they have been taught since birth as 'authentic', as if they spring freshly from their inner selves. In other words, what is conformist in one context becomes authentic in another. The fact that students often object to local norms (such as gender roles) gives them the sensation of being radical non-conformists.

3. It bears pointing out, as an aside, that anthropology was enamoured of this assumption in the 1990s, when ethnographers were eager to excavate the agency of the subject and celebrate its capacity for resistance against repressive social norms, which were imagined to be somehow external to the self and its inner kernel of authentic desire (see Abu-Lughod 1990; Sahlins 2002; Mahmood 2005).

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the parameters of the real experience industry. Instead, student development projects treat poverty as a static state, as if it lies outside of history and politics: during my interviews, stu-dents told me repeatedly that 'poverty is no one's fault'. This illusion allows students to pretend to address the problem of poverty without ever having to confront their position within a global class divide, question the scaffolding of their own privilege and the sources of Western wealth, or acknowledge their role as consumers in the capitalist world system. As I indicated above, the closest that most students get to reflecting on the structure of global inequality is to recognise that they are 'lucky' in comparison to the poor people they encounter abroad.

Here the full irony of students' invocation of 'the real' becomes apparent. This used to be the language of leftist revolutionary movements, which tra-ditionally saw the process of conscientisation as promoting awareness of the 'objective' conditions of existence and the true nature of social relationships (see Althusser 1971; Jameson 1984). In Marxian terms, 'the real' points spe-cifically to labour exploitation, class antagonism, and political power. But now even this concept – the concept of 'the real' – has been colonised and neutralised by capital. The real, once considered a space of revolutionary potential, has become an experience to be bought and sold, and 'awareness' has become a state of individual self-cultivation rather than a state of politi-cal consciousness. Neither point towards a collective political project with clear class referents. Power falls out of the equation altogether; the personal eclipses the political. This is not to say that the political is actually more real than the personal, or that the problem of exploitation is necessarily more important than that of alienation, but rather simply that the latter is much more readily appropriated.

I have painted a bleak portrait of student development projects, but I do believe that there is room for optimism. Regardless of how they frame their experience, students return from development projects newly cognisant of the brute fact of material inequality on a global scale. As educators, we need to help students interpret this fact – to historicise it, explain its causes, and explore substantive solutions. In addition, we need to nourish their potential for a form of critique that stretches beyond the desire for self-actualisation. The first step towards this end is to help students deconstruct the logic of the development projects they participate in – to help them recognise the culturally particular construction of personhood that underwrites the model of authenticity and alienation that sits at the centre of the real experience industry. The second step is to help students situate themselves with respect to the operations of global capitalism and equip them with the tools with which to understand political economy. The third step is to encourage them to imagine alternatives to predominant forms of apolitical engagement and to find their own political voice. As I like to remind my students at LSE, what if the 2.5 million young people that leave Britain's shores each year used their energy and money (billions of pounds, remember) to tackle the ultimate causes of global poverty? To challenge the pathologies of power and imagine new ways of organising international economics? Another world might be possible after all.

Jason Hickel is an anthropologist at the London School of Economics whose research interests include liberalism, democracy, development, and political conflict. While his regional expertise focuses on Africa, he remains interested in Euro-American culture, particularly among undergraduates. His forthcoming book is tentatively titled *Democracy as Social Death: Liberalism and Vigilante Violence in South Africa*.

Notes
1. Bank of America estimates that parents alone contribute £950 million each year to help cover the costs of U.K. students volunteering abroad (Market Wire 2011).
2. One way to understand this phenomenon is that when in a context of cultural dif-ference students experience themselves as more authentic because their beliefs run up against local norms. Given this contrast, students experience norms and values that

profit by marketing products under the sign of anti-consumerism. The student development industry works on the same premise (hence the critique of things like smart phones and makeup that ap-pears so frequently in students' narratives). Student volunteers seek to pur-chase the sense of being redeemed from the consumerist mainstream, and the sense of being part of a movement or a 'groundswell' of resistance. This process pushes commodity fetishism to new heights. The commodity – be it Ethos water or the development experience – assumes what Zizek (2009) has aptly called a 'redemptive' quality: in the act of consumption the con-sumer believes they are buying not only their redemption from the evils of mainstream consumerism, but also the redemption of the suffering world.

At each stage of this double movement, youth resistance (first against a repressive establishment, then against consumerist individualism) has been not only neutralised but channelled back into new forms of consumption. 'Cool' has been conquered twice over.

I do not want to overdraw the distinction between youth resistance in the 1960s/ 1970s and youth resistance today, however. Despite their different referents, both are understood as non-conformist, and both shift critical attention from the problem of exploitation and inequality to the problem of individual alienation – a notion of alienation devoid of any reference to la-bour and production, in contrast to the Marxian understanding of the term. In both cases, the critique of alienation has been a boon for capitalism; in-deed, marketers seek to generate feelings of alienation and then hold up the idea of individual self-realisation as its solution. Individuals seek to achieve full personhood within this paradigm by resisting mass conformity and cul-tivating the inner self. People think of this as a countercultural process – a process by which the individual resists society – but in fact it has become essential to the reproduction of capitalism, for the primary method of self-realisation has become consumption. And since final authenticity can never be fully achieved (authenticity is always unstable, as I described above), there is no end-point. In other words, the critique of alienation operates as capitalism's own recuperative frame (see Hickel and Khan 2012: 210) – it is a form of critique that not only fails to attack the basic tenets of capitalism, but in fact facilitates its expansion.

The present model of student development projects poses a serious prob-lem for the possibility of building a substantive critique of poverty in devel-oping countries. As with the counterculture movement of the 1960s, this model of development transforms a heartfelt political urge – the urge for change, the urge for revolution, and in this case the urge to put an end to human suffering – into a passive form of consumerism. Just as the gap year gradually became a form of 'diet rebellion', student development projects offer up a form of 'diet revolution'. The Break Away website provides a clear illustration of this: the organisation uses the image of a raised fist in its logo, alongside an icon of silhouette demonstrators holding placards, and refers to itself as a 'social movement' – even going so far as to cite the definition of collective action developed by sociologist David Snow (Break Away 2013). They borrow this imagery and language from leftist activism, but their programme includes no such radical content, and never suggests that capitalism might be at issue behind the social problems they purport to solve. Indeed, their mission statement focuses only on 'personal trans-formation', 'deeper understanding' (with no clear direct or indirect object), and 'active citizenship', which students supposedly gain from a single week volunteering abroad.

What we have here is an invocation of revolutionary activism that is entirely devoid of substantive critique and empty of political referents. This is the vacant shell of the revolutionary sign, so preoccupied with image and identity that it no longer speaks to the crucial question of power. The actual causes of poverty – anti-democratic regimes propped up by Western powers, IMF-imposed structural adjustment programmes, austerity condi-tions attached to World Bank loans, power imbalances at the World Trade Organisation, indebtedness to Western banks, corporate tax evasion, land grabs, unfair labour laws, inflation-targeting, and Wall Street corruption – go unmentioned and unaddressed within

To Hell With Good Intentions by Ivan Illich

An address by Monsignor Ivan Illich to the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on April 20, 1968. In his usual biting and sometimes sarcastic style, Illich goes to the heart of the deep dangers of paternalism inherent in any voluntary service activity, but especially in any international service "mission." Parts of the speech are outdated and must be viewed in the historical context of 1968 when it was delivered, but the entire speech is retained for the full impact of his point and at Ivan Illich's request.

IN THE CONVERSATIONS WHICH I HAVE HAD TODAY, I was impressed by two things, and I want to state them before I launch into my prepared talk.

I was impressed by your insight that the motivation of U.S. volunteers overseas springs mostly from very alienated feelings and concepts. I was equally impressed, by what I interpret as a step forward among would-be volunteers like you: openness to the idea that the only thing you can legitimately volunteer for in Latin America might be voluntary powerlessness, voluntary presence as receivers, as such, as hopefully beloved or adopted ones without any way of returning the gift.

I was equally impressed by the hypocrisy of most of you: by the hypocrisy of the atmosphere prevailing here. I say this as a brother speaking to brothers and sisters. I say it against many resistances within me; but it must be said. Your very insight, your very openness to evaluations of past programs make you hypocrites because you - or at least most of you - have decided to spend this next summer in Mexico, and therefore, you are unwilling to go far enough in your reappraisal of your program. You close your eyes because you want to go ahead and could not do so if you looked at some facts.

It is quite possible that this hypocrisy is unconscious in most of you. Intellectually, you are ready to see that the motivations which could legitimate volunteer action overseas in 1963 cannot be invoked for the same action in 1968. "Mission-vacations" among poor Mexicans were "the thing" to do for well-off U.S. students earlier in this decade: sentimental concern for newly-discovered. poverty south of the border combined with total blindness to much worse poverty at home justified such benevolent excursions. Intellectual insight into the difficulties of fruitful volunteer action had not sobered the spirit of Peace Corps Papal-and-Self-Styled Volunteers.

Today, the existence of organizations like yours is offensive to Mexico. I wanted to make this statement in order to explain why I feel sick about it all and in order to make you aware that good intentions have not much to do with what we are discussing here. To hell with good intentions. This is a theological statement. You will not help anybody by your good intentions. There is an Irish saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions; this sums up the same theological insight.

The very frustration which participation in CIASP programs might mean for you, could lead you to new awareness: the awareness that even North Americans can receive the gift of hospitality without the slightest ability to pay for it; the awareness that for some gifts one cannot even say "thank you."

Now to my prepared statement.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the past six years I have become known for my increasing opposition to the presence of any and all North American "dogooders" in Latin America. I am sure you know of my present efforts to obtain the voluntary withdrawal of all North American volunteer armies from Latin America - missionaries, Peace Corps members and groups like yours, a "division" organized for the benevolent invasion of Mexico. You were aware of these things when you invited me - of all people - to be the main speaker at your annual convention. This is amazing! I can only conclude that your invitation means one of at least three things:

Some among you might have reached the conclusion that CIASP should either dissolve altogether, or take the promotion of voluntary aid to the Mexican poor out of its institutional purpose. Therefore you might have invited me here to help others reach this same decision.

You might also have invited me because you want to learn how to deal with people who think the way I do - how to dispute them successfully. It has now become quite common to invite Black Power spokesmen to address Lions Clubs. A "dove" must always be included in a public dispute organized to increase U.S. belligerence.

And finally, you might have invited me here hoping that you would be able to agree with most of what I say, and then go ahead in good faith and work this summer in Mexican villages. This last possibility is only open to those who do not listen, or who cannot understand me.

I did not come here to argue. I am here to tell you, if possible to convince you, and hopefully, to stop you, from pretentiously imposing yourselves on Mexicans.

I do have deep faith in the enormous good will of the U.S. volunteer. However, his good faith can usually be explained only by an abysmal lack of intuitive delicacy. By definition, you cannot help being ultimately vacationing salesmen for the middle-class "American Way of Life," since that is really the only life you know. A group like this could not have developed unless a mood in the United States had supported it - the belief that any true American must share God's blessings with his poorer fellow men. The idea that every American has something to give, and at all times may, can and should give it, explains why it occurred to students that they could help Mexican peasants "develop" by spending a few months in their villages.

Of course, this surprising conviction was supported by members of a missionary order, who would have no reason to exist unless they had the same conviction - except a much stronger one. It is now high time to cure yourselves of this. You, like the values you carry, are the products of an American society of achievers and consumers, with its two-party system, its universal schooling, and its family-car affluence. You are ultimately-consciously or unconsciously - "salesmen" for a delusive ballet in the ideas of democracy, equal opportunity and free enterprise among people who haven't the possibility of profiting from these.

Next to money and guns, the third largest North American export is the U.S. idealist, who turns up in every theater of the world: the teacher, the volunteer, the missionary, the community organizer, the economic developer, and the vacationing do-gooders. Ideally, these people define their role as service. Actually, they frequently wind up alleviating the damage done by money and weapons, or "seducing" the "underdeveloped" to the benefits of the world of affluence and achievement. Perhaps this is the moment to instead bring home to the people of the U.S. the knowledge that the way of life they have chosen simply is not alive enough to be shared.

By now it should be evident to all America that the U.S. is engaged in a tremendous struggle to survive. The U.S. cannot survive if the rest of the world is not convinced that here we have Heaven-on-Earth. The survival of the U.S. depends on the acceptance by all so-called "free" men that the U.S. middle class has "made it." The U.S. way of life has become a religion which must be accepted by all those who do not want to die by the sword - or napalm. All over the globe the U.S. is fighting to protect and develop at least a minority who consume what the U.S. majority can afford. Such is the purpose of the Alliance for Progress of the middle-classes which the U.S. signed with Latin America some years ago. But increasingly this commercial alliance must be protected by weapons which allow the minority who can "make it" to protect their acquisitions and achievements.

But weapons are not enough to permit minority rule. The marginal masses become rambunctious unless they are given a "Creed," or belief which explains the status quo. This task is given to the U.S. volunteer - whether he be a member of CLASP or a worker in the so-called "Pacification Programs" in Viet Nam.

In addition, it bears pointing out that volunteering abroad imparts value to job candidates in a more direct sense as well. The agency staffers I spoke to claimed that volunteering equips young people with qualities like pas-sion, commitment, and initiative; teamwork and cooperation; maturity, confidence and independence; and, most importantly, patience, resilience, adaptability and tolerance. As Bonnie Urciuoli (2010) has pointed out, these are highly valued traits in a neoliberal economy that relies increasingly on immaterial and affective forms of labour. In addition, it strikes me that many of these terms – particularly the last few in the list – refer euphemistically to traits that will allow employers to put young workers in difficult positions with little training and too much responsibility in a context marked by long hours and bare-bones staffing, the hallmarks of the brave new world of labour flexibility that neoliberal theory so ardently celebrates (see Cremin 2007).

Mastering the language of omnivorous taste and neoliberal personhood is indispensable to the kind of personal statements and interview conversations required to earn a spot in the elite, 'global' companies that LSE students want to work for. The upshot of this, as Sue Heath (2007) has shown, is that gap year travel and development volunteerism has widened the achievement gap between lower and upper class students: participating in these activities improves one's employment prospects, but requires resources that generally only wealthy white students have at their disposal.

The depoliticisation of poverty

Of course, one might argue that in spite of the critical points I have devel-oped above, student development projects are not intrinsically bad. Indeed, proponents often insist that at least such projects contribute in small ways towards bettering the plight of suffering humans around the world: more wells have been drilled, more schools built, and more orphans entertained than would have been the case without the student development craze. But this defence obscures a broader problem that needs to be taken into account, namely that student development as I have described it appropriates the possibility for substantive political critique and engagement among students and transforms it into a passive form of consumerism that not only depoliti-cises poverty but also distracts attention away from its actual causes.

The depoliticisation of poverty through the student development craze can be understood as the second stage of a double movement in Euro-Ameri-can culture over the past few decades. When students began to vaunt the values of authenticity and individual self-expression during the countercul-ture movement of the 1960s and 1970s, it was not long before this ethic was co-opted by capitalism. Many retailers saw the popular passion for indi-vidual identity as heralding fantastic new market opportunities: responding to consumers' desire for authentic expression, companies began to market products according to 'identity' niches that appealed to the prevailing ethos of non-conformity (see Lyotard 1993). 'Counterculture' quickly became a marketable identity; to be countercultural, people had to consume the com-modities symbolically associated with counterculture – commodities that instantiated the value of non-conformity, that indexed alternative social and political identities, and that signalled rejection of the mainstream. In other words, capitalism found ways to appropriate consumers' spirit of rebellion in the service of new forms of consumption – a phenomenon that Thomas Frank (1998) has aptly called 'the conquest of cool' (see also McGuigan 2009).

In the 1990s, just as capitalism had triumphed over the counterculture movement by reformulating it as consumerist individualism, the timbre of youth resistance began to change. Students began to develop a critique of consumerism, of over-mediation and hyper-reality (cf. Eco 1990; Baudrillard 1994), and of the social fragmentation brought about by individualism, and they sought ways to perform this critique. But, once again, it did not take long for capitalism to turn this new critical impulse into an industry. The obvious example is the growing fad of 'virtuous commodities' (Hickel and Khan 2012: 213) like Ethos water, Tom's shoes, Product Red, and Whole Food apples, all of which make

Privilege and competition in the labour market

Students' experiences of volunteering abroad relate to recent changes in the labour market and the pressures that students feel as job candidates. When students report their reasons for volunteering abroad, they work hard to dis-tance themselves from the perception that they were motivated by a cynical desire to pad their CVs, which would undermine their ability to construct their experience – and their desire for the experience – as real or authentic. At the same time, however, students display remarkable familiarity with the reasons for which employers might be attracted to candidates that have volunteered abroad. As one student put it, 'I think on a CV it demonstrates a kind of dynamism, I guess, or an energy, a get up and go'. Another pointed out, using similar terms, that 'It shows commitment, it shows independence, it shows a bit of get up and go, that you've actually gone and challenged yourself'. Others point out that they can usefully discuss their experiences in personal statements and during interviews, as a way of illustrating that they are 'global citizens' with an 'international outlook'.

It is not surprising that students pick up on this discourse, given how ubiquitous it has become. At LSE, the Volunteer Centre explicitly peddles development projects as a way for students to boost their careers. The list of reasons that the Centre gives to encourage students to volunteer includes that it will 'make you shine above others', it will 'help you network', it will 'help you get a reference', and it will 'change your life and help you learn about yourself' (LSE Volunteer Centre 2011). The idea of cultivating authen-ticity becomes important here, and is connected to students' potential ca-reer trajectories: the Centre claims that volunteering 'allows you to discover where your real interests and passions are'. They also cite statistics from recent studies showing that 73 per cent of employers would hire candidates with volunteering experience over those without, and that 94 per cent of em-ployees who volunteered had benefited by improving their salary or being promoted. At the beginning of every term, the Volunteer Centre advertises development projects in the school's main thoroughfare with banners that lead with the line 'Improve your CV!' Even the Global Brigades group at LSE uses this approach in their promotional materials, despite the fact that their participants try to distance themselves from this aspect. In other words, the job market is an ever-present but continually disavowed animus of the real experience industry.

One might imagine that employers find candidates who have worked abroad more attractive than candidates who have not because the former have a broader spectrum of knowledge about the world and better cross-cultural communication skills. But in my years of working with students who have volunteered abroad, I have seen no evidence that they are any more knowledgeable or skilled in this particular sense than their peers. Yet I suspect – although I cannot prove – that this fact does not matter much to employers. My conversations with students who have had job interviews indicate that employers never test their knowledge or skills related to their volunteer experience for content or accuracy. Rather, they seem to be test-ing for a certain kind of social capital, or personhood: they appear to want people who are in touch with their authenticity, people who have a strong sense of personal identity. The ability to present a lucid narrative of personal development denotes the kind of self-managing, individuated subject that employers in a neoliberal economy seek.

More importantly, ease with this kind of language – the language of self-cultivation – also communicates the aura of class privilege that makes job candidates attractive to elite employers. Shamus Khan (2011) has pointed out that what characterises the new elite is not exclusivity of taste, but expan-siveness – the ability, for example, to create 'casual connections' between high and low culture and across cultural spaces. Students who can reference their appreciation for French wine in the same breath as they discuss Brazilian manioc beer, or whose music collections include South African kwaito alongside Spanish guitar, distinguish themselves from the masses by their very 'omnivorousness', to use Khan's term. Indeed, elite preparatory schools intentionally train their students to master this kind of self-presentation.

The United States is currently engaged in a three-front struggle to affirm its ideals of acquisitive and achievement-oriented "Democracy." I say "three" fronts, because three great areas of the world are challenging the validity of a political and social system which makes the rich ever richer, and the poor increasingly marginal to that system.

In Asia, the U.S. is threatened by an established power -China. The U.S. opposes China with three weapons: the tiny Asian elites who could not have it any better than in an alliance with the United States; a huge war machine to stop the Chinese from "taking over" as it is usually put in this country, and; forcible re-education of the so-called "Pacified" peoples. All three of these efforts seem to be failing.

In Chicago, poverty funds, the police force and preachers seem to be no more successful in their efforts to check the unwillingness of the black community to wait for graceful integration into the system.

And finally, in Latin America the Alliance for Progress has been quite successful in increasing the number of people who could not be better off - meaning the tiny, middle-class elites - and has created ideal conditions for military dictatorships. The dictators were formerly at the service of the plantation owners, but now they protect the new industrial complexes. And finally, you come to help the underdog accept his destiny within this process!

All you will do in a Mexican village is create disorder. At best, you can try to convince Mexican girls that they should marry a young man who is self-made, rich, a consumer, and as disrespectful of tradition as one of you. At worst, in your "community development" spirit you might create just enough problems to get someone shot after your vacation ends_ and you rush back to your middleclass neighborhoods where your friends make jokes about "spits" and "wetbacks."

You start on your task without any training. Even the Peace Corps spends around $10,000 on each corps member to help him adapt to his new environment and to guard him against culture shock. How odd that nobody ever thought about spending money to educate poor Mexicans in order to prevent them from the culture shock of meeting you?

In fact, you cannot even meet the majority which you pretend to serve in Latin America - even if you could speak their language, which most of you cannot. You can only dialogue with those like you - Latin American imitations of the North American middle class. There is no way for you to really meet with the underprivileged, since there is no common ground whatsoever for you to meet on.

Let me explain this statement, and also let me explain why most Latin Americans with whom you might be able to communicate would disagree with me.

Suppose you went to a U.S. ghetto this summer and tried to help the poor there "help themselves." Very soon you would be either spit upon or laughed at. People offended by your pretentiousness would hit or spit. People who understand that your own bad consciences push you to this gesture would laugh condescendingly. Soon you would be made aware of your irrelevance among the poor, of your status as middle-class college students on a summer assignment. You would be roundly rejected, no matter if your skin is white-as most of your faces here are-or brown or black, as a few exceptions who got in here somehow.

Your reports about your work in Mexico, which you so kindly sent me, exude self-complacency. Your reports on past summers prove that you are not even capable of understanding that your dogooding in a Mexican village is even less relevant than it would be in a U.S. ghetto. Not only is there a gulf between what you have and what others have which is much greater than the one existing between you and the poor in your own country, but there is also a gulf between what you feel and what the Mexican people feel that is incomparably greater. This gulf is so great that in a Mexican village you, as White Americans (or cultural white Americans) can imagine yourselves exactly the way a white preacher saw himself when he offered his life preaching to the black slaves on a plantation in Alabama. The fact that you live in huts and eat tortillas for a few weeks renders your well-intentioned group only a bit more picturesque.

The only people with whom you can hope to communicate with are some members of the middle class. And here please remember that I said "some" -by which I mean a tiny elite in Latin America.

You come from a country which industrialized early and which succeeded in incorporating the great majority of its citizens into the middle classes. It is no social distinction in the U.S. to have graduated from the second year of college. Indeed, most Americans now do. Anybody in this country who did not finish high school is considered underprivileged.

In Latin America the situation is quite different: 75% of all people drop out of school before they reach the sixth grade. Thus, people who have finished high school are members of a tiny minority. Then, a minority of that minority goes on for university training. It is only among these people that you will find your educational equals.

At the same time, a middle class in the United States is the majority. In Mexico, it is a tiny elite. Seven years ago your country began and financed a so-called "Alliance for Progress." This was an "Alliance" for the "Progress" of the middle class elites. Now. it is among the members of this middle class that you will find a few people who are willing to send their time with you_ And they are overwhelmingly those "nice kids" who would also like to soothe their troubled consciences by "doing something nice for the promotion of the poor Indians." Of course, when you and your middleclass Mexican counterparts meet, you will be told that you are doing something valuable, that you are "sacrificing" to help others.

And it will be the foreign priest who will especially confirm your self-image for you. After all, his livelihood and sense of purpose depends on his firm belief in a year-round mission which is of the same type as your summer vacation-mission.

There exists the argument that some returned volunteers have gained insight into the damage they have done to others - and thus become more mature people. Yet it is less frequently stated that most of them are ridiculously proud of their "summer sacrifices." Perhaps there is also something to the argument that young men should be promiscuous for awhile in order to find out that sexual love is most beautiful in a monogamous relationship. Or that the best way to leave LSD alone is to try it for awhile -or even that the best way of understanding that your help in the ghetto is neither needed nor wanted is to try, and fail. I do not agree with this argument. The damage which volunteers do willy-nilly is too high a price for the belated insight that they shouldn't have been volunteers in the first place.

If you have any sense of responsibility at all, stay with your riots here at home. Work for the coming elections: You will know what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how to communicate with those to whom you speak. And you will know when you fail. If you insist on working with the poor, if this is your vocation, then at least work among the poor who can tell you to go to hell. It is incredibly unfair for you to impose yourselves on a village where you are so linguistically deaf and dumb that you don't even understand what you are doing, or what people think of you. And it is profoundly damaging to yourselves when you define something that you want to do as "good," a "sacrifice" and "help."

I am here to suggest that you voluntarily renounce exercising the power which being an American gives you. I am here to entreat you to freely, consciously and humbly give up the legal right you have to impose your benevolence on Mexico. I am here to challenge you to recognize your inability, your powerlessness and your incapacity to do the "good" which you intended to do.

I am here to entreat you to use your money, your status and your education to travel in Latin America. Come to look, come to climb our mountains, to enjoy our flowers. Come to study. But do not come to help.

students I interviewed reported that after a short time with their host organisations they broke away to carve out their own more authentic activi-ties, such as finding an impoverished local school to teach in, which they found much more satisfying. For many students, surrounding themselves with poor people who appear to be untouched by external interventions is crucial to constructing their experience as 'real'.

Recognising this anxiety among consumers in their target market, many agencies represent themselves as standing against the commercial model. For example, Operation Groundswell's promotional video specifically asserts that they refuse to be 'a big-box company', which they regard with disdain. Rather, they want to help students 'plunge headfirst into the world' in an 'authentic way' to connect with 'real people and real places' and to have 'meaningful, genuine experiences that exist in the real world, not in the virtual world' (Operation Groundswell 2013). In other words, they construct the real experience specifically against the commodified version of it, dis-avowing their own status as a profit-making company.

There is another, even more pernicious threat to the authenticity of their experience that students have to negotiate. In 2010, satirist Matt Lacey up-loaded a three-minute comedy sketch onto YouTube that portrayed a posh university student relating stories of his 'Gap Yah' – a spoof on the tediously drawn-out vowels of upper-class Britons – to a friend over the phone. The student opens with, 'That really reminds me of this time on my Gap Yah, I was in Africa, in Tanzanah (sic.), and I saw this woman with malaria, she had, like, flies all around her eyes, and she looked at me with this vacant stare but with a sense of enduring hope, as if to say "you know despite our differences you and I are one, we're kindred spirits" ...'. By intensifying the kind of story that students returning from volunteer projects so frequently relate, Lacey's sketch exposes the absurdity of millions of wealthy, white British students imposing themselves on developing countries for the sake of having a 'spiritual-cultural experience' – to use the words of Lacey's char-acter – and to accumulate the social capital that comes along with it. The sketch went viral, with 660,000 views in its first month and 50,000 fresh hits each day, clearly hitting a nerve at the heart of youth culture in Britain. By the end of 2012, the clip had been viewed nearly 5 million times.

Most students who seek to volunteer abroad are aware of the Gap Yah parody. It causes them significant anxiety because it exposes the fact that the very process of distinguishing oneself as a unique individual in this manner has become mainstream, and therefore something to be ridiculed. As a re-sult, students have to work hard to distance themselves from this caricature – they have to find ways to differentiate themselves within what has become an otherwise conformist activity. According to one student, the leader of an organisation at LSE known as Global Brigades (The U.K. equivalent of Alternative Break) that facilitates short-term development projects abroad:
When I got back I kind of felt annoyed that other people thought I had some cliché gap year experience. And, like, most everyone who heard me out would understand that it was a different experience. But the immediate reaction you get is 'Gap Yah'. It [The YouTube video] went viral, so every-one would be like 'ah, so you went on your Gap Yah to Tanzanah (sic.) ... I kind of had to fight that stigma, which was quite frustrating. Everyone kind of brands you like that so quickly.

Interestingly, I have found that students who are most anxious about the Gap Yah parody seek to distance themselves from that cliché by insisting that they did not go abroad to 'find themselves', and by disavowing any form of self-transformation even to the point of denying having had a per-sonally meaningful experience at all. In other words, in order to maintain the authenticity of their experience they have to reject 'authenticity' itself, purging their narratives of anything redolent of self-cultivation. Even the rejection of the pursuit of authenticity flows from a desire for authenticity. In this sense, the system of meanings that structures the real experience indus-try absorbs the critique without being challenged or upended by it.

in close proximity to 'nature' (or the perceived absence of Western civilisation), it allowed them to cultivate a sense of being in touch with their inner selves in a space where they were free from the 're-pressive' social constraints of their home society. Since the 1990s, however, gap-year travel has moved from the fringe to the mainstream, from being stigmatised to being actively encouraged by parents, schools, and employers (see O'Reilly 2006). Indeed, every British student I spoke to indicated that they felt it was expected of them to do volunteering during their gap year – it has become so institutionalised, so ritualised, that it is now written into the established pattern of the modern British lifecycle. In other words, the whole process of rebelling and dropping out has become normative. Establishment culture has found ways to envelop – and thus neutralise – what was once one of the primary forms of resistance against it.

In this sense, the gap year has become a form of 'diet' rebellion – a form of rebellion that, like Diet Coke, has been conveniently stripped of its unpleas-ant elements so that consumers can get the sensation of experiencing the real thing without suffering any of the difficulties normally associated with it (see Zizek 1999). This sublimation of rebellion allows students to 'drop out' while retaining (even, as we will see, bolstering) their position within mainstream society (see Ansell 2008). Some students recognise this quality of institutionalised rebellion with a certain degree of chagrin. As one put it to me: 'At the end of the day, it's just a year, you still have a timeline, you still have expectations afterward, it's not as dangerous and wild as people think, because you're going back, you have your university place before you leave, there's the expectation that you get back onto your track'.

The first paradox here is that in order to separate themselves from the mainstream and become unique individuals, students engage in a process that has become undeniably conformist. The second paradox is that students feel stuck between their desire to have a real, authentic experience and their anxiety about realising that in order to do so they have to participate in an industry geared toward money and profit; that their experience is ultimately managed and mediated by a bunch of middle-men – exactly the kind of ubiquitous commodification that they seek to escape by going abroad. One student I spoke to told of how she paid £4,000 and flew to her host country only to realise that she had been swindled by local profiteers behind a fake NGO. Such outright scams are not uncommon – and are hardly surprising, given the billions of dollars that flow through this industry – and they are cited by students as illustrations of a more subtle anxiety, namely that many development agencies are ultimately more concerned with the experience of the volunteers than with poverty alleviation. After all, experience is the end product that they are selling. Indeed, the Real Gap Experience website markets its volunteer projects with banners that announce deals like 'Get 20% off your Thailand experience now!' (Real Gap Experience 2013). The volunteer is the consumer, and the people in the host community are the (free) raw material that is extracted and instrumentalised toward creating the product. Indeed, the existence of poverty, and the experience of helping to fix it, has become a commodity itself, a thing to be bought and sold.

While most students make use of the volunteer placement agencies that dominate the industry, they almost universally disavow alignment with this approach and often speak about how they want to do it differently the next time around. One student complained about how her experience working with an orphanage in Cambodia failed to match up to her expectations be-cause it was so well-managed and well-funded. 'I felt cheated', she reported. 'I thought I was going to have a life-changing experience where I would come back and be completely transformed … [but] those kids were so well cared for … something was not right'. 'But if I would have organised it myself,' she continued, 'I think that would have been far more beneficial because … I would have known what I wanted to get out of it. Whereas this felt so organised, I didn't really know what I was taking from it. You take from it, but not at a deeper level, just really on the surface rather than a deeper level'. The very fact that these experiences are institutionally organised – rather than being spontaneous, as they may have been in the 1970s – makes students anxious about the extent to which they are really authentic. Two

The Reductive Seduction of Other People's Problems by Courtney Martin
from Bright Magazine, January 2016

Let's pretend, for a moment, that you are a 22-year-old college student in Kampala, Uganda. You're sitting in class and discreetly scrolling through Facebook on your phone. You see that there has been another mass shooting in America, this time in a place called San Bernardino. You've never heard of it. You've never been to America. But you've certainly heard a lot about gun violence in the U.S. It seems like a new mass shooting happens every week.

You wonder if you could go there and get stricter gun legislation passed. You'd be a hero to the American people, a problem-solver, a lifesaver. How hard could it be? Maybe there's a fellowship for high-minded people like you to go to America after college and train as social entrepreneurs. You could start the nonprofit organization that ends mass shootings, maybe even win a humanitarian award by the time you are 30.

Sound hopelessly naïve? Maybe even a little deluded? It is. And yet, it's not much different from how too many Americans think about social change in the "Global South."

If you asked a 22-year-old American about gun control in this country, she would probably tell you that it's a lot more complicated than taking some workshops on social entrepreneurship and starting a non-profit. She might tell her counterpart from Kampala about the intractable nature of our legislative branch, the long history of gun culture in this country and its passionate defenders, the complexity of mental illness and its treatment. She would perhaps mention the added complication of agitating for change as an outsider.

But if you ask that same 22-year-old American about some of the most pressing problems in a place like Uganda—rural hunger or girl's secondary education or homophobia—she might see them as solvable. Maybe even easily solvable.

I've begun to think about this trend as the reductive seduction of other people's problems. It's not malicious. In many ways, it's psychologically defensible; we don't know what we don't know.

If you're young, privileged, and interested in creating a life of meaning, of course you'd be attracted to solving problems that seem urgent and readily solvable. Of course you'd want to apply for prestigious fellowships that mark you as an ambitious altruist among your peers. Of course you'd want to fly on planes to exotic locations with, importantly, exotic problems.

There is a whole "industry" set up to nurture these desires and delusions—most notably, the 1.5 million nonprofit organizations registered in the U.S., many of them focused on helping people abroad. In other words, the young American ego doesn't appear in a vacuum. Its hubris is encouraged through job and internship opportunities, conferences galore, and cultural propaganda—encompassed so fully in the patronizing, dangerously simple phrase "save the world."

The "reductive seduction" is not malicious, but it can be reckless. For two reasons. First, it's dangerous for the people whose problems you've mistakenly diagnosed as easily solvable. There is real fallout when well-intentioned people attempt to solve problems without acknowledging the underlying complexity.

There are so many examples. As David Bornstein wrote in The New York Times, over four decades of Westerners working on clean water has led to "billions of dollars worth of broken wells and pumps. Many of them functioned for less than two years."

One classic example: in 2006, the U.S. government, The Clinton Foundation, The Case Foundation, and others pledged $16.4 million to PlayPump, essentially a merry-go-round pump that produced safe drinking water. Despite being touted as the (fun!) answer to the developing world's water woes, by 2007, one-quarter of the pumps in Zambia alone were in disrepair. It was later estimated that children would need to "play" for 27 hours a day to produce the water PlayPump promised.

We are easily seduced by aid projects that promise play. The SOCCKET, an energy-generating soccer ball, made a splash in 2011 when it raised $92,296 on Kickstarter. Three short years later, the company that created it wrote to its backers: "Most of you received an incredibly underwhelming product with a slew of manufacturing and quality control errors... In summary, we totally f*#ked up this Kickstarter campaign."

Reading their surprisingly candid mea culpa, I couldn't help but wonder where the equivalent message was to the kids in energy-starved areas whose high hopes were darkened by a defunct ball.

In some cases, the reductive seduction can actively cause harm. In its early years, TOMS Shoes—which has become infamous for its "buy one give one" business model, wherein they give a pair of shoes for every one sold—donated American-made shoes, which put local shoe factory workers out of jobs (they've since changed their supply chain).

Some development workers even have an acronym that they use to describe these initiatives: SWEDOW (stuff we don't want). AIDWATCH, a watchdog development blog, created a handy flow chart that helps do gooders reality check their altruistic instincts. It begins with the simplest of questions—"Is the stuff needed?"—and flows down to more sophisticated questions like, "Will buying locally cause shortages or other disruptions?"

Second, the reductive seduction of other people's problems is dangerous for the people whose problems you've avoided. While thousands of the country's best and brightest flock to far-flung places to ease unfamiliar suffering and tackle foreign dysfunction, we've got plenty of domestic need.

In a chilling essay, C.Z. Nnaemeka calls this underserved American demographic the "unexotic underclasss"—single mothers, veterans, the elderly—and argues that entrepreneurs have missed a huge opportunity:

> ...the unexotic underclass can help address one of the biggest inefficiencies plaguing the startup scene right now: the flood of (ostensibly) smart, ambitious young people desperate to be entrepreneurs; and the embarrassingly idea-starved landscape where too many smart people are chasing too many dumb ideas.... The unexotic underclass has big problems, maybe not the Big Problems—capital B, capital P—that get 'discussed' at Davos. But they have problems nonetheless...

Like Nnaemeka, I think there is tremendous need and opportunity in the U.S. that goes unaddressed. There's a social dimension to this: the "likes" one gets for being an international do-gooder might be greater than for, say, working on homelessness in Indianapolis. One seems glamorous, while the other reminds people of what they neglect while walking to work.

It's intimidating to throw yourself into solving problems that you've grown up with and around. Most American kids, unless they've been raised in a highly sheltered environment, have some sense of how multi-faceted problems like mass incarceration really are. Choosing to work on that issue (one that many countries in the Global South handle far better than we do, by the way) means choosing to nurture a deep, motivating horror at what this country is doing via a long and humble journey of learning. It means studying sentencing reform. The privatization of prisons. Cutting-edge approaches already underway, like restorative justice and rehabilitation. And then synthesizing, from all that studying, a sense of what direction a solution lies in and steadfastly moving toward it.

For some, there's less learning to do. For ten million American kids whose parents have been incarcerated at some point while they were growing up, choosing to work on this issue is more about linking policy and programmatic learning with personal experience—a hard-earned, shorter road to enlightened action.

The activists, entrepreneurs, advocates, designers, and organizers that I admire most these days are up for that kind of investment. They seem to lean in to systemic complexity with a kind of idealistic sobriety.

long, for a while it's in your mind that there's some-thing that's changed, but you can't really say what that is. It's the way you view stuff and think about stuff that changes'. Another student used similar terms to explain her experience: 'no one was really that fussed about what they looked like, we, like, didn't wear make-up for the whole time, and it didn't really matter what you wore ... I think there's something free and independent about not being dependent on your foundation or whatever, and not feeling like you have to look a certain way every day'. Once again, what comes through here is an urge to resist materialism, certain forms of consumerism, and Western social norms and expectations.

Some students confessed to me that when they returned from their time abroad they felt 'self-righteous' and 'superior' and sometimes tended to look down on the people they had left behind at home, as though they had ex-perienced something that no one else could understand. They told me that reuniting with their friends proved to be difficult. One student explained that when she got back her friends threw her a welcome-home party, and became upset with her when she seemed depressed and unhappy to see them: '[My time in India] was just so amazing and I really missed everyone there [in India], it was just amazing, and they [my friends at home] couldn't understand'. One student told me that her experience was so 'rich and pro-found' that she couldn't talk about it with most people, because 'I'm not gonna pretend that they can connect on that level'. Another put it in terms of 'real' versus 'fake', or 'deep' versus 'shallow', saying: 'I know it's bad because it sounds like you're being really superior; I went back home to York and thought "Oh these Yorkies, they have no idea, these people are so shal-low and superficial, they need to go and do something". I know that sounds bad, but that's what I felt'.

The paradoxes of authenticity

The language that young British natives use to describe their experiences abroad indicates that participation in development projects provides a way for them to separate themselves from what they perceive to be the cultural mainstream: they want to 'find themselves', to cultivate a sense of unique identity, to get in touch with their 'authentic' desires, to 'get off the beaten track', to do something 'wild' and 'dangerous'. The reason that gap year travel – or its snap gap equivalent – becomes a useful way to accomplish this has to do with the meaning it continues to carry over from an earlier era. For most of its history, the gap year has been associated with drop-outs: youth who failed or refused to secure a university place and consciously rejected 'the system'. Students who took gap years were stigmatised within main-stream opinion, but celebrated by the anti-establishment fringe who, follow-ing the counterculture movement of the late 1960s, sought ways to revolt against what they perceived to be the suffocating constraints of middle-class society with its established life trajectories.

As I have argued elsewhere (Hickel and Khan 2012), the countercultural movement assumed a fundamental antagonism between the individual and society, and saw the former as repressed by the latter. This logic first gained popular traction during the 1960s with the rise of the New Left: Herbert Marcuse and others decried capitalism not only for exploiting labour and ap-propriating workers' surplus (the staple critique of the Old Left), but also for promoting mass conformity and the 'suppression of individuality'. He noted that capitalism in an age of mass consumerism teaches individuals 'to love and hate what others love and hate', and thereby suppresses the individual's 'true' desires (Marcuse 1964). Following the work of Freud, which was popular at the time, the New Left considered the individual to have 'inner' or 'authentic' desires that existed prior to social norms and expectations (see Strathern 1988; Sahlins 2008). For them, freedom became about allowing each individual to recover their own desires and express their inner selves. The object of revolution became self-realisation, or the recovery of authenticity (see Taylor 1989, 1991; Keane 2007), as in the figure of the 'strong poet' that Nietzsche championed against the 'slave morality' of mass society.[3]

Gap-year travel was a central component of the counterculture move-ment: hippies used it to signal their rebellion, freedom and originality, but also because, by putting them

free time spent playing with children who did not have video games to distract them. These idealised representations of life among the poor are possible because student volun-teers do not have to experience the stressful pressure of everyday responsi-bilities that their hosts do.

Students claim that this context facilitates 'meaningful relationships', implying that such relationships are more difficult to achieve at home be-cause of the ubiquity of technology (again, they blame Facebook and smart phones), the pressures of performance at school and the stress of everyday responsibility in London. This discourse does contain a critique of alienation and social fragmentation that students feel in Western society, but it does so only by disavowing the fact that in most instances – given barriers of language and culture and relatively short time spans – the 'meaningful' re-lationships that students develop with people in their host regions (relation-ships that, again, are usually with children, and are rarely maintained after the student's departure) never approach the level of intimacy that is possible with their peers and relatives in Britain. One student who went to Ghana for seven days reported that: 'I think we had really meaningful relationships with the people there. I don't know how much of that is because we were the first group to go [to that community], so they probably made more ef-fort. But particularly with the children ... we got a lot of attention from the children.' It is interesting that students use the term 'meaningful' instead of more concrete terms, such as 'intimate'. The term 'meaningful' becomes useful because its vagueness permits a rhetorical sleight of hand: when stu-dents say that their relationships with their hosts were meaningful it seems as if they mean intimate, but in fact they mean simply that the relationships carried meaning – that the encounter was personally transformative, for ex-ample, or that it facilitated their sense of having a real experience. In other words, the important thing is not the content of the relationships they form abroad, but what they come to symbolise in students' narratives.

Students tend to explain the value of volunteering abroad in terms of becoming more 'authentic', a term that relates closely to the conception of 'the real' that they invoke. One student put it this way: 'It's the first experi-ence that takes you out of your usual context and puts you in a completely unfamiliar scenario that forces you to figure out who you really like and who you don't like, and figure out the things you really enjoy'. What is at stake here for students is that volunteering abroad operates as a sort of ritual of self-realisation that they find exceedingly valuable. It provides a sort of liminal phase through which they must pass in order to emerge as a fully formed person ready to reintegrate into their home society. In the words of one student: 'There's this expectation that your gap year will change you and you'll become the person that you are supposed to be. You find your-self; it's all about finding yourself'. This seems to make intuitive sense to most Euro-Americans given longstanding associations between experiencing nature and achieving self-realisation, and given common cultural notions about the value of separating oneself from a familiar context and embarking on a challenging journey in order to gain perspective and maturity. But it seems strange that students should believe that living in foreign countries among resource-poor brown people should make them more authentically themselves. Indeed, it seems more likely that being in a context where one does not know the language and is ignorant of basic cultural rules would make one less oneself – less capable of 'authentic' self-expression – than be-ing in a context where one is fluent in the language and culture.2

Many students I have encountered frame their experience in terms of becoming 'deeper' people than their peers, who they cast as 'superficial' by contrast. Female students often represent this surface-depth model with reference to make-up and clothing. For instance, two of the students I in-terviewed reported that prior to leaving for their volunteer experiences they used to be 'classic uni girls' who partied a lot and were into shopping. But during their time abroad they 'stopped caring about those things, the makeup, the straighteners' – they became less 'materialistic'. As one of them put it, 'You never wear make-up when you first come back. And even though that doesn't last very

They seem to hold a precious paradox at the center of their work — on the one hand, newbies have to acknowledge how much they don't know and cultivate a tremendous amount of patience and curiosity. On the other, they have to hold on to their beginner's mind that leads them to ask the best kinds of questions and all that fresh energy for change, which veterans so desperately need. They are people working on the least "sexy" issues imaginable: ending homelessness, giving more people access to credit, making governments work better.

I understand the attraction of working outside of the U.S. There's no question that the scale and severity of need in so many countries goes far beyond anything we experience or witness stateside. Why should those beautiful humans deserve any less of our best energy just because we don't share a nationality?

(And I'm not arguing that staying close to home inoculates kids, especially of the white, privileged variety, like me, from making big mistakes.)

But don't go because you've fallen in love with solvability. Go because you've fallen in love with complexity.

Don't go because you want to do something virtuous. Go because you want to do something difficult.

Don't go because you want to talk. Go because you want to listen.

Don't go because you loved studying abroad. Go because, like Molly Melching, you plan on putting down roots. Melching, a native of Illinois, is widely credited with ending female genital cutting (FGC) in Senegal. But it didn't happen overnight. She has been living in and around Dakar since 1974, developing her organization, Tostan, and its strategy of helping communities collectively address human rights abuses. Her leadership style is all about finely calibrated moments of risk — when she will challenge a local leader, for example — and restraint — when she will hold off on challenging a local leader because she intuits that she hasn't yet developed enough trust with him. That kind of leadership doesn't develop during a six-month home stay.

The rise of the social entrepreneurship field in the last few decades has sent countless young people packing across continents. In 2015, global nonprofit Echoing Green received 3,165 applications for about 40 fellowship spots, the majority of them from American applicants interested in social change abroad. For the last decade, recent college grads have been banging down the doors at places like Ashoka and Skoll World Forum, both centers of the social entrepreneurship universe, and SOCAP, focused on impact investing. And, to be sure, a lot of those grads are doing powerful work.

But a lot of them, let's be real, are not. They're making big mistakes — both operationally and culturally — in countries they aren't familiar with. They're solving problems for people, rather than with, replicating many of the mistakes that the world's largest development agencies make on a much smaller scale. They drop technology without having a training or maintenance plan in place, or try to shift cultural norms without culturally appropriate educational materials or trusted messengers. Or they're spending the majority of their days speaking about the work on the conference circuit, rather than actually doing it.

This work can take a toll on these young, idealistic Americans. They feel hollowed out by the cumulative effects of overstating their success while fundraising. They're quietly haunted by the possibility that they aren't the right people to be enacting these changes. They feel noble at times, but disconnected from their own homes, their own families, their own friends. They burn out.

There's a better way. For all of us. Resist the reductive seduction of other people's problems and, instead, fall in love with the longer-term prospect of staying home and facing systemic complexity head on. Or go if you must, but stay long enough, listen hard enough so that "other people" become real people. But, be warned, they may not seem so easy to "save."

The White Tourist's Burden by Rafia Zakaria
from Aljazeera America, April 2014

My friend Jack likes to tell his favorite story about a summer he spent volunteering in Colombia. He recounts that story anytime he's handed the opportunity, at parties, lunch meetings and airports. He highlights varying facets of the story on different occasions — the snake he found in his tent, his camaraderie with the locals and his skills at haggling. The message to his audience is clear: I chose hardship and survived it.

If designer clothes and fancy cars signal material status, his story of a deliberate embrace of poverty and its discomforts signals superiority of character. As summer looms, many Americans — college students, retirees and others who stand at the cusp of life changes — will make similar choices in search of transformational experiences. An industry exists to make these easier to make: the voluntourism business.

A voluntourist is someone like Jack, who wishes to combine exotic vacation travel with volunteer work. For anyone interested in being one, a dizzying array of choices awaits, from building schools in Uganda or houses in Haiti to hugging orphans in Bali. In all of them, the operational equation is the same: wealthy Westerners can do a little good, experience something that their affluent lives do not offer, and, as in Jack's case, have a story to tell that places them in the ranks of the kindhearted and worldly wise.

As admirably altruistic as it sounds, the problem with voluntourism is its singular focus on the volunteer's quest for experience, as opposed to the recipient community's actual needs. There is a cost associated with such an endeavor. A 2010 report by the Human Sciences Research Council, based in Pretoria, South Africa, analyzed the thriving AIDS orphan tourism business in South Africa.

Under this program, well-to-do tourists sign up to build schools, clean and restore riverbanks, ring birds and act as caregivers to AIDS orphans for a few weeks. This led to the creation of a profitable industry catering to volunteer tourists. The orphans' conditions are effectively transformed into a boutique package in which "saving" them yields profits from tourists. The foreigners' ability to pay for the privilege of volunteering crowds out local workers.

Africa is traditionally a favorite destination for those searching for saviordom, but the harms of voluntourism are not limited to that continent. On the Indonesian island of Bali, for example, a burgeoning orphanage industry exists to cater to voluntourists who want to help children. Children leave home and move to an orphanage because tourists, who visit the island a couple of times a year, are willing to pay for their education.

These children essentially work as orphans because their parents cannot afford to send them to school. Instead of helping parents cater to the needs of their children, the tourist demand for orphans to sponsor creates an industry that works to make children available for foreigners who wish to help. When the external help dries up, these pretend orphans are forced to beg on the streets for food and money in order to attract orphan tourism.

Volunteerism presents an escape, a rare encounter with an authenticity sorely missed, hardship palpably and physically felt – for a small price.

The pitfalls of the voluntourism industry go beyond orphanages. For example, Dorinda Elliot, a contributing editor at the Condé Nast Traveler website, writes about a "failed voluntourism project" in Haiti — a set of houses built by an American church. Buoyed by the imagined nobility of their endeavor, the builders failed to consider the needs of the would-be inhabitants. The uneducated families that moved into the houses lacked professional skills and employment to improve their conditions and continued to beg for food long after the tourists left. A community directed approach, instead of a tourist-determined one, would have invested in helping the families develop skills necessary to tackle their primary need, poverty.

claims to provide 'life-changing volunteering'. A surprising number of others rely on phrases along the lines of 'develop yourself, develop the world'. That self-development comes ahead of development itself is telling. As a recruiter at one agency confessed to me, 'We're giving students their own experience ...we're not actually doing much development'. The notion of life-changing experience frequently carries overtures redolent of the kind of personal transformation normally associated with religious conversion. One Tearfund staffer told me during an interview that 'We want people to go out and be changed... [to] come back from these experiences transformed'. While Tear-fund is a Christian agency that draws on progressive evangelical language, this same orientation towards personal transformation appears in the dis-course of even secular agencies. Many agencies devote resources to counsel-ling volunteers upon their return, helping them develop ways to think about their experience, maintain the momentum of their personal transformation, and communicate their new life insights to their peers in the U.K.

Students reflect this language in their own discourse. They say they want to have their 'horizons broadened' and their 'perspectives changed' – two phrases that appear repeatedly in students' narratives, and which they use to identify the commodity value of development projects as opposed to that of tourism. As one student put it: 'When you're involved in one of these proj-ects you try and learn the culture, you try and understand them [the locals] in order to help them, and that kind of changes your perspective, you get a lot more out of it. Instead of us going in to help them they're helping us in some form as well. They enrich our thinking and broaden our perspectives and stuff like that, and that's more rewarding than just tourist sightseeing'. According to another, 'People do these projects in order to appreciate and get perspective on their own lives. I know that was one of my reasons. I think that's a big one. People consider it an enriching experience, an en-lightening experience'. When I pushed students to explain what they gained from the experience in more specific terms, they insisted that they returned home with a greater appreciation for the things they had. According to one student: 'When I came home I really appreciated the value of money ... it [also] really made me appreciate my education, and it really made me want to work really hard in uni [colloquial term for university] and really hard in life. It made me realise that I have these opportunities for a reason. And it made me realise that we are so lucky'. Another student put it this way: 'I can't think of a better way to appreciate [the privileges we have] than to go somewhere where they don't have those benefits'. Others would talk about how they returned with a greater appreciation for family relationships, and less of an interest in material things.

When pressed to explain how living in rural Tanzania, for instance, is more 'real' than living in England, students fall back on what we might recognise as a Romantic model of the Noble Savage. Many insist that life among poor, rural brown people is less complicated than life in the West, less individuated, less consumer-oriented, less concerned with superfluous wants than necessary needs, less mediated by technologies – like Facebook and smart phones – that they say 'disconnect' people from 'real' human relationships and community. Students also say that they feel more 'natural' in this context. As one put it: 'there's something more natural when you're in that environment because you're not surrounded by the constraints of "oh you have to be at school at this time" or "I need to do well in my degree" ... And you're closer to nature as well in that kind of setting'. Others report that they are less concerned with their 'image' and other 'superficial' matters, they can 'be themselves' without the usual demands of daily life in Britain, which they represent as artificial 'constraints'. In this discourse, 'the real' is imagined as a state situated closer to 'nature', with nature – again, the sav-age slot – defined as the 'third world' inhabited by poor brown people, and particularly poor brown children, who symbolise a kind of innocence. Some students set up a binary that casts 'traditional' life as good or innocent and 'modern' life as bad or corrupt, momentarily inverting the narrative they use to describe the imperatives of development (in this sense a profound ambivalence about the 'traditional' exists at the centre of student develop-ment discourse). Students like to reminisce about conversations shared dur-ing long evenings without television and care-

South. Five of these were women, three were men, all were middle class, and all but two were white. From their narratives I draw out themes that are broadly representative, in my experience, of un-dergraduate discourse on student development. I also draw on promotional material used by development organisations that recruit student volunteers, interviews with staff and volunteers at five of those organisations, and dis-cussions I had with students at a development fair at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

'The Real' in the structure of undergraduate desire

Students in the U.K. spend anywhere from £1,000 to £5,000 (or U.S.$1,500 to U.S. $7,500) each to participate in volunteer projects abroad.1 With sums like this involved, it is clear that students are not just looking to give their la-bour away for free in the classic sense of volunteerism; they are consciously purchasing a commodity that costs many of them a sizeable portion of their savings. Indeed, many students work in Britain for the first few months of a gap year specifically in order to pay for the volunteer experience they want to have abroad. So what exactly are they buying that they find so valuable? A quick look at the discourse of the agencies involved in this multi-billion dollar industry provides a few initial clues. Andrew Jones (2004) calculates that at least 85 such agencies operate in the U.K. Some of them organise trips for students (or 'customers', as the for-profit agencies call them) directly, while others connect students to local organisations in the Global South, with India and South Africa ranking as the most popular destinations among students (Go Overseas 2012). Real Gap Experience, STA Travel, Tearfund, Restless Development, Latitude Global Volunteering, VSO, and Volunteer International HQ are some of the more popular agencies that students use today. Many of these agencies promise to sell students not just an experi-ence, but a 'real' experience – a popular term used across the industry to distinguish volunteering from 'normal' travel or tourism.

Mirroring this terminology, students explained to me in interviews that they wanted to do something more 'real' or 'deep' than just simply trav-elling around, because sightseeing is 'temporary', 'self-serving', and does not allow you to 'really experience the culture'. Ideas about 'connecting', 'building relationships', and 'engaging' or 'interacting' with 'locals' 'on the ground' or 'in the community' crop up frequently in students' discourse, as they do in the marketing materials of the agencies. Of course, it is clearly possible to build relationships like these nearer to home, by volunteering in the U.K. But this is not a satisfying solution for most students for a few main reasons. First, they claim that they desire to serve poor people, and second, they claim that they desire to experience dramatic cultural difference. When I point out that poor people and cultural difference can be found within the borders of the U.K., students tend to resort to a third reason: that they desire the 'challenge' and 'risk' of travel abroad. When I suggest that Kosovo or Moldova might fit the bill on all three counts, I find that most students admit they will only be satisfied going to Africa, Asia, or Latin America. In other words, it seems that brown and black people are pivotal to students' fanta-sies of the real experience, even though they avoid stating this outright. This is reflected in the marketing materials that development agencies use, which almost always feature images of British students (usually white) among brown or black people; images of students among white people, even if they are obviously impoverished, simply do not work in the same way. Agencies realise that the important thing for students is to encounter the needy, third-world Other – the modern instantiation of the 'savage slot' reconfigured for postcolonial sensibilities (see Simpson 2004).

The key dimension of a real experience is that it should have a personally transformative effect on the student volunteer – an effect that can only be achieved when the conditions I have listed above are in place. Many of the agencies sell volunteer experiences on this basis. Tearfund's tagline reads: 'Are you ready for a journey that will change your life?' accompanied –on their website and promotional material – by photographs of brown and black children with various white students (almost all female) superimposed as interchangeable cut-outs in their midst. Another popular agency, PoD,

In recent years, the ethics of voluntourism, especially its underbelly of exploitation, have been questioned by academics and activists alike. Most of the debate, however, is limited to questioning whether volunteer vacations do more harm than good or how it promotes stereotypes that fuel the engines of a burgeoning white-savior industrial complex.

Typically other people's problems seem simpler, uncomplicated and easier to solve than those of one's own society. In this context, the decontextualized hunger and homelessness in Haiti, Cambodia or Vietnam is an easy moral choice. Unlike the problems of other societies, the failing inner city schools in Chicago or the haplessness of those living on the fringes in Detroit is connected to larger political narratives. In simple terms, the lack of knowledge of other cultures makes them easier to help.

This imagined simplicity of others' problems presents a contrast to the intangible burdens of post-industrial societies. Western nations are full of well-fed individuals plagued by less explicit hardships such as the disintegration of communities and the fraying of relationships against the possibilities of endless choices. The burdens of manic consumption and unabated careerism are not as easily pitied as crumbling shanties and begging babies. Against this landscape, volunteerism presents an escape, a rare encounter with an authenticity sorely missed, hardship palpably and physically felt — for a small price.

Despite its flaws, the educational aspect of voluntourism's cross-cultural exchange must be saved, made better instead of being rejected completely. Natalie Jesionka, a columnist at the Daily Muse, offers future voluntourists some direction on making a real impact on their trips. She emphasizes the need for the volunteer to adapt to the culture, to be flexible, relevant and realistic. In addition to fostering mutual understanding, this would create less-domineering, nonjudgmental volunteers who are not obsessed with the pursuit of the emotional highs (and photo ops) of the altruism they paid for. It would also enable the dislocation of the stereotype that finds need and want in other and exotic places by revealing the same dimensions within their own locales and the connections between the marginalized of here and the excluded of there.

If Jack and other voluntourists could do such simple due diligence, their efforts would be more meaningful beyond good party stories and Facebook profile pictures and, more important, promote a more robust global interconnectedness than what exists today.

From Service Learning to Learning Service by Claire Bennett and Daniela Papi
from Standford Social Innovation Review, April 2014

We often use "service learning" to describe volunteer programs and international volunteer travel, emphasizing learning through service—service that teaches life lessons that help both the traveler and the world. The profound lessons that international volunteering can bring is one of the main reasons that academic institutions are incorporating it—and sometimes requiring it—in coursework.

But the concept of service learning is outdated. We are firm believers in the power of international travel to help people gain experience, perspectives, and skills that can help them improve the world, but think that going on a trip billed as "serving others"—when the travelers themselves are often the ones who disproportionately benefit—can undermine these effects.

Globalization, mass communication, and ease of travel have brought about a new sense of global interconnectedness, often accompanied by an increased sense of responsibility. Traveling to a place that exposes people to the realities of poverty and other global issues can spark complex emotions and a desire to take action. In our research on

volunteer travel, we found that the motivation behind international volunteering was overwhelmingly the desire to "help" or "give back."

But good intentions are often hard to link with good results. The international development sector knows this well, yet it is often teams familiar with travel, rather than international development, which manage service trips offered through universities and travel companies. Instead of marketing volunteer travel as the smallest intervention on the spectrum of international development offerings, organizations generally market service learning as the most "responsible" travel offering. Therefore, instead of judging service travel against international development impact criteria, people often view it as better or "more authentic" than the other end of the spectrum of mass tourism.

In fact, while some volunteer placement organizations admirably strive to educate and empower all involved, many are simply motivated by the increasing demand for service placements and potential profit. The race to attract more customers can result in increasingly simplistic solutions and tokenistic volunteer offerings that have negligible impact, or worse, do harm to the communities they purport to help (the worrying trend of orphanage tourism is just one example). In addition, teachers and program facilitators can be perpetrators in their request for or design of "feel good" experiences for youth. We have come across more than one teacher looking for a volunteer project that students could complete from start to finish in a few days and "feel a sense of accomplishment" in having done something meaningful.

The reality is that designing an intervention whereby young and inexperienced volunteers effectively and sustainably "help" a community overseas—one that speaks a different language and has different cultural assumptions—is extremely difficult. It is also very difficult to manufacture opportunities at scale where the volunteers' impact on the ground significantly offsets the resources and time it takes to manage them. Reducing the negative effects of volunteering can be easier in some contexts (for example, some environmental cleanup projects which require less cultural understanding), but even then, a reputable organization committed to vetting, training, and supporting both volunteers and host organizations is necessary to make the program successful for all parties.

This is becoming increasingly important because volunteer travel is no longer a niche activity but a burgeoning sector appealing to millions of eager, high-paying travelers who want to help make the world a better place. Our research is showing that far from achieving this, many young volunteers return home disillusioned and frustrated by the complexities they have uncovered, and lack support in transforming this into future positive action.

Our programs need to not shy away from this complexity but embrace it as an important learning experience. We need to shift the way we measure impact and reframe service travel marketing. Organizations sell the vision of a volunteer disembarking from a plane saying, "Hi, I'm here to help you!" but we believe the message needs to be "Hi, I'm here to learn from you about how I can help—now or in the future." This shift means seeing these travelers not as "volunteers" serving local "beneficiaries," but rather as humble foreign visitors who are looking to learn from local people to understand context, culture, and history that they can use to valuably contribute—either during their trip or after they return.

We are not suggesting that foreign communities should be testing grounds for learning, though we indeed could describe many of today's volunteer travel offerings that way. In our proposed model, it is implicit and essential that:

Volunteers make a positive contribution during their time through the work they support or solidarity others feel—and at minimum avoid causing harm

Local organizations invite volunteers to contribute to and learn about the project they want to participate in and related issues

Programs support the translation of that learning into action—either through personal lifestyle changes or through global action that continues after they return home

the United States and Britain. In the U.S., one of the most popular ways to be involved with this kind of initiative is to join student-led Alternative Break programmes, whereby small groups of students spend school holidays – usually slightly more than a week – volunteering abroad rather than simply travelling for fun, doing anything from building wells in Peru to teaching English in Ghana. The primary stated goal of these trips is to promote 'active citizenship' or 'service learning' among students (see Handler 2013). The concept of Alternative Break first emerged on Ameri-can campuses in the early 1980s and spread quickly after the founding of an organisation called Break Away in 1991, which sought to help students across the country establish their own projects. In 2010, Break Away alone processed more than 72,000 American students into development projects abroad (Break Away 2013).

In the United Kingdom, the 'gap year' phenomenon operates as a rough equivalent to Alternative Break. Many students take a year off after complet-ing their A Levels and before beginning tertiary study, and increasingly seek to spend that time not simply working or travelling, but also volunteering abroad – usually as individuals rather than in groups of peers. Students who do not take full gap years participate in such projects as well, taking shorter trips abroad that are sometimes known as 'snap gaps'. The number of Brit-ish students that participate in development projects has grown rapidly over the past two decades. A 2004 study estimated that some 250,000 students were engaged in gap year projects of at least three months, nearly double the proportion of students from a decade before (Jones 2004; see also Birch and Miller 2007). A more recent study estimates that, including students engaged in shorter-term projects, the number of participants is now as high as 2.5 million each year, or 34 per cent of the country's total population between 16 and 24 years old (Market Wire 2011; see also Student Times 2012).

In this article I analyse the rise of the student development phenom-enon as the product of changing ideas about personhood, politics and labour markets among Euro-American youth. I show that participation in develop-ment projects offers a way for students to craft themselves in an alternative – even rebellious – mould, to have a 'real experience' that marks them off from the cultural mainstream as more 'authentic' and 'rounded' individuals than their uninitiated peers – a characteristic that carries significant social capital and provides increased traction in a job market that has become vi-ciously competitive. I discuss the paradoxes that students negotiate as they attempt to construct a sense of non-conformist authenticity through an ac-tivity that has become not only normative and highly structured but also ultimately managed by a profit-making industry. I argue that the student development craze represents an impulse to resist consumerist individual-ism, and that this impulse has been appropriated and neutralised by a new logic of consumption, transforming a profoundly political urge for change into a form of 'resistance' that is emptied of any meaningful political refer-ence and rendered compatible with global capitalism. Finally, I show how students' pursuit of self-realisation through participation in development has a profoundly depoliticising effect, shifting attention away from substantive problems of extraction and exploitation to the state of the inner self.

Of course, not all students who go abroad go to developing countries –some participate in projects closer to home, in the United States or West-ern Europe – but this seems to be the ideal that most pursue, for reasons that I will explore in the following pages. This article does not pretend to convey findings in the manner of an exhaustive, large-scale empirical study on the topic (e.g., Jones 2004; Birch and Miller 2007). Rather, it offers a se-ries of critical reflections – pertinent to both sides of the Atlantic – gleaned from more than a decade of my own everyday experience interacting with undergraduates whose desires focus on development. My interest in this topic began with observations I made while teaching in the United States at the University of Virginia and participating in development projects with Americans, but here I draw mostly on observations in the United Kingdom between 2011 and 2012. The quotations I present derive from extended per-sonal interviews with eight British undergraduate students at the London School of Economics (LSE) who had recently returned from development projects in the Global

cultural prejudice through an active ontological position of "catching the thoughts and capturing the emotion" (p.165). Through working with these ideas with my students in class and in the field, I have found many students have been open to a form of gaze reversal. They have journalled openly and honestly – in some cases very honestly (!) about their experiences of bracketing judgements and catching prejudice (Bruce, 2015). Other students I have worked with have clearly resisted the welcome, and have chosen to stay well within their constant selves. As they seek to hold on fiercely to their stable subjectivities, I am mindful of the ethical tensions and dilemmas of engaging pedagogically with difficult knowledges (Britzman, 1998).

The (im)possibilities

Any approach to global service-learning has possibilities and limitations, and what I suggest here is no exception! Based on my initial work in using this approach I have found it to be risky and precarious and I have often times wanted to retreat. As I reflect upon this pedagogical project many questions circulate: (1) the ethics of inviting students into a project that could (is likely to) invoke ontological/epistemical violence; (2) the ethics of assessing such an emotive and psychic project as a university requirement; and (3) the concerns for the safety of community partners and the risk of (further) instrumentalisation.

Nevertheless, there have been poignant moments of disruption to students' previously held beliefs which render me hopeful of the possibilities of a postcritical approach (Bruce, 2015). And I find myself encouraged by Biesta's (2014) hope in the beautiful risk of education, and challenged by Britzman's (1998) ideas of love and risk in education. On the subject of engaging with difficult knowledges, Britzman (1998) writes "what is actually occurring when education represses uncertainty and trauma if the very project of reading and of love requires risking the self?" (p. 55). If global service-learning is in any way a project of love (and I think that it can be), then there will be inherent risks–a risk to self. The risk of being undone through a radical and ethical encounter with the Other, is to me, a risk worth taking.

The 'Real Experience' Industry by Jason Hickel
from Learning and Teaching Journal, 2013

Student development projects and the depoliticisation of poverty

Abstract

Participation in development projects in the Global South has become one of the most sought-after activities among American and British high school graduates and college students. In the United States this often takes the form of Alternative Spring Break trips, while in Britain students typically pursue development work during their 'gap years'. Development projects offer students a way to craft themselves in an alternative mould, to have a 'real experience' that marks them off from the cultural mainstream as 'authentic' individuals. The student development craze represents an impulse to resist consumerist indi-vidualism, but this impulse has been appropriated and neutralised by a new logic of consumption, transforming a profoundly political urge for change into a form of 'resistance' compatible with neoliberal capi-talism. In the end, students' pursuit of self-realisation through development has a profoundly depoliticising effect, shifting their attention away from substantive problems of extraction and exploitation to the state of the inner self.

Introduction

Participation in development projects in the Global South has become one of the most sought-after activities among high school graduates and college undergraduates in

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We suggest literally flipping the concept of service learning on its head to become learning service, where learning is not the outcome or byproduct of serving the world but a fundamental part of it. It focuses on learning that comes first and throughout, allowing travelers to recognize that to help others, they must be open to changing their own perspectives. Organizations running these programs must help travelers learn about the context, issues, and people of the place they visit, and engage with the necessary research and questioning to seek out responsible organizations with which to partner. In this way, we can measure the success of international exchanges by the traveler's increased ability to effect change in the future, while providing solidarity and support, and causing no harm, along the way.

The current model suggests that service travel aiming to support global development is altruistic, whereas travel designed for personal development and learning is selfish. We argue to the contrary: Far from always being the morally superior option, traveling abroad to "help" can in fact display a lot of ego. Educators and volunteer travel providers can communicate this to people by asking them to compare two concepts:

1. Inexperienced volunteers who paint a fence that no one needs or who inadvertently support a corrupt organization
2. Travelers who go overseas with the express purpose of listening to and learning from the people they meet so that they are more able to take action on the issues about which they learn

We can deconstruct these examples by asking: Is it altruistic? Is it effective? And for whom?

The learning service approach requires more commitment than a two-week stint abroad, but it can help diminish the "hero" complex often associated with volunteer travel. Success then relies on finding a suitable placement, where there can be a meaningful learning exchange, and a framework and support for future action. By reminding participants that personal development and global development are intrinsically linked, they can apply this approach to all aspects of their lives, the choices they make, and the world around them. If we as educators and travel providers can focus on building opportunities for students and others to learn the skills and experience they need to make a positive impact on the world through everything they do, their long-term contribution can far exceed the tourist spectacles currently passing as volunteer opportunities.

#InstagrammingAfrica: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism by Lauren Kascak & Sayantani Dasgupta
from The Society Pages, December 2014

An article in The Onion mocks voluntourism, joking that a six-day visit to a rural African village can "completely change a woman's Facebook profile picture." The article quotes "22-year-old Angela Fisher" who says:

"I don't think my profile photo will ever be the same, not after the experience of taking such incredible pictures with my arms around those small African chilldren's shoulders."

It goes on to say that Fisher "has been encouraging every one of her friends to visit Africa, promising that it would change their Facebook profile photos as well."

I was once Angela Fisher. But I'm not any more.

I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN not one but three separate, and increasingly disillusioning, international health brigades, short-term visits to developing countries that involve bringing health care to struggling populations.

Such trips—critically called voluntourism—are a booming business, even though they do very little advertising and charge people thousands of dollars to participate.

How do they attract so many paying volunteers?

Photography is a big part of the answer. Voluntourism organizations don't have to advertise, because they can crowdsource. Photography—particularly the habit of taking and posting selfies with local children—is a central component of the voluntourism experience. Hashtags like #InstagrammingAfrica are popular with students on international health brigades, as are #medicalbrigades, #globalhealth, and of course the nostalgic-for-the-good-days hashtag #takemeback.

It was the photographs posted by other students that inspired me to go on my first overseas medical mission. When classmates uploaded the experience of themselves wearing scrubs beside adorable children in developing countries, I believed I was missing out on a pivotal pre-med experience. I took over 200 photos on my first international volunteer mission. I modeled those I had seen on Facebook and even pre-meditated photo opportunities to acquire the "perfect" image that would receive the most Likes.

Over time, I felt increasingly uncomfortable with the ethics of those photographs, and ultimately left my camera at home. Now, as an insider, I see three common types of photographs voluntourists share through social media: The Suffering Other, The Self-Directed Samaritan, and The Overseas Selfie.

The Suffering Other

In a photograph taken by a fellow voluntourist in Ghana (not shown), a child stands isolated with her bare feet digging in the dirt. Her hands pull up her shirt to expose an umbilical hernia, distended belly, and a pair of too-big underwear. Her face is uncertain and her scalp shows evidence of dermatological pathology or a nutritional deficiency—maybe both. Behind her, only weeds grow.

Anthropologists Arthur and Joan Kleinman note that images of distant, suffering women and children suggest there are communities incapable of or uninterested in caring for its own people. These photographs justify colonialist, paternalistic attitudes and policies, suggesting that the individual in the photograph …

… must be protected, as well as represented, by others. The image of the subaltern conjures up an almost neocolonial ideology of failure, inadequacy, passivity, fatalism, and inevitability. Something must be done, and it must be done soon, but from outside the local setting. The authorization of action through an appeal for foreign aid, even foreign intervention, begins with an evocation of indigenous absense, an erasure of local voices and acts.

The Self-directed Samaritan

Here we have a smiling young white girl with a French braid, medical scrubs, and a well-intentioned smile. This young lady is the centerpiece of the photo; she is its protagonist. Her scrubs suggest that she is doing important work among those who are so poor, so vulnerable, and so Other.

The girl is me. And the photograph was taken on my first trip to Ghana during a 10-day medical brigade. I'm beaming in the photograph, half towering and half hovering over these children. I do not know their names, they do not know my name, but I directed a friend to capture this moment with my own camera. Why?

This photograph is less about doing actual work and more about retrospectively appearing to have had a positive impact overseas. Photographs like these represent the overseas experience in accordance with what writer Teju Cole calls the "White Savior Industrial Complex."

Moreover, in directing, capturing, and performing in photos such as these, voluntourists prevent themselves from actually engaging with the others in the photo. In On Photography, Susan Sontag reminds us:

The postcritical perspective (see Figure 1) explores the possibility of being altered ontologically as a disruption to our stable selves. In a Levinasian sense, it is an ethical call of the Other before will. The postcritical responds through acts of justice but in ways which are interrogative of the privileged ethnocentric subject (still visible in critical resistance perspectives). This positionality takes seriously notions of hyper-self-reflexivity (Kapoor, 2004) or alternative criticality (Burbles & Berk, 1999), emerging out of humility and a desire to be undone in a face to face encounter with alterity. The postcritical is in part a response to Mignolo's (2011) critique of modernity, which exposes the ways in which the shiny side of modernity can only be built upon the shadow side – of epistemic and anthropocentric violence. If we hold this reading up as a mirror in which to examine global social justice, what would we see if we had eyes to see?

By framing desire in a Levinasian way, we may be open to the possibility of being undone through ethical relationality with the Other–decentering and disrupting our stable selves, and this is what Biesta (2006) calls a pedagogy of interruption. In my own emergent teaching, I have hesitantly implemented in very precarious ways a postcritical pedagogy of interruption for global service-learning, and in the final section of this blog I will share some of these ideas with you.

Beyond salvationism

I use the words 'hesitantly' and 'precariously' to describe a postcritical approach to service-learning, as I find that there is a great deal of uncertainty. The pedagogical work is deeply affective and ontologically disruptive, and thus both risky and unscripted/unpredictable. A postcritical approach can only be offered as a welcome, and an invitation for participants to engage humbly and openly in ethical relationality with the Other. The risk of being undone through an altering encounter means that this is difficult pedagogical work, and as a teacher my desire to retreat from the risks is always present.

Postcolonial and poststructural perspectives inform this approach to service-learning (Andreotti, 2011; Burbles & Berk, 1999). Students are invited to 'reverse the gaze', so that instead of positioning the Other/partner as one in need of help or assistance, a postcritical approach asks the student to exercise alternative criticality (Burbules & Berk, 1999) in reflecting upon their own subjectivities; particularly about the ways in which they think about people radically different to themselves.

The postcritical approach is not about doing, helping or serving; it is deeply relational. Drawing upon Biesta's idea of a pedagogy of interruption, this approach is founded upon ethical responsibility toward the Other as a position of openness to 'being taught by the Other'. Biesta (2013) points out that this position is significantly different to 'learning from the Other'. When one learns from the Other, one takes on some new knowledge and understanding, and this is essentially a project of self-betterment; whereas, being taught by the Other is being open to being altered in a way that destabilizes and disrupts previously held beliefs. Biesta cites Levinas (1991) to explain this further:

To approach the Other in conversation … is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other … is an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics [i.e., making explicit knowledge that is already inside the learner]; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain (p. 51).

Openness to being taught by the Other requires a very different orientation to service-learning and is for the most part, deeply existential.

When teaching using a postcritical approach to service-learning, I draw upon a number of postcritical tools including: 'alternative criticality' and 'hyper-self-reflexivity' (Burbles & Berk, 1999; Kapoor, 2004); humility and openness (Freire, 1998); and the idea of "bracketing judgments" (Kirby, 2009, p.164) and preconceptions of the Other in order to be open to being taught, without prejudice or claims of knowing (Bruce, 2013). Kirby (2009) argues that we are able to reflexively engage in subjective ideas of

significance for global service-learning projects as a tool for reflexively thinking about the kinds of programs that we implement. The tool invites us to question our practices by considering the extent to which we are cognisant of, or complicit in the following:

Hegemony. The justification of superiority and the support of domination. Hegemony reinforces/justifies the status quo.
Ethnocentrism. The projection of one's view as universal, better, right and/or superior. An understanding that one's view is central and others are peripheral/fringe.
Ahistoricism. Forgetting historical legacies and complicities. The implementation of programmes/projects without complex historical analysis and recognition of our own complicities.
Depoliticisation. No regard for power inequalities & ideologies. A lack of ideological and structural analysis.
Salvationism. Framing help as the burden of the fittest. An uncritical desire to help others 'progress' and develop in order that they may participate in a dominant global system. Often a project of self-betterment.
Uncomplicated solutions. Offers 'feel good' quick fixes, which lack complexity and any form of hyper-self-reflexivity (deeply challenging one's owns views through humility and an openness to being altered). Offers easy and simple 'solutions' that do not require systemic change.
Paternalism. Waiting for a 'thank you'. Seeking affirmation through paternalistic acts toward others including the portrayal of others as in need of education, health care, etc.

Any detailed reading of such critiques can render us paralysed. In a sense, I find myself in a double-bind of sorts. If I act then I may become complicit in causing harm, and in not acting I may also cause harm, or at least allow others to carry out harm. In spite of such critiques I find myself desiring to continue to express my 'love' for others through acts of justice, charity and humility. So I am left, like many of us with this persistent question: why in light of this critique, do I continue to desire a position of ethicality toward others?

The desire to persist

I argue here that desire is complex, metaphysical, and deeply affective. It emerges within us contingently at the intersections of unique genealogies of politics, history and culture. The work of theorising desire for 'development' and for the 'Other[1]' is undoubtedly complex yet very necessary for those of us engaged in intercultural and global contexts. Desire has been defined as: "(1) arising out of some determinate lack, (2) proceeding towards some determinate presence or object, and (3) concluding in the satisfaction or restoration of the subject in the absorption of that object" (Dalton, 2011, p. 23). As Figure 1 illustrates, (often unconscious) desire for the Other may become instrumental in the economic performativity of the Other as we shroud the Other in our notions of development, or in the 'devouring' of the Other for personal gain, and/or as a project of self-betterment (Bruce, 2015).

Figure 1: No longer available...

Interrogating desire provides a way for us to think otherwise about complex issues of modernity, development and otherness (Figure 1). Where a modern, development perspective often positions the Other as either excluded or performative for economic benefit, the critical resistance perspective may at best allow the Other to exist alongside us. We see side-by-side existences in proclamations of tolerance, celebrations of diversity, and in social justice projects which enable the oppressed to participate in modern, development projects – or now knowledge society notions of progress.

Photography has become almost as widely practiced an amusement as sex and dancing – which means that... it is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power.

On these trips, we hide behind the lens, consuming the world around us with our powerful gazes and the clicking of camera shutters. When I directed this photo opportunity and starred in it, I used my privilege to capture a photograph that made me feel as though I was engaging with the community. Only now do I realize that what I was actually doing was making myself the hero/star in a story about "suffering Africa."

The Overseas Selfie

In his New York TimesOp-Ed, that modern champion of the selfie James Franco wrote:

Selfies are avatars: mini-me's that we send out to give others a sense of who we are... in our age of social networking, the selfie is the new way to look someone right in the eye and say, "hello, this is me."

Although related to the Self-Directed Samaritan shot, there's something extra-insidious about this type of super-close range photo. "Hello, this is me" takes on new meaning—there is only one subject in this photo, the white subject. Capturing this image and posting it on the Internet is to understand the Other not as a separate person who exists in the context of their own family or community. but rather as a prop, an extra, someone only intelligible in relation to the Western volunteer.

VOLUNTOURISM IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT the fulfillment of the volunteers themselves, not necessarily what they bring to the communities they visit. In fact, medical volunteerism often breaks down existing local health systems. In Ghana, I realized that local people weren't purchasing health insurance, since they knew there would be free foreign health care and medications available every few months. This left them vulnerable in the intervening times, not to mention when the organization would leave the community.

In the end, the Africa we voluntourists photograph isn't a real place at all. It is an imaginary geography whose landscapes are forged by colonialism, as well as a good deal of narcissism. I hope my fellow students think critically about what they are doing and why before they sign up for a short-term global volunteer experience. And if they do go, it is my hope that they might think with some degree of narrative humility about how to de-center themselves from the Western savior narrative. Most importantly, I hope they leave their iPhones at home.

Before You Pay to Volunteer Abroad, Think of the Harm You Might Do by Ian Birrell
from The Guardian, November 2010

A damning report says that well-intentioned westerners do little to alleviate the lot of poverty-stricken children in developing countries

By 10pm, the aptly named Bar Street is pulsating with tourists drawn to Siem Reap by the famous Cambodian ruins of Angkor Wat. As hip-hop blares from clubs, children playing traditional instruments are led along by men with placards reading: "Support our orphans." The kids offer sweet smiles to the diners and drinkers and anyone making a donation is invited to visit the nearby orphanage, one of several in the city, and perhaps spend time working there.

This is the most direct attempt to lure tourists, seducing them with wide eyes and heart-wrenching stories of abandonment. Other orphanages rely on websites filled with pictures of happy children. Some have hooked up with guest-houses, taxi drivers and, best of all, western tour companies that offer voluntary work alongside the holiday of a lifetime.

But behind those smiles can lie untold misery. For in Cambodia, as in other parts of the globe, orphanages are a booming business trading on guilt. Some are even said to be kept deliberately squalid. Westerners take pity on the children and end up creating a grotesque market that capitalises on their concerns. This is the dark side of our desire to help the developing world.

Look again at those cute children. Those "orphans" might have been bought from impoverished parents, coerced from loving families or simply rented for the night. An official study found just a quarter of children in these so-called orphanages have actually lost both parents. And these private ventures are proliferating fast: the numbers increased by 65% in just three years.

Once again, clumsy attempts to do good end up harming communities we want to help. We have seen it with foreign aid, corrosive in so many countries by propping up despots, fostering corruption and destroying local enterprises. We have seen it with the dumping of cheap food and clothes, devastating industries and encouraging a dependency culture. And now we see it with "voluntourism", the fastest-growing sector of one of the fastest-growing industries on the planet.

Insiders call them guilt trips. All those teenagers heading off on gap years, fired up with enthusiasm. Those middle-aged professionals spending a small fortune to give something back to society. And those new retirees determined to spend their downtime spreading a little happiness.

Now the flipside of these well-intentioned dreams has been laid bare in an incendiary report by South African and British academics which focuses on "Aids orphan tourism" in southern Africa, but challenges many cherished beliefs.

The study reveals that short-term volunteer projects can do more harm than good. Wealthy tourists prevent local workers from getting much-needed jobs, especially when they pay to volunteer; hard-pressed institutions waste time looking after them and money upgrading facilities; and abused or abandoned children form emotional attachments to the visitors, who increase their trauma by disappearing back home. "The more I delved into it, the more disturbing I found it," said Amy Norman, one of the researchers.

Development charities offering professionals the chance to use skills abroad have raised similar concerns; Voluntary Service Overseas even condemned this burgeoning industry as a new form of colonialism. VSO asked what right unqualified British teenagers had to impose their desire to do good at schools in developing countries. And Norman is correct: the more you look below the surface, the more these trips raise profound questions about misplaced idealism and misconceived attitudes.

In recent years, a disturbing form of slum tourism has taken off, with rich visitors sold a glimpse into the lives of the very poor. In Asia, unbelievably, tourists pay for trips to hand out food to impoverished rural families. In Africa, tour firms throw in a visit to an orphanage alongside a few days on the beach or watching wild animals. Critics argue that dropping in to take photographs of orphaned children, who may have seen parents recently waste to death, reduces them to the status of lions and zebras on the veld.

Many orphanages let tourists work with children. But what would we say if unchecked foreigners went into our children's homes to cuddle and care for the kids? We would be shocked, so why should standards be lowered in the developing world? Yes, resources might be in short supply, but just as here, experts want children in the family environment or fostered in loving homes, not in the exploding number of substandard institutions.

As the authors of this report point out, the harsh truth is that "voluntourism" is more about the self-fulfilment of westerners than the needs of developing nations. Perhaps this

is unsurprising in a world in which Madonna thinks it is fine to take children from African families.

In Ghana, just as in South Africa and Cambodia, there has been a boom in unregistered orphanages. Last year, police investigated one after the rape of an eight-month-old boy and discovered 27 of the 32 children were not orphans. A government study found up to 90% of the estimated 4,500 children in orphanages had at least one parent and only eight of the 148 orphanages were licensed. Unicef officials said children's welfare was secondary to profits and it is thought less than one-third of income goes on child care.

Too many travellers carry a naively romantic idea of doing good alongside their luggage. "Unfortunately, they are led by their hearts and not their heads and unknowingly support environments that may be abusive to children," said Mark Turgesen, international co-ordinator of ChildSafe Network, which protects children from abuse. Last month, the British owner of an orphanage near Siem Reap was charged with sexual assault of a teenage boy; up to 100 children were moved to a safe house by investigators.

Inevitably, the needs of impoverished communities are subverted by the demands of wealthy visitors. Alexia Nestora ran the North American arm of a major "voluntourism" group and admitted such firms loved orphanage stops. "They sell the best and are the most tearjerking projects to pitch to the media. Volunteers come away with the classic picture with an orphan and tell all their friends about their experience – as a business person I loved this." However, she started to question their validity once she went into the field and discovered the work carried out by volunteers was often unnecessary, as admitted by organisers. "The funding they bring with them is the attractive part."

The desire to engage with the world is laudable, as is the desire to volunteer. But we need to tread more carefully. Unless we have time and transferable skills, we might do better to travel, trade and spend money in developing countries. The rapid growth of "voluntourism" is like the rapid growth of the aid industry: salving our own consciences without fully examining the consequences for the people we seek to help. All too often, our heartfelt efforts to help only make matters worse.

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(Beyond) The Death Of Global Service-Learning And The White Savior Undone by Judy Bruce
from Campus Compact

The critique of global service-learning is now well established in academic literature and here, on this blog site. Did you read for example, Rich Slimbach's critique of the 'White Saviour'? His reference to Teju Cole's Twitter still leaves me feeling identity 'cringe': "The white saviour supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening". Most of us are unlikely to actually found charities, or receive awards, but we are arguably all complicit in supporting "brutal policies" while simultaneously engaging in charitable and justice work.

Where does critique leave the field of global service-learning? Why in the face of relentless critique do we continue to struggle for space? And if we persist, what alternative possibilities exist for the field?

In this blog I provide a very brief summary of the critique levied against the field (for those of you that have managed to escape this!). In light of this potentially paralysing critique, I suggest one possible reason for the desire to persist; and finally, I consider a theoretical and practical alternative.

The white saviour undone
The HEADSUP tool (Andreotti, 2012) provides a useful framework for recognising the limitations of dominant and enduring global engagement practices. The tool has