each location, I noticed that the answers started resembling one another. With volunteers hanging out in tight-knit groups, and the more veteran ones taking an active role in introducing the greenhorns to local tips and tricks, a shared discourse on the host organization, local culture, and appropriate conduct was quick to emerge. At times, evidence of “group think” makes it difficult to distinguish between individual volunteer voices. Rather than mourning the loss of authentic voice, I found this to be helpful in understanding the formation and articulation of privileged – mobile, white, normative – subjectivity as a process that extends far beyond the two volunteer tourism sites covered in this project.

I have deliberately chosen to exclude the subaltern, that is, the *voluntoured* communities, from this study, partly for strategic and partly for ethical reasons. On the strategic front, the critical turn in the social studies and humanities has, for the most part, chosen to neglect those who help reproduce, stabilize, and institutionalize power, focusing instead on those excluded from or oppressed by it. In the long run, this is a potentially dangerous tendency because it pushes the already invisible center of our socio-political formations further into oblivion. The invisibility of privileged subjectivity does not detract from its power to shape what is desirable or normative. It only leaves us more mystified about the ways in which power manifests and reproduces itself in the first place. Ethical considerations further substantiate this choice. Although I have had a few informal conversations with locals about the effect of volunteering in their communities, including these testimonies in my research would have only compromised their already fragile economic position. Local interlocutors were invariably dismissive or ironic of volunteering efforts: they either did not acknowledge volunteers as proper “workers”, preferring to refer to them simply as tourists (something which deeply upset the volunteers), or they had derogatory opinions regarding the overall usefulness of their presence. Making these views public could have prevented those who confided in me to further participate in volunteer tourism as project coordinators, host families, or service providers. This being said, subaltern figures are not entirely absent from this study. They are being invoked indirectly whenever volunteers talk about their desire to “make a difference” and their failure to do so, or whenever they express sympathy or anger for local customs and conditions. It is through this mediated exchange that we come to grasp the power dynamics at the core of volunteer tourism.

Adding Archaeology

About a year ago, I presented a paper on the uses of ethnography in International Relations at the International Studies Association (ISA) convention in San Francisco. This led to a quite serendipitous email correspondence with a fellow colleague who shared my enthusiasm. I had suggested he read the work of Nancy Miller (1991), Judith Okely (1992), and Ruth Behar (1996), all of which deeply influenced my thinking. Eventually, he wrote to announce that his romance with ethnography had come to an end: “The absence of reflexivity [...] reminds me that my desire to become an ethnographer may be a false desire – perhaps it is best for me to be an IR person who wants to be an ethnographer.” I replied that “my brief full-frontal encounter with ethnography [has taught me that] anthropology needs global politics. I’m not quite sure anthropology needs ‘IR’, but it definitely needs some sort of social and political thought” (email correspondence, 24 April 2008). Ethnography does not need to import the theories, methods, or jargon of international studies, the state-centric focus of which might clash with the genre’s stated interest in cultural critique. Ethnography does, however, need to ground its writing in a more thorough understanding of the distribution, reproduction, and contestation of power on a global scale. That is why I propose anchoring the narrative repertoires and events of fieldwork in a method of abstraction that takes its inspiration from Foucault’s archaeological method.

Archaeology, also known as “analytics of government” (Rose 1999:15-20; Dean 1999:20-7), is interested less in describing the “general principles of reality” than in identifying the rationalities that make that reality acceptable and the fissures that could transform it (Foucault 2002:201). It is a method that is deeply committed to unearthing the conditions, or truth regimes, that make certain judgements possible and foreclose others, that legitimize certain forms of being and outlaws others (Butler 2003:4). Archaeology is Foucault’s alternative to a long tradition in social inquiry of uncovering “political universals” and the laws that govern them. Allergic to concepts which historical, sociological, economic, and political analysis took as a given (e.g., state, sovereignty, civil society, people, capital, etc.)¹⁴, Foucault was rather interested in the problems (i.e., the forms and effects of power) that lent these concepts an ontological presence (Neal 2009:541). Archaeology turns away from the essence of things to study the conditions and processes that give them meaning. This represents a “general re-orientation in Western thinking in the twentieth century” (Tully cited in Walters and Haahr 2005:290).

In contrast to ethnography, archaeology suggests that the minute description of everyday practices and experience is purely descriptive unless we take into account how they work in conjunction and disjunction with political institutions, economic regimes, and programs of government. It also implies that the ethnographer’s responsibility does not stop at accurately transcribing fieldwork events, statements, and artefacts. No matter how urgent the ethical implications of textual representation, we cannot allow the spoken repertoires of

¹⁴ For instance, Foucault refers to the theory of the state as an “indigestible meal” (2008:77)

our research subjects sideline the material and discursive strategies involved in producing neoliberal subjects and social relations (Ferguson 2006:19). In the formulation of Jean-Francois Bayart, “subjectivization is too important to be left up to the subjects” (2008:199). Without a larger political ambition, even the most ethically conscious texts cannot help but become exercises in flatfooted and sterile sociology. This is why I ultimately propose a dialogical method that moves between the narrative constructions of volunteer tourists and the governmental strategies involved in their subjectivization to construct a biopsy of our present condition. It is only with the help of the latter that a “critical attitude” – which Foucault defines as an attitude of “reflected intractability” with regards to how we want to be governed, by whom, in the name of what principles, with what objectives in mind, and by what means (2002:194) – becomes possible.

In merging ethnography and archaeology, my study has become much more theory-intensive than I would have envisioned. While this can seem like a betrayal of my initial ethnographic aspirations, I maintain that theory must not necessarily act as an alienating force. To inspire political action, social analysis does not have to keep scholarly erudition at a bare minimum in order to speak to the largest number of people, as argued by 1980s feminists (Harding 1987; Hartsock 1983, 1987; Cohn 1987; Enloe 1999, 2001) – the first to call for a consideration of everyday life in international politics. The “all-these-theories-and-the-bodies-keep-piling-up” rhetoric (Zalewski 1996) draws upon a series of parochial dichotomies (“reality” vs. “armchair theory”, “the world out there” vs. “the ivory tower”) that do more to police the use-value of critical scholarship than to advance any progressive notion of emancipation. We cannot reject critical theory off-hand simply on account of its textual density. Certainly, there are plenty of examples of “bad” theory – exceedingly esoteric, methodologically flawed, poorly communicated, and plain unconvincing theory. But, I would argue, this is less an example of theory, than of “theoreticism” – the dogmatic application of critical theory divorced from its historical context and lived surroundings. To quote Sylvère Lotringer (2009), “anti-theory and theoreticism are two sides of the same coin. But, of course, it is the wrong coin.” In a different vein, Fredric Jameson explains that, “what is socially offensive about ‘theoretical’ texts like [his] own, is not their inherent difficulty, but rather the signals of higher education, that is, of class privilege, which they emit” (Kunkel 2010). Even if theory is, for now, mostly confined to the upwardly mobile, overeducated, liberal elite, it remains essential for mapping and navigating our way through social reality. Refusing to engage with it can only result in ignoring the subtlety and complexity of our current predicament, which has no difficulty whatsoever to internalize its externalities, include its opponents, and commodify consent (Frank and Weiland 2002; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Every form of critique that trades theory for direct action, “speaking truth to power”, and other quixotic attempts to emancipate the human condition, can only produce more of the same. The road to hell is paved with uncritical intensions. The merit of theory is to guide us through the ethico-political complexities surrounding us, but also to warn us about the righteous temptations they bear.

Conclusion

The project before us explores the strategies of government mobilized in (re)producing the flexible subject of late capitalism through an ethnographic study of two volunteer tourism sites in the Global South. Combining ethnography with an analytics of government to forge an anthropology of subject formation represents a methodological innovation in international studies. The original contribution of this dialogical method is not a matter of simply “importing” ethnography from cultural anthropology into international relations. Rather, it consists in challenging the common assumptions about ethnography – the promise to capture authentic reality and to communicate it in an accessible language – and grounding this genre in political critique. While I remain convinced that theory is what makes the world around us intelligible and malleable, I also wish this text to be a user-friendly hermeneutic guide to our contemporary condition – a “critical ontology of ourselves” (Read 2003:2). The language and theory used here may not be readily accessible to people outside the profession, but this does not mean that this project is removed from everyday life. Such “high” theory is necessary to demonstrate the intricate complicity that binds our strategies of individuation to conditions we perceive as unjust and violent. The trouble with a governmental regime that relies on affect and autonomy, as opposed to one that draws exclusively upon calculation and discipline, is that it obscures this complicity so well that it precludes critique or makes it seem ridiculous. The goal, then, is not to eliminate theory, but to acquire and teach a level of theoretical literacy that will allow us to dispense with these mystifications and engage in a rigorous (self-)examination of our deepest emotional and political investments.

The two chapters that follow use ethnographic material gathered during my research travels in Ghana and Guatemala to tackle the questions enumerated in the beginning of this chapter. Chapters four and five illustrate two very distinct sets of conditions where volunteer tourism produces subjects and social relations conducive to the entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism. The Guatemalan example shows that volunteer tourism mobilizes a series of affective investments which cover the historical and material origins of difference in a cultural blanket and allow only white middle-class people to benefit from the generous sentiments they espouse. The case in Ghana demonstrates that, even when volunteering contributes nothing to the proper education of young adults, it still fulfils an important pedagogical function that can help volunteers enter the ranks of the professional class. In both instances volunteer tourists come to embody desirable resources, capacities, and aesthetic sensibilities that help them enjoy the same currency as material or financial capital. Together, these effects draw the contours of a new global imaginary discussed in the concluding chapter.

Guatemala: Emotional Styles of Rule

Proving the ethical value of volunteer tourism seems always easier than showing how the formula is complicit with colonial and capitalist forms of rule. In opting for an alternative form of travel, which bypasses the ecological destruction, economic exploitation, and commercial orientation of modern mass tourism, volunteer tourism appears to be a critique of the consumerist lifestyle of advanced industrial societies, along with the wastefulness and inequality that result from it. In that sense, overseas volunteering entails a normative promise – the promise that “another world is possible”: a world governed by transnational responsibility and charitable ambitions. What this chapter sets out to demonstrate, however, is the opposite, namely that volunteer tourism is a politically suspect practice that does more to consolidate than to challenge Orientalist sensibilities and the spirit of capitalism.

In adopting this view, I challenge the tourism and hospitality literature, which is (mostly) confident about the ability of volunteer tourism to counteract the more problematic products of the travel industry (Wearing 2001, 2002; *see* chapter one). I also complicate the Foucauldian model of subjectivization, which suggests that neoliberal individuals organize their lives around a-emotional market principles (Rose 1996; Lemke 2001; Brown 2003; Foucault 2008). Images of rugged individualism, masculinism, and ruthless competition invoked by classical liberal economics (e.g., the “organization man”) have come under increasing attack for their alienating and destructive consequences. Economic rationality is not exhausted in models of instrumental action and bureaucratic organization styles (Illouz 2007, 2008; Read 2009; Bolz 2009). Instead, neoliberal subjects are expected to demonstrate social responsibility and environmental awareness, a desire for social change, and an appreciation for cultural diversity. Acts of alternative consumption can go a long way. But, as leisure and hospitality studies have already noted, volunteer tourism has the advantage of demonstrating a notion of sacrifice, frugality, and self-esteem that driving a hybrid car or shopping for locally-grown organic produce cannot. The task of this chapter is to problematize the intimate relation between emotional literacy and economic performance exemplified in volunteer tourism.

The chapter traces my convoluted research travels through the Peten region of Guatemala from false expectations, through conceptual ambiguity, and finally to a critique of emotional styles of rule. The journey starts with what would later turn out to be a mistaken assumption about the moral economy of volunteer tourism. Influenced by Stephen Wearing’s (2001) work, reproduced all across tourism studies and industry brochures, I embarked on my journey hoping to find compassionate subjects eager to “give back” and “do something useful on vacation”. With great surprise, however, I learned that my fellow volunteers quickly lost interest in the charitable work of Volunteer Peten (VP), the organization we had signed up with, turning their attention to the local culture and natural beauty instead. Most of them felt that the organization suffered from a lack of direction and that their efforts did not enjoy support from the local community. To avoid feeling useless, volunteers chose to spend their time sightseeing, getting to know the locals, and learning about the indigenous culture. Just as

I was beginning to doubt the use of emotional competencies in producing neoliberal subjects and social relations, I realized that “emotional capitalism” (Illouz 2007) does not have to be limited to care and compassion. The fact that my fieldwork did not reveal the acts of charity and responsibility demanded by the brochure discourse does not mean that volunteers do not find alternative ways to demonstrate their affective credentials. In Guatemala, volunteer sensibilities manifested themselves through a romantic appreciation of the “small place” we were living in. Yet the seemingly benign and benevolent sentiments (i.e., tolerance, sympathy, multicultural appreciation) volunteers shared for locals did more to reproduce “the ideological form of ‘postmodern’ global capitalism” (Zizek 2009:22) than to initiate any meaningful models for justice.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. I start by describing the work of Volunteer Peten, after which I discuss the organization’s failure to construct San Andres as a credible (i.e., “poor enough”) volunteering destination. The ensuing frustrations, however, were short-lived. As the third section explains, volunteers quickly turned their feelings of uselessness into an enjoyable multiculturalist stance towards the local place and people. I conclude the chapter with a critique of these seemingly benevolent sentiments, which subsume difference to the consumptive logic of capitalism and serve only to validate the moral superiority of white middle class individuals. Except for the final section, the chapter follows the unfolding of events “in the field” as well as the hermeneutic trajectory I used to interpret them.

Volunteer Peten

Over the past decade or so, the Guatemalan village of San Andres, where the organization Volunteer Peten (VP) is based, swelled to its current size of 20,000 inhabitants. Landless or land-poor farmers were relocated to the Peten region by decades of civil war and the dismal state of Guatemala’s land tenure system (Sundberg 1998:394). Peten, at the heart of which San Andres lies, used to be the most sparsely populated area in the country, home to a large tract of Central America’s rainforest (Selva Maya) rich in mahogany and timber. This drew both the impoverished classes and foreign natural resource extraction companies to the region. Since the 1960s, the population of Peten jumped from 25,207 to an estimated 614,000 (Schwartz 1990:11).¹⁵ Initially, migrants were drawn by the colonization activities of the Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarrollo de Peten (FYDEP, the National Development Agency for the Peten), a military-led government institution given “extensive and in practice exclusive authority” in the Peten, ostensibly to promote economic development in the region (ibid. 253). The agency sold land parcels, established infrastructure to promote social and economic development, and regulated the harvesting of forestry resources (ibid. 252). In 1986 FYDEP was abolished and quickly replaced by privately owned cattle and farming ranches, foreign resource extraction companies, and transnational NGOs, which today make

¹⁵ The latest figure is a 2010 estimate issued by the Guatemalan government based on data collected at the 2002 national census (<http://www.ine.gob.gt/index.php/demografia-y-poblacion/42-demografiaypoblacion/207-infodemo2010>; consulted 10/5/2010).

up the region's main sources of employment (Sundberg 1998:394). Still, despite relatively abundant employment, San Andreseños continue to live on \$4/day (Mateo, 17 September 2008) without plumbing, clean water, a proper garbage disposal system, safe transport, and textbooks, not to mention “luxuries” like job security, social benefits, sports and recreation facilities, and mobility rights (for work or leisure).

From August to September 2008 I worked alongside the program director, Mathew Peters (Mateo), his small local team, and volunteers from the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, and Germany, in a conservation park right outside San Andres, where we dug ditches, made compost, built trails, and so on. Some volunteers also taught English in local schools and helped out at the library. In the afternoons, I would usually conduct interviews, transcribe notes or write in my fieldwork diary. Over the course of two months I interviewed a dozen volunteers aged 19-26. (Peak season was coming to an end when I arrived and many of the volunteers were leaving. The new ones that arrived had taken a term or a year off school and, hence, were not rushed by the beginning of the fall term.) The reasons volunteers gave for joining the program ranged from the personal to the professional. Some needed to get away from the tedious yet hectic routine they followed at home. Alice describes the altercations she used to have with her boss, fights with her boyfriend, stress concerning her grades, overwork, and fear of failure. “I needed to put things in perspective and take a step back from my life in America” (2 September 2008). Similarly, Kristen wanted to take a break from her full-time job which was both stressful and boring (26 September 2008). Zack, on the other hand, “had a strong desire to develop a social consciousness; [he] wanted to get a sense of the poverty and the challenges people face on an everyday basis in the Global South” (8 September 2008). Others, like Alison and Paula were intrigued by the magnitude of the volunteer tourism phenomenon and were curious to see if this might be an appropriate subject of research for their undergraduate or graduate work.

Despite these differences, what all volunteers had in common was the desire to experience something out of the ordinary, to travel to a smaller, slower, and quieter place, a place where people are warm and hospitable, and where tradition has not yet been corrupted by modernity. As Edward Bruner explains, Western metaphysics is predicated on a notion of the lost original which modernity, with its technological progress, rationality, secularism, and economic imagination, has destroyed once and for all. “Tourists are searching for ‘experience’ and for their ‘origin’ through the rural, the primitive, the childlike, the unpolluted, the pure, and the original. They are returning to the Garden” (cited in Badone 2004:183). San Andres, with its picturesque lakeside location, surrounded by natural reservations, church bells, Sunday soccer games, people who know their neighbours by name, and a lifestyle that seemed to be following the same cycle since time immemorial was exactly the “small place” volunteers had hoped for. But beneath this facade lay all the fantasies and tensions that make volunteer tourism in the Global South a problematic encounter.

The organization allowed volunteers to acquire a sense of what it means, for a while at least, to be “independent and self-sufficient” (Joanna, 1 September 2008) in a foreign situation. VP gave volunteers everything they needed to feel at home from the moment they

set foot in San Andres: a home, a substitute family, three meals a day, an occupation, and a circle of friends. In other words, for only \$350/month (a modest fee compared to what other organizations are charging), VP distilled the overwhelming excitement and foreignness of living abroad to a manageable routine. In addition, during the ten years he spent in San Andres, learning the language, the bureaucratic ins and outs, the social norms that govern the place, and everyone's name, Mateo acquired an in-depth local knowledge, which he could now pass on to volunteers. Also, by virtue of having built a couple of schools, a library, and a conservation park as well as providing a source of income for the families selected to host volunteers, Mateo enjoyed a reputation of trust and credibility, volunteers were invited to take advantage of. In effect, the reason why we could feel "at home" in San Andres was because Mateo had come here long before us and made this distant place *available* for our intervention.

Not surprisingly, we viewed Mateo with respectful awe. At VP all work was inspired by his vision and structured around his own daily schedule. In the mornings Mateo used to go to the park to build trails, make compost, plant trees, or build animal shelters. After lunch, he taught English to students of various ages at three different schools. In the evenings, he could be found at the library where he helped students with their homework or screened movies. Maintaining a hectic work schedule seemed vital to his personal well-being. He viewed his work with an almost obsessive enthusiasm and dedication, most volunteers had trouble imitating, especially given Mateo's reluctant leadership style and aloof disposition. We always asked ourselves "how Mateo could have left behind his life in the US for this (sic)." While his generosity and frugality impressed us, we could not comprehend the effortlessness and factualness with which he carried out his work. This is how Mateo explains it:

I can't imagine ever having a job and a pay check. I've done these kinds of jobs at home and they all just want to get through the day and get to the weekend. It seems ridiculous to work only for the time that you spend outside your work, for the weekends, and evenings, hobbies, and vacations. What a waste of time! I just can't function in that kind of an environment. This is my hobby. It doesn't feel like work to me. I can live here with very little to no money. Whereas at home I couldn't function. I used to get very depressed. If other volunteers don't want to put in the same effort as me, that doesn't affect me. Everyone's different. This is not a job and it is not for everybody. (17 September 2008)

For Mateo, then, moving to San Andres was not a matter of renunciation or self-sacrifice. He viewed it as a natural, even necessary, step for his own wellbeing. Meanwhile, volunteers were left to make their own decisions about when, where, how, and how much they would like to get involved. Mateo rarely assumed a leadership role and he never monitored our daily work performance. Because flexibility seemed to be the key word in VP, volunteers were free to interrupt their work week at any time for a trip to Belize or Antigua (a

popular tourist destination in Guatemala famous for its colonial-style architecture and Spanish language courses), or just skip a day of work to stay home with a book or swim in the lake. Slacking was most difficult for newcomers, who were plagued by guilt feelings whenever they did not complete the humanitarian work they had signed up for. But they were quickly “re-educated” through initiation talks with veteran volunteers, which always included stories devoted to normalizing idleness. This was either done by complaining about Mateo’s poor organizational skills or by pointing out the uselessness of his various projects.

With this loose organizational style, Mateo could not generate the desired levels of work commitment and enthusiasm. As Rebecca complained, the vision seemed to be “in Mateo’s head” and was rarely shared with the volunteers (28 August 2008). Kristen, who had an ample record of volunteering in her native Australia, was surprised that, at VP,

there is no obligation for time, energy or participation. There is not enough communication between Mateo and the volunteers. He has a vision, but we don’t know what it is. I’ve just received the newsletter in my email the other day and I learned more about the organization than from the team leader. In the places that I’ve volunteered before, we used to get together at the start of the day or the week to discuss the direction, the goals of the organization. (26 September 2008)

Although she admitted that Mateo was “an inspirational presence [...] there is a lack of creative energy between Mateo and the volunteers.” With no team spirit or feedback from Mateo, volunteers’ motivation levels were volatile. Some of us were committed, others not at all. For Kristen,

volunteering is not as hard work as I expected. It’s actually very easy and I often feel like I’m not giving enough. Also, the fact that we are not paid, that this is not an obligation, makes you ask yourself: are you happy with what you’re doing? Or are you happy with giving only a little of your time? There’s also the option of having no motivation, of doing nothing. You don’t have to be continually moving. Maybe, we are culturally lazy. Maybe not lazy, but the volunteers I’ve been working with haven’t got any experience with physical jobs. (26 September 2008)

At the end of the day, it was Mateo who worked hardest of all. His triple work day in the park, in schools, and at the library made volunteers admire his dedication and spirit of self-sacrifice, but not necessarily follow his example. In addition to these, these projects also failed to arouse the interest of the community or the imagination of volunteers.

“The park is not a real project”, volunteers complained repeatedly. Because the park already employed a full-time personnel, the tasks we were assigned seemed useless. Also, the community showed very little interest in the project. “What’s the point of building trails

nobody will walk on?” Alice wanted to know (2 September 2008). Since the villagers never came to visit the park, and did not seem to take any interest in the project, she felt the reforestation project was just a way to attract volunteers and their funds. Although she understood the park was necessary for VP to remain solvent (pay bills and salaries), she thought volunteers should be given something meaningful to do, a purposeful existence, during their stay. “We are paying a nice chunk of money while we're here and it would be nice to feel useful. It is no coincidence that as soon as the construction project was done, everybody left” (ibid.). Kirsten raised similar concerns: “I have yet to find out what good the park is doing” (26 September 2008). Volunteers ironically called the project “Mateo’s baby” because it did not seem to fill any local needs or wants although, in theory, they all agreed that conserving the natural resources of an area so violently stricken by deforestation was imperative. To this we must also add the fact that working in the park was often a very difficult task: it was physically exhausting, slow-moving, and not very rewarding.

Teaching English in schools was considered equally futile because, after years of classes, students’ language skills were still minimal. After only a couple of days in town, Kristen was

disheartened at the schools, seeing that adolescents don’t want to learn English. I had the presumption they wanted to learn English. I have been trying to teach [my host family] a few words in English and show them where Australia was on the map. But they couldn’t care less. They don’t even reward children’s performance in school or reprimand the lack thereof. There is generally a gross indifference towards education, which I can’t understand because I learn just for the fun. I came all this way just to learn about their culture. (26 September 2008)

Andrea, who had been tutoring the 10-year old daughter of her host family, was disillusioned that the girl had not progressed beyond a few introductory phrases in English despite also attending Mateo’s English class. “Mateo could forget about it”, she told me (19 September 2008). Some blamed “their culture” for the lack of emphasis placed on education. Others argued that, since most children in San Andres had no interest in ever leaving the community anyways, they had no need for English.

The people here have lived in these places for thousands of years, and will continue to do so. It is amazing how rooted and traditional these people are. No one wants to move or immigrate. All they want is to get married and build a house. They don’t want to learn English and explore the world. (Joanna, 1 September 2008)

Without an institutional or leadership structure in place to convey the importance and merits of their efforts, volunteers quickly lost interest in the work they had signed up for. As new volunteers turned into veteran ones, the respectful awe the group initially had for Mateo and his program turned into comical curiosity: we could not really understand why this character was doing all this Sisyphean work that seemed to go nowhere and benefit no one. Slowly, the charitable ambitions, volunteers originally had in joining the trip, gave way to frustrations – frustrations about having wasted their vacating time and money for a cause they could not identify with or find a place in. But, although the organization was indeed Mateo's brain child, it was not entirely his fault that volunteers felt useless. As the next section demonstrates, volunteer destinations are carefully designed sites of intervention, the urgency and credibility of which depends on a host of different factors.

Design Destination

Even if ultimately volunteer tourism is still a form of leisure, volunteers hope it will not reproduce the sea-sand-and-sex formula of classical tourism, which most of them find to be dull. (Whenever I asked volunteers whether they had been anywhere in the developing world prior to coming to Guatemala, they excluded previous family trips to all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean – for them, these did not count as travelling to the Global South.) Volunteer tourism should revolve around “something bigger than just a couple of weeks of sitting on a beach” (Jake, 19 September 2009). Besides relaxation, volunteers also want to be in situations they have never experienced before (Joanna), test their endurance limits (Kristen), do something outside their normal comfort zone (Jake), and demolish the cultural barriers that separate them from others (Zack). Destinations should not be too familiar – they should not be inundated with modern cultural and semiotic goods – or too affluent – the needs of local people should be visible and urgent. These expectations are not entirely unreasonable: the brochure discourse, with its constant invocation of the need to “give back” or “make a difference” and incessant promises of “unique experiences” and “doing something worthwhile”, represents overseas destinations as places so steeped in poverty and so removed from modernity that volunteering there would be like being Mother Theresa and Indiana Jones in one. As Eric, a volunteer I met in Ghana, would say, “[in volunteer tourism] adrenalin and humanitarianism go well together” (7 April 2009).

Measured according to these hopes, San Andres can be regarded as a “failed” volunteer tourism destination. Volunteers incessantly complained they could not recognize the needs of the community and the purpose of the aid programs meant to address them. San Andreseños did not show much interest in either the conservation park or in learning English. Also, they did not seem to be “poor enough” to require volunteer help or foreign aid in the first place. Mateo explains that this is a recurrent challenge for the volunteer tourism industry. Attractive destinations “cannot be found out there”. They have to be carefully designed by finding the right balance between, on the one hand, places that are “poor enough” to make

volunteers feel needed and useful and, on the other, relatively safe and affluent places, where volunteers can be hosted, fed, and entertained.

Sure, there are places which are far worse than San Andres, where people live in extreme poverty, but you can't go there. What would you do there? Where would you stay? What would you eat? And can't do anything there, but go and stare at the poverty. (17 September 2008)

San Andres seemed to fare well on the second count, but less so on the first. Volunteers agreed that, compared to the neighbouring communities of San Benito, La Libertad, or Carmelita, not to mention Guatemala City, San Andres was “pretty well-off.” All of the people in San Andres had three meals a day, a roof over their heads, and a job that paid regular salaries. Some of the families even had indoor plumbing (thanks to the revenue generated by hosting volunteers). And the crime rate was low. Although they rarely travelled to other places in Guatemala, lacked recreational possibilities, and retired late, most volunteers considered these to be luxuries not necessary for a decent standard of living. Poverty is elsewhere, not in this “urban centre in the midst of a rural world”, Zack argued. “If you want to see poverty, go to Carmelita or Santa Elena, where people really live in dirt” (8 September 2008) While none of us could imagine spending the rest of our lives in San Andres, which is why we admired Mateo, the locals were considered fortunate enough to have their basic needs covered. To quote Kristen:

although most volunteers think of San Andres as unsafe and destitute, because that's what most websites and guidebooks report about Guatemala, I learned that locals have more than they need. They have enough water and food for their children, common spirit, shelter, sun, some education, recreational facilities, a soccer field and basketball court. They even have TVs and electronic products, not that I rate poverty based on these, but I'm surprised. They are over the poverty line. There are no starving people in the streets; it's reasonably clean; not overpopulated; there is general well-being. Life doesn't seem to be a struggle, just very mundane [boring]. But people here seem happy with the mundane. (26 September 2008)

Initially, this came as a surprise to me. Having carefully studied the brochure discourse of various organizations across the entire spectrum of the industry, I assumed that this practice would be imbued with a moral economy that celebrated the virtues of care, compassion, and charity (Simpson 2004:683; Lisle 2008). But Volunteer Peten was not like other organizations online. The website talked more about what the organization could do for volunteers – offer language training, provide an insight in local culture, train volunteers to design and participate in sustainable projects, and help them “develop any project that suits

their abilities and goals” – than the other way around. Alongside its many projects and initiatives, VP hopes to:

aid development in Guatemala by training international volunteers to participate in, design, and implement sustainable projects. We can train volunteers in numerous areas of interest including best management practices, approaches to education, problems that affect Guatemala, possible solutions to various problems, and most importantly, culture (<http://www.volunteerpeten.com/Volunteering.htm>).

On the one hand, promising to train volunteers makes sense given that VP does not require them to have any previous expertise or skills. On the other hand, it remains unclear how this will improve the material and environmental conditions in San Andres. While there is something admirable about Mateo refusing to portray San Andreseños as *dependent* on the arrival of foreign help, this silence confirms that Volunteer Peten is geared entirely towards the needs and desires of volunteers. The ambition of the organization is to push the (physical and emotional) boundaries and expand the (cultural, linguistic, professional) horizons of volunteers, not to engage in aid and development assistance.

I asked myself: how could care and responsibility be missing from an enterprise, the success of which depends upon these very orientations? Maybe normative aspirations such as these are what determined volunteers to sign up for the trip, however, by the time I conducted the interviews – all of which took place on site, towards the end of each volunteer’s stay – most participants, frustrated with the perceived uselessness of their placements, the lack of support from the local community, and the unfulfilling type of work they were given, had more or less given up on volunteering and become just alternative tourists, which is how the locals had viewed them all along. If a normative impetus existed before the trip, it vanished by the time I joined the conversation. So I asked Mateo what he thought about the “not poor enough” thesis. He seemed irritated by the supposition:

Of course [the people in San Andres] are poor. There is no electricity, no water, women have to get up at 4 in the morning to grind maize, people have to make sacrifices to send their children to school. [...] Here people make \$4 a day. Does that mean they are not poor? You can have a house, electricity, water, food, basic things, but you can't have any purchasing power, you can't travel anywhere, you can't have a bank account, you can't save any money or plan for the future. In Guatemala 60% of the people are poor. They just make it day by day. (17 September 2009)

Poverty in San Andres may not have taken the visibly disturbing form volunteers had expected from *Save the Children* commercials and other photogenic/pornographic displays of poverty (Hutnyk 2004), but this does not mean that the place is not steeped in material need

and economic uncertainty. Research indicates that poverty includes a variety of dimensions beyond mere physical survival, from community participation, to use of modern technology, access to economic and social security provisions, and opportunities for self-advancement and –improvement (Chrisinger et al. 2009). Mateo made no effort to help volunteers understand the multi-dimensional structure of need in San Andres and how the projects initiated by Volunteer Peten tried to address those needs. His hope was that, simply by staying with local families (if not by participating in the work projects), volunteers would automatically come to understand the realities of local everyday life: they would get to see what locals have to do to get by, cook meals, send their children to school, and so on. This never happened. Although VP did allow Western tourists to participate in a world they usually only got to see from a distance, from tour busses, television, or the pages of *National Geographic*, it lacked the political pedagogy that could have turned this purely observational encounter into a more substantial form of engagement.

Contrary to popular opinion, need is only rarely a visible, unambiguous fact of life. Most often, it must be conjured through aesthetic, often pornographic conventions of destituteness, disease, and the dissolution of the normal order of things (Nyers 2005:90-1). To recognize need we must learn to see misery and suffering even when they are hidden underneath quotidian normality. And not even then will we have a foolproof solution to it. Responding to need in a way that does not objectify and further disempower the so-called “victim” is a whole other can of worms (Malkki 1996; Ticktin 2006). Need is not a natural fact, just as our response to it is not a spontaneous emotion. One is a social and aesthetic construct (Hutnyk 2004), the other a trained emotional style to a particular historical moment (Berlant 2004:7). The San Andreseños with their regular eating habits, their literate children, their cell phones, and their color TVs with foreign cable were not considered to deserve compassion, which is why volunteers often complained of feeling useless. Yet precisely because of its ability to conceal its lacks so very well, San Andres could very well serve as the “supply point” of desire for Western tourists (Ahmed 2006:115). Instead of precarity and discontentment, volunteers saw only cultural richness, natural beauty, warmth and hospitality – all the resources the ordered and mechanistic West is thought to have lost in the process of modernization. Had Mateo assumed a more proactive role in teaching volunteers how to recognize need and exploitation, but also in showing them how they are implicated in the social forces responsible for these conditions, the program would have had radically different results. But Mateo’s deep resentment for politics, largely informed by his experience with aid and development work, precluded any such transformation.

Mateo’s opinion about humanitarian work was unapologetic. He dismissed it as a highly professional, bureaucratic, and disconnected field:

You get [on the field] and they take you to a fancy downtown office, with a computer, where they make you feel important. On the first day there is a presentation, on the second day there's a seminar, and on the third one – a conference. There are meet and greets, luncheons, occasional field trips in

armoured vehicles, and workshops, but no contacts with the local community. Even if you want to, it's hard to get involved because most of the time is spent at the headquarters, rather than in the field. (17 September 2008)

As anecdotal as this evidence sounds, it is not far off the mark. Different from the 1960s and 1970s, when a certain focus on self-restraint, sacrifice, and frugality encouraged aid workers to form collaborative and informal relations with the local population, today's heightened security risks and litigation necessities have produced a "fortified aid compound" (Duffield 2009:15). As Mateo suggests, the latter is a logistical and architectural model that isolates aid personnel from the community they are meant to serve with the help of safety protocols, gated barracks, barbed wire, and armoured vehicles (*ibid.*). By comparison, thanks to its affordable pricing and transparent organizational structure, Volunteer Peten enjoys an aura of virtuous localism most development agencies, NGOs, and larger volunteer tourism organizations cannot replicate. Furthermore, long-standing ties to a community whose socio-geographical scale seems quasi-natural and pre-political further help Mateo to remain "separate from politics" (Zack, 8 September 2008).

This is not an unprecedented position. All over the media, the business "community", and the third sector we see a growing distrust of politics – an activity that has become synonymous with corruption, inefficiency, and excessive government intervention. The voluntary sector, for instance, has become increasingly suspicious of and impatient with the efforts of the UN and government-sponsored aid to address the needs of the developing world. This has led especially American philanthropic organizations to extol the virtues of "corporate giving" and private donations (from higher education institutions, religious organizations, and the populace) (Hudson Institute 2010). There is a problematic assumption here that *real* aid is better governed by market principles and privatized sensoriums than by distant officials and inefficient agencies. In viewing his own work as an apolitical genuine, attempt to "make a difference", Mateo inadvertently supports this position. But small-scale volunteer tourism is far from an authentic emotional reaction to scarcity or suffering. It too is the result of material exchanges and social constructs (e.g., race, gender, and class identities; touristic tropes; narratives of (non-)modernity, etc.), which are through and through political. As the experiences in San Andres demonstrate, scarcity and suffering cannot elicit a charitable, compassionate response unless there is a political pedagogy to make these conditions visible and urgent. Charity and compassion assume – indeed, require – the existence of political conditions of inequality and exclusion. If we remove politics we do not find purity or innocence. What we find instead are a bunch of seemingly benevolent sentiments, such as sympathy, tolerance, and recognition, which lend volunteer tourism an air of virtue that is beyond critique. Insisting on the politics/purity separation can only exclude the work of deliberation and struggle that could return politics to its proper meaning and truly make volunteer tourism an alternative to the status quo.

A Small Place

Almost without exception, all volunteers “loved” San Andres for its tranquility, traditional values, and natural beauty. Although the municipality of San Andres stretches over some 55 rural communities and numbers a population of 20,000 people (Mateo tells me the actual size is closer to 107 villages and 40,000 people), the town could still entertain volunteers’ fantasies of romantic localism and their sentimental cravings for intimacy and authenticity. If San Andres was not “poor enough” to allow volunteers to demonstrate their compassion, at least it was slow, quaint, and remote enough to let volunteers develop a cultural sensibility of the liberal multiculturalist sort (Zizek 1997; Lisle 2006). A “small place”, as Jamaica Kincaid explains in her eponymous book (1988), is a place that is *imagined* to exist outside the bounds of modernity. It is a place where tradition is still intact, culture still authentic, and people still friendly. This is not only a geographically distant place, it is also a temporally detached place, removed from the benefits (e.g., education, technology, security, legality) as well as the burdens of modernity (e.g., alienation, speed, standardization, and stress). If “residents of the first world live in *time*”, meaning they live in a fast-paced world where communication is instantaneous and time is a scarce economic good, for people in the developing world “time is a void”: in their world “nothing ever happens” (Bauman 1998:45, original emphasis). In this imaginary, the only constants punctuating their lives are the rhythm of nature and the force of tradition.

San Andres seems like a perfect candidate for such a “place.” Set on the shore of the turquoise Lago Peten Itza, along a steep ravine surrounded by green pastures, Mayan ruins, and occasional patches of jungle vegetation, San Andres is a “small, traditional, peaceful and relaxing” place (Joanna, 1 September 2008). For Alice, life in San Andres is “pleasant, beautiful, and nice.” When she leaves she will miss everything “except the food.” In the three months that she had spent there she “fell in love with San Andres” and its “cute” and “adorable” inhabitants (2 September 2008). But San Andres is not just a place to vacation in. Many volunteers also consider it their home, even if only for a temporary period of time. Being able to “live in the community”, stay with a host family, get to know the local culture, and maybe even *be* local for a while is a great source of consolation for volunteers frustrated with the unrewarding placements they signed up for. Kristen, who is on a round-the-world trip, explains that she has no interest in moving all the time: “I would rather live with a family in an affordable place rather than switch hotels every night. I don’t want to just a spectator, traveling all the time. I want to live in a community.” San Andres has lived up to all her expectations:

I feel like I live in the most beautiful place on earth. I can watch the lake from my house, swim, work in the jungle with plants and tress. I am surrounded by good people. It is not too Westernized although it’s creeping in. People help one another. It’s not so individualized yet. Just the natural surroundings. I am happy to be here and not somewhere else. (26 September 2008)

Mateo is not bothered by the fact that volunteers seemed to be more interested in the romantic delights of this rural lifestyle than in doing volunteer work:

It doesn't depress me if volunteers do not put all their efforts into the projects. I invite them to come along. But if they don't, it doesn't affect me, one way or the other. This is not a job and it is not for everybody. Some are more attracted to the small town than to the work. Everyone's different. Even people who come here just to relax and have a good time, make a big difference. Most people in the US and Canada never travel or make an effort to come to Guatemala or get out of Antigua, away from the tourist track. Coming here will change their way of looking at the world, forever. (17 September 2008)

He goes on to explain that in the early days of VP,

volunteers used to live out in the park, 10 at a time, and just talk in English about their travels [and] their favourite beers. I said, that's it, you got to stay with a family, you have to interact with locals at least once a day. You can't just come here to make friends. We were in the middle of building a house [at the park] and I realized this is not what I want, this subculture. (17 September 2008)

Since 2005, however, volunteers have been staying with local families, which Mateo handpicks depending on their living conditions (for instance, cement floors are a requirement; indoor plumbing is not). This has increased the pull of the organization because many want to “see how locals live”, eat home-cooked meals, and find a home away from home. The final frontier, for most volunteers, was to live like the natives do: to abandon all modern amenities (not television and cell phones, but hot water, high-speed internet, modern transportation, and Western cooking) and be accepted by the local community. On the one hand, this is part of the much-discussed quest for authenticity in independent travel (MacCannell 1973). On the other hand, however, accessing “the backstage” fulfills a much more ample purpose: in going native, white metropolitan subjects demonstrate their ability to assume a flexible subjectivity that has the capacity or the opportunity to live fully in the global moment, bypassing the difficulties and constraints that govern the lives of racialized and impoverished people (Ahmed 2006). While San Andreseños are more or less fixed by their income, race, and unfavorable citizenship, volunteers are free to move at their heart's desire (Bauman 1998). In choosing a place that is seemingly so far off the map of modernity they demonstrate the necessary moral virtues and cultural competencies (e.g., versatility, open-mindedness, kindness, tolerance, and a cosmopolitan curiosity) expected from white bourgeois subjects. On top of that, Western passports, disposable income, and a white complexion further allow volunteers to occupy a privileged position (Zizek 1999; Ahmed 2006) that gives them not

only the freedom to travel somewhere else, but also *the flexibility to be someone else*. In effect, I was not convinced that VP's transition to having volunteers stay in local homes had engendered the intimate encounters and transformative experiences Mateo was hoping for. In fact, closer contact with the San Andreseños convinced volunteers that Guatemalans led content, self-sufficient lives threatened only by imminent modernization.

While my fieldwork in Guatemala did not reveal the compassionate souls I had originally envisioned, this does not mean volunteers are a-emotional figures. The absence of a subject eager to “give back” or “be good” does not refute my proposition that neoliberalism has made emotional literacy into a requirement for entrepreneurial performance. Volunteer tourism continues to invoke and perform affective competencies – only under a different guise. Since San Andres was “not poor enough” for volunteers to demonstrate their humanitarian abilities, it at least allowed volunteers to “fall in love” with the local people and culture. While I would often complain – in my journal – about the tedium of rural life (“There is no movie theatre, no newspaper stand, and no decent radio station. Only the incredibly slow internet café and the 20-or-so books I brought with me make the time go by.”), other volunteers had no trouble finding “something to do.” They found pleasure in playing with children, sampling local dishes, visiting Mayan temples, waterfalls, and natural reserves, joining the local basketball and soccer league, shopping for souvenirs, and learning local crafts. Personally, I could not understand what exactly was so “fascinating” or “adorable” about the unhealthy nutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and the gargantuan ecological challenges we were surrounded by. But after a volunteer once asked me “what’s there not to like about San Andres?”, I decided to keep my opinions to myself. Often it would frustrate me that I could not share the enthusiasm of my fellow volunteers: I would ask myself if perhaps I was too cynical or impatient to enjoy the cultural riches and interpersonal warmth the experience had to offer. In the end, however, it became clear to me that the multicultural sensibility of my fellow volunteers was not without problems. It precluded not only the capacity for political reflection, but also the ability to engage with others in a way that could invite a model for justice (Boler 1997; Harimon 2009). As the next section shows, feeling for the other (be it through pity, sympathy, empathy, or tolerance) is not a safe bet against colonial and capitalist violences.

Emotional Styles of Rule

Postcolonial, post-structuralist, and Marxist writers of the latter half of the 20th century have spilled a lot of ink discussing the difficulties of the self/other relation and, more specifically, the historical and semiotic conditions responsible for reducing difference to “a projection of ourselves or of our ideals” (Todorov 1992:168). In what follows I focus only on a subset of this problematic, namely the multicultural subject that lies at the centre of volunteer tourism. In particular, I am interested in discussing multiculturalism as the “cultural logic of multinational capitalism” (Zizek 1999). Multiculturalism, the practice of giving importance to all cultures in our society, as the Oxford dictionary defines it (2010), should be

understood as an emotional style that allows individuals to manage difference and handle problems related to claims of identity and recognition (Illouz 2007:6). Since the mid-1980s the logic of multiculturalism has established itself as the dominant model for justice in liberal democracies (Brown 2006:2). Growing demands for recognition from ethnic, sexual, and social minorities have instituted tolerance, anti-discrimination, and sympathy as the quintessential emotional competencies of our time. But these seemingly benevolent sensibilities have not always managed to offer a more ethical mode of engaging difference. The concern, voiced especially by critics on the left, is that liberal multiculturalism has done more to reduce difference to the consumptive logic of capital and exacerbate the struggle for political subjectivity than to address conditions of exclusion and exploitation (Zizek 1999; Boler 1997).

The first charge against multiculturalism is that it promotes an aesthetic understanding of difference that fits too nicely with the depoliticizing ambitions of capitalism. The smorgasbord of cultures on display today suggests that the road to self-expression and self-fulfilment is paved with various cultural and semiotic goods. The multicultural subject is encouraged to “get in touch with” or “get to know” as many cultures as possible and build fluid and hybrid identities. In reality, however, what is promoted here is not a substantive understanding of difference. Difference is broken down into a series of aesthetic and sensorial markers (e.g., different cuisines, traditions, dress modes, sexual orientations, and lifestyle experiments), which are then repeated and recombined to provide an appealing but, I would argue, ultimately innocuous version of difference. As James Ferguson argues, “real cultural differences always take on meaning within contexts of sharp social and economic inequality” (2006:19). The current multicultural orthodoxy silences all prior conflicts that allowed for these differences to emerge in the first place as autonomous categories (e.g., blacks, chicanos, immigrants, LGBT, disabled, the working class, and all other minorities) (Epifanio 2002:7). When emptied of its historical and material baggage, difference loses the antagonistic qualities that made tolerance and recognition necessary in the first place. It also dilutes the deliberative disposition that could build transformative coalitions across distinct modes of being (Zizek 1999:208-10; Malkki 1996; Brown 2002; Ticktin 2006). Without a political context, the role of difference and its multicultural “solutions” (e.g., affirmative action, gender mainstreaming, awareness and recognition) is to make sure that everyone occupies their “proper” place in the capitalist social structure.¹⁶ Multiculturalism then becomes capitalism’s preferred style of rule (Rai 2002; Zizek 1997, 1999).

Walter Benn Michaels’ extensive research on the topic illustrates these ideas well (2008). “The trouble with diversity”, as his book (2006) is entitled, is that it will do anything to avoid redressing material inequalities and injustices. Multiculturalism is only so forceful because it has been able to take the poor entirely out of the picture, replacing the gap with a Disneyland version of cultural difference (San Juan 2002:14). Anti-discrimination laws

¹⁶ San Juan Epifanio Jr. has even gone as far as to argue that critical theory, with its emphasis on providing space for the accurate representation of all kinds of subjectivities, is complicit with this capitalist strategy of managing difference (2002:9).

against racism, sexism, homophobia, and more recently “obesism” are often useful in raising awareness, promoting tolerance and cultural relativism, and spreading a sentimental education that is good for business. Workers who can live up to these emotional competencies are expected to tackle problems more creatively and communicate more effectively, improve productivity, and consolidate the company’s reputation in the community. Especially in places with an ethnic and racially diverse workforce, these strategies can help resolve labour shortages and smoothen labour disputes. Material inequality, on the other hand, is missing from the equation because poverty is the only problem that cannot be resolved with politically benign promises of cultural recognition and respect: including it would imply rethinking the entire current mode of economic organization (Michaels 2006). There are certainly exceptions to this trend. Recognition cannot always be reduced to mere sentimentality. It is often a basic demand made by individuals and groups that are denied dignity in a myriad of ways in everyday life. Such a demand often serves as the launching point for other, more substantive demands and struggles around employment, equality rights, political inclusion, and so forth. This is not to deny, however, that, when the political injustices and historical suffering responsible for the violation of human dignity are “culturalized” (i.e., replaced through aesthetic terms), tolerance and recognition are nothing more than emotional styles meant to demonstrate the capaciousness of white middle class subjects – “a right of entry” to social and more material forms of capital (Illouz 2007:63).

The only way life in San Andres could be celebrated for its exotic properties was if volunteers treated the distinctiveness of the place as a given, beyond historical investigation and political questioning. In order for San Andres to live up to volunteers’ dreams of tranquility, tradition, and slowness, its geography, history, economy, and politics had to be obfuscated. While it is true that San Andres is a village buried amidst Mayan ruins, jungle vegetation, and the turquoise Peten Itza lake, where almost everyone knows everyone, family is the most important social institution, and where life follows a cyclical pattern punctuated by Sunday soccer matches, traditional celebrations, and church sermons, this is not a complete picture. San Andres is also a place where plastic garbage is burned every day at 6pm to make fire, where the illiteracy rate is one of the highest in Central America, where the land tenure system determines entire family structures, where the yearly food intake is made up of roughly six staples, where sewage pipelines flow into the turquoise lake, and where the frustration of locals is manifested through mocking, cheating, or marrying tourists. Western fantasies of loss and redemption glorify small places like San Andres as repositories of traditional values and natural beauty (Kincaid 1988). But they fail to mention that small places are also suffocated by boredom, lack, and political stagnation.

This romantic portrayal of San Andres is not only factually incomplete, it also strips the small place of its political and material troubles. To think that the people of San Andres are static is to ignore Peten’s recent population increase and the economic reasons for it. To think the San Andreseños are traditional is to ignore how much of what volunteers celebrate as “local knowledge” (i.e., medicinal plants, natural resources management, animal treatment) is in fact an improvised alternative to missing funds and more advanced tools. To

think they are tranquil is to dismiss the “muscular tension” (Fanon 2005[1961]), the prowess, anger, envy, and sarcasm most locals share for *gringos*. Volunteers “fell in love” with San Andres because they thought it contained all the virtues and qualities modernity has lost, namely, tradition, community, tranquillity, hospitality, honesty, and natural beauty. The point is not that San Andres is none of the above, but that reducing San Andres and its inhabitants to these essential attributes, their distinctiveness becomes yet another consumer commodity for tourists to adorn themselves with (San Juan 2002). Using San Andres to nurture the fantasies of romantic localism is not only a sign of benign ignorance or naiveté on the part of tourists, but also a refined colonial stance, one in which the inhumane treatment and violent exploitation of local populations is being replaced with humanist reverence and cultural relativist enlightenment vis-à-vis local skin color, living conditions, and ways of life.

This brings us to the second charge against multiculturalism. Multiculturalism cannot be practiced from the margins: it occupies a deterritorialized position, “the empty point of universality”, as Žižek (1999:216) calls it, from which all cultures are to be inventoried, known, and respected. Multiculturalism necessitates an epistemological and ethical distance between the observer and the observed that allows the former to appreciate the authenticity of the latter while asserting its own superiority (Žižek 1999:216). This should not surprise us – it is not a glitch in the system, but the fundamental requirement of multiculturalism: some need to celebrate difference while others need to be (and remain) different. The only ones who stand to gain from multiculturalism are the benefactors. It is they who will be rewarded for upholding the normative conventions they themselves have created, while the objects of their gaze must remain silent, passive, and backward (Malkki 1996; Brown 2006). Just like the 19th century abolitionist movement helped the ever-expanding bourgeoisie occupy a stable place in British society (Rai 2002:18-20), loving the San Andreseños helps young adults from Western countries build social capital, which can then be exchanged against more material forms of capital, such as career advancement, wealth, etc. (Illouz 2007:66-7). And just like the British abolitionists preferred to fight for the end of slavery in the colonies rather than improve the conditions of the British and Irish working classes at home, it is easier for volunteers to celebrate the “small place” in the South than to reflect on what condemned that place to the underbelly of modernity in the first place.

While appreciating the pre-modern qualities and virtues of the locals, volunteers began acting as gatekeepers of modernity, trying to protect what they perceived to be an uncorrupted paradise from external influences. Volunteers did not just ignore what Johannes Fabian (1983) calls the coevalness (the contemporary presence) of the other; they actively tried to prevent it. Zack, for instance, was afraid that, as more new people moved to San Andres, “which no one knows where they come from or what their business is, they risk destroying what is beautiful about San Andres.” What is beautiful about San Andres, he explains, “is the sincerity that results from a small town world, from not having a life of incredible excess.” Whereas back in the United States, where he is from, people are afflicted by stress, consumerism, and the pressures of a culture obsessed with appearances, life in San Andres follows a slower pace and revolves around community values. “However, things are

changing, they are not inherent. There are tons of people who come from the outside and soon San Andres will become an urban centre like Santa Elena” (8 September 2009). Similarly, Kristen takes pleasure in the unspoiled “not-too-Westernized” charm of San Andres, but fears that “it might be creeping in” (26 September 2008). Rebecca, on the other hand, worries that the more commodities enter San Andres, the more polluted the lake and its surroundings will become because the locals are “young consumers” who have not yet learned the basics of environmental protection (28 August 2008). In all of these instances and many more like them volunteers tried to keep San Andreseños “in their place” because they saw that place as a fragile remainder of a better time, when in fact that time never existed outside the framework of colonial modernity.

It is difficult to tell whether or how exactly volunteer will benefit from the affective competencies acquired during this trip. Perhaps, there is no direct link between participating in overseas volunteering and gaining entrance to a better school or job. The merits of volunteer tourism are both diffuse and durable. Even if they do not translate in direct professional and material returns, they still effect a transformation in political subjectivity. If we understand subjectivity as the sum of experiences and practices through which subjects become aware of themselves and their possibilities for action in the world, volunteer tourism certainly plays a role in where these young adults see their potentials and limitations. Paula’s story has remained with me throughout this research. A Polish émigré who had moved to Britain to do a degree in human geography, Paula was a self-funded mature student who had limited financial opportunities to undertake such an extravagant trip. (The program at the Eco-Escuela, a parallel organization in San Andres, which charged \$150/week for home stays and language courses, was the only one she could afford.) Yet the magnitude of the phenomenon in Britain convinced her that she had to experience volunteer tourism for herself. Perhaps she could even use it as the topic of her undergraduate thesis. The day I met Paula she had already decided to cut her trip short. She was planning to stay for a month but San Andres bored her and her program seemed like “a waste of time.” Because the Eco-Escuela did not provide her with any volunteering opportunities, I invited her to come along to Mateo’s conservation park. On her first and only day there we built trails from sawdust using shovels and a wheel barrel. The work was exhausting and somewhat Sisyphean. Paula decided not to come back to the park:

It is unfair that, at a job interview, it matters more if you have volunteered in {the Global South] than if you have been serving tables at a restaurant at home. Waitressing is much harder and it shows you need the money. Volunteering only shows your parents are rich. (9 September 2008)

Unable to share the multicultural enthusiasm of her fellow volunteers for local culture and people, Paula felt like a maladapted outsider. (The other volunteers avoided her for her “bad mood” and “intense” disposition.) She could not understand how overseas volunteering could widen her future professional possibilities or enrich her personally – something I

discuss at greater length in the following chapter. For her, San Andres was neither a place of repose, nor a lost Eden, but a desolate sight she felt unable to do anything about.

Conclusion

The above narrative follows a certain chronological progression. Young adults are attracted to the formula of volunteer tourism in the hopes of lending a helping hand to people in need while, at the same time, enjoying an out-of-the-ordinary vacation. Once they come to San Andres, however, volunteers realize that locals are by far not as impoverished and, hence, as appreciative of their help as they initially expected. As a result, they grow frustrated and disappointed – mostly at the host organization, which they now feel has not lived up to its initial promises. They abandon their volunteering projects and begin devoting their time to getting to know the local “culture” and its “adorable” people. This narrative is not set in stone. Instead of celebrating the ideology of liberal multiculturalism, working with Volunteer Peten could have just as easily fostered a critique of modernity. But without a political pedagogy to help volunteers recognize the struggle and disagreement lurking behind the multiculturalist gaze along with volunteers’ own role in extending these social conditions, no such transformation was possible.

The brochure discourse advertises volunteer tourism in the Global South as an alternative to more mainstream forms of travel and a critique of the modern consumerist lifestyle. This chapter, however, has demonstrated that volunteer tourism and the affective competencies it cultivates do nothing to alter the economic-political status quo. Rather it recycles a series of sentimental platitudes about meaningful vacations, grassroots action, and cultural diversity to (re)align the force of capital with certain normative social ideals (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005:36). In so doing, volunteer tourism conceals its relation to the very processes and formations from which it claims to be distinct. The present moment is replete with similar examples that make the distance between for-profit ventures and anti-capitalist strategies disappear: marketing campaigns that appeal to customers’ moral attachments; business models that put an emphasis on simplicity and frugality; urban regeneration plans that target the living space of artists and activists; labour practices that promise self-esteem and –realization; and modes of dress and conduct that recycle the symbols of underground culture. Volunteer tourism, then, is not an isolated case. It is one of the many programs and strategies of governmentality that mobilize affective competencies to, on the one hand, extend the logic of capitalism into the most intimate corners of our lives and, on the other hand, assess and reward the ability of certain individuals to navigate the social field according to desirable modes of conduct. In the meantime, the *voluntoured* represent the dark side of this exchange – the silence that surrounds them in this project mirrors their silence in the field. It is impossible for them to fare well in the struggle for political subjectivity as long as they exist solely as objects of intervention and admiration.

Ghana: Experience, Education, Entrepreneurship

When I met Sandra in Ghana, she was already on her third volunteering trip. At age 23 she had earned a Bachelor of Science; had volunteered in an orphanage in Nepal, an HIV clinic in Zambia, and with Projects Abroad (PA) in Ghana; had held numerous community-oriented part-time jobs at home in Washington DC; and had written her MCATs twice – all in the hope of getting into medical school. Sandra is perhaps the only volunteer I met in Ho, who thought that the trip was a success.

Ghana was the first volunteering trip where I was actually able to get placed in a hospital and a clinic that would let me do some hands-on work. At the Ho Polyclinic they did have me do some busy work like recording a list of patients with their complaints, but they also let me play in the lab, talk to patients one-on-one (once I picked up a little Ewe), let me take vitals, etc. Taking vital signs and talking one-on-one with patients is something that just wouldn't happen in the US (at least not in big cities, no idea about super rural areas) because of the liability. [...] At Volta Regional hospital I was holding babies and taking notes on patient interviews in the pediatric department and I got to watch an amazing range of surgeries (that would NEVER happen here, that alone made the trip worth it medical experience-wise). (email correspondence, 5 March 2010)

Although the experience overseas helped Sandra get a job as a medical scribe, she still does not know whether it will help her get into medical school. Her plan was to use volunteer tourism to compensate for a not so competitive MCAT score.

Jobs and schools are crazy competitive, and you have to have something that makes you stand out whether it's winning an award, having some insane talent, or doing something like volunteer in a third world country in conditions that most people in this part of the world would not want to put up with. You have to have something like that on your resume/application, because everyone – this is especially true in medicine – has perfect grades, research experience, appropriate job experience, and awesome test scores. I find it amusing (in a sick way) that there is a growing shortage of physicians in this country (just to add to the health care problems that we already are dealing with), and yet they make it close to impossible to get into medical school. Obviously you have to be driven, somewhat intelligent, and dedicated to making it happen – but I really think that too much is based on numbers. (email correspondence, 5 March 2010)

So far, Sandra has applied to 15 medical schools (MD) and three doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) schools. She got rejected by most MDs and accepted by all three DOs because the latter

take into account the full picture. [...] For DOs, who aren't as number crazy, it showed them that I am dedicated and willing to get medical experience even if I have to go to extreme lengths. Another major bonus is that all of the trips are great topics of conversation during interviews, the stories I have from all three trips have helped me keep the flow of the interviews going as well as keep the interviewer interested. (Email correspondence, 5 March 2010).

It is a misnomer to refer to volunteer tourism as “taking time off.” What motivates young people to bear the cost of these programs is the hope that they will gather professional experience or, at least, experiment with various professional identities and ways of life. Once in the field, volunteers are often *forced* to take a vacation (e.g., travel, read, hang out in ex-pat bars) because they lack the necessary skills or social connections to actually engage in the work they would have liked. In principle, however volunteer tourism is not about “doing nothing”, it is not about escaping the responsibilities of modern life. On the contrary, it is about getting as much done as possible *even* while on vacation; it is about organizing all temporalities towards the possibility of future revenues. Here is Sara, a first-year Political Science student from Australia who took a year off school to travel:

I didn't want it to be just one year of traveling. If you're going to take so much time off, then you should get something out of it, something tangible, something that's not so selfish, something emotionally and morally rewarding. And on an entirely superficial but legitimate note, it looks great on my CV because I want to go into international relations, maybe work for an NGO. And I know this is a far cry, but anything helps. (26 March 2009)

With the institutionalization of volunteering, the “gap year” changed from an alternative form of travel reserved for “hippies” and hedonists to an institutionally accepted and commercially successful educational experience (Simpson 2005:448). This is especially true for high school and college graduates from countries of the Global North, who, in light of mass higher education and credential inflation, find it increasingly difficult to secure jobs based solely on degrees and expertise. Paying \$2,500/month to volunteer in Ghana may seem absurd or overpriced, but it is a small price to pay for an educational and personal experience that will help students make the transition from reserve army of labor to professional middle class and beyond.

Seeing volunteer tourism as another form of “continuing education” or “lifelong learning” is not the same as saying that volunteers are self-interested figures who perform charitable acts only to boost their résumés. This chapter will unpack this behaviorist

assumption to address the more complex socio-economic factors and governmental rationalities responsible for valorizing overseas volunteering. The exigencies of network capitalism, I argue, force individuals to treat all extra-curricular activities and temporalities as a future investment. This is especially urgent for young adults whose only insurance policy against cheap and contingent labor is education – a type of education that goes beyond professional expertise, academic credentials, and the classroom experience. Even if volunteers do little to improve the well-being of their hosts or accumulate professional experience, from a governmental perspective, volunteer tourism remains an effective strategy for teaching young adults how to operate in multicultural settings and globalized sites to better consolidate their entrepreneurial future. Overseas volunteering can sustain the illusion of its usefulness because its merits are assessed *at home*. It is here that volunteers garner the admiration of friends, family, guidance councilors, admission officers, and employers, most of whom, never having travelled to Africa before, continue to entertain all sorts of colonial fantasies about the “dark continent.” In effect, regardless whether volunteering realizes its educational promise or not, this chapter argues that, what is of essence is that this rite of passage helps young adults become the responsible, resourceful, and self-enterprising subjects needed to navigate the uncertain economic climate we live in.

The argument proceeds in four parts. The first section lays out the theoretical framework of the chapter, arguing that volunteer tourism is an educational strategy designed to enhance the employability and economic vitality of young adults in an increasingly competitive and precarious economic climate. The second section presents ethnographic material that illustrates yet also complicates this thesis. It shows that even when volunteer tourism entails no professional value or humanitarian contribution, the experience is still ripe with human, social, and cultural forms of capital, which in a global economy are central to economic profitability. Section three takes this logic further. It argues that the reason why the experience in Ghana was ripe with human, social, and cultural forms of capital is because volunteers were confronted with various racial tensions that helped them develop all sorts of skills and sensibilities that are good for business. No place is better for learning the cultural and interpersonal competencies needed in a flexible economy than the multicultural encounters, material deprivation, and social chaos usually attributed to the African continent. As the final section shows, the real benefits of volunteering materialize at home, through the colonial fantasies and governmental rationalities circulating in the Global North.

Volunteers Are Already Workers

After I came back from Guatemala, I decided that for my next case study I would pick a radically different organization. It was going to be a large organization in a popular destination. My hope was not only that I would gain more ample access to volunteers than I had in Guatemala, but also that I would come into contact with a different demographics. I thought that by enrolling in a program five times more expensive, I would volunteer alongside middle-aged professionals. I could not have been more wrong. Projects Abroad

(PA) is indeed one of the world's largest, best structured, and well-known volunteering organizations. Based in London, PA runs over 150 projects in 20 countries. Ghana, however, is its most popular destination, attracting some 500 volunteers every summer looking to have an educational experience in an exotic site (Ghana Handbook 2008; for more information see chapter 3). Despite the fact that a three-months volunteering trip to Ghana costs up to \$9,000 (not including spending money) volunteers were still high school graduates and college students ages 17-25.

With a few exceptions, most volunteers had borrowed or received the money for the trip from their parents, whom they convinced that volunteering in Ghana was going to be a lucrative investment in their future education. As Katherine explains, "the only way I could justify doing it in my father's eyes was if it would contribute something to my future" (19 April 2009). This was a particularly important argument for pre-med students, who made up the majority of volunteers. Some had already graduated from college and were in need of additional extra-curricular activities to improve their chances of getting accepted into medical school. Others were fresh out of high school yet already planning for the acerbic competition awaiting them in the years ahead. Still others had taken a "gap year" between high school and university to experiment with various health professions. Projects Abroad was prepared to cater to their needs. It offered them a choice of two hospitals and several clinics to volunteer in Ho. PA also organized regular outreach programs where volunteers could travel to nearby villages to distribute medical supplies and treat wounds. The rest of the volunteers worked in schools and orphanages. For them, the professional rewards of volunteering in Ghana were less straightforward. They were rather interested in "experiencing Africa" in a useful and worthwhile way.

Most undergraduate students now realize that the labour market is no longer a meritocratic race where credentials and job experience are enough to secure employment: creativity, risk-taking, and a certain militant spirit are required (Brown and Hesketh 2006). One needs to "go out and do something", take initiative in a way that not only demonstrates your job-related aptitudes, but sets you apart from everyone else in the race (Brooks 2006:278). The "massification of higher education", underscored by the rise of the information economy, has produced a flexible labour market, where credentials need to be complemented with more credentials, work-related experience, voluntary work, extra-curricular activities, out-of-class learning, and an entrepreneurial personality (ibid. 286). Although skill and training continue to be the acid test of employment, the knowledge economy has radically shifted the model of labour from the "organization man", whose efficiency depended on diligently following managerial demands, to the entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism, whose economic vitality depends on being able to navigate (and capitalize on!) the ups and downs of the market in a rational, self-reliant, but also innovative way.

Brown and Hesketh (2006) explain that, until the baby boomer generation, the problem of getting the right people for the right job was resolved by finding people with adequate skills or education. In the latter half of the 20th century, however, the formula of

labour specialization championed in liberal economic theories, and later realized in the Fordist model, was replaced by a new paradigm of labor, which measures the productive capacities of workers in terms of their intellectual and communicative abilities (ibid. 15). While this new logic is by no means dominant in terms of actual numbers (they apply mostly to service sectors and knowledge-intensive occupations in urban conglomerations of the Global North), what autonomist thinkers have called affective or immaterial labor has a hegemonic effect upon the rest of the economy (Hardt and Negri 2001). In management theory it has resulted in a shift from employment to *employability*. Employees are no longer stuck in a dependent relationship with their employers, who in exchange for loyalty, obedience, and tenaciousness offer job security and social benefits. Instead, leaner, flatter, and more flexible business models depend on employable individuals, who are less concerned with executing commands than with using and expanding personal skills and capabilities above and beyond their job description (Brown and Hesketh 2006:18). Unlike employment, which implies a more or less stable workplace, employability is a non-referential quality always assessed in relation to other job seekers vying for the same position (ibid. 25). In this context, the nature of work is profoundly altered to replace lifelong employment with a series of lifelong educational strategies, which are supposed to teach individuals the flexible qualities they need to navigate the volatile economic climate we live in (ibid. 21). We see here how Foucault's (2008) "prediction" about the generalization of entrepreneurship through competitive modes of action is coming true.

In parallel with the labour market, higher education also underwent reform "in the interests of efficiency through flexibilization" (Olssen 2006:222). If the classic mission of university education was to promote and protect the idea of national culture as well as disseminate universal humanist beliefs (Readings 1996), as education is moving outside the classroom, its emphasis falls on those transferrable skills and talents that can endow students with a deterritorialized neoliberal ethos (Ong 2006:148). The focus in education is shifting from the progressive accumulation of knowledge to "skills training", "performance", "enterprise", "excellence", and "creativity." This so-called model of "enterprise education" or "enterprise curriculum" deviates from the social-democratic language of "equality of opportunity", "free education", and the ambition to redress socio-economic imbalances through education (Peters 2001:65-6). Study abroad programs, language courses, international internships, and volunteering programs belong to this category. Because volunteer tourism fits particularly well with the seductive world-as-classroom formula, the practice quickly became an almost standard requirement for higher education and career development (Simpson 2005). Although this may not apply equally to all disciplines, the broad aim of volunteer tourism is to prepare future employees for an increasingly mobile economy where skilled workers can easily cross territorial, linguistic, and professional borders (Olssen 2006:221; see Ong 2007b). Those for which overseas volunteering cannot make a professional difference (e.g., students in engineering, science, business, etc.), can instead turn to other forms of study abroad, foreign language, and exchange programs. These transnational excursions offer not only professional experience, but also moral education and

multicultural literacy, which can easily be incorporated into a “narrative of employability” (Brooks 2006:279) to allow those who can afford them to become entrepreneurial subjects (Ong 2006:140). Ultimately, this “workforce versatility” is meant to postpone the crisis of flexible capitalism: teaching workers how to thrive in a contingent labour market from an early age onwards makes the perpetual climate of economic crisis look like yet another inescapable fact of life (Olssen 2006:222).

The promise of volunteer tourism, in particular, is to produce a “professional, self-governing, careerist persona” (Simpson 2005:447). Whether a certain program actually manages to “make a difference” or endow students with much-desired professional expertise is secondary. What matters is that, by having lived for a few months in a radically different cultural setting, without local language skills, modern amenities, or the comfort of loved ones, students and graduates develop sought-after immaterial skills: “communication”, “leadership skills”, “problem solver”, “team player”, “quick learner”, and so on. The reason why paid volunteering abroad programs do not require their participants to have prior skills and experience is because these are assets the trip itself is supposed to deliver. Other than in modern mass tourism, where the dangerous and mysterious non-West serves as a playground for bourgeois fantasies, in the case of volunteer tourism, the adventurous and destitute Global South functions as a classroom where young adults can experiment with various professional identities (ibid. 465), mobilize humanitarian sensibilities, and learn how to “mediate between diverse traditions and communities on a global scale” (Ong 2006:141). On volunteering trips young adults can literally earn a “world-class” degree that will leave those at home in awe.

It is too easy to treat volunteer tourism as a sub-category of the travel industry or to dismiss it as a humanitarian sham that appeals only to spoiled brats. As shown here, the trope of the egotistical volunteer actually betrays a series of complex socio-economic mutations that expose students and graduates alike to an unprecedented level of professional competition and insecurity. Rather than being a natural reaction to global poverty, volunteer tourism, along with a series of other training strategies, is *designed* to enhance the employability and work versatility of young adults. As Sandra explains, “volunteer tourism is a safe learning environment to get experience, which is so hard to get in the countries where we come from. All jobs I look at online, you need an MA, a PhD or several years working experience.” (22 April 2009) At the same time, the virtuous aura surrounding overseas volunteering should not be forgotten. If volunteer tourism works, it is precisely because it does not seem to be an entirely premeditated response to global economic flexibilization. The practice strikes a chord with admission officers and recruitment agents back home because it subscribes to the principles of liberal civil society, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitan citizenship, all of which, in a global economy, are intimately related to professional expertise. As Engin Isin explains, what distinguishes the new knowledge economy is that human (skills, expertise, experience, capacities), social (emotionality, trust, charity), and cultural capital (mobility, experience, civility) have become points of access for economic profitability (Isin 2000:156). Entrepreneurial subjects are expected to add linguistic abilities, interpersonal

skills, and a certain level of resourcefulness to their traditional area of expertise in order to better navigate increasingly complex socio-economic situations.

Useless Education?

In coming to Ghana, all volunteers had a two-fold ambition: to “make a difference” in the lives of the people they were going to live and work with and to add some professional experience to their education. This is, in fact, what volunteer tourism programs promise: that “you can do something for yourself and for others at the same time” (Christina, 16 March 2009). Despite the exorbitant price difference, the program in Ghana was similar to that in Guatemala: volunteers felt neither that they had contributed to the well-being of local people, nor that the trip had any professional value for their education. With Sandra’s exception, most volunteers left disappointed. Whether they were placed in schools or in hospitals, volunteers became bored and disillusioned within the first couple of weeks.

Despite an acute need for medical assistance, pre-med students were not well-qualified enough to actually handle patients. Their tasks were mostly of the administrative and observational sort. A medical student working with another health organization in town furiously observed that PA volunteers are “basically paying to do medical things that you couldn’t do in the US” or “using people who are less well off to get medical experience” (Vanessa, 7 April 2009). But closer to the truth, for most medical volunteers, “this placement was boring as hell. I got no sense of achievement out of it at all.” Even Eric, who was a certified paramedic, complained that “the bureaucracy [in Ghana] didn’t allow [him] to work to his full potential” (Eric 7 April 2009). His medical expertise was needed more by fellow volunteers, who sustained minor injuries or came down with flu symptoms, than by the Ghanaian health care system. Charles, the PA regional coordinator for Ho and the Volta region, explains that the purpose of PA projects is to learn new skills, not to work:

From the medical side, legally they are limited. If it is for learning purposes, it is good, but legally they cannot help. Hospitals would not like to take the risk. They would need someone to work but not someone who is not legally allowed to do it. Those legal restraints, maybe it is possible to remove them because doctors are needed in Ghana. (18 April 2009)

The only exception was Sandra, who felt like she had gotten “the experience [she] came here for.” She explains that the key to a successful training period is to establish rapport with the local staff:

I have a very different mind set than most. A lot of people were stand offish in the beginning. You have to do a bunch of bullshit in the first week so they see you’re trustworthy. I didn’t know how to do anything, but you jump in and try it. Most people get scared and don’t want to do anything. You’re nice to

patients and they start trusting you even more. I learned how to take blood pressure and a few key phrases in Ewe. Patients think you know what you're doing because you're white. By the end of it they were letting me take medical histories, which only the head nurse could do. (22 April 2009)

In schools the situation was slightly different. Volunteers were encouraged from their first day onwards to take charge of however many classes they wanted and teach whatever subjects they preferred. The work was demanding, but we were energized by the enthusiasm and affection of our students. Plus there was never a shortage of work. At some schools, the local teaching staff was overwhelmed by the size of their classes. At others, the teaching method oscillated between apathy and corporeal punishment. Volunteers did their best to alleviate the situation by taking on as many classes as possible, reorganizing the curriculum, confronting the staff about their teaching methods, and introducing new games and activities. Still, many felt that the fruits of their labor would be short-lived.

The case of Christina and Judith is illustrative. They got in touch with each other before coming to Ghana to coordinate what gifts and donations they would bring to the daycare centre at which they were going to volunteer. They each organized fundraisers in their own communities and used the proceeds to buy suitcases full of handicrafts and musical instruments, repaint the school, and replace all chairs and tables. They also made substantial changes to the curriculum. When they arrived at the daycare, there were 50 children crammed into one room. They opened up another room and separated babies from 2-3-year olds. For the toddlers they organized a daily schedule containing crafts, singing, and playtime. The daycare staff was very grateful for their efforts and threw a party in their honor when they left. To us, they became known as the “ideal volunteers.” And, yet, their help was not sustainable. The objects would stay but the changes they had made to the curriculum along with the new teaching methods they had introduced would not be implemented in their absence. The permanent daycare staff could not afford to give children as much individual attention as the volunteers had because they had other domestic duties to attend to (16 March 2009). Only days after they had left, all the activities Christina and Judith had brought supplies for (e.g., singing, drawing, and doing crafts) were abandoned (Marion, 17 April 2009).

For the other volunteers, Christina and Judith's story was a warning. It told us that even in the cases we were asked to do work (sometimes more than we could handle) that work was often either unsustainable or unrewarding. For volunteers to feel needed, it is not enough to provide them with a task from 9-5; that task must also feel rewarding and fulfilling, make a substantial change in the lives of local people local community and generate the gratitude of the community. These are not expectations easy to meet.

Certainly, Projects Abroad was partly to blame for these disappointments. From a strictly logistical point of view, PA was not actively involved in managing work placements, communicating with the local staff, or following up with volunteers. Except for providing a host family, a local liaison, and a tee-shirt, Projects Abroad left volunteers to their own

devices. Often placements were poorly chosen, according to some cliché fantasies of humanitarian assistance, rather than based on actual local needs and desires. Projects Abroad was very much aware of these complaints and, at the time of research, was planning to introduce a so-called “worthwhileness campaign” that would submit both volunteers and work placements to a series of screenings to make sure their skills and interests matched. This is how Tina, a PA staff member working in the Accra office, explained her role in the campaign:

Some people want to come to Africa and save the world, some want to gain experience. Many come thinking “I want to change the life of children in Africa. I always wanted to go to Africa”, not being realistic or thinking that they don’t need saving. The job of PA staff is to manage these expectations and weigh them against the realistic possibilities on the ground because in the past there have been volunteers who complained that their stay has been a complete waste of time and money. Volunteers can make a small difference. You cannot have revolutionary expectations because your experiences will be disappointing. (13 March 2009)

The only volunteers to speak in positive terms about Projects Abroad were Sandra and Eric. Sandra, the only one to have benefitted professionally from the trip, thought “volunteer tourism [was] a safe learning environment to get experience, which is so hard to get in the countries where we come from” (22 April 2009). Eric, in a somewhat dismissive gesture, argued that Projects Abroad was the right choice for “people fresh out of high school”, who possessed little travel and work experience. While for him – due to his extensive travel experience, the organization had been “the wrong choice”, it could provide others “with their first overseas experience without having a shock” (7 April 2009). For all other volunteers, however, the program had been a disappointment:

I don’t think I’ve helped anyone while I was here. Only I benefited. I changed but I don’t think I initiated any change. After I leave I’d have made a difference to myself but not to anyone else. This bothered me to a crazy extent in the beginning. I was coming all the way across Africa and paid a lot to be here when I could have stayed home, eat my own food, sleep in my own bed, be with my friends and family and still work in an orphanage down the road every day. I could have saved money and been more useful. It is misleading to think you can volunteer in the hospital because the placement is mostly observatory. It’s for you and you only. For instance, one day you are asked to take vitals. If it’s not you taking them, someone else would. I don’t help at the hospital, I observe. I felt Projects Abroad was a bit to blame. They make it sound as if you weren’t here, Ghana would fall apart, as if your presence is

sought for. They painted a picture that's not in any way correct. (Patricia, 6 April 2009)

Volunteering is more of a selfish thing than giving back. It might open up perspectives for yourself, not make a difference. I have issues with saying you're making a difference, unless you're here for a long time. Two months is more selfish: you experience, you grow. I've made some friendships and if they have made a difference to someone, I'm glad but it bothers me when people come here thinking they're going to change things. I used to think that on my first trip. (Sandra, 22 April 2009)

Volunteering is more self-indulgent than you would think. It's more for your own reasons than for saving Africa. You see and do things that you want to do and also help a bit. I'd still tell people to do it, but realistically you can't change anything. It's almost a guilt thing. I feel like I could do something so I should. I have much more than them, so I should help and I get a really rewarding thing out of it as well. Being here ends up being far more about you than you'd imagine. (Mark, 21 April 2009)

When I first came, I was thinking I was going to create more of an impact than I have. I understand now that you cannot expect huge impacts in such a short time. You must learn to appreciate small changes. (Katherine, 19 April 2009)

Fifty percent was about my own growth. [...] There were moments when what I wanted did not match with what Ghana wants or needs. At first I was very frustrated about it but I'm glad to have stuck it out because I learned a lot through frustration. (Eric, 7 April 2009)

For many volunteers and their parents, having an organization as trustworthy and reputable as Projects Abroad to guide and assist them through their first trip to Africa was, initially, an important solace. It promised a safe experience and a relevant educational program. By the end of their trip, however, volunteers would realize that Ho, and Ghana in general, was actually a peaceful and relatively well-off place, that did not require an overpriced chaperone. Unless you were a medical volunteer, who relied on access to hospitals and clinics, you did not even need to join an organization to volunteer – you could find dozens of opportunities to get involved by just making some local contacts.¹⁷ Many

¹⁷ An additional source of dissatisfaction was PA's non-transparent financial operations. Volunteers paid approx. \$2,500/month, of which the host family received only \$350. Most volunteers did not perceive this price discrepancy as unfair. They just wanted to know what the remainder of their payment was used for. Here is Sara: "I'd like to know what projects it [the program fee] goes to. I

volunteers swore to come back and help on their own. “I know where to rent a room, how much it would cost, I know people at the clinic...” (Sandra, 22 April 2009). Humanitarian efforts did not necessarily need institutional support to bear fruit so much as an on-going relation of trust and cooperation. They did however require trust, cooperation, and a general understanding of the local culture and socio-economic structures; clear goals and a long-term commitment; skills and expertise; knowledge of the local language(s); and, above all, a democratic vision of the possibilities and limits of social change. Volunteering in a foreign country turned out to be a much more fragile and time-consuming relation than any of us had imagined. For the time being, however, volunteers drew little motivation and satisfaction from their participation in the program. Like in Guatemala, the longer volunteers stayed, the more they behaved like tourists. They read, relaxed, and traveled, resigning their initial charitable aspirations.

Although the *Ghana Handbook* volunteers are given on arrival discourages travel during the work placement, it is clear from the PA website that exploring the cultural sites, major market towns, and wildlife Ghana has to offer is very much a part of the appeal of this destination. The website spends more time describing the country’s touristic attractions than explaining why Ghana needs the help of international volunteers.

In Accra or Kumasi you can visit the bustling African markets selling everything from shoes and batteries to traditional cloth and carvings. Then a tailor in the street will transform your wood-cut prints into skirts and shirts for a couple of pounds. You can relax on some great palm-lined beaches along the coast, watch monkeys in Kakum Rainforest Reserve near Cape Coast and go mountain biking in the Akuapem Hills. If you want to party, Accra and Kumasi have lots of bars, clubs and restaurants - none of our volunteers ever fails to have a good social life here.

During the weekends, you can get together and travel to places such as Ada in the Volta Delta or Kakum National Park. During your weeks off you may think about traveling to Mole National Park to see elephants close up and on foot, or get some more stamps in your passport by visiting Benin or Burkina Faso - and some even make it as far as Timbuktu!¹⁸

know that a majority goes to recruitment – fairs and expos – but I would have appreciated a better breakdown than just a percentage pie chart in a guidebook which was global, not even broken down by country. It seemed like a token gesture to appease people. I’d like the money to do to the projects where I am. Maybe not in my placement, but in my town so I can go and see it. Volunteers should have a say in to. Make me feel that I’m not only helping in terms on time, but also monetarily.” (26 March 2009)

¹⁸ Projects Abroad, <http://www.projects-abroad.org/destinations/ghana/projects-abroad-in-ghana/>, consulted 10 March 2010.

Making sure volunteers enjoy their stay is part of PA's official mission and an intrinsic component of Charles' job description. His responsibility is to help volunteers explore "the beaches and nightclubs in a different country without having any problems" (18 April 2009). Indeed, Ghana has no shortage of both. On Fridays we would catch a tro-tro (communal van) from the station in Ho and escape for a few days, weeks even, to tourist havens that knew how to cater to the culinary tastes, accommodation levels, and service expectations of their Western clientele. Together with volunteers from fellow organizations, foreign students, Western aid workers, Middle and Far Eastern entrepreneurs, and members of the indigenous upper class, we would go for Mexican food and karaoke at Champs Sports Bar; hang out in Osu – Accra's chic neighborhood, where internet access was fast, the grocery stores carried all our favorite products, and nightclubs were abundant; go swimming at Labadi Beach Hotel; and spend our weekends at the Oasis Beach Resort in Cape Coast, the more remote Big Milly's in Kokrobite just outside of Accra, and many other similar establishments. For white people, hungry for Western food, entertainment, and service standards, Ghana offers an endless variety to choose from with the added bonus of a warm climate, servile people, and lax law enforcement. Certainly, the more intrepid travelers would also venture beyond the tourist trail, into the northern hinterland, or neighboring Togo, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. But most of us avoided these itineraries because they presented too many discomforts, like spending dozens of hours on public transport, eating only local food, staying in rudimentary guesthouses, and having to put up with the eccentricity of being the only white person in sight. The whole purpose of leaving Ho was to escape, for a few days at least, the boredom and deprivations of living in a small town in West Africa.

Inevitably, however, upon return we were all relieved to be back in what we liked to call "home sweet Ho." In time, even the more skeptical of us learned to "love" Ho. There was something deeply reassuring and, at the same time, satisfying about being able to say "I live here", as opposed to "I am staying at this hotel" or "I am passing through." On the one hand, it made us less of a prey to local vendors and hustlers; on the other, it gave us a sense of belonging. Despite the small town feel, tedious work, and occasional afternoon boredom, Ho had many things to offer: its manageable size, safe atmosphere, and the familiarity we had developed with shopkeepers, vendors, cab drivers, ice cream men, tailors, and the rest of the white community confirmed that we had made Africa, the place everyone associates with extreme poverty, distress, and chaos, our temporary home. Ho provided the best of two worlds: entertainment and safety. "I'm glad to be in Ho", says Katherine, "because compared to all other cities in Ghana, it is big enough that I can get everything I need, it is big enough to provide some sort of entertainment, and it is safe for me to walk at night" (19 April 2009). Similarly, Mark "wouldn't want to be anywhere else" in Ghana except for Ho: "It's friendlier. People are so much nicer here. You don't get hassled or begged. In Accra or Kumasi people constantly ask you for money or food. It's homely – you can feel at home here" (21 April 2009).

Nervous Conditions

Probably, the most comforting thing about Ho was that we rarely had to confront the racial tensions we encountered elsewhere on our travels. Being white in Ghana means you are constantly on display. People shout “yevu” or “obruni” (white person in Ewe and Twi, respectively) after you in the streets or they touch your skin and hair to check for a difference in texture. There are obvious advantages to being white: you always get the best seat on the bus, the biggest plate of food, the place in front of the line. If you’re white, someone will guide you, share their food with you, or buy you a drink; when you’re lost, someone will help you handle your logistical problems quicker and smoother without expecting anything in exchange; when you’re down, someone will cheer you up. If you are white, Ghana is one huge resort where almost everyone works as an entertainer. Rarely did I meet anyone indifferent to white bodies.¹⁹ As the PA Handbook announces:

Ghanaians truly deserve their reputation as some of the friendliest in Africa and, provided you show them respect, you will be welcomed with open arms. At times you will be frustrated by the culture, but there is a lot to be learned here. If you are tolerant, respectful, and always remember that you have been welcomed visitors, you will spend some of the best months of your life here. (2008:3)

But the longer you stay in Ghana, the more bothersome the racial undertone of these encounters becomes. In time, the Ghanaian friendliness comes to feel exhausting: your dress is scrutinized and your smoking habits reprimanded; your gestures and opinions awaken either curiosity or laughter; people ask for your name and contact information, they want their picture taken with you; they assume you are wealthy and expect you to pay “white prices”; they want to be around you at all times. Eventually, all that attention and attending become an unbearable form of inspection. This is where Ho can serve as a shelter. The sheer size of the expatriate community in Ho abates the inquisitive gaze of locals and gives whites a chance “to vent [and] let out [their] frustrations about Ghana and Ghanaians”²⁰ (Carey, 23 March 2009).

¹⁹ I can only speculate as to why this did not also occur in Guatemala despite the fact that both Latinos and Indios are racialized groups. One reason could be language. Guatemalans constantly referred to us as “gringos”, but most volunteers took this term to mean American or foreigner, not white. I noticed that race is usually considered a sensitive, even shameful category, which volunteers tried to avoid it at all cost. In Ghana, however, there was no escaping: local language and cultural practices were designed to make our racial identity visible.

²⁰ These things usually happened in English. We were comfortable using the language as if we owned it and no one else around us could understand it (although it is Ghana’s official language). If we spoke English with an impeccable accent, versatile vocabulary, and abundant cultural references it was indeed hard for locals to follow our “white” speech. On the other hand, Ghanaian English was a constant source of humour and mockery for us volunteers. Every day we amused ourselves with the peculiar sayings and mispronunciations we heard.

What is frustrating about traveling through Ghana is the constant haggle over taxi and tro-tro prices where you are cheated because you're white. I understand the idea but I can't stand it anymore. I'm getting tired. At the end of our trip [my friend] Judith had to calm me down because I couldn't take it anymore. And it is more or less everywhere like this: in the market, in tros, it's always about the price. At first, everything was new. But step by step I hate the feeling of having to repeat myself. You lose a lot of time and energy. And it's the same with Ghanaian boys. The first time they ask you 'can you take me home?' You joke that there is no room in your luggage. But after three months I overreact because I don't want to have this conversation again and again. *They want to be your friend but that is not how you make friends. It's too easy to have friends here because I'm white, not because I'm interesting or I'm nice, only because I'm white.* Being white can be funny, but I'm bored with it. [After Judith left, Marion was supposed to travel for another two weeks on her own but she realized she was "not strong enough" to face all of the hassles and frustrations by herself] (Marion, 17 April 2009)

Being white in Ghana is strange. It gets you so much attention. If there's anything I'd want to do, I could do it here. It doesn't matter if it's illegal or I'm not trained to do it. But the tension can get annoying sometimes. If you want to walk or sit in a bar everyone wants to talk to you. (Mark, 21 April 2009)

My biggest fear is that I allow myself to take the advantages that they give me because I'm white: cut in line, get served first, or get the best of everything. It also sucks if people think that you're an ATM although I haven't found this here. It's different in Ho: how friendly everyone is, how safe it is. I understand now that when people say 'yevu' it's a loving term in Ho, not to hassle or get money out of you. Ho is one of those innocent places, like America in the 50s. My mom used to tell me how everything used to cost a nickel, you could go out at night without being shot or raped, you didn't have to have your guard up all the time. But you can feel how it's changing. In 10 years it's going to be a completely different town because everyone wants the same benefits as the rest of the world. This is good as far as hygiene, sanitation, and healthcare is concerned, but you also see people caring about name brand clothes, new cars... You see the same dumb obsessions they care about in the rest of the world infiltrate a sleepy little town like this. (Sandra, 22 April 2009)

I have no desire to come back to Ghana for all the cultural things I've experienced. Neo-imperialistic, that's what it is. They are so thankful for everything whites do. This undeserved level of respect... it's welcoming and

at the same time overly subservient. I don't deserve that. I'm sick of being idolized. My goal in 10 years is that no one will have to travel to volunteer. There will be universal gratitude. (Vanessa, 7 April 2009)

In Ethiopia people would just want to be your friend to discuss your culture. In Ghana there are genuine people, who befriend you with no ulterior motives and then there are those who just want something from you. In Ho you stand out as a white person because there are not so many white people here. It was a novelty to me the first month, hated it the second month, and got used to it the third month." In the beginning, people used to call me "yevu" and I would go to them on the street and strike up a conversation only to discover they wanted something from me. I find this reverse racism frustrating. I couldn't understand if people were trying to rip me off just to spite me or because they were opportunists and wanted to make more money off me. (Eric, 7 April 2009)

I'm tired of being seen as a foreigner when I've lived here for so long, not being recognized by my neighbors, not being recognized in stores, being just a blank face, just another volunteer. They call you "yevu" and are not interested in your name. For some reason they feel the need to identify you as a foreigner and share that with everyone else on the street. It is very frustrating, especially when parents teach their kids that. If I confront them about it, I'm not being taken seriously. They think it's funny because you're white. They don't see it as racism. They keep telling me "yevu" is not a bad thing. They look up to you. They have a saying in Ewe that "the white man is close to God" or that "if you're going to church and you see a white man on the way, you can go home because you've seen God." I don't know if they come up with it on their own or someone's teaching them, but there needs to be some sort of intervention. They have really warped conceptions about what skin color means and this rises from slavery times. (Carey, 6 April 2009) My neighbors still call me "yevu" after I've lived here for so long [seven months]. I got so mad [one day] that I yelled at them: "I've been living here for 7 months. I am no longer a yevu." He answered: "You've been living here for 7 months and you still can't speak Ewe." (23 March 2009)

I, too, witnessed several instances of "reversed racism." One day, for instance, Charles, our coordinator, invited me for a drink at the White House, our favorite hangout spot, and asked me to "teach him everything I knew that he didn't know". The request baffled me and I tried changing the subject to his job with PA. Although his job was exhausting and it offered no remuneration or benefits, he enjoyed it because it gave him a chance to "hang out with volunteers, sharing ideas, learning new things, especially about social issues." "For

instance, I'm being very liberal now. In the past I've had a very serious view about homosexuals. But I've been discussing the positive aspects with volunteers and it's not that bad. Maybe I'm limiting my mind to my own cultural values and not responding to other possibilities." I wanted to know why the words of a white person "carry a different weight" in Ghana. Charles' answer reminded me of the country's colonial history, something rarely discussed amongst volunteers or locals:

Ghanaians believe whites are well off and with their money they can help by buying their drinks, eating their food, sleeping in their hotels. Ghanaians like visitors more than their own. If you are white it means you are well to do and you get lots of attentions. The eyes are on you always: some are waiting for you to make a mistake or some are waiting for you to make a friendly gesture. This is a colonial mentality. In pre-colonial society, our local kings were considered superior beings. With colonization, whites took over our kings. This had a strong impact on most Ghanaians. Also the kind of inventions they have made and the kinds of things they've been able to do with their lives. The people admire that." [Independence has not changed this mentality because] although Ghana is politically independent, economically it still depends upon foreign loans, policies, and imports. You cannot support your body fully. White people are in power and you look for help from them.²¹ [...] Ghanaians think whites will bring innovation. It is a general mentality here. Their presence helps put so many things in place. (18 April 2009)

In Ghana, racial identities were reduced to and deduced from biological and behavioral traits. This vexed our sensibilities, be they of the liberal humanist or the critical sort. At home, none of us would have dared to use terms like "black" or "white" with the same ease. But in Ghana these appellations were employed nonchalantly. Sometimes we borrowed them jokingly as a sign of belonging or spitefully to defy being called "yevu" and "obruni." Still, it seems to me that the racial encounters reproduced above have little to do with the Western history of racial discrimination. The fascination for the epidermal as well as the cultural properties of whiteness is not so much "racism" – this would assign volunteers a victim role – as the racialization of whiteness. For the first time, in most of our lives, our racial identity was made visible and we had to confront the consequences of this racial gaze. Our white bodies had been made public: we existed for everyone to see, touch, and assess. Historically, whiteness has been the unmarked centre of humanity, the *nomos* of normality and normativity, and the standard of reference by which all other positions were assessed as either desirable or deviant. To be outside this centre "is to inhabit the negative: it is to be 'not'" (Ahmed 2006:139). Whether it was a naïve, childlike sense of wonder or proof of a deep-seated historical consciousness that made Ghanaians shout "yevu" or "obruni", with

²¹ At the annual ISA meetings, Siba Grovogui repeatedly tells an African joke that captures this mood: "Colonialism ended in the 50s, but when will Independence end?"

every interpellation, whiteness was being “provincialized” a step further (Chakrabarty 2000). “I know I’m white”, volunteers would occasionally shout back. But that did not make things any better. Being white in Ghana opened all sorts of doors for us, yet it also represented an obstacle. It aligned us with standards of beauty, civilization, and progress and it also made us uncomfortable (Ahmed 2006:132).

Research in both Guatemala and Ghana shows that, in putting tourists in contact with foreign and unusual situations, volunteering trips are better at facilitating an emotional or intimate experience than a professionally relevant one. Even when volunteers do nothing but travel across Ghana, the pedagogical value of the formula should not be dismissed. Living and traveling on their own, making multinational friends, having work responsibilities, confronting racial, cultural, and material differences, narrating their daily adventures in a blog, learning how to survive without modern amenities – all of these activities are central to voluntourism’s educational mission. Organizations like Projects Abroad do not teach specific skills, like how to be a teacher or a caretaker, but rather a series of professionally desirable character traits, like self-reliance, initiative, endurance, innovation, creativity, and resourcefulness. There is nothing like dealing with unnerving and somewhat traumatic racial encounters to demonstrate these qualities. Phrases like “expand your horizons”, “fulfill your potential”, or “come back a changed individual” may sound like empty platitudes, but in fact they express the sincere pedagogical ambition of volunteer tourism.

As you get older, you start being in a comfort zone. And then you take a 24-hour flight, not knowing what to expect, you live alone, away from your family, it’s scary. But I think I’ve handled it quite well. (Lucy, 2 May 2009)

I learned how to live without my parents. I learned English. And how to live without my organized life in Switzerland. In all, I learned how to be stronger. (Marion, 17 April 2009)

Being in Ghana helped me understand that although I still want to go to med school and become a doctor, I do not want to do this for the rest of my life. I also want to do other things, a bunch of other things. (Patricia, 6 April 2009)

Every trip changes you, and I’m not talking about making a difference. It’s always changed me in a good way. I go home with a very different mindset every time. It’s like when you step away from a situation and everything seems easier or clearer. I don’t agree with a lot of views in America: the obsession with appearance, money, big houses. But a lot of times you get sucked in. You can come here and have a good time and be yourself. A lot of times I’m more myself here than at home. Sometimes I put on a front at home. Of course this “new me” mindset is difficult to maintain at home, but the value of traveling is still indisputable. Travel helps you gain perspective.

When you settle in you become comfortable. When you're in new situations, you learn and grow. On this trip I learned where I want to fit in the medical field. If you never expose yourself to new situations, you get really boring. My dad's job made a lasting impression upon me. I blame Shell for my urge to travel. But trips in the developed world don't really interest me. I don't see it as travel, but visiting previous home towns and family. They're not as enriching as here where you have the complete difference in culture. I find it really important to understand different cultural perspectives, to see every side of the story. It will make me a better physician. I will understand things better than the regular Joe. I'm a care-taker. My family thinks this is a dangerous personality trait. (Sandra, 22 April 2009)

When you're uncomfortable you grown the most. I was put in a situation that was completely different from the lifestyle I have at home – that's what I mean by uncomfortable. The water was not always running; I was eating different foods; I was sleeping in a different bed; I did not know what the communication would be like before I came here; I was living in a place where people still sleep on the street or at the place of their work. I'll be going home a more appreciative person: excited for a healthcare system that's trustworthy, understanding that having clean water and electricity at all times is not something that we can take for granted, knowing what a child with malnutrition looks like. (Katherine, 18 April 2009)

It becomes clear from these statements that volunteer tourism is not about achieving development goals, but about initiating self-development. It is not a form of bringing help, but of self-help. PA placements did little to endow volunteers with professional expertise, yet the overall experience was still perceived as educational and transformative. What is to be made from this paradox? The case study in Ghana demonstrates that affective experiences and extraordinary events can easily acquire an educational dimension, which in turn can be of professional value. It is precisely because the time in Ghana was so emotionally “demanding” that this trip remained of educational relevance despite its apparent uselessness. To still enjoy their time abroad, volunteers had to mobilize a great deal of endurance and patience as well as learn to cope with various cultural anxieties and nervous conditions. Being able to overcome the effects of racial tensions, material deprivation, and geographical distance presumes a variety of social and affective competencies (e.g. ingenuity, problem-solving, conflict resolution, leaderships skills, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, international experience)²², without which one's degree, skills, and professional expertise would be

²² Note that these qualifications are “non-referential unit[s] of value” (Readings 1996:39), which are at least as uncertain and volatile as the economic climate they are meant to navigate. Because these are concepts with no internal content or external referent, they can be used fluidly to refer to whatever modes of conduct capitalist principles of efficiency and competition happen to require without ever

worthless in the new economy (Isin 2000:162). Whether it is by allowing volunteers to experiment with various professional identities or to gather the necessary linguistic and cultural competencies to confidently navigate a foreign setting, volunteering in the Global South is ripe with affective and aesthetic lessons that can easily be translated into entrepreneurial skills.

Imagining Africa

The Global South has a strange function: its material dispossession and semiotic foreignness represent a boot-camp-like training ground for tomorrow's professional elites. Even in those moments when all we did was go out for drinks at the White House or read books by the pool, even when we ditched work or quit our placements altogether to tour the country's resorts and expat hangout places, we were still doing something almost no one we knew had done. Whether volunteers felt disappointed with the placements and disillusioned with what little difference their presence had made, the pride (and angst) of friends and relatives at home provided a constant reminder of their exceptional audacity.

All my female friends are proud of the work I'm doing with the local children. But I don't know why because, for me, this has been a normal step in my life. It fits in with my life. I've always spoken of doing something like this. Occasionally there are people who say I'm crazy because they live in a secure environment they are used to and are afraid of giving that up. They don't understand how I can leave my life behind. Or they are scared that I might get sick. (Christina, 16 March 2009)

People at home are proud of what I'm doing in Ghana because they think it is selfless. We are not making any money off this. Yes, I get to put it on my CV, but this is a very minor thing. I've paid to do this. Most people could do this. But when you're at home it could seem quite daunting to go around the world and help. They say what I'm doing is great but they would never be able to do it themselves. (Sara, 26 March 2009)

At home everyone's so proud. Everyone I've ever known in my life has called my mom to ask whether I'm still in Ghana. But what's there to be proud of? If I wasn't here, no one would care. But although I may not be needed, coming to Ghana by myself is a big step for me. I'm only 18 and have proven during this trip that I have the independence and the self-control not to go crazy. My friends and family have an incorrect perception of what my time here is like.

having their worth or desirability questioned. In effect, they are more effective as strategies of inspection and surveillance than as economic steering mechanisms.

Ghana is not like the rest of Africa. And PA is a big security. If I came here alone, it would be a bigger deal. (Patricia, 6 April 2009)

Before I came to Ghana, I got a text message from my friends saying how cool they think it is that I'm going to Ghana. But I don't see anything special about it. Although everyone admires and is proud of what I've been doing in Africa, I cannot see what the big deal is because this has been my plan since grade 4. I was raised with the thought that this is something I was going to do... like being raised with a family business. (Eric, 7 April 2009)

Some think I'm crazy but they respect me for what I'm doing. A lot of them have done exchanges in Australia or Britain but I was the first one to go to Africa, to the Third World in general. They say I'm brave but I needed to do it. (Katherine, 19 April 2009)

People at home find what I'm doing very strange. I come from a very rural part of England. It's kind of a big deal. No one I know went to Africa. A lot of people never leave town, let alone come to Africa. Older people are happy and admiring. My friends kind of expected that from me because I've had an impulsive life and traveled a lot. I always intended to do a gap year and go to Africa. (Mark, 21 April 2009)

They [friends and family] think I'm just an angel for sacrificing myself to help needy Ghanaians. Only my parents would like me to come home and get a job instead of helping Africans who are naturally lazy and can't help themselves. [...] But it's cool to be unselfish. Being so self-centered is so terrifying. You can be more content if you do stuff that's not for yourself. And it's fun. I think the greatest deed is the deed you don't get credit for. (Vanessa, 7 April 2009)

Some volunteers took the reactions of their friends and family as a well-deserved compliment. Others, seemingly more modest, thought the compliments were unwarranted. Helping, for them, was a natural calling, an organic reaction to global poverty and injustice, something they were supposed to do all along. Being called "crazy" in this situation is not an injury so much as a confirmation of their exceptional deeds and the extraordinary distance they are prepared to travel in order to help others in need (Kuszewski 2009). In all cases, however, what is admired are not the effects of volunteering, which are never assessed or questioned, but the fact that the altruism of these young adults has extended to a space outside modernity, a space that in the Western imagination is usually associated with anarchy and danger – Africa. Being able to say "I lived in Ghana" bears such purchase in the minds of friends, relatives, Facebook audiences, and possibly also admission and recruitment officers

back home, that even when someone openly admits to the uselessness of their sojourn they can still not abort their trip.

Carey's story is compelling. Following her parents' example, she joined the American Field Service to complete her senior year at a high school in Ghana. She was supposed to attend classes in Ho for nine months but graduated early. She then tried volunteering at a school for a while but was quickly disillusioned with the meager results of her work. When I met Carey, she used to spend most of her days at the White House listening to music, reading, keeping track of the arrivals and departures of other white people. As she puts it, "I went from being a student to being a teacher to doing nothing." And although this has taught her more patience, she was visibly unsatisfied:

There are very few things that I've gained from staying here for that long. Ghana seems to be slightly stagnant. There are not a whole lot of changes here [...] In seven months I've seen one road being paved and one traffic light getting fixed. Things move really, really slowly here. I guess I've become a little bit more tolerant here. In the beginning a lot pissed me off, things I would not want in a country, in a town. I would get frustrated about Ghana, the racism, the massive amounts of volunteers... But I've become more patient about things. I guess that's not a good thing. It's a good things for me, but not for Ghana because they could use some solutions. (6 April 2009)

Carey often talked about what she missed from back home, mostly friends and food. But she could not leave because she had to prove, especially to her father, that she had the strength and stamina to "hold out until the end." Several other volunteers shared her doubts. Eric, Patricia, Sara, and Marion, for instance, felt that Ghana would "not have fallen apart", had they not been there (Patricia, 6 April 2009). They were resentful to have spent their savings on a trip that felt more and more like an overpriced vacation. Vanessa, Carey, Vivienne, along with the two employees in the Accra PA office, Tina and Elli, noted that Ghana was far from the apocalyptic landscape they had been led to believe. Life in Ghana was, on the one hand, much more strict and regimented (i.e. not as exciting), and on the other hand, a lot more mundane and boring (i.e., not as exotic) than people at home imagined. Sometimes, things would go in the opposite direction with volunteers complaining about the local food, lack of comfort, local customs and ways of life. More than once, I saw volunteers engage in fights over money with host families and street vendors, tell off beggars and children, make racially charged observations, or simply break down in tears exhausted and exasperated with the unintelligible world around them. Having "done their part" by spending a hefty sum of money to help Ghana, volunteers often felt entitled to act in the most assertive and arrogant of ways. Still, no one dared to break their trip short. Going home early would have meant admitting that Ghana was less extraordinary than people imagined or too difficult to handle and losing (some of) the esteem of their family, friends, and future employees. This was especially true for PA staff. Both Tina and Elli complained their jobs were "boring

since it ha[d] the word ‘desk’ in it” (Tina, 13 March 2009). Still, they decided to sign one-year contracts in the interest of acquiring “international work experience” (ibid.). The work may have been unrewarding, but at the same time it was easy and repetitive enough to feel like a “paid holiday”:

There is a lot that I can gain from it, not from the job itself but from living and working overseas in a foreign country. It stands out. [...] It shows that you’re adaptable, you can hold your own in various situations, you are willing to travel, easy-going and laid-back. Also, the logistics of going abroad, you have to be organized and proactive. All of these are good qualities for future employers. (Elli, 27 March 2009)

If volunteers and foreign workers alike are prepared to tolerate be it the monotony or the frustrations of being “mandatory tourists” in Ghana, then, it is fair to ask: What irreplaceable good can Ghana, and Africa in general, offer people in the Global North? Is there a function or a lack that only Africa can fill?

“Africa” is indeed an exceptional place and a place of exception. The name refers to a variety of Sub-Saharan political units and cultural groups located outside or at the antipode of modernity. Both South Africa, with its considerable white minority and established tourism industry, and the Maghreb, with its preponderantly Muslim population and fragile geopolitical position in the War on Terror, are excluded from this trope. “Real” or “black” Africa, as it is commonly referred to, has little to do with the actual geographic outline and historical experience of the continent. It is a colonial fantasy about timeless cultures, moral simplicity, communitarian values, ecological harmony, religious mysticism, and historical stagnation. Despite successive encounters with agents of modernity, i.e., explorers, missionaries, colonial administrators, adventurers, development workers, tourists, volunteers, and celebrities, Africa seems to have remained impervious to modernity. It is *unmodernizable*. For some this indicates the heroic resilience of African people to defend their ancestral life forms; for others it demonstrates their incorrigible, i.e. lazy, corrupt, and duplicitous, nature.²³ Either way, Africa is probably the only destination where Westerners do not have to feel like their arrival is belated and where the fantasy of the Grand Tour, the overlap of travel and *travail*, is still alive. That is why the trope functions as a final frontier for adventure tourism, a spiritual resource for self-actualization, a cultural repository of instructive lessons, in short, “the training ground for citizens of empire” (Mathers and Hubbard 2006:212; Mbembe 2001).

²³ A series of recent mass-market publications propose to demonstrate that foreign aid is counterproductive for Africa. Instead, what is needed to overcome the continent’s self-made development issues are trade liberalization, leaner government institutions, and a more responsible leadership: Robert Calderisi. *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn’t Working* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Dambisa Moyo. *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2009);

Conclusion

Our present predicament is such that economic and political benefits are being granted in a “graduated” fashion, depending on individuals’ abilities to respond opportunistically and ingeniously to the demands of flexible capital (Ong 2005:698). Students and graduates are at the forefront of this race for mobile privilege. Having only their education as an asset, they must participate in all sorts of extra-curricular activities and “continuing education” programs to ensure their transition from reserve army of labor to professional middle class. Volunteer tourism is one such strategy. This chapter has argued that, despite the apparent uselessness of overseas volunteering projects, the practice remains instructive. Volunteer tourism introduces young adults from the countries of the Global North to tumultuous cultural, emotional, and interpersonal experiences that can endow them with the necessary skills and resources to operate in multicultural settings and volatile economies. Whereas, in Guatemala, tourists found it easy to develop an affective relation with the “friendly” locals and their “authentic” culture because their foreignness (*gringos*) was not explicitly racialized, in Ghana, such sentimental effusions were frequently interrupted by moments of frustration, anger, and sheer hopelessness. To this we must also add the virtuous aura volunteering enjoys in the imagination of people back home. The enduring colonial fantasy of Africa, as both a repulsive and attractive site, presents volunteering in Ghana as an intrinsically brave, sacrificial, and exceptional act, regardless of its actual humanitarian merits (or lack thereof). Yet, at the end of the day, volunteer tourism can only remain a promise of employability, never a guarantee. Despite the conceit of capitalism to govern uncertainty through savings, speculation, and risk assessment, the future remains the only dimension of time for which there is no historical evidence (Brooks 2004:2). The little we know about the future is that it bears no reason for celebration. It announces the rise of a competition-based political system that strays even farther away from the universal values of dignity and justice.

Conclusion: International Political Life

The ambition of this project has been to explore the strategies and technologies through which volunteer tourism produces forms of subjectivity and social relations that are congruent with the entrepreneurial logic of neoliberal government. Be it through the affective competencies it cultivates or by teaching volunteers how to become employable figures, volunteer tourism, I have argued, is one amongst a variety of everyday practices (e.g., financial, consumption, lifestyle, health, education, and professional) that provide capitalism with the necessary “forms of sociality and subjectivity” (Read 2003:135). Chapters four and five have explored this proposition through ethnographic material gathered in Guatemala and Ghana. In this final chapter, I wish to discuss how the emotional and entrepreneurial strategies mobilized in volunteer tourism engender hierarchical and uneven modes of political subjectivity. After a summary of the arguments presented in this study, I turn to Aihwa Ong’s work on “flexible citizenship” (1999, 2005, 2007b) in an attempt to better understand how various “graduated” forms of political subjectivity shape the fields of possibility of our everyday life.

In the latter half of the chapter, I situate some of the theoretical claims about governmentality, biopower, and capitalism I have made so far (*see* chapter two) within the broader IR discipline. My aim here is to respond to a couple of recent critiques raised against Foucauldian approaches to global politics. The first concern asks whether Foucault’s theories on power, subjectivity, and government can be “internationalized”, and whether, should such a transfer be possible, this justifies speaking of a *global* logic of governmentality. The second questions the use of Foucault in launching a critique of (post-Fordist) capitalism, given the French thinker’s disdain for Marx’s historical method, class analysis, and ambitions of social transformation. Since both concerns speak to the theoretical framework of this project, I consider it relevant to further elaborate my position to show that a Foucauldian reading of international political life and the socio-economic conditions governing it can further the scope and aim of International Relations research.

Uneven Fields of Possibility

This project has touched upon a variety of theoretical themes, from Foucauldian theories of power, subjectivity, and government to post-Marxist interpretations of biopower, capital, and labor. It has also included ethnographic discussions on the politics of global tourism, charity and aid, education and affect, colonial relations and racial tensions. The question at the heart of these investigations has been: what kinds of subjects and forms of life does neoliberal government make possible? This question derives from the original proposition that volunteer tourism, even when accused of being a hypocritical practice meant to appease white guilt – as it is often the case in the media – or a boring and useless activity that does not further anyone’s wellbeing – as many volunteers interviewed in this project argued –, it still produces types of subjects and social relations that are beneficial for network

capitalism. Following Foucault, I have defined neoliberalism as a mode of social organization that, in using market principles to optimize the productivity, longevity, and security of a population, subsumes social life to market logics. This rationality of government comes with its own peculiar forms of political subjection. On the one hand, individuals are expected to give their lives an entrepreneurial form by assessing risks and benefits, fostering self-reliance, and calculating future returns, while, on the other hand, it requires them to align these rational considerations with the principles of associational life, such as care, responsibility, and empathy. Volunteer tourism, then, is a recruitment and education strategy for young adults who need to develop the personal and professional competencies necessary for fulfilling the flexible ethos of neoliberalism. We have seen examples of this both in Guatemala and Ghana.

Guatemala being the first stop in my fieldwork, I was surprised not to find the charitable souls advertised all across the brochure literature. Instead, the volunteers I worked with quickly lost interest in the educational and ecological programs offered by our host organization. To ward off boredom, they turned to alternative modes of engagement, such as travelling, socializing with “friendly” locals, and getting to know the “authentic” culture. All of these allowed them to demonstrate their affective credentials in ways that volunteer work could not either because it was perceived as useless and inefficient or tedious and unrewarding. I remained skeptical, however, that these apparently benevolent and generous forms of engagement were closer to Orientalist fantasies of knowing, possessing, and consuming the other than to any veritable model of justice. The multiculturalist sensibility volunteers showed for locals confirmed the capaciousness and open-mindedness of white middle-class *gringos* but denied the Peteñeros their dignity.

On the more expensive project I joined in Ghana, volunteers were much more adamant about the need to gain professional experience during their trip. While the placements themselves could offer no such advantage, simply by virtue of “living” in Ghana and grappling with its material lacks, infrastructural challenges, and especially racial tensions, volunteer tourism had the potential to enhance the employability and work versatility of these young adults. At home, in the imagination of friends, family, guidance councilors, admission officers, and employers at home, for whom the “dark continent” was a repository of disease, want, and chaos, volunteers continued to be admired for their responsible and sacrificial actions. Although volunteers considered “Africa” to be far less exotic and much more exhausting than they had imagined, no one dared to break their trip short for fear of losing the appreciation of those at home. All in all, volunteer tourism, even when it generates nothing but boredom and frustration and even when volunteers do nothing “useful” but travel and relax it still remains a valuable source for human and social capital and an effective strategy for shaping the entrepreneurial conduct of young adults.

These lessons cannot go unnoticed in the study of global politics. As rationalities of government are being modified by the deterritorialized expanse of capital, programs and strategies of rule enter the most intimate and mundane corners of our lives. This does not mean, however, that governmentality impacts all of us in the same way: while certain forms of life come to embody normative and desirable forms of subjectivity, others are “de-

subjectified” (Neal 2008:51) through their inability to conform to sanctioned rationalities of government. Governmentality, then, is a field of possibility that separates normative forms of life from suspicious ones (Foucault 2001). Volunteer tourism is a particularly good example for seeing how, despite its universal ambition, global governmentality leaves plenty of room for unevenness, differentiation, and hierarchy. Simply by virtue of having lived and worked in places the Western imagination assumes to be destitute and dangerous, volunteer tourists come to acquire a more advantageous form of political subjectivity. While this idea has been briefly addressed in chapter two, I explore it here at greater length with the help of Aihwa Ong’s work on “flexible citizenship” (1999, 2005, 2007a, 2007b). My use of her work, however, is selective. While I am compelled by her conceptualization of “flexible citizenship”, I use it more to understand how various practices of mobility engender distinct forms of political subjectivity than to make a claim about citizenship proper (as a legal prerogative or a set of practices). Just as Ong argues that citizenship has become a more or less arbitrary category that can be denied or withdrawn at any moment, I want to propose that political subjectivity has become a flexible seal of quality conditional upon individuals’ ability to conform to neoliberal dictums.

In its neoliberal intimation, Ong explains, the term citizenship refers to a variety of life forms that occupy the vacuum left by the historical disintegration of sovereign territoriality. An increasingly loose relation between political membership and territorial belonging has made room for zones of “graduated sovereignty” that follow the mobile and transient paths of capital (e.g. global cities, cyber-space, refugee camps, regional labor markets, high-tech districts, etc.) (Ong 2005). These flows create localities and conditions that make it possible for the *rights* of citizenship to be claimed outside state territory and national legislature, under conditions that contravene the fundamental principles of national representative democracy. As a result of these mutations, the criteria of citizenship have changed radically: they have been flexibilized to reward those subjects who can respond opportunistically and creatively to the demands of flexible accumulation (2005:698). Citizenship is distributed competitively depending on whether individuals act as entrepreneurial agents and/or if they live up to the moral dictums of associational life. It can, just as easily, be denied or withdrawn anytime because there is enough room for spontaneity and gratification in this logic of government, as there is for punishment and exclusion. What was once a legal prerogative is now a scarce good to be earned based on merit, conduct, and market value (Ong 2007b:89; Rose 2000:1408).

To illustrate these concepts, Ong uses the example of the mega-city, which she defines not based on size, but on its ability to attract and capture inherently footloose global goods, from capital, to services, cultural products, experts, and artists (2007b:83). Foreign professionals, in particular, are highly-valued scarce goods that can attach speculative value to a certain locale. The responsibility of global cities is to lure these *pieds-à-terre* into becoming residents by offering them prestigious housing, tax breaks, maids, and entertainment to facilitate an international lifestyle (ibid. 86). Meanwhile, “old” citizens have to fight off the side-effects of real-estate speculation, urban agglomeration, and political

disenfranchisement brought on by these patterns of “gentrification” (ibid. 91). In this context, citizenship becomes a strategic category for valorizing the membership of some populations over others (ibid. 88). Those who possess the skill, talent, symbolic capital, market value, and self-enterprise to creatively adapt to global conditions and transnational processes will be rewarded with a growing number of passports, residence permits, and mobility incentives as well as an increased access to job markets, housing options, and cultural goods around the world. Those who fail to conform will become second-order citizens, confined to slums and ghettos, doomed to perform low-skilled and tedious jobs, with little possibility of escape. Their citizenship rights will be claimed through appeals to biological survival, rather than universal human rights, and will be granted only by the grace of humanitarian organizations, foundations and charities. While some are granted all the rights and privileges of citizenship, others have to claim them through struggle.

If we shift our focus to the problem of subjectivity, we see that volunteer tourists are on the fortunate end of a similar exchange. Regardless of the actual usefulness of this practice, in terms of professional training or humanitarian assistance, simply by virtue of having lived and worked in places the Western imagination assumes to be destitute and dangerous, volunteer tourists are “in line” with standards of civilization, normativity, and market value. The type of deterritorialized, flexible subjectivity that is to be earned here is not (necessarily) a legal prerogative or some economic reward. Although it may generate material benefits in the future, at its very least, volunteer tourism allows participants to expand their “field of possibilities” (Foucault 2001:341). It allows individuals to build human and social capital, establish social relations and networks, communicate their self to others, navigate their social field in an expert and admirable way, demonstrate professional competence, and use their material and semiotic surroundings as an extension of their own shape (Ahmed 2006:130-3; Illouz 2007:66-7). It allows volunteer tourists to enjoy the same currency as material or financial capital, to be as desirable and esteemed as experts, and as assertive as people who enjoy the legal benefits of political constituency without actually bearing any of the responsibilities of actual membership. The political subjectivity of “local” populations is, on the other hand, of the suspect kind. It buys them a place on earth, as part of a state, racial category, or cultural group, but it also makes it impossible for them to transgress into other spaces and forms of being. Should these people wish to “have a part” in how their lives are governed they must conform to the dictums of foreign help. This is not to suggest that there are only two types of subjectivity possible – “good” and “bad”, flexible and local. There are multiple “graduated” ways of modes of being in the world. It so happens that in volunteer tourism the extremes are brought face-to-face. Volunteer tourism, then, is more than just a sociological commentary on how we spend our free time. Whether it teaches young adults how to use affective competencies or how to enhance their employability, the formula entails a promise for becoming a better subject.

Roads Ahead

In the first chapter, I offered two counts on which this project can contribute to the study of global politics: volunteer tourism is a great venue for studying transnational social relations *in movement* and for exploring a hitherto ignored dimension of International Relations – the formation and articulation of white middle class individuals. In closing, I want to suggest two additional ways in which this study can further the study of international politics. Contrary to liberal and Marxist critiques of Foucauldian approaches to global politics, I maintain that governmentality studies remain helpful for revealing the connection between global politics and the “uneventful” and banal experiences of everyday life.

Global Governmentality

The work of Michel Foucault is not a novelty in International Relations. It was first popularized during the 1980s and 1990s through the work of RBJ Walker (1993), Richard Ashley (1990 with Walker), Jim George (1995), Spike Peterson (1992), and Jens Bartelson (1995), all of whom sought to reveal the social and linguistic constructedness behind *Realpolitik* staples such as “anarchy”, “sovereignty”, “state”, and “power struggles” (Selby 2007:326). In demonstrating how these concepts not so much describe as produce our international reality, these so-called dissident scholars were the first to use Foucault (but also Derrida, Agamben, Said, Spivak, Bhabha) to denaturalize the disciplinarity of the field. More recently, however, since the translation and publication of Foucault’s last two lecture series of at the *Collège de France*, *Security, Territory, Population* (2007) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), the French theorist has been recuperated from two additional vantage points: critical (bio)security studies, which seek to identify the militaristic as well as molecular strategies used to define “what life is, and what it is for”, and governmentality studies, interested in how power affects and organizes the more quotidian content of our lives (Kiersey and Weidner 2009:354). While it is difficult to speak of distinct schools of Foucauldian thought, there are stark differences between the two.

With minor exceptions (Nyers 2003), *biosecurity* approaches typically work with an Agambenean reading of Foucault. Their goal is to understand how biopolitics subsumes human life to the strategic calculations of power in ways that transgress the limits of legitimate rule. Rather than representing a break with sovereign power, biopolitics, in this context, extends sovereignty into the terrain of emergency and exceptionality. This reading of Foucault has featured prominently in post-9/11 IR theory, particularly in rethinking the discipline’s classic problems of war, risk, and survival in the wake of the War on Terror, exceptional incarceration and interrogation practices, and the rise of digital and biometric surveillance and securitization strategies (Dillon and Reid 2001; Shapiro, Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004; Jabri 2006; Reid 2006; Dillon 2007; Dauphinee and Masters 2007; Salter 2003, 2008; Dillon and Neal 2008; DeLarrinaga and Doucet 2008; Dillon and Reid 2009). By comparison, the more benign and mundane effects of governmentality have remained relatively understudied. It is those rather “uneventful” facets of international political life, such as finance, education, housing, labor, architecture, art, leisure, and lifestyle choices, that

governmentality studies have turned to in an effort to show how international relations affect our lives and how our lives are the stuff that International Relations are made out of (Larner and Walters 2004; Walters and Haahr 2005; Kiersey 2009a, 2009b; Weidner 2009). This approach has not been spared controversy, especially concerning the possibility to “scale up” Foucault for the study of governmentality on a global level. In what follows, I review and respond to these claims.

A number of scholars have wondered whether Foucault’s overwhelming interest in *capillary* power – that is, power relations concerned with shaping the “conduct of conduct” and turning human beings into subjects – is compatible with the study of the international (Albert and Lenco 2008:256; Chandler 2009). Jan Selby forcefully argues against “scaling up” a theorist whose primary focus was the “‘domestic’ social arena” (2007:325). The way in which Foucault has been imported into IR is a long shot away, Selby claims, from the project Foucault himself had in mind when he set out to theorize/historicize the rise of liberal bourgeois societies. Left to his own devices, Foucault was much more interested in the productive possibilities of power, than “in situations of coercive and totalitarian control” (ibid. 331). Consequently, he lacks a conceptual vocabulary appropriate for dealing with structural inequality, exploitation, or questions of social change and justice. Critical security scholars have tried to rescue Foucault for their own purposes, but they have only been able to use him productively through an Agambenean reading of biopower, which demonstrates that “Foucault, standing alone, cannot be convincingly internationalized to provide a theoretical account of the contemporary world order” (ibid. 337). This is not just a methodological, but also an ethical concern. Seeing how the international is organized around national interests, power struggles, and anarchic competitions, it would be imprudent to sideline these in favour of lower rank concerns, such as the self-understanding of individuals, the management of households, or the organization of communities (ibid.). In effect, Foucault can neither adequately explain the vast majority of the world’s population, nor help us comprehend the continued relevance of violence and domination in international life.

Foucault would not have denied these accusations. He has often stated that it has never been his intent to provide us with a theory of power so much as to “create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made [and make themselves into] subjects” (2001:326). This approach to power is radically different from the juridical models used in political theory, economy, and history (ibid. 327). Rather than focusing on what legitimizes power, what institutions can exercise it, and what norms legitimize it, Foucault has been much more interested in how power relations, as opposed to power itself, are exercised in action. “The analysis of power relations within a society cannot be reduced to the study of a series of institutions or even to the study of all those institutions that would merit the name ‘political’. Power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social” (ibid. 344). This approach calls for an analysis that is “more empirical, more directly related to our present situation” (ibid. 329). Also, it automatically shifts our understanding of government from an activity organized around the state and its administrative apparatus to a collective effort which affects and concerns all of us. While IR scholars have been careful to

divide the world into a domestic and an international half, Foucault has been busy mapping the erratic trajectories of power, regardless of where they took him. Some times they happened to take the shape of institutions, policies, or states; other time they did not. Where they led was not of much importance because Foucault never started from the concepts or levels of analysis that historical, economic, and political analysis took as a given (e.g., state, sovereignty, civil society, people, capital, etc.) and he was never shy about “abandoning them” (Neal 2009:541). Much rather, he “force[d] us to reassess our concepts” by realizing that there are no ontological givens, only events, problems, and fields of possibilities. Unfortunately, the disciplinary bastion of International Relations guards its territory with a solemnity that makes it difficult to see global politics as something of our own making.

A second concern is that, when talking about the global reach of governmentality there is a tendency to exaggerate the success and homogeneity of this project, and downplay the persistence of geopolitical differences and hierarchies. Here, Selby is right to note that theories of global governmentality can result in “accounts which overstate [the] unity, evenness, and indivisibility” of the global (2007:336).

For all the delicate spatial metaphors, no sense is given of just how variable across the world bio-political administrative systems really are (or how much the practices of government and the constitution of subjects differ between, say, New York and New Guinea), or even more important, of why these differences exist (ibid. 336).

If we understand governmentality to mean the social reproduction of capitalism on a larger scale, we must be careful not to overstate the effects of this project or the term may become misleading and vacuous. We do not inhabit a smooth and homogenous global space (Larner and Williams 2004:5). The practices and technologies of neoliberal government remain “much more unevenly distributed” than the term global governmentality suggests (ibid. 339). Especially considering that neoliberalism represents a shift from an exchange- to a competition-based economic model, in seeking to organize life according to market principles, governmentality remains exclusionary, divisive, and hierarchic in spite of its global ambitions (Reid 2009). As the example of volunteer tourism demonstrates, “[g]lobal neoliberal government [...] does not, and cannot, work on a truly global population” (Kiersey 2009:385). Individuals, even entire communities, must show themselves worthy of the normative benefits of neoliberal government by acting as responsible and self-reliant agents (Rose 2000:1397-8). Some will succeed, others will fail, and many more will be somewhere in between. Globality should be understood less as a geopolitical reality than a discursive site of intervention, a problem to be resolved, or a space to be accessed. In the same spirit, global governmentality is not so much a descriptive framework as a critical method meant to interrogate the international effects of neoliberal rule neglected by other IR theories (i.e., cosmopolitan, humanitarian, imperial, post-colonial) (Larner and Williams 2004:3).

All in all, governmentality studies offer at least three distinct contributions to the discipline of International Relations. First, the study of governmentality takes up a dimension of biopower that is often ignored in biosecurity approaches, namely, the ambition to “exert a positive influence upon life” by organizing and optimizing life according market principles (Foucault cited in Kiersey and Weidner 2009:345-5). Mitchell Dean explains that, if biopower

is concerned with matters of life and death, with birth and propagation, with health and illness, both physical and mental, and with the processes that sustain or retard the optimization of the life of a population [, it] must then also concern the social, cultural, environmental, economic and geographic conditions under which humans live, procreate, become ill, maintain health or become healthy, and die. From this perspective, bio-politics is concerned with the family, with housing, living and working conditions, with what we call ‘lifestyle’, with public health issues, patterns of migration, levels of economic growth and standards of living. It is concerned with the bio-sphere in which humans dwell. (cited in Selby 2007:333)

Critical IR has been more interested in how biopower “kill[s] to make life live” (Dillon and Reid 2009) than in how it uses capitalist principles to give expression of life’s highest ambitions. Governmentality studies seek to make up for this omission by paying attention to the ability of biopower to produce, design, and sustain the space *between* birth and death. This relates to a second advantage. By showing how personal, mundane, and everyday practices are implicated in the way power is dispersed and exercised, governmentality makes possible the repopulation of IR (Larner and Williams 2004:4). This implies a radical break with the discipline’s state-centric understanding of power and its radically dehumanized picture of the international. As Davies and Niemann explain, IR theory mystifies and obscures the reality of global affairs “behind a veil, which designates the practice of IR as the exclusive domain of experts, statesmen, diplomats, and, more recently, the chieftains of global business” (2002:561). Whenever human life appears on the international stage it is filtered either through the voices and actions of these official figures or through the interests of state institutions (Jabri 1998:594). Although critical IR has made an effort to include women, indigenous people, and formerly colonized subjects in the conversation, the study of everyday life remains closer to sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies than to political studies. Governmentality studies have the potential of returning the discipline to the ontology promised in its name, namely, the study of international social relations (Davies and Niemann 2002:567). Finally, governmentality adds a historical dimension that is missing from theories of global politics. In wanting to offer a “history of the present” (Barry et al. 1996:2 cited in Walters and Haahr 2005:5), governmentality approaches are particularly inquisitive about the origins, rationalities, and ethics behind international norms for intervention, cooperation, and resolution (ibid. 17). Although still a novel addition to IR, governmentality can help “advance

[...] our grasp of the modalities and rationalities of power” in ways that have yet to be explored in IR (Larner and Williams 2004:4).

Critique of Capital

One argument disputing the relevance of governmentality studies for International Relations, hitherto not discussed, is Chandler’s (2009) idea that the “hollowing out” of territorial political communities makes the liberal project, even on a domestic level, increasingly difficult. Far from the liberal internationalist dream, implied by Foucauldian scholars, Chandler argues that liberalism suffers from a “mass passivity or ‘checking out’” (ibid. 363). Scholars of governmentality have responded to this charge by proposing an economistic definition of liberalism that hangs on the cusp between Foucauldian theories of neoliberal government and Italian post-Marxist thought (Kiersey 2009; Weidner 2009). They suggest that what makes the world go round is a different kind of liberalism, one inspired from the capitalist principles of neoliberal economic theory. Just because political leaders have been having trouble putting forth a program of globally shared values does not mean that global liberalism is dead. On the contrary, “neoliberal *economic* governmentality” (Kiersey 2009:367, emphasis added) has an increasingly deterritorialized reach over the content of our everyday lives.²⁴ As we have seen with volunteer tourism, instead of “checking out”, subjects are incited to compete for and live up to the demands of a mobile, differentiated, and thoroughly entrepreneurial style of rule. While convincing, Marxist scholars are skeptical of this logic. They doubt the viability of an “Italian Foucault”, in other words, a Foucauldian critique of capitalism. These arguments have not yet surfaced in international studies, but IR scholars can only benefit from considering them.

Perhaps the most obvious overlap between late Foucault and post-Marxist thought is their mutual reliance on biopower. What Foucault defined as the inclusion of human life in

²⁴ It is important to note that Chandler’s arguments regarding the impossibility of a liberal internationalist order are better directed at critical security studies than at governmentality approaches. It is in the former case that liberalism has been defined as a globalizing force manifested through the diffusion of international norms and regulations (the liberal way of rule), but also through the need to securitize life through a variety of global biopolitical tactics (the liberal way of war) (Kiersey 2009a:28, 33). Governmentality studies, on the other hand, are concerned with *neoliberalism*, which in the Foucauldian conception, has nothing to do with the normative theory designed to set the limits of legitimate power (Hindess 2004:25) or with establishing international cooperation and coordination based on shared economic interests (Larner and Williams 2004:8). As Wendy Brown (2003) and Maurizio Lazaratto (2008) explain, neoliberalism is an art of government that extends market logic to all areas of life as a strategy for optimizing the welfare of the population and giving expression to the deepest fantasies of individuation. Foucault’s definition of neoliberalism has more in common with the Marxist (esp. the Frankfurt School) understanding of the term, where liberalism is a way of spreading capitalist relations across the globe, than with the liberalism of political theory, global governance, or critical security studies. It also has very little to do with the liberalism Chandler is referring to. We are dealing here with a multi-layered confusion of what (neo)liberalism means in these various contexts. Still, Kiersey and Weidner (2009) have taken the time to dedicate an entire journal issue to respond to Chandler’s charge.

the calculations of government was then rephrased, in typical Marxist parlance, as the subsumption of social life to the logic of production. Foucault's original idea that, in contemporary neoliberal rule, the market "plays the role of a 'test', a locus of privileged experience" (Foucault 1997:76 cited in Hindess 2004:26), was carried a step forward by Italian autonomist thinkers (e.g., Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazaratti, Sandro Mezzadra, Franco Berardi, Christian Marazzi, and Leopoldina Fortunati)²⁵. They turned to Foucault, rather than the Frankfurt School, to make sense of the post-Fordist contradictions of our times: the exchange of social security provisions for autonomous and rewarding work; the blurring of labor and leisure time and the enjoyment that comes with it; the presence of entrepreneurial injunctions alongside therapeutic models of care; the simultaneous use of affect, communication, and language for capitalist gains as well as the work of the multitude – all of these examples and many more like them reflect an ethico-political confusion that classical Marxism can no longer fully explain or resist. Instead of deploring the expansion of capitalism to all spheres of life as something that suffocates the autonomy of individuals, post-Marxist thinkers argued that the "new (post-1968) spirit of capitalism" (what has been alternatively called network capitalism, communicative capitalism, flexible accumulation, or the new (knowledge) economy) was what allowed individuals to express their unique identities, realize their dreams of autonomy and empowerment, and forge ethical relations with their larger communities (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). To understand this aporia, Foucault's writings on neoliberalism and biopower became indispensable: only here does it become clear how the promise of life can be realized at the very point in which it is subsumed to the principles of competition and accumulation.

Joining Marx and Foucault together might seem, at first sight, like a *faux pas*. Not only is Foucault famous for making derisive comments about Marx²⁶, his epistemological and ethical perspectivism also collides with the humanist commitments of his predecessor (Eccleshall et al. 2003:228-9), especially in terms of the ontological priority of the subject, the critique of ideology, and the primacy of economy, infrastructure, and technology over all other relations (1980:118). Still, post-Marxism maintains that Foucault's work on neoliberal government can help revitalize materialist critiques of capital. This is particularly true for IR, where Gramscian notions of "hegemony", "imperialism", and "world systems" have monopolized the spectre of Marx. By comparison, a Foucauldian reading of power, subjectivity, and government can reveal the social constructedness and everyday relevance of capitalism. Capitalism does not exist "outside" or in spite of our efforts to fight alienation, avoid consumerism, pursue social responsibility and sustainability, and join social

²⁵ For a good introduction into the diverse ideas of this group see Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds. *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁶ In *The Order of Things* (1973) he says, "Marxism exists in nineteenth century in the same way a fish exists in water; that is, it stops breathing anywhere else" (cited in Marsden, 1999:21). And in an interview published in *Power/Knowledge* (1980), Foucault claims that "[a]s far as I'm concerned, Marx doesn't exist." The mythical entity constructed around the proper name of Marx is illusory. The various uses and interpretations of his work and life have made his persona into a figure larger than life or history (*ibid.* 76).

movements. Rather, it is mode of social organization sustained through hospitable life forms (e.g., bodies, subjectivities, social relations, material processes, desires, and fantasies). What explains capitalism's resilience in the face of new social and technological conditions is the ability to incorporate elements which we prefer to think of as external to its operation, such as leisure, art, affect, intellect, or the body (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005:28). Foucauldian critiques of capitalism may indeed detract attention from strictly materialist relations of production, class-based identity categories, and dialectical processes, but, at least, they demonstrate that the battle for capital is fought on terrains that were once external, ornamental, and outright inimical to economic profitability.

For some Marxists, however, this theoretical mix is close to heresy. For instance, Timothy Brennan (2005) challenges not only the novelty post-Marxist thinkers attribute to the current mode of social organization, but also their overwhelming focus on the experiences of liberal bourgeois societies. Writing about Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2001), Brennan argues that the end of imperialism (as we knew it) and the coming of a new biopolitical global order "turns out to be a matter of faith rather than anything resembling an analysis of the record" (ibid. 344). Central to autonomist thinking is a major analytic conflation: far from the post-industrial age Hardt and Negri proclaim, agriculture and industry are still the dominant economic sectors (ibid. 337). The intellectual and immaterial components of modern life can be given precedence only if we ignore the slave-like conditions characteristic of "guest-worker systems, uncaptialized agriculture, and the archipelagos of maquiladoras at heart of globalization's gulag" (ibid. 338). This debate is about more than just the physicality of modern regimes of labor. At its very core, it deals with a question that causes a rift in leftist thought: Are there any profound transformations in the logic of capitalism that require us to turn away from traditional Marxist methods and strategies towards more post-structuralist tools? In other words, does post-Fordism describe a global reality or is it merely "the opiate of the intellectuals" (McGee 1997)? It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a thorough response to these queries. I can only offer a few preliminary arguments in defense of a Foucauldian reading of capitalism and subjectivity.

It is perhaps true that the "Italian Foucault" (Weidner 2009:392) cannot be of much help in constructing a critique of capitalism in the proper sense, that is, a critique that outlines a specific normative strategy for action. It is no coincidence that scholars working with Foucauldian (but also Derridean, Deleuzian or Lacanian) theories and methods have called themselves post-Marxist: they have abdicated from many of the classic Marxist tenets, such as the explanatory primacy of relations of production, the objective interests of class, and the utopia of communism (McGee 1997:203), in favour of a different analytic stance. This begs the question: "What [...] is the need among those hostile to Marxism to assume a Marxist mantle while throwing flames at Marxist mannequins?" (Brennan 2005:363) Why would one label herself as a Marxist, when her political commitments clearly indicate a hostility to the state, party politics, and class-based interests? Marxists, like McGee and Brennan, are concerned that attaching the temporal signifier "post" somehow degrades leftist politics from a metanarrative to something of lesser value, like a performative identification (McGee

1997:202) or a cultural heritage (ibid. 210), that can be adopted and abandoned on a whim. Identifying yourself with a philosophical position you no longer believe in is like trying to “reconnect” with a cultural heritage you do not share any values with, McGee argues. It is a purely sentimental affiliation with what was, devoid of any substantive allegiance to the Marxist interpretation of history, political vision, and method of analysis (ibid. 216).

What McGee and Brennan suggest, here, is that Marxism is not a pick-and-choose system – either one subscribes to it entirely or not at all. I am not convinced that this is the case. Marxism is not a firm structure of belief, impervious to historical transformations. The socio-economic and technological transformations of the past half century, along with the intellectual contributions of post-structural thought urge us to rework and innovate on the grand narratives of classical Marxism. This does not mean that we have to give up on the normative dream of the multitude. None of the post-Marxist thinkers, from Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to Hardt and Negri (2004), have done so. They have only become more attuned to the strategic challenges contemporary pluralities and differences pose to the “new international.” To quote Wendy Brown (1999:26-7), they encourage us to rethink “socialist ideals of dignity, equality, and freedom, while recognizing that these ideals were conjured from historical conditions and prospects that are not those of the present.” In confronting the realities of subjectivity, aesthetics, and language, continental theory (broadly speaking) offers critiques and moral-political visions that are much more appropriate for our contemporary condition than those presented by strictly materialist readings of the present (Brown 1999). It is not post-Marxism that is melancholic in its respect for something that has passed, as McGee suggests. Rather, purist interpretations of Marxism, with their “failure to apprehend the character of the age” (ibid. 19), are a sign of nostalgia. Conservative readings of Marxism, such as these, do more to lose friends and alienate people by presenting political struggle as something exhausting, rigid, and akin to spiritual sacrifice, than to convince that politics is a practical matter deeply relevant for everyday life and personal wellbeing.

The seductiveness of Foucauldian methods is that they allow us to gain a hermeneutic understanding of how seemingly abstract and removed processes, such as international politics and capitalist relations, have a direct bearing upon our own lives. But with these rewards come commensurate responsibilities. As Andrew Neal correctly observes,

[t]here is some irony in taking a historian who is not a historian and a political theorist who is not a political theorist and trying to rethink him for International Relations (IR) or for the study of relations of capital. It is not possible to do so and remain faithful to those disciplines. To engage with the highly promiscuous thinker that is Foucault is to be unfaithful. It is not possible to engage with Foucault while holding onto even the most rudimentary of disciplinary commitments, such as the idea that ‘the international’ as an object of study. For Foucault, such objects do not exist, they are only problems which ‘different events and practices... are apparently organized’. (2009:541)

We cannot expect Foucault to provide us with a novel theory of the international or refurbish the field of International Relations when his primary goal would have been to interrogate the ontological force of these concepts and fields. What we can expect, however, is for governmentality approaches to initiate a general reorientation of the discipline towards international political *life*, in all its quotidian, connected, and conflicted aspects. The ontology of International Relations is made of transnational social relations “realized and produced by people” (Davies and Niemann 2002:567). In that sense, the joint study of government, capital, and subjectivity can contribute to a hermeneutic understanding of how global politics affects our lives and how our lives are what global political relations are made of.

Conclusion

Recently, a friend asked me to identify one common idea that unifies all of critical theory. It took me a long time to find an answer and, by no means, is this a complete one. Critical theory (and here I include all neo-Nietzschean and post-Marxist efforts to theorize the present condition), I told him, teaches us that *The Matrix* is a false promise. The world we inhabit is not some sort of a brutal prison which we can get to know or escape from by swallowing a pill of enlightenment. There is no outside. It is not just that we are not able to step out of reality, but also a matter of there not being any higher authority that controls the fate of our lives. This realization suggests, at the same time, a greater sense of hope – if there is no higher power, it means the present order is more permeable to change – and a greater degree of skepticism – if there is no maker, the world we see is of *our* making. We find a perverse sense of complicit hope (or hopeful complicity) in this lesson: we are direct participants in the violence, economic dispossession, and natural destruction we see all around us, if not by actually causing them, then at least by not being able to extricate ourselves from the conditions that make them necessary. The principal ambition of my work has been to illustrate this impossibility. I wanted to show that volunteer tourism, far from being an exercise in Superman Politics, a selfless and history-less rescue act, is in fact yet another strategy that binds us to power in ways that are difficult to refuse, not only because of their subtlety, but primarily because of the pleasurable and empowering effects they have upon us.

I have been asked numerous times, during the course of this research, by educators, parents, past and future volunteers, whether I would advise people to join or not volunteering trips. In the end, the decision is a personal one, with the caveat that even the personal is intensely governed (Rose 1991:1). It has never been my attempt to offer a conclusive answer to this dilemma. Rather, my goal was to write a user-friendly hermeneutic guide to our contemporary condition – a “critical ontology of ourselves” (Read 2003:2) applied to the case of volunteer tourism. Given that so many of our strategies of individuation are bound up with conditions we perceive as unjust and violent, we must practice a more rigorous (self-

)examination of all the things we do to improve ourselves and the world around us. Certainly, this is no easy task. In a cultural age that celebrates entrepreneurial self-work, the discourse of therapy, and electronic self-monitoring (*see* Wolf 2010), ethical practices of the self are often too quickly reabsorbed into regulatory moral guides or conflated with pleasurable capitalist modalities (Guillory 2000:41; Nehamas 1998; McNay 2009). The advantage of a neoliberal art of government that relies on affect and autonomy, as opposed to one that draws exclusively upon calculation and discipline, is that, in the case of the former, political subjects submit to its directives spontaneously and enthusiastically. The more enjoyable, admirable even, the current rationality of government appears, the more ridiculous and neurotic our attempts to critique it will seem. It is not that we have acquiesced to neoliberalism, but that we have become emotionally invested in it. The former would have been a tragedy – the latter is a farce, as the title of Žižek's latest book suggests (2009). This presents us with an altogether different predicament.

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Appendix 1: List of Interviews

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