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Communities Based on “Sweaty Infestations of Joy”: A look at the Temporary Moral Communities Formed through International Volunteering Trips.

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ABSTRACT

Voluntourism is a phenomenon that is both widely popular and greatly criticized. Voluntourists judge their volunteering based on the relationships formed during the experience. While critics tend to judge voluntourism in terms of long term economic and well-being indicators and statistics. To understand why volunteers judge their own actions as positive in the moment and can change their opinions after the fact, this study will look at overseas volunteer trips as forming temporary moral communities. The lifecycle of voluntourism temporary moral communities is broken down into five periods: 1) Pre-Departure; 2) Arrival; 3) Everyday; 4) De-Orientation; and 5) Return. Using a thorough analysis of volunteers’ personal blog sites, and ethnographic research on a volunteering trip to the World Girl Guiding Centre, Sangam, in India, the lifecycle of overseas volunteering temporary moral communities will be examined and then displayed textually through experiential vignettes and visually through social network analysis diagrams.

Key Words: Voluntoursim, Overseas Volunteering, Morality, Ethics, Ethical, Relations of Responsibility, Moral Communities, Social Network Analysis.
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1 INTRODUCTION

A “sweaty infestation of joy” are the words the lead singer of the band Hedley chose to describe his experience on a Me to We volunteer trip to rural Ecuador (Hoggard 2015). These words paint a picture of the spread of something uncomfortable yet positive. He did not simply experience a spreading of joy—he sweat over it, sacrificing comfort to manifest it. Hedley is not alone in publicly championing overseas volunteering or in associating the experience with an emotional and transformative sense of widespread accomplishment. One personal blog entry from a volunteer states:

the other day we handed over the first 8 completed houses to their new owners. I’ve personally worked on four of them and have seen most of the others first hand; I can honestly say I’m proud to have contributed. These houses look, feel and even smell awesome – or maybe that’s just the sweet aroma of sweaty people and a varying lack of hygiene. (Baker 2015)

This trend is embedded within the overreaching cultural logic of humanitarian reason. Coined by anthropologist Didier Fassin (2014a), “humanitarian reason” refers to the Western world’s current association of suffering with basic humanity. Fassin (2014a) recognizes that actions and rhetoric based on humanitarian reason are incredibly diverse; however, he claims that they both rely on the compassion consensus, which refers to narratives evoking compassion and a sense of fundamental human connection between suffering people and the benefactors in a position to help them. In the humanitarian age the terms victims, suffering, and humanity are canonical messages repeatedly established by governments and non-governmental organizations as the basis for action.

The idea that to volunteer overseas is to help those who need it the most—and that to help and need help is to be human—is a common theme among the writings of international volunteers. For example, the “About” page on the blog “Life of a Volunteer” states, “volunteering is not just about travelling and seeing the world, to me it’s more about throwing myself out there and helping the communities that need it the most. It is at the very core of being human, no one has made it through life without someone else’s help” (Dhana 2016). Along similar lines, it is often thought that to help in any form makes a real difference in particularly marginalized or suffering lives. Marsh (2015), a staff member of the volunteering company Big Beyond talks about his
work in Uganda saying, “engaging the most marginalized and remote of people here is a tough task, but this is also where the need is the greatest. The levels of poverty and hardship are at their highest amongst those who live closest to the forest. This is where volunteers can make a real difference, irrespective of their expertise or skill set.”

Despite their compatibility with humanitarian discourse, international volunteering vacations, popularly referred to as “voluntourism,” are at the centre of as much critique as praise. A growing body of both academic and popular literature has emerged largely criticizing the phenomenon for failing to have meaningful long-term impacts on target communities and for primarily supporting Western interests. In an article in *The Independent*, Zatat (2016) claims that voluntourism is neo-colonialism and that volunteers writing about their experiences are doing “what colonists have been doing to Africans for centuries: [voluntourists] have made them victims and [themselves] the necessary interventionists.” Scholars are similarly critical. In a social science study of voluntourism, for example, Conran (2011) states,

> While volunteer tourism tends to be positively, and more importantly, intimately experienced, the focus on intimacy overshadows the structural inequality on which the encounter is based and reframes the question of structural inequality as a question of individual morality. This reframing contributes to a cultural politics, which normalizes the privatization of social services and economic development by NGOs. Thus, albeit inadvertently, this normalizing effect supports the continued expansion of neoliberal cultural ideologies and economic policies.

Both critical articles—one popular, the other academic—connect voluntourism with the expansion of unequal and damaging power relations. These and other studies and critiques commonly focus on the official policies and mission statements directing humanitarian action—that is, on the government, corporate, and not-for-profit actors; the documents they produce; and the formal rules of conduct they mandate. Through this lens, voluntourism has been connected to macro cultural trends and global structures of power. In other words, it is the structures constructed out of humanitarian reason that are being critiqued, while the underlying moral rationale is left untouched. While critics are placing value in statistical analysis and long-term wellbeing indicators, participants in voluntourism are placing value in personal relationships. When contradicting values are raised explicitly an aporia, or inextricable impasse, is generated (Fassin 2014a). As a result, the different lenses of analysis used by participants and critics are creating an impasse that prevents any productive conversation between the two perspectives.
The purpose of this study is to examine the enacted moral rationale that allows individuals to label their voluntourism activities as “good.” The purpose here is not to make any statement concerning the legitimacy of this rationale, but to understand its existence. In order to contribute to the macro cultural discussion around volunteerism, I will turn to the micro, focusing on the individual and the experiential to begin to untangle the contradicting values that are currently creating an impasse between the critics of and participants in voluntourism. While uncovering the moral processes that are at work, I will also propose and test a method for studying morality. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that through the process of overseas volunteering, a distinct moral discourse or temporary moral space is formed that shapes participants’ judgement of their actions while in the voluntourism space—and that this discourse can be traced over time through the interplay of relationships and identities.

1.1 GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Before outlining the theoretical framework for this thesis, I want to address some glaring questions. First, why look at morality to help forge a bridge across the discourse impasse between voluntourism critics and international volunteers themselves? Because of the moral nature of the pro-voluntourism argument, it is so difficult to argue against it. Fassin (2014b) refers to this phenomenon as the “immunity of humanitarianism”. Instead of trying to argue against a moral argument regarding voluntourism, I propose to consider how that moral argument is constructed within lived experiences. Second, what exactly is voluntourism, what can it look like, and why am I so interested in it from a moral perspective? As the paid participation in travel and activities for both the enjoyment of participants and the benefit of apparently suffering others, voluntourism is embedded in the broad humanitarian discourse, while also creating small, fast-forming, temporary moral communities. Volunteers meet as strangers or sometimes as known groups, travel to a new space specifically to engage in humanitarian acts, are briefed and taught how to act, and then for a short period of time act as “humanitarians,” adopting a new normal, before leaving the specific humanitarian space and returning to previous life activities. A moral process is being defined and performed within a bounded space and period of time, providing an opportunity to study the complexity and formality, the extraordinary and the ordinary of the moral processes at play in the phenomenon of voluntourism.
The research on which this thesis is based was devoted to an investigation of the complex moral systems within voluntourism using the following questions: How are ethics established and what does the ethical look like in the humanitarian space of voluntourism? What are the ordinary ethical conditions within the voluntourism space and how is it constructed? What specific meta-values are established and how do these values shape the judgements of participants during their voluntourism experience? And finally, how are subjectivities striven towards, created, or imposed during a volunteerism trip?

1.2 THEORETICAL APPROACH

Morality has long been a focus of study in philosophy, and so a wealth of understanding can be drawn from the historical and modern work within this discipline. Fassin (2014a) warns that borrowing from one discipline to another is only beneficial when adopted to fit the perspective of the borrowing discipline. To this end, Fassin (2014a) calls for a practice of heuristic translation that not only applies philosophical concepts to anthropological investigations but also flexibly utilizes outside concepts to think through phenomena and develop new context-specific ideas. Just as Fassin (2014a) argues against maintaining a forced purity when utilizing philosophical concepts, I will also not attempt to perfectly maintain or reproduce the philosophical and anthropological concepts I am drawing on. Theory is only useful if it can be utilized to make sense of the specific phenomenon one is looking at. Drawing on a range of philosophical and anthropological concepts, I will briefly outline a theoretical framework to understand the phenomenon of international humanitarian volunteering, and how a collective sense of the “good” is formed and enacted within this context. With the aim of providing a framework to unpack the formation of humanitarian moral communities, experiences of international voluntourism are going to be treated as moral systems that are continually being formed and reformed through politically and socially mediated interactions between individual participants and a program’s key members, organizational structure, recipients of aid, perceived beneficiaries, and other actors.

To begin, it is worth considering the “good” that international volunteers commonly claim to be pursuing through their work. To locate the “good” or the pursuit of the “good,” one first has to know what one is looking for. “Every act and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit,” wrote Aristotle (1941), “is thought to aim at some: and for this reason the good has
rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.” Aristotle (1941), however, also problematized the concept of the “good”; stating that, “the term ‘good’ is used both in the category of substance and in that of quality and in that of relation, and that which is . . . prior in nature to the relative.” From this we can summarize that the “good” is that which is aimed for but this aim is not a single objective thing.

A second important distinction in this discussion is the use of *morality* and *ethics*. These terms are often used interchangeably to refer to both conceptions and the human pursuit of the “good”; however, despite being common terms, there is no consensus in either realm of the words’ precise meanings and differentiation. Since the time of Aristotle, the “good” has been associated with both objective code and process. These two aspects of the “good” are reflected in the terms *morals* and *ethics*. Foucault distinguished between morals and ethics as institutional codes and processes of self-conscious self-formation, respectively (Laidlaw 2014). However, the terms have also been used in reverse. Keane (2016), for instance, compares the work of anthropologists K. E. Read and Arthur Kleinman showing that for Read, morals are the specific and ethics the relational, while for Kleinman, ethics are instead the explicit and morals the enacted. In his published lecture “Living as if it mattered,” Lambek (2015a) proposes replacing distinctions between morality and ethics with the terms *ethics* and *ethical*. In this framework, the noun *ethics* refers to codified rules or meta-values, while the adjective or adverb *ethical* connotes a quality or property of action. In other words, *ethics* the noun refers to objectified concepts used in explicit discourse, while the adjective *ethical* describes the complex process of living that the objective is drawn from but not equivalent to. Lambek (2015b) claims that separating ethics and morals is not only confusing but also artificially distances rules or codes from action. Codes provide criteria and categorization that influence acts of judgement, while enacted judgement produces actions that reinforce, question, or distort codes. In this way, ethics appear stable and infallible, while the ethical is inherently inconsistent and messy (Lambek 2015a). One talks about ethics but enacts the ethical. One can proclaim that helping others is good, but when met with the opportunity to help, one also has to consider one’s own time, safety, and the myriad of other ways one could alternatively help someone. Helping others is a statement of ethics, while the decision to help or not in a particular context is the ethical aspect of the situation.
To understand then how people are striving for the good in their particular practices, one has to look at the ethics they are exposed to, as well as how they label themselves and others; and the social ties or responsibilities that mitigate action. One needs to be concerned with ritual, ordinary action, and interaction. International volunteers each enter the voluntourism experience with their own set of ethics, and are exposed to the formal ethics of the organization as well as the judgements of their volunteering peers. Despite the potential for diversity based on participants’ own experiences, the majority of participants who talk about their experience online judge their overseas volunteering actions as “good,” at least while in the international context. The pronouncement of “good” is shared, while the definition of good itself is vastly varied. Das (2015) defines the ordinary as a way of living and, from an initial survey of voluntourism, it appears a common way of living, or at least interpreting and communicating actions as good, is created with its own patterns of judgement. To explain this, we need to look at visible and invisible aspects of morality but also how their position in relation to the whole system creates different relations of responsibility. In other words, what is needed is to trace the temporary moral systems of voluntourism to search for the common elements or patterns.

The overarching symbolic field or cultural problematic shaping a society at any given moment can have profound effects on the moral possibilities within that society (Troulloot 2003; Robbins 2013). Under the light of the overarching cultural problematic, particular features of reality are illuminated, and others are hidden from the realm of possibility (Robbins 2013). French anthropologist Didier Fassin (2009) identifies that the Western world has fallen into an “Empire of Trauma” where a focus on justice, dominance, and inequality has been replaced by discourses of trauma, suffering, and exclusion. In later work, Fassin (2012) labels this social imaginary “humanitarian reason,” and argues that under this cultural problematic, basic life and the human body have emerged as meta-values influencing governmental, corporate, and civil organizations. Within this cultural space, humanitarianism can simultaneously be understood as an ideology connecting humanness to the ability to suffer, a code of values prioritizing life and condemning suffering, and an industry acting to alleviate meaningless suffering in the name of humanity.

This theoretical framework provides a lens through which to look at volunteering trips as forming their own moral communities. Looking at volunteer trips as moral communities will aid in the understanding of how participants understand and communicate their own experiences.
Once the lens of participants is understood, we can start to address the impasse between critical reflections of voluntourism. Furthermore, this theoretical framework for looking at moral communities will provide a framework that can then be applied to other micro contexts beyond voluntourism.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research questions outlined above, this study used four key research methodologies: 1) textual analysis, 2) participant observation, 3) semi-structured interviews, and 4) social network analysis.

Keane (2014) has argued that ethnographic research, rooted in participant observation, is ideally suited to studying morality because it allows one to observe both naturalized patterns of behaviour as well as conscious ethical thought. Following this logic, my initial research plan centred around ethnographically studying a voluntourism program as a participant. To quote from one of my own earliest research outlines, the plan was to “actively participate in the formation, daily life, and dispersal of a temporary community of international voluntourists from a group’s initial meeting to the day of their separation.” And I went on to justify this approach by stating, “the clear differentiation of the humanitarian space from other everyday modes of life, which define a voluntourism experience like [name of organization I had hope to work with], will allow me to observe how categories and criteria for judgement are forged through ritual, as well as demonstrate how criteria are identified, questioned, and reformulated in the course of daily action within this moral space.” However, as I attempted to make this research plan a reality, I hit a snag, and that snag turned out to be the start of a whole field of thorn bushes, as described below. Although incredibly frustrating, the barriers I encountered to conducting participatory observation pushed me to expand my thinking on what my research could look like. I had to ask myself, “How could I find moral systems without actually observing them?”

It turns out that participant observation is not the only research method particularly suited to understanding moral systems, nor is it the only one that Keane (2014) specifically highlights. Textual analysis can also be used to identify the interplay between ethics, acts of ethical judgement, and self- and other identification. In this age of mass social media, there is an abundance of publicly accessible online texts on voluntourism authored by a wide variety of
actors, from official organization representatives, to individuals posting during a volunteer placement, to disenchanted individuals colourfully criticizing their own experiences and naïve assumptions years after their own voluntourism experiences. During the summer of 2016, I performed extensive online research reviewing a mixture of official websites, social media accounts, marketing campaigns, as well as third-party sites promoting discussions on relevant topics, and individually run personal blogs.

Textual analysis involved coding volunteer organizations’ websites and participants’ personal blogs for thematic categories. Blogs were found through Internet searches using keywords: *volunteering, travel, overseas, volunteer trip*, and similar phrases. Thematic analyses of blog entries focused on descriptions of the lifecycle of volunteer trips, relationships, and enacting project goals and outcomes. This thesis directly quotes 25 blogs and 18 reviews that can be considered key informants (see appendix 3 and appendix 4). More sources were reviewed but these 43 sources are drawn on directly for their clarity.

While I collected and analyzed online texts, I continued to pursue opportunities to engage in participant observation with a voluntourism organization. I still felt strongly that I could not truly speak to the “ordinary” that was experienced by participants during international volunteering trips without actually engaging in that ordinary or every day. Having gone on an overseas volunteering trip myself in 2011 and then having studied international development from a highly critical and analytical standpoint as part of my undergraduate degree, I have a mixed relationship with voluntourism and have in time shifted from happily participating in to critiquing voluntourism. For me today, it is difficult not to automatically critique and find structural arguments against what I read in popular sources. I hoped to be able to more easily suspend my disbelief and accept the perspective of participants if I participated alongside them.

What I quickly found is that the voluntourism industry is very familiar with the types of critical analysis of humanitarian development that I was taught in international development studies. In recent years, most academic and popular studies of voluntourism I have looked at have been highly critical, focused on the wider development discourses the phenomenon is embedded within. In retrospect, I think this abundance of critical discourse contributed to the difficult time I had trying to arrange ethnographic research. Although my first attempt started out promising,
once my request reached higher up along the bureaucratic food chain, that organization suddenly grew less receptive and explained they would have to get their lawyers involved. Although I was unaware at the time when I first made contact, this particular large organization closely monitored its public image and had recently prevented the airing of a CBC documentary that featured them. After contacting multiple organizations and not making much headway with any of them, I received approval from one relatively small Canadian organization to attend one of their two-week volunteering trips to Northern India. Just under a week before I was to board a plane, the organization contacted me to explain that due to low numbers, the trip had been rescheduled and that I would not be rebooked on another trip as others had. Before abandoning the idea of conducting participant observation altogether, I decided to make one final attempt. Using personal connections for leverage, I contacted Sangam, the World Guiding Centre in India, and asked whether I could join their community volunteering program scheduled for mid-September to early October. They were keen to accommodate me, but the situation did not match my carefully constructed research plan. Due to the proximity of the Centre’s 50th anniversary, and all the specific events scheduled around that occasion, they did not have anyone sign up for the community program that normally occurred in the fall. They were more than willing to run the program just for me, and to have staff and long-term centre volunteers from around the world be interviewed; however, there would be no one for me to observe and participate alongside.

What would the value in this trip be if I could not conduct participant observation? The purpose of the ethnographic research component was to experience and contextualize the claims individuals make about their experiences abroad. I could still accomplish this goal by immersing myself into one of these experiences, as long as I was sure to temporarily abandon my analytical gaze and allow myself to be first and foremost a participant. I decided to go on the trip, but with a promise to myself to keep a detailed account of what I was thinking and feeling. This account was not to be structured by my research questions or themes but to be a raw collection of how I lived on a daily basis, and the ups and downs of developing that new routine. The Community Programme at Sangam, also known as the “Tare Programme,” operates under the idea that its participants are putting Girl Guide values into action to impact a wider non-Girl Guide audience.

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1 *Tare* is Hindi for *star*, referring to the idea that the community volunteers are considered the stars of the Sangam community.
in local communities. Four days a week, I travelled away from the centre and ran supplemental activities at one of the centre’s community partners: Tara Mobile Crèche. In the evenings, I planned for the next day on site, and on Wednesdays and weekends I participated in cultural and leadership programs meant to ground my experience on site within the context of Indian and Girl Guiding culture. My personal reflective writings during this time has become another text—albeit much more in-depth than most that are publicly shared—that I analyzed alongside blog posts, testimonials, and even satirical pieces.

While staying at Sangam, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with centre volunteers. I conducted 7 interviews while at Sangam. These interviews were loosely based on a set of predetermined open-ended questions and were flexible enough to allow participants to guide the exact flow of the interview.

My final methodology was social network analysis, involving the visualization of moral systems over time. By visualizing the relations of responsibility that compose a moral system, one is able to see the various relationships and connections that impact an individual’s actions and judgements. Each social network diagram is centred on a single individual and is time specific. The diagrams used in this study (see Figures 7-11) are all based around myself, the researcher.

Using the four aforementioned methodologies, I will illustrate how participants in voluntourism are able to create and maintain moral communities that inhibit critical reflections of voluntourism in personal experiences.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The first substantive chapter “Not Voluntourism, But…” will set the stage for the exploration of voluntourism by exploring the discourses of the critique and how overseas volunteering trips are promoted. The top five popular arguments in mainstream media against voluntourism will be presented, followed by an in-depth look at how organizations attempt to separate themselves from these critiques.

The following chapter, “Constructing a Situational Ordinary: The Lifecycles of Temporary Moral Communities,” will move away from how organizations present themselves, and look at
the lived experiences of individual participants. These experiences will be compared to create a shared lifecycle of voluntourism and the temporary moral communities that are formed.

A final substantive chapter, “Untangling Relations of Responsibility: A Moral Systems Approach in Action,” will map the interplay between ethics, the ethical quality of action and reaction, and subjectivity in a single subject—the primary researcher. Using network analysis, a single moral system will be mapped through the progression of the life cycle of the volunteering trip.
2 NOT VOLUNTOURISM, BUT…

The Collins online dictionary (2019) defines *voluntourism* as “tourism in which *travelers do voluntary work to help communities or the environment in the places they are visiting*. Urban Dictionary (2019), a user-generated and moderated dictionary, provides a fundamentally similar definition of *voluntourism* but with a very specific negative connotation. There, *voluntourism* is described as the “unholy marriage of ‘volunteer’ and ‘tourism’” and is further defined as

an act carried out by "voluntourists", … when hordes of - generally - the great unwashed backpacker brigade descend on a place to… have a jolly nice holiday - usually at precious little cost to themselves - and do the occasional bit of good work.” (Roo, 2005).

In the Global North, voluntourism is a rapidly growing industry. In fact, a 2008 study, cited by Kushner (2016), surveyed 300 organizations that market to would-be voluntourists and estimated that 1.6 million people volunteer on vacation, spending around $2 billion annually. In the media’s portrayal, voluntourism is mainstream and socially popular; however, if you go looking for “voluntourism” opportunities, you are unlikely to find it under that name.

For the purposes of this research, *voluntourism* is being broadly defined as the paid participation in international travel and related activities for both the enjoyment of participants and the intended benefit of apparently suffering others. Conceptualized in this way, voluntourism is both a practice related to a broad humanitarian discourse and one that creates small, fast-forming, temporary moral communities. This study will use the terms *international volunteering trips* and *voluntourism* interchangeably in a value neutral way.

In 2016–2017, temporary moral communities of the kind that interested me for the purposes of this research could be found under labels such as “Ethical Travel,” “Purposeful Vacations,” “Service Learning,” and “immersive” or “participatory tours” (wide representation of the types of words used in marketing campaigns and by participants—not exact specific wordings). In using alternative terms, organizations offering international volunteering trips are actively separating themselves from the label of “voluntourism.”

Why is *voluntourism* rejected by the commercial purveyors of the phenomenon that this term is meant to represent? In popular discourse, *voluntourism* currently possesses a strong negative
connotation. The term has been adopted into the vocabulary of developmental criticism, becoming synonymous with a commodified development experience that at best fails to create lasting development and at the worst caters to consumers’ desires at the cost of the wellbeing or stability of vulnerable communities.

What this study neutrally identifies as voluntourism, largely identifies itself by what it is not, namely the “voluntourism” of the popularized critiques. For example, Fathom Impact Cruises (2017) claims to offer “A Journey of a Different Kind,” and Operation Groundswell (2018) is “not your cookiecutter vacation.” Therefore, to understand the current voluntourism market, it is necessary to first survey what the industry is separating itself from.

2.1 POPULAR CRITIQUES OF VOLUNTOURISM

A survey of critiques of voluntourism published in popular online and print media between 2014 and 2017 reveals five categories of critiques: (1) that voluntourism is too tourist-centric; (2) that it is fundamentally unsustainable; (3) that its participants lack the skills needed for the projects in which they engage; (4) that it constructs and/or deepens unequal power relations between benefactors and beneficiaries of assistance; and (5) that there are pressing needs in participants’ home countries that are overlooked when participants choose to work elsewhere. Although described separately for the sake of clarity, these categories often overlap or are combined within a single argument. These five categories represent the majority of the popular anti-voluntourism discourse; however, these areas of contention are presented and combined in numerous ways creating a sense of a dynamic standpoint rather than a single formulaic problem with the phenomenon. What all these critiques have in common is a questioning of the concrete effects of well-intentioned efforts. Critiques are littered with the terms misguided and well-meaning, implying that the critiques are not predominantly of the motivation but of the execution and long-term results of these “do-good” intentions.

2.1.1 UNSUSTAINABLE

The argument that voluntourism is unsustainable takes two main forms: that projects do not result in lasting change, and that the constant change of staff prevents projects from having a lasting impact. An argument made by Ferdius (2017) provides a summary of the first form: “The
design of these programmes leads to superficial engagement for volunteers. This makes it hard for them to think about—or do anything about—the structural issues that create humanitarian crises in the first place. . . . These issues include the history, social, political and economic conditions that frame people’s lives.” The second form is summarized nicely by Mano (2016): “the necessity for sustainable solutions, as opposed to immediate but ultimately superficial gestures of help, becomes evident when looking at voluntourism programs within social services. These programs typically last fewer than three months, and the sudden disruption in any bonds formed between a volunteer worker and their clients can be distressing.”

The argument that voluntourism is unsustainable is often sustained by asking questions of projects such as: Is there a long-term plan for the community to take over a project? And, What happens when volunteers are not present? For instance, in the *New York Times Magazine* article titled “The Voluntourist,” Kushner (2016) seeks to poke holes in a single volunteering project by asking, “Did the missionaries have a long-term plan to train and recruit qualified teachers to staff the school? Did they have a budget to pay those teachers indefinitely?” These simple questions are used to illustrate how a project is not thinking long term and instead the focus is perpetually short term or only as long as the next group visit.

### 2.1.2 Unskilled

A common critique of overseas volunteers, especially of younger volunteers such as students, is that they do not bring any relevant skills to the projects they are joining. In an article in *The Conversation*, Fredius (2017) states: “Most students bring few relevant skills to their volunteer sites. They are not required to commit to long-term involvement either.” The article goes on to claim that “instead, volunteers take part in service projects like basic construction, painting, tutoring in English and Maths, distributing food, or ‘just being a friend’ to children perceived as alone and in need of social support.” Former overseas volunteer turned critic, Biddle (2016) characterizes what she refers to as the “voluntourism economy” as “tacking unskilled work onto an exotic location and calling it volunteer service.” Closely related to the tourist-centric argument, projects requiring basic skills are focused on meeting the needs and interests of potential participants regardless of whether they result in any real impact for communities. The argument is also made that such basic skills are possessed by locals and do not need to be imported. Biddle (2016a) asked the founder of the volunteer cruise line *Fathom* about the
unskilled labour she had her guests participate in. When she asked whether locals could not perform the tasks, Biddle was told that “the workforce simply didn’t exist.” As an individual with travel experience in the Dominican Republic where Fathom sometimes operates, Pippa (2016a) responded: “This is something that just about anyone driving through the DR would have a hard time believing. Again, the needs of local communities were secondary to the market opportunity at hand.” This line of thinking is further explored in the negative power relations critique below.

The more extreme version of the unskilled tourist argument is that most voluntourists are not only unskilled for the work they are undertaking but are deeply naïve—blindly acting on emotional impulses. What is lacking in knowledge is made up for in sentimentality. This is a recurring theme in the satirical Instagram campaign “Barbie Savior.” In her own words, Barbie Savior (2016) explains that she decided to volunteer because “I was deeply fascinated with and moved by those living in the Third World, specifically the country of Africa. . . . As I grew older I learned about the poverty and disparity that ravage the entire country. Even though I have no training whatsoever, I know that the answers to all the problems here lie within me.”

In another Instagram posting, Barbie Savior (2016) brings her knowledge of the benefits of paint colour and is under the impression that this is a genuinely helpful contribution. As a satirical
social media campaign run by two friends with volunteering experience, Barbie Savior is not based on concrete examples but is building on a very real perception that the voluntourism market is full of unskilled people under the false impression that they are making a positive difference in the lives of others (Barbie Saviour 2018). The argument that sentimentality does not overcome skill deficits is clearly summed up by Kushner (2016): “Unsatisfying as it may be, we ought to acknowledge the truth that we, as amateurs, often don’t have much to offer. Perhaps we ought to abandon the assumption that we, simply by being privileged enough to travel the world, are somehow qualified to help ease the world’s ills. Because the mantra of ‘good intentions’ becomes unworthy when its eventuality can give a South African AIDS orphan an attachment disorder or put a Haitian mason out of work.”

2.1.3 UNEQUAL/NEGATIVE POWER RELATIONS

The humanitarian discourse in which voluntourism is embedded, creates a fundamental power divide between the suffering and those who choose to aid them. Zatat (2016) claims that, through the act of paying to volunteer “you have done what colonialists have been doing to Africans for centuries: you have made them victims and yourself the necessary interventionist.” Furthermore, without knowledge of the country and culture one is entering, it is easy to reinforce “often racist depictions of local residents as uncivilized peoples or helpless victims” (Mano 2016). The argument is that the structure of voluntourism programs are fundamentally unequal and that the relationships forged during them fortify stereotypes that then further reinforce the inequality.

The unequal power relations argument is most commonly, although not exclusively, connected to overseas volunteer work in orphanages. Biddle (2016b) asserts “any person who has had children climb on top of them in a frenzy for attention, clamor to have their picture taken, or cry in their arms as they prepare to leave, has to admit that they are in a position of immense power.” The volunteers get to leave, the children do not. Talking about the aid-orphan industry, AlJazeera America reporter Zakaria (2014) states, “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.” Zakaria goes on to explain that the market for orphans helps to create more orphans, as parents choose to send their kids to orphanages because they know their education will be paid for: “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 more orphan tourism. Biddle (2016b) agrees, claiming that, “by choosing to support orphanages that rely on volunteer labor, well-meaning volunteers are inadvertently using this power to exacerbate a broken system and disincentives governments and NGOs from finding lasting systems-based solutions.” This form of critique points to the power structures that voluntourism is embedded in and supports making the argument that inequality is deepened by participating in structures of us and them, and giver and receiver. In this critique, the will to help is declared not a skill and therefore good intentions are deemed not enough of a reason to volunteer abroad.

2.1.4 TOURIST CENTRIC

Voluntourists, looked at in this study, travel through a for-profit business or a non-governmental organization (NGO) that charges for overseas experiences in order to keep itself afloat. Through a focus on “selling social good,” overseas volunteering has developed into an over $2 billion market (Pippa 2016a). As a business, a voluntourist organization has a vested interest in its clients, the voluntourists. This necessary focus on the needs and interests of volunteers is viewed as potentially problematic as it reinforces the power imbalance between paying customers and unpaying recipients. Al Jazeera reporter Zakaria (2014) asserts, “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.” In other words, it is thought that the experience of the volunteer is valued over the results for the community. People can feel that they have made a difference and therefore be satisfied with their experience regardless of whether lasting change has actually occurred. “It’s done for the experience of the volunteer,” says Roger O’Halloran (in Stewart 2014), the executive director of PALMS, an NGO that was born out of the Catholic social movement of lay missionaries. “It’s all about the volunteer, with the pretense of helping someone, and I don’t buy it.” What O’Halloran and others do not buy is that the voluntourism is actually primarily about social good, instead of the commoditization of altruism.
2.1.5 Need at Home

The final popular critique is one that asks potential voluntourists to look in their own backyards first. It has been argued that before volunteers go overseas, they should address real issues of poverty that exist within their own countries. Mano (2016) writes “those jumping at the chance to help communities abroad should not neglect the immense work that still needs to be done at home. For example, residents of the Attawapiskat region and other Indigenous communities in Canada are still suffering the effects of brutal Canadian colonialist regimes, yet these issues are often shirked in favour of more seemingly adventurous travel opportunities.” Zakaria (2014) explains this phenomenon stating, “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.” The simple and exciting hero-helping-victim narrative is easier to leave uncomplicated when someone is relatively uneducated about the lived realities of a situation and the complex history that created it.

2.2 Current International Volunteering Market

Popular criticism tends to lump international volunteering trips together under the deprecating title of “voluntourism.” Organizations that offer international volunteering trips stay clear of the term voluntourism, however—separating their programs from popular critiques instead of directly arguing against them. According to the publicly accessible promotional material surveyed, each program offers participants a “unique” experience and is fundamentally “different” from the competition and the subjects of critical development discourse. Many volunteering programs that this study looks at quietly recognize the problems of voluntourism and then present themselves as something else. Through a wide survey of the public marketing of international volunteering programs, conducted using textual analysis of program websites and promotional material, I have identified four ideal types of secular international volunteering programs: (1) Work Camps; (2) Highly Personalized Community Connections; (3) Connector Organizations; and (4) Vacation +. For the purposes of this study, I will not be looking at
organizations directly affiliated with any religious groups or missions, which is another category. This does not exclude participants with strong religious ties or motivations, but restricts the focus of this study to programs that do not officially represent any particular religious belief.

2.2.1 WORK CAMPS

The oldest model of international volunteering that continues to have influence today is self-referred to as “Work Camps” or “International Voluntary Service.” This style of development travel gained mass popularity in the Global North directly after the Second World War and maintained that popularity throughout the Cold War era. The still-operational Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS 2018)—formed in 1948 at the UNESCO International Work Camps Conference—defines voluntary service work camps as groups of people working together for social reconstruction. According to the CCIVS’s 2013 report entitled “The Power of Action: How Voluntary Service Contributes to Human Rights Education and Intercultural Learning,” the enduring goal of work camps is to create both physical and social infrastructure, changing how people think and live. A segment of the report reads:

A concrete work project has of course its own timetable and objectives. At the same time the project serves as a catalyst for dialogue as it provides an opportunity to work together according to each person’s ability and to practice living together. In such situations volunteers experience a new reality which can challenge their habits and convictions as well as those of the local community. (CCIVS 2013)

Today, the CCIVS has branches in 41 different countries, each representing their own organizations (CCIVS 2018). Each of these organizations considers itself to be a modern-day continuation of the style of peaceful reconstruction carried out by European civilians after the Second World War.

The ideal type this study identifies as Work Camps is characterized by the identification with the international voluntary service movement and with the use of a “camp”-based organizational structure. Promotional material tends to draw on World War II roots and Cold War era legacy. One of the important connections to the legacy is a focus on civilizations working towards “peace”—and there is a significant focus on fostering peace. The first objective of the CCIVS, as of 2015, is “The promotion and development of the voluntary service movement on the national, regional and international levels in the contemporary world; Towards peace, international
understanding, friendship and co-operation among the people of the world, particularly youth” (CCVS 2018).

To elaborate on the shared structure, work camps are characterized by the use of base sites or camps that are developed to achieve specific goals. These camps house volunteers, who come to work on a project and live with others doing the same thing, usually a little away or separated from local communities. Work done by these camps is typically manual labour or basic service provision and is designed to be easily completed by a rotation of people. This means the work is standardized and requires minimal skills. Although one of the oldest forms of international volunteering, Work Camps is the least prevalent ideal type in the current development landscape.

2.2.2 Highly Personalized Community Connections

The Highly Personalized Community Connections ideal type is characterized by an emphasis on being the bridge between individuals, with their personal abilities, and a particular community or group of communities. These programs incorporate participants into existing projects or ongoing relationships with set communities. Heavy use of the terms collaborations and relationships counters the argument that overseas volunteering is objectifying individuals and communities and entrenching deep global power inequalities. This type of program is the most likely to employ terms such as ethical travel and emphasizes that everyone has something different to offer. Organizations offering this type of program can either focus on promoting volunteerism as
its prime vision and mission or use volunteers as a means to achieve their vision or goals within a community. For example, Operation Groundswell’s (2018) aim is to provide participants with authentic and ethical travel opportunities, and it claims it uses its relationships with communities in different parts of the world to accomplish this. Big Beyond (2018) on the other hand, is an NGO working to “help” two specific communities develop—one in Uganda, and the other in Southern Ethiopia—and one of its most significant strategies is to use volunteers to tackle the community goals they are best able to address.

![Operation Groundswell Promotional Material (2016)](image)

2.2.3 Connector Organizations

In contrast to organizations that rely on community connections, the Connector Organizations ideal type bridges the gap between people who want to volunteer and projects seeking volunteers. These organizations’ prime missions centre on enabling other people to “make a difference” or have a sense of accomplishment. These organizations are almost exclusively for-profit businesses, although often possessing an ethical or social enterprise certificate of some sort and working with a large variety of NGOs. Examples include: Global Vision International (2018), which offers over 150 distinct volunteering projects that run throughout the year in over 50 countries; and International Volunteer Headquarters (2018), which operates in roughly 30 countries with a similar number of projects. Such Connector Organizations offer volunteers a conduit to finding a volunteering experience that is a good fit for them, providing individuals...
with many different choices.

2.2.4 VACATION +

I have termed the last ideal type “Vacation+.” This type consists of organizations offering trips with the opportunity to participate in volunteering experiences as part of a vacation package. Volunteering is treated as a highly organized activity or excursion for guests and is fit around typical Western tourism standards. Often these programs are marketed as making volunteering accessible to all, including families with small children and older individuals. These opportunities are connected to both big corporations, such as the Ritz Carleton’s Community Footprints Program (Ritz Carleton 2018) and the Carnival Cruise ship line’s “voluntourism” ship called the Fathom (Carnival Cruise 2018), as well as small specialized travel companies such as Hands Up Holidays (2018).

These aforementioned ideal types together paint a picture of the various characteristics of international volunteering trips presently available to potential participants. In practice, particular
trips may fall between categories and be a hodgepodge of these standardized categorizations. The purpose of outlining distinct categories is to portray the various possibilities and to provide an idea of the heterogeneity within the voluntourism market.

2.3 COMMON CORE

On paper, these differences can appear quite significant, and a common strategy to circumvent the critical voluntourism narrative is to explicitly distinguish a program as substantially “unique” in comparison to the competition. Despite differences in how programs operate and present themselves, however, there is a common core that unites all of these international volunteering programs. This common core is composed of both what programs promise participants and how participants talk about their experiences. The broad commonalities are threefold. First, these programs are all presented as extraordinary experiences—as being outside the bounds of the everyday. Secondly, volunteer programs involve a contribution or connection to humanity. These contributions can be talked about as “making an impact,” or in terms of increasing global human connections and understanding how to become a global “citizen.” The final commonality is a narrative of personal change or transformation. Through these commonalities, a particular sense of ordinary is created within international volunteering spaces. Das (2015) defines the ordinary as a way of living, and so the way of living within all voluntourism experiences, although varying, includes a feeling of the extraordinary, a sense of being connected to humanity, and the narrative of “making an impact.”

2.3.1 THE EXTRAORDINARY

In general, travel is undertaken with the expectation of encountering difference. One travels to see new places, to have new experiences, or to take a break from the activities of one’s regular life. This sense of difference is a key component of all volunteer travel; however, the nature of this different experience varies. Voluntourism, in general, is advertised as providing an extraordinary experience without actually using the word extraordinary. Instead, descriptive words, such as adventure, journey, cultural, exotic, conservation, and so on, are employed to paint a picture of the type of specialized short-term experience being offered. This type of language is used to depict a separation from the mundane and the known.
The perceived extraordinariness of international volunteering goes beyond a separation between volunteering and participants’ daily life at home. International volunteering trips are repeatedly referred to by organizations and participants as substantially different than other vacation experiences. This difference is most commonly described in terms of depth or authenticity. The volunteer-based experience is “real”—and the social and cultural integration is “deep”—in contrast to the highly produced and replicable tourist vacation. The extraordinary nature of volunteer-based travel, in comparison to standardized “vacation” travel, throughout the blogs cited was often cited as the explicit reason for choosing a particular voluntourism program. For instance, Cory (2014) writes on the overseas volunteering review website Go Overseas:

One of my biggest fears of backpacking was going on a trip and coming back with the same or similar stories as the thousands of tourists that travel to SEA [South East Asia] each year. It’s not hard to do, see some beaches, party on Khao san rd, get to a full moon party and see Angkor wat. However this trip gave me none of those typical stories, yes they were a sight to see but being able to go beyond that is what makes this a especially special.

For Cory, volunteer-based travel renewed his interest in international travel providing him with the possibility of an authentic and meaningful experience rather than a “cookie cutter” commercial experience that is similar to the experiences of hordes of tourists every year.

The separation between tourist experiences and travelling volunteer experiences is also commonly used by organizations and their representatives to distance themselves from the critical voluntourism discourse discussed in the previous section. For example, co-founder and representative of the overseas volunteering organization UBELONG Cedric Hodgeman (N.D.) stated in an interview with GoOverseas.com, “We’re not a tourism company. We don’t offer volunteering opportunities next to surf getaways”—elaborating that, “we [UBELONG] are uncomfortable with the ‘voluntourism’ fad—we believe the motivations of volunteers and tourists are very different.”

On two levels, the out-of-the-ordinary nature of voluntourism is stressed: different from the daily, and different from other forms of vacation or temporary escape from the daily. Although a sense of the extraordinary is a strong commonality between international volunteering programs, there are similarities between different experiences of this extraordinary. The space of voluntourism is temporary and distinct from other spaces; however, a common ordinary can be
identified as occurring within this type of extraordinary social and physical space. This sense of ordinary is found in the ways of acting, interacting, and judging that become normalized within the volunteering space. Although the common ordinary experienced in the volunteering space is not the same as daily life back home, a sense of routine and expectations for behaviour are created within it.

2.3.2 HUMAN CONNECTION

Experiencing this rich cultural immersion changes you as a person. As you become a part of this new community, you are slowly, but surely, transformed into a Global Citizen.

(Global Vision International 2018)

This promotional statement, and the many similar ones issued by countless organizations, alludes to both a sense of accomplishment and a sense of universal humanity. In speaking of being or becoming a “global citizen,” a particular judgement of action and a sense of identity are being referred to simultaneously. This commonality can be interpreted as a particular process of subjectification. Faubion (2011) recognizes that there is only a fuzzy line between the acts of achieving and ascribing in regard to self-formation. The judgement of a person and the judgement of individual action, by oneself and others, is tightly intertwined within interaction. Individual judgement is shaped by one’s perceived social positioning of others, and these perceptions are at least partially informed by collective understanding of potential subjectivities (Read 2014, 163-172). External categories and internal labelling and striving for particular categories are combined in reflective consciousness. Within a broad Foucauldian framework, Laidlaw (2014) asserts that reflective consciousness, “is what allows one to step back from his way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, its goals” (102). The capacity for reflective consciousness is what allows one to identify oneself and others as ethical subjects. The commonality of self-identifying as acting on one’s human identity or global citizenship, alludes to a shared process of reflective consciousness that is fostered through Western international volunteering trips.

This commonality is not always in the form of clear subjective labelling, referring to the use of identifiers such as “global” or “world” citizen, but also presents itself as a recognition of belonging to and acting within a larger whole. After spending nine months at a volunteer placement in Rwanda, Kate Turner (2014) published on her personal blog, called “Urugendo
Rwiza: That’s bon Voyage in Kinyarwanda,” a list of ten things about volunteering. Number eight was titled “Piece of the Puzzle” and was accompanied by the following explanatory paragraph:

I am a piece of the puzzle; one of many in a concerted effort to reduce poverty. Some days when you think of the bigger picture it can be overwhelming – there is so much to do to reduce inequalities. But on the flip side, I do feel a sense of solidarity with other volunteers that we are working together and making a contribution. I am a piece in the big [Organization’s name] development puzzle. (Turner 2014)

Turner is writing about the process that Das (2015) refers to as “moral striving,” as belonging to the organization is becoming part of her identity. Identity-defining relationships were formed between herself, the other volunteers, the organization, and the community she is “contributing” to. In Chapter 4, I will more closely examine interconnectedness and the construction of relations of responsibility by looking at my own experience volunteering with Sangam, the international Girl Guiding and Scouting centre in India.

Substantively, this constructed form of subjectivity aligns with the broad cultural problematic of humanitarian reason, as defined and put into historical context in the Introduction. In the Western world, humanitarianism can simultaneously be understood as an ideology connecting humanness to the ability to suffer, a code of values prioritizing life and condemning suffering, and an industry acting to alleviate meaningless suffering in the name of humanity. The subjectivity broadly defined as “global citizen” identifies the fundamental sameness of all humans and then calls for individuals to have a positive influence on humanity through conscious action. A common marketing strategy is to directly present volunteering trips as an opportunity to positively impact humanity. For instance, the tagline for Me to We University and College Volunteer Trips (Me to We n.d.) is, “Be the change in.... Kenya .... China... Nicaragua... Ghana... Ecuador... Arizona…Mexico... India…”. Similarly, reflecting on and looking for a shared humanity or sameness is a reoccurring theme in the public blogs of participants reviewed by this paper. A recognition of this sameness is something that participants seem to actively strive towards. For instance, Debbie (2014) posted this reflection:

Sometimes I’m guilty of seeing people so different in appearance from what I’m used to, and a part of me forgets that they are just people too. I’m not denying that their lives might be somewhat different to my own, but they’ll still work, have friends, family, and in many
cases, need to arrange where to meet their friends using their mobile phones, no matter whether they have a ginormous spear or not!

The concept of forging human connections is even the inspiration behind one organization’s name. UBELOONG seeks to foster a sense of social inclusion within the overseas communities they work in. The co-founder explains to GoOverseas.com that “UBELONG volunteers fuel a feeling of ‘belonging’ among project beneficiaries” and elaborates that “by bringing locals and international volunteers side by side to work together they feel that they matter, that they belong to the same world, and that they have much more in common than they initially thought” (UBELONG 2018). Generally, volunteering trips are framed around the realization of the universally human and encourage participants to actively strengthen those connections in some way. The underlying idea is that if we are all fundamentally human, then despite the differences these others should be able to engage with the wider world and have their basic human needs met.

2.3.3 PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

In the voluntourism sphere, participants are presented as becoming “global citizens” by being active members of humanity. This is a clear form of identity acquisition and recognition. Alongside these clear discourses of human connection and engagement is a narrative of personal self-transformation for the voluntourist.

Returning to Kate Turner’s (2014) list of ten things about volunteering, number nine on her list is, simply, “Life Changing.” The elaboration is as follows:

I cannot deny, my life has completely changed. From the moment I stepped on the plane, everything I knew was going to be different; country, language, continent, climate, food, people, friends, job, home, city, money. It couldn’t get anymore radical. But it’s the long term changes; my attitude, my appreciation, my standards (which are incredibly low now when it comes to appearance, cleanliness, food that I’ll eat, places that I will sleep and hours that I will generally wait for anything at all). And my outlook – its changed. I am not stressed, I don’t wander around feeling like I am going to have heart attack at any moment, I sleep like a baby and I am very happy. And I appreciate things a lot more and remember the good things that I’ve temporarily left behind and look forward to being reunited with all my friends and family when I return (hopefully less of a crazy stresshead nutter). (Turner 2014)

In her entry, Turner (2014) acknowledges the transformational impact her international volunteering experience has had on her life. Her (Turner 2014) entry suggests not only
recognized differences in personal thoughts and actions, but also changes in the process of self-reflection. A transformation implies deep structural changes and not just temporary or surface alterations in action or appearance. Returning to ideas of self-formation, the discourse of transformation suggests change in the internal and external criteria governing reflective consciousness. In other words, one believes that how one judges oneself and others is now different and that this difference will lead to perceivable changes in how one acts and reacts. This idea of structural change in reflective consciousness is evident in the prevalence of referring to change using language such as “life altering” or “permanent”.

Whether individuals’ long-term reflective consciousness is permanently altered is of less significance here than the fact that individuals believe and desire these changes to be permanent. In later chapters, the longevity of these acquired forms of reflective consciousness will be addressed. The commonality is that participants identify themselves as being fundamentally different—and in positive terms—more at the end of a program than at the beginning. Assertions of self-transformation were equally prevalent in very short, week or two-week experiences, as in extended programs of a month or longer.

At the close of her long-term volunteer placement in Ethiopia, Debbie (2014) posted a reflection she entitled “Leaving Resolutions.” In this post, Debbie identified behaviours and perspectives she had learned abroad that she specifically wanted to carry forward into her future:

This is a list of things that I’ve learned, experienced and appreciated a lot while being here, and I hope to continue these in my current and future life. By writing this down, maybe that’ll spur me into action! (Debbie 2014)

The list she provides is mostly comprised of ways of interacting with people, such as smiling at strangers, sharing, and listening to others’ stories. For Debbie, the list represents changes in how she acts and judges her own interactions that she specifically identifies as positive and that she wants to make a permanent part of her identity.

2.3.4 COMMON CORE CONCLUSION

These three elements—the extraordinary, human connection, and personal transformation—are interconnected in international volunteering marketing campaigns, blending together in cohesive
yet diverse ways. Below are two examples of how the common core can be combined in differing ways.

We invite you to join us on a mind and heart opening journey of self-discovery in one of the most beautiful places on Earth. Come, lend a hand! And you’ll find you will receive much more than you have given. (Tropical Adventures 2018)

If you’re looking for a tour bus to take you to a pat-on-the-back volunteer project, you’re in the wrong place. Our goal is to take you directly into the experience. We take local transportation, we eat local food, and we sleep according to local standards. Unlike many volunteer travel organizations, ethical travel is at the crux of our philosophy. We make our programs as financially accessible as possible while packing them with adventure, community service, and education. (Operation Groundswell 2018)

Although one organization invites the reader to “come, lend a hand” (Tropical Adventures 2018), and the other offers an “ethical travel” experience, both are offering an extraordinary experience, at “one of the most beautiful places on Earth” or through living like a local, that promises volunteers the opportunity to become closer to humanity and oneself by helping or connecting with others in need.

This common core speaks to a way of conceptualizing and judging one’s experiences of international volunteering programs that is enduring the popular critique. The question is now: how does one make sense of this common core and why is it largely impervious to the negative voluntourism narrative?

2.5 VOLUNTOURISM AND VOLUNTEERING TRIPS IMPASSE

According to co-producer Mark Weber (2014), the documentary Poverty Inc. was created to try to bridge a disconnect between the development industry and those on the receiving end. In a published interview about the documentary on the critical blog site BarbieSavior.com, Weber (n.d.) reflects on the misunderstanding of the film expressed by some in the development industry:

One such woman I recently shared a panel with blasted the film as ‘Tired and whiney and wrong.’ The word ‘whiney’ struck me given the incredible response the film has received from the African community. This is exactly the disconnect the film is trying to bridge. But for people who have spent their entire lives in the industry, it’s a tough pill to swallow.
Freelance writer and blogger Pippa Biddle (2015) has similarly expressed frustration with the inability to dissuade people of the “good” of international volunteering. Biddle (2014) reflects on this in her popular online piece “The Problem with Little White Girls (And Boys): Why I Stopped Being a Voluntourist,” stating that although her “question resonated with a lot of people,” her initial answer that “we need to think before we volunteer, was for many, mostly unsatisfactory.” She concludes that “the desire to travel does, after all, go hand-in-hand with the desire to give back for the multitudes of young people signing up for volunteer trips each year.”

Fassin (2014) has looked at the disconnect between supporters and critics of humanitarian development through a sociological lens. He asks, “can any and everything be submitted to critical analysis?” (329). And he concludes that discussion breaks down when contradictions are directly raised. Fassin (2014) refers to this breakdown as an aporia, or an inextricable impasse (328-337). Since there are direct contradictions of values underlying the positions of those who claim, “the work I am doing is fundamentally positive because I am helping to ease the suffering of others” and those who claim “your actions are increasing suffering,” participants in and critics of international volunteering programs largely speak around each other. The negative voluntourism narrative is grounded in discussions of cause and effect and not discussion of the morality of wanting to help others. And while participants do not deny these causal relations, they place themselves outside of them. Fassin (2014) further explains that productive critique is so difficult because in order to be heard one needs to simultaneously recognize oneself or one’s actions in the critique and then accept the displacement of that identity. As this overview of the current international volunteering industry has shown, volunteering organizations have responded and thoroughly separated themselves and the nature of the experiences they offer from the critical discourse. Fassin (2014) suggests that effective critique needs to come from an insider-outsider; someone who both does and does not identify with the group. Ethnographic research, as the open-minded participatory engagement in activities by an outsider, offers the potential to generate effective critique that can be understood and accepted by contradicting parties.

Negative impacts described in the critical voluntourism discourse (motif), although supported by logical arguments, do not align with the lived experiences of those who participate in overseas volunteering programs. To understand this deep impasse, there needs to be an understanding of
the perceptions of participants that simultaneously acknowledges lived realities and can draw connections with the findings of critical discourses. Instead of merely dismissing narratives of voluntouring as pursuits for and the accomplishment of some “good” as unfounded by “facts” and therefore wrong or based in extreme naivety, it may be more fruitful to break down how these perceptions are formed. The moral logic governing participants’ interpretation of volunteering trips is not simply born of a lack of knowledge but is shaped by the context of the experience.
3 CONSTRUCTING A SITUATIONAL ORDINARY: THE LIFECYCLES OF TEMPORARY MORAL COMMUNITIES

On my trip I got to travel with the most beautiful people (S/O to all my OG family that I still talk to & visit), have the most remarkable trip leaders (who have become significant role models for so so many - if not all - of us trippers), and experience and learn so much. We were faced with hard truths, tall mountains, flat tires, and a little bit of Delhi Belly, but all of this was worth it, especially with the unwavering support from our new family, and the locals we met and stayed with. (Siobhan 2015)

I took a leap of faith into the unknown—and it turns out, the unknown is where I feel the most comfortable. (Becker 2016)

I saw happiness in conditions in which one would least expect it, liveliness in the simplest forms of living, and adventure in every opportunity. (Jain-Poster 2016)

The above statements made by former international volunteer trip participants summarize a period of living as an international volunteer that will be referred to as a temporary moral community. This chapter will define the concept of temporary “moral communities” and then trace and analyze the temporary moral communities formed during international volunteering trips.

3.1 TEMPORARY MORAL COMMUNITIES

The “moral” in temporary moral communities encompasses the interplay between ethics, the ethical, and subjectivity, as mediated through ritual and relations of responsibility. If the moral refers to the complex way that ideas of the “good” are spoken of, acted on, and judged, then what is a temporary community? And how can it be moral in this sense?

The previous chapter established a sense of being outside of the ordinary as a core feature of international volunteering trips. Can a construct of morality enacted within the ordinary and unconscious be applied to an experience removed from the everyday? A sense of being outside of the ordinary is only one component of the common core of international volunteering trips. Participants judge their actions as accomplishments rooted in a sense of increased human connection, and they associate these accomplishments with changes to their own identities. Das (2015) defines the ordinary as a way of living, and from a survey of international volunteering
programs it appears a common way of living is created during the “exceptional” experience of volunteering overseas. In other words, within the exceptional space of an international volunteering experience, a temporary ordinary is created with its own patterns of relations of responsibility. With this in mind, the term community is to be defined as the physical and social space and the enclosed relationships where there is a sense of ordinary or an established way of interacting and judging.

As the paid participation in travel and activities for both the enjoyment of participants and the benefit of apparently suffering others, volunteer tourism is generally embedded in the broad humanitarian discourse, while also creating provisional spaces of specific action. Participants meet as strangers or sometimes as known groups; travel to a new space specifically to engage in humanitarian acts; are debriefed and taught how to act; and then for a short period of time act as “humanitarians,” adopting a new normal, before leaving the specific humanitarian space and returning to previous life activities. A moral process is being defined and performed within a temporally and spatially bounded context constructing a temporary moral community, which provides an opportunity to study the complexity and formality, the extraordinary and the ordinary of the process of morality.

3.2 THE LIFECYCLES OF TEMPORARY MORAL COMMUNITIES

Temporary moral communities—as with any social construct—do not simply spring into existence and then eventually dissipate, but are constructed, modified, and brought to a close. Since volunteer tourism is confined to set periods of time, the process of creation and closure are closer together and easier to distinguish than ongoing mundane community formation. A common thread throughout the blogs analyzed for this paper was the appearance of four distinct time periods that encompass the international volunteering experience: pre-departure, introduction or orientation, daily volunteering life, and de-orientation followed by a return home. There is a clear beginning—a decision to leave home and engage in volunteering activities—as well as a clear end—participants say goodbye, return home, and reflect or speculate on what they will retain from the experience. These broad periods, occurring in this order, form the skeletal structure of the lifecycle of volunteering trips.

To conceptualize the flow of this four-period lifecycle, it makes sense to consider the temporary
moral communities of international volunteering as constituting a liturgical order—in this context, meaning a sequence of rituals that occur in order. I borrow this usage of the term *liturgical order* from Rappaport (1998), who explained,

I refer to rituals and sequences of rituals as liturgical orders because I take them to be orders in virtually every sense of the word. First, they constitute orders in the sense of “systems,” as exemplified in such phrases as “the moral order” or “the economic order” or “the natural order”—more or less coherent domains within which generally commensurable processes are governed by common principles and rules. As such they constitute order, as opposed to disorder or chaos… Further, inasmuch as liturgical orders are more or less invariant sequences encoded by other than the performers their performance entails conformity. This is to say that, although their words may not be cast in the imperative mood, they constitute orders in the directive sense. Finally and most obviously, they are orders in that they are more or less fixed sequences of acts and utterances, following each other “in order.” (8)

This is true for the lifecycles of volunteering trips. They are temporary systems with their own rules and common principles and, as such, they exist in order rather than in chaos. Volunteer trips happen in a set order, with departure from home always happening before the return. The lifecycles of volunteering trips are also directive in that they affect action and identity in specific ways. One is a volunteer once one participates in acts of volunteering.

As discussed, liturgical orders are comprised of a system of rituals. It is not the four periods of the lifecycle of volunteering trips that are the rituals themselves, but instead the resulting enactment of rituals. A ritual—as a structured performance of formal acts and utterances that is not completely encoded by its performers—is simultaneously a form of action with social and material consequences and a form of structure that establishes convention (Rappaport 1999). Rituals enact identities and expectations that then exist within an established period or context. Or as conceived in the realm of ordinary ethics, “rituals effect states of ethical personhood and relation, transforming a biological infant into a named social person, a man and woman into a married couple, novice into a monk, a profane condition into one of blessing… and so forth” (Lambek 2010, 44). Conventions are not merely outlined but performed, put into existence through action. This performativity of rituals separates an actual ritual from the description or understanding of a ceremony (Rappaport 1999). In a liturgical order, sequences of rituals create different periods with distinct categories and criteria of judgement. To return to the words of Rappaport (1999):
Periods . . . are temporal durations within which phases are encompassed—such phases as spring/summer/autumn/winter, childhood/youth/manhood/death, night/day. Thus, through the series of rituals comprising them, liturgical orders sever seamless durations into distinct periods and may also invest those periods with significance. Moreover, as liturgical orders distinguish periods from one another, so may they unite them into larger, meaningful entities. (11)

Rappaport (1999) distinguishes between two broad categories of messages that can be transmitted through ritual. In Rappaport’s (1999) own words, “the self-referential represents the immediate, the particular and the vital aspects of events; the canonical, in contrast, represents the general, enduring, or even external aspects of universal orders” (53). The most common category of messages is self-referential, which provides information about the current physical, social, or psychic state of an individual, group, or object (Rappaport 1999, 54). Alongside self-referential messages, rituals can also transmit canonical messages that are already encoded and well known. These messages are invariant; however, the participants and self-referential messages associated with the canonical can change (Rappaport 1999, 53-54). For instance, the process of passing through customs when travelling overseas is generally extremely standardized. The customs officials ask a standard set of questions that the traveller is typically prepared for, and at the end of a successful exchange, the traveller is given permission to formally enter a country. This process is well established as a canonical ritual; however, the effects this unchanging structure of exchange has on individuals can vary greatly. For an individual leaving their home country for the first time, this process officially transforms them into a traveller with permission to visit someplace new to them. A vacationer returning to their home country is transformed from a foreign visitor back into a citizen who is welcome to stay. For the international volunteer, passing customs might mark the start of the humanitarian space. From the moment the volunteer steps past the gates of customs, they are a temporary volunteer accepted into a country to see and to act for the benefit of others.

Ritual produces “an ‘ought’ in which the ‘is’ of behaviour may be judged” (Rappaport 2003, 133). There is, however, rarely only one “ought” or dimension of the “ought.” Ritual explicitly presents particular categorizations and affiliated ought’s, but in doing so does not erase nor necessarily supersede what an individual has previously been taught and experienced. For example, after taking the Hippocratic Oath, a trained individual becomes a doctor who is expected to help in the instance of a medical emergency. In practice, however, a doctor may have
to consider other responsibilities, such as looking after children in their care or making a scheduled appointment, when deciding whether or not to stop and identify themselves as a doctor when walking past an accident. Ritual analysis is but a starting point for uncovering how particular action is conceived as “good.” Despite appearances, an established code of ethics does not stand alone but is only one factor influencing the ethical quality of action. A key component of liturgical orders, as well as rituals in a broader sense, is recurrence (Rapport 1999). While participating volunteers may only engage in the lifecycle of international volunteering once, the organizations they work with oversee the cycle. Furthermore, regardless of the specific organization, or even broad type, international volunteering trips all follow the same basic lifecycle, although with different emphasis placed on different periods. Orientation, for instance, may constitute a day or it may last an entire month depending on the duration of the trip and the expectations for the daily life period of the trip.

The rest of this chapter will break down each of the four periods of the volunteering lifecycle to look for trends and common variations. For each period, there is a breakdown of aspects of that period and the preceding rituals based on field work, interviews, and the textual analysis of public blogs, reviews, and promotional content.

3.3 Pre-Departure Thematic Analysis

Is pre-departure even a period or merely the liminal state before the first established period of orientation marked by arrival? Although technically occurring within the spatial and temporal realm of the everyday, there is a time where the individual lives as a “future” international volunteer or a “volunteer to be,” and is recognized as such by others. Many individuals may think of possibly participating in volunteer tourism, but this does not make them a “volunteer to be” until applications are submitted, payments made or fundraised for, and travel arrangements booked. Pre-departure is preceded by a period of choice, solidified by concrete acts of promising to become an “international volunteer,” and involves a period of preparation for taking on the future identity and, in doing so, leaving home.

3.3.1 Choice

Although far from formulaic, each blog author has their own literary style and set of personal
circumstances; the pre-trip blogs, often constituting a blog’s inaugural posts, share thematic elements that speak to the choice that future international volunteers have made. A choice that is solidified in the signing of documents and the buying of plane tickets.

International volunteering trips do not start with leaving home, but with the choice to participate. Although there are many international volunteering options available that make finding an opportunity that fits into one’s budget and schedule relatively easy, one cannot spontaneously choose to volunteer overseas and then jump on a plane the very same day. The would-be volunteer traveller has to take concrete steps to bring their humanitarian desires to life. Taking the initial steps to act on one’s notion to volunteer overseas is often the focal point of whole blog posts. Contacting an organization or filling out an application form is a choice that signals the start of a process. In the words of prolific volunteer blogger Kaelyn Lynch (2016), “abandoning everything you know as normal to learn something new is a conscious choice that is strange, difficult, and, above all, uncomfortable.” For many of the studied bloggers, the moment that the plane ticket is bought or the final forms signed signals the start of their experience as marked by the beginning of their blog devoted to it. Even when blogs begin with leaving home, or stepping off a plane in a foreign country, that initial blog posting in the blogs studied almost always contains a reflection on the process leading up to the formal starting point.

Why do participants make this “difficult” or “uncomfortable” choice? The pre-departure period is a time of active longing, or working towards making particular longings a reality without actually realizing those desires yet. Every individual has their own distinct set of reasons for choosing to volunteer overseas, but within all these personal rationales, the longing for personal change and to assert agency comes into play.

3.3.2 PERSONAL CHANGE

Many of the studied blog narratives start at a crossroads—or at a longing for a crossroads—at a period of inevitable or desired personal change or uncertainty. To push for or control particular personal change, the individual makes the choice to engage in international volunteering. For instance, this is precisely how the blog “LiveGiveVolunteer” (Grey 2016), and the tale it conveys, begins:
The idea for this blog and its focus, sprang primarily from the fact that I am completing my time at university and honestly, the idea of transferring myself straight from my desk of 9-5 studying, to a brand new desk of 9-5 working (except with the bonus of not having to pay for my own caffeine addiction) seemed to be a dull start to a fresh opportunity. Therefore…I have come up with a plan. The plan to volunteer!

In the case of “LiveGiveVolunteer,” the desired personal change was in their daily routine and the focus of their time and energy. Seeking a change, post-graduation, is a common element of international volunteer stories. Similar longing can be attached to other crossroads: the changing of jobs, children graduating leaving a parent(s) with an empty nest, or ending a serious relationship, for example. The nature of this desired change is quite varied in the blogs looked at, ranging from a difference in one’s routine, individual skill sets, or outlook on the world, but for all it is a change centered in the self.

The longing for personal change is typically not only written of in terms of difference but also in regard to personal growth or improvement. Not only does one long to be different but one longs to be different for the better. A strong positive sentiment is attached to the personal change envisioned. For instance, prior to leaving for a volunteer trip, Nina (2016) writes on her blog, “I am so excited for this adventure! I’ve been wanting to develop myself through international volunteering since I graduated and I’ve actually got to the point when it’s happening.” When she first graduated university, Nina (2016) was unable, for reasons she does not publicly disclose, to immediately engage in overseas volunteering but spent time in the workforce first. The desire to grow as a person, and do so through volunteering, stayed with her, eventually prompting her to take concrete steps on this longing. Nina (2016) elaborates:

This is so important though. So important that I do this and to challenge myself and to learn from it. I’ve grown so much since graduating, which is ironic as I sit here in my Graduation hoodie (planes are cold man). I feel like this has all been work-y development though: ‘professional’. Now it’s time for Nina to develop,”

Nina (2016) speaks of a very individual desire not just to gain tangible benefits such as lines on her resume but she is also seeking a sense of changing as a person. This idea of changing as a person implies a longing for an identity formation. For some, the decision to volunteer abroad is a choice to move towards a fruitful identity change.

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3.3.3 TO DO SOMETHING (AGENCY)

Alongside a desire for individual change, the desire to volunteer abroad is framed as a longing for taking action that will have a positive impact. For example, take the beginning of Czarina’s (2016) international volunteering experience as relayed in her own words on the open participant blog for the organization International Volunteer HQ:

In mid-June, I'll be starting a new job, but until then, I'll have a few weeks to do as I please. After reading through several positive reviews, I've decided to apply to the Elephant Conservation program in Sri Lanka, beginning June 6. I'm delighted to be able to say that my spot is confirmed and I've applied for a Sri Lankan Visa today. I'm waiting for an airfare quote, and then I'll be all set to book my trip. I'm very excited to take advantage of this down time and give back to the world!

This individual is experiencing a crossroads in their life, and instead of focusing on a need to change herself, she frames her choice to volunteer in Sri Lanka as a way to “give” to the world. Desires for personal change are fundamentally selfish, but this second desire is spoken of as primarily selfless, as a giving rather than gaining. For instance, in her online appeal to friends and family to raise money for her volunteering trip Courtney (2017) states, “I live a privileged life here in America, therefore my purpose is to help others take those steps to a brighter future.”

What this participant is longing for is a justifiable appreciation of one’s own lifestyle. In a study of Young British Volunteers in Kenya, Emilie Crossley (2012) found that her participants’ “pursuit of ‘appreciation’ was tied to a defensive strategy.” She explains, “poverty presents a challenge to the lifestyles, materialism and indulgences of affluent Western subjects and can therefore induce feelings of guilt or unconscious anxiety as the Self is threatened by this spectre. By seeking ‘appreciation’, volunteer tourists can demonstrate an acknowledgement of poverty whilst also preserving their present lifestyle and self” (Crossley 2012, 243). Understood in this way, even the pursuit of helping others is being pursued based on self-interest, or at least understood in relation to oneself—the individual future-volunteer.

In her book The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism, Chouliaraki (2013) recognizes contemporary humanitarianism as embedded in a “self-oriented morality” (3). A feeling of solidarity is still being produced, but one that “explicitly situates the pleasures of the self at the heart of moral action” (Chouliaraki, 2013, 4). These “pleasures of the heart” can be sought-after personal emotional reactions, such as a sense of personal fulfillment or
accomplishment, as in the case of Courtney (2017), or sought-after reactions from others. On the volunteer travel review website GoOverseas.com, one Operation Groundswell participant reflected on her reason for participating stating, “truly we all want those experiences that people look at you and go ‘wow you did what? You did that really’” (Cory 2014). In other words, acting towards global solidarity is emotively powerful because acting for the other is known to be beneficial to the self. Nick Benson (2016) similarly talks about volunteer tourism as “travelling with a purpose” in terms of personal gain, saying, “This is going to be the first of many small steps towards that aim of actually knowing something about the world, not just a ‘seeing’ or reading about it; my first time travelling with a purpose.” Although seemingly selfless, the desire to act provides the individual with a sense of self purpose that is equally individually rewarding as it is other-focused.

3.3.4 CONNECTION BETWEEN PERSONAL CHANGE AND AGENCY

Far from being at odds with one another, narratives of international volunteer travel combine the selfish and the selfless into a coherent set of desires that are thought to be met through volunteer tourism.

For Phil (2015), contributing something to or acting on the world and changing as a person are deeply intertwined. The conclusion of the first posting on his blog entitled “A Series of Adjustments: Adventures of an Aspiring Altruist,” reads, “given that life is a series of adjustments; try to [realize] how you want to be by the time you reach the end of it” (Baker 2015). Prior to this statement, Phil explains that he feels his cynicism is constantly preventing him from trying to have an impact on the world, to try and help people or make a dent in the atrocities and hardship rampant on the planet. To become the person he wants to be, he needs to become someone who acts. He explains:

Despite being made with more than my fair share of confidence and an uncanny ability to swan through life thus far, I am not content. Youthful aspirations of something more have remained motionless; mere aspirations. At least in part, this stems from caring too much about what people think. Society has molded me to think that I should judge and be judged. The question I should be asking is: Do I care enough about other people? Honestly, I don’t know that I do. Given the constant barrage of ill tidings from the media, often we turn our backs and blink the plight of others away. I know I have done. I plan to change this attitude and hope, even in the smallest of small ways. (Baker 2015)
This is as true of a young adult who has yet to settle into the workforce, as is true for recent university graduate Phil (Baker 2015). Prior to leaving for a long-term volunteering placement in Ethiopia, working professional Debbie (2015) asserts (on her blog Debiopia), “the only way to be who you want to be, is by being it.”

Most of the longing for personal change and agency lies firmly in the realm of the abstract, of an individual striving for a sense of who they want to be. But this is not the only form this longing can take. A sense of personal change and asserting agency is even found where the longing attached to international volunteering is highly specific. One of the Sangam volunteers I interacted with during my stay had a very detailed life plan for herself. She was volunteering at the World Guiding Centre in India with the plan of volunteering at the other World Guiding Centres, as it would make her more hirable in a position at the United States Girl Scouts corporate offices (Emily 2016).

### 3.3.5 Fear/Uncertainty

The choice to engage in international travel is not seen as a simple or easy one. Alongside the longing is uncertainty and fear, giving the choice weight or special significance for many. Signing up for a volunteer trip is described as a big step precisely because it is scary.

International volunteering is a choice that is prompted by very real goals or desires. At the same time that international volunteering is perceived as having much to offer, it is also largely new and unknown, for it involves leaving one’s ordinary. The fear of the unknown is depicted as a personal hurdle to continuously overcome in the pre-departure period. To sign up for a trip, one’s fear is initially overcome, but in the time between becoming a “future international volunteer” and actually acting as one, there are opportunities to back out. This fear can make the pre-departure period a time of continually questioning and having to reaffirm one’s choice. This was the experience of Dana (2014) who wrote on the Go Overseas website,

> I don’t know if I’ve ever felt more nervous in my life than in the days leading up to this trip. I had never done any international travel or any sort of program even remotely close to this. It was going to be a completely unprecedented experience for me and I remember being so petrified that as I was sitting in the airport waiting for my flight I seriously considered just not getting on the plane.
This fear was almost debilitating for Dana (2014), who had to weigh her longing against her fear even in the minutes before getting on the plane to become an international volunteer. Fear is a recurring theme, but its role in people’s pre-departure lives is not necessarily one of harbouring doubt. For some, the fear associated with international voluntourism is continuously a part of its appeal. For instance, Debbie (2015) writes, “Do something every day that scares you… I often think of this as good advice. What is life for, if not for living? Get up, go out, and experience new things.” For some, the benefits are not only worth the risk but the risk is adding to the value of the experience. By this thinking, fear is not a challenge to going but proof of its worth.

Furthermore, a sense of fear can be connected to the perceived real-world consequences of one’s steps and missteps in an international volunteering context. Eighteen-year-old Hudson (2016) described himself as “shit Scared” in the days leading up to his volunteer teaching placement in Morocco, explaining that, “being a teacher is a massive responsibility, and I want to make sure that my contributions are meaningful.” This speaks to the double-edged sword of agency. One can achieve positive change, but one can also fall short or even have negative effects.

3.3.6 PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING

As already established, once the choice has been made, there is a gap between this decision and its actual fulfillment. The choice complete, the process started, individuals are now “future volunteers.” As a “future volunteer,” one is not acting as an international volunteer but preparing to do so. Every participant goes through a period of preparation, but the structure and formality of this process is far from uniform. With the ritual of signing my participant agreement complete, I had less than three weeks as a future volunteer before I left home as a “volunteer.” The brevity of my pre-departure period is an oddity, as most blogs looked at in this study speak of this period in terms of months. Generally, the pre-departure period provides an opportunity for the expectations of future volunteers to be adjusted or fine-tuned. Prior to departing for a three-month volunteer trip in Ghana, Nick Benson (2016) wrote a post for Verge Magazine online entitled, “Redefining My Expectations of the ‘Global South.’” His piece begins with the question, “How can you prepare for the unknown?” and speaks of the internal work he underwent to get himself ready to act with purpose and make genuine connections with Ghanaian people.
Once attached to an organization, it is no longer solely the responsibility of the individual to “prepare” for being an international volunteer. Organizations will typically provide some form of preparation for participants, ranging from a simple what-to-expect reading outlining the itinerary and what to bring to an in-depth booklet, online course, or even in-person pre-departure orientation sessions. Whatever form this training takes, it creates a sense of preparedness in participants. Below is a page from one of International Volunteer HQ’s (IVHQ) detailed online training modules (see figure 6).

**Figure 6 - IVHQ Training Material (IVHQ 2017)**

In the pre-departure period, organizations are not only passing on particular processes and practices but are also imparting world views. After discussing his internal preparations for his trip, Nick Benson (2016) briefly writes about a training weekend he attended in the United Kingdom before his Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) trip to Ghana. He described the training
as a chance to meet and share concerns with other “future” VSO volunteers. The one substantive piece of knowledge he says he took away from the event was “people power.” Nick further explains:

I did develop one expectation from my training, which I’m going to hold on to, and that’s people power. Volunteering organizations are all about people, and I’m confident that the same people who are a key resource for development in Ghana are going to be a great support system. In a people-power environment like that, what to expect is what you bring to it yourself (Benson 2016).

Pre-departure training is an opportunity to not only learn about an upcoming trip but also to learn about the expectations, approaches, and priorities of the organization one is travelling with.

3.4 ARRIVAL THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Arrival is an exciting and scary time of introductions and the unknown. It is a time of learning and first impressions. The volunteer is learning about new people, the setting, and a new routine. Everything is new in the immediate arrival period, and the volunteer is not expected to know exactly what to do. One starts off in a period of liminality between identities, and through the arrival stage one gains the identity and status of volunteer and starts to define relationships with other participants, locals, and staff.

3.4.1 INITIAL STAGE IN A RITE OF PASSAGE: SEPARATION FROM THE ORDINARY

According to van Gennep (in Turner 1969), the initial stage in a rite of passage is a separation from the ordinary. The second phase is a period of liminality ending with re-aggregation back into society with the new identity. Turner (1969) expands on van Gennep’s idea of liminality, stating that “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95). On arrival, international volunteers are separated from their past social order and enter a period of liminality. Volunteers speak of a separation from their everyday and a sense of being outside of the ordinary.

Dhana (2016), for example, summarizes their “surreal” experiences on their first day as a volunteer, as follows:

Travelled for more than 15 hours and 10 hours to finally get to the farm (yes I am going to fully utilize this opportunity to complain, classic) with zero hours of sleep and no proper food
my brain had completely stopped functioning and I was put into this beautiful moon lit farm of tony’s in the middle of nowhere (then) only surrounded by tall trees, birds, snakes and spiders and ALOT of bugs… I looked around and I really wondered if I had gone crazy why did I travel all the way here with no access to any digital communication (my madre was probably wondering if I was alive) or water. I felt like a spoilt brat, I did not mind being there, I just did not realize how I got there and what was going on; blame it on the jeeeee, jet, jet lag. It was a very surreal experience. (Dhana 2016)

This initial sense of separation is accompanied by a feeling of “why” and great uncertainty. Before the new situation is made sense of, the extraordinariness of the situation is scary and intimidating. Many bloggers and reviewers, looked at in this study, wrote about how they were overwhelmed and even fearful in their first moments of arrival, as in the following excerpts:

Culture Shock is real. I remember my second day in Bali, I found myself crying in a cafe, wondering what I was thinking traveling all the way from Canada to Indonesia. Things just seemed so different. I wondered if I were safe, felt lost without being able to call for help should I need it, was frustrated with people who couldn’t understand me, and even more frustrated when I couldn’t understand them. The food was different, even the coffee was different.” (Dempster 2014)

My time in Madagascar wasn’t all sunshine and beaches. When I first arrived, I was struck by how incredibly far I was away from everything familiar.” (Daniel 2016)

To begin with I wanted to leave and go home everything was to overwhelming” (Horn 2016)

All three of these excerpts speak of a great sense of difference. The landscapes, food, languages, and even coffee are all dissimilar to what is known and familiar for participants. There is a sense that they do not yet belong in this new setting. Van Gennep (1960) considers life to be divided into a series of passages from one identity of classification to the next. After a separation from their old identity, an individual enters a liminal period where they are between identities (van Gennep 1960). Upon first arrival, individuals’ positions as volunteers are not yet cemented and there is a liminal time where they must make the passage between their identities back home and their roles as volunteers. Before relationships are forged with locals, program staff, and other new volunteers, voluntourism participants find themselves in an in-between state defined by difference.

The immediate and great sense of difference induced many of the bloggers studied to reflect on their own way of life back home. A common conclusion to this pondering was that one is so
lucky or blessed back home compared to the living situation they are newly introduced to. One does not only think the new situation is different but judges it as worse than back home. Use of words such as *poverty, underdeveloped,* and *disadvantaged*—which accounts of overseas volunteering are riddled with—connote this relational judgement. For instance, Isabel (2016), was struck by how different, and better, care for the elderly is in her home country and immediately felt blessed for what she had back home. Although Isabel does not directly call her placement “impoverished,” she defines its occupants by what she feels that they do not have compared to back home, such as a “comfortable bed . . . a place to eat, and family and friends who didn’t abandon [them].” Isabel (2014) wrote on the Go Overseas website:

> When I got to the project site, a retirement home “Casa Maria”, I was a little in shock by knowing just how lucky and blessed I am that I don’t live like the elderly at the retirement home and that I have a comfortable bed, and a place to eat, and family and friends who didn’t abandon me. Then I realized I was there for a reason and to give back.

For Isabel (2016), the stark contrast reminded her why she was there: “to give back.” Alongside a sense of purpose, the immediate contrast between home and their new surroundings can cause feelings of guilt. When Dempster (2014) found herself out of reach of “digital communication” she called herself “a spoiled brat” evoking a sense of guilt for missing or yearning for what she did not have access to. Although reactions vary, the common variable is a comparative judgement. Over time, this comparative judgement might grow more nuanced, but initially it tends to be a simple verdict that these people are worse off.

### 3.4.2 WELCOMES

International volunteering experiences commonly begin with welcomes. Participants speak of two different types of welcome. The first is an informal welcome that is composed of one’s first encounter with locals, other participants, and staff. This informal welcome is less ritualized than later formal welcomes. The initial creation of relationships with new people help to mediate the sense of difference and disconnection.

> After a long drive, we were all half asleep when someone spotted the kids. First there was just one, sprinting toward our lorry waving both hands in the air yelling “JAMBO!” (‘hello’ in Swahili, the local language). Then more and more kids started coming out of houses and running through fields chasing after our lorry, with the biggest smiles on their
faces. I’ve never smiled as much as I did at that moment! All thoughts of going home were gone. I had never felt so welcome. (Haber 2014)

In a situation where everything is strange, the hello of a child feels warm and as something the newcomer can recognize as friendly. Haber (2014) “never felt so welcome,” but I also imagine she never felt so out of place only moments before.

Gestures of welcome vary, but for most bloggers studied simple acts are interpreted as genuinely welcoming by individuals. Daphne (2014) writes about her first day in Nepal stating, “I was met by Prem, the VSO driver, who crowned me with a marigold garland and we made our way through the busy road from the airport to the guest house.” For Daphne, the simple action of being met and “crowned” with flowers was something worth noting. The simple action became an important gesture in the midst of an unfamiliar situation. Although casual in nature, these simple gestures are not accidental but often planned out to create that sense of welcoming. Furthermore, many of the bloggers studied feel that their initial experiences made them feel comfortable and safe despite the unfamiliarity of the situation in general. For instance, Louise (cited in Big Beyond 2013) spoke on video about her initial arrival in Uganda with Big Beyond stating:

I have been really pleasantly surprised (giggle). Um it’s not a five star Hilton, I certainly felt from the minute (emphatic hand gesture) I arrived, the minute I arrived, you know it was a beautiful home, it was warm, it was cozy, it had a little bed, I had my own space, the food is delicious, and it’s weird I feel like (sigh - arms out) there I am a London girl in this uh little African village (smile) in the deepest darkest Uganda, and I am here and I feel really comfortable. I feel safe.

Louise is deeply surprised at just how safe and comfortable she feels, because she characterizes her location as being the “deepest darkest part of Uganda,” as being the unknown and distant. The welcome establishes acceptance and comfort amidst great difference.

On top of casual acts of welcome, relationships are cemented into particular roles through formal introductions. These formal introductions can be labelled as performative rituals. Performative acts in themselves bring something conventional into being (Lambek 2015c). By being welcomed as a volunteer in the way only volunteers are welcomed, one officially becomes a volunteer and is recognized by oneself and others as such. Rituals simultaneously perform two intertwined moral functions. Rituals make explicit and potentially change criteria for
identification and judgement and, furthermore, by engaging in a ritual one is indicating to oneself and others present that they accept the criteria embedded in the ritual (Lambek 2010). A set of criteria and a sense of obligation to follow and use them within the established period is created. Through a particular activity or event, the new volunteer is made part of the group—often both part of the volunteer group and to some extent a temporary member of the local community—and subject to the expectations of those groups. For Fathom Cruise Lines, the ritual of becoming a crew member comes in the form of a dance. Jema (2016) explains:

The staff gathered in lines before the stage announcing their very own dance, the Fathom Shuffle. A few rounds and passengers were invited to join in. Why not, Grace and I thought, we came to have fun. Grace and I took our place in the dance area and together invited the week to begin with silly steps and open arms.

The formal welcome often takes the form of some sort of ceremony or show put on by local people and the organizations involved. These performances are not only performative but also illustrate some of the values of the group. The welcome ritual at Sangam incorporated traditional Indian forms of welcome indicating the importance of local culture to the work and running of the organization (see Chapter 4). Respect and cultural awareness were enacted as important values to Sangam through the ritual of welcome itself. One was simultaneously made an official resident or guest of Sangam and told that guests and residents of Sangam were expected to be respectful and mindful of local traditions as well as Girl Guiding traditions.

Dave Rosin (2015), a member of the band Hedley, reflects on his welcoming experience—happily describing the effort and time that was invested into the act of welcoming the band into the community as people there to help:

The welcoming was incredible it was so rad to be not just expected by a community but also just so genuinely welcomed. You know they had such an awesome little ceremony prepared for us and the fact that they had prepared it, they had their speakers out in the microphone and they were speaking in all of their reception style voices, and just so happy to have us there as well as just the performances and the dances, all of the real kind of inside look for us into the indigenous culture here that has been here for centuries.

Rosin is not the only volunteer to use the word *genuine* in relation to their interactions with locals. The use of the word *genuine* suggests that something about the experience makes volunteers feel they are having a real connection with individuals. Occurring at a time of separation from one’s ordinary life, the welcome becomes a contrasting experience that counter-
balances the fear and feeling of the unknown and starts to form very intimate-feeling relationships.

For some, the welcome also comes from those that have come before. For instance, Nina (2016) wrote, “we found a letter too from the previous interns; so sweet. It detailed top tips for Chbar Ampov and what’s best to do in the area. Top tips about local markets and about the teachers in our school; really reassuring and a really lovely welcome.” Getting a letter from those who have come before not only welcomes newcomers into their roles, but also provides reassurance that the experience is survivable and worthwhile. A letter such as the one Nina found is performative because it is addressing volunteers, or those that took their position, and in reading the letter one officially takes on that role. The letter is for volunteers and by reading that letter one is affirming that that is the role they are taking on.

3.4.3 Authentic/Real/Local Experience of Place

The words authentic and real are not only used to describe relationships but also one’s experience of a place. Demster (2014) writes of her orientation saying, “you will be insanely busy, but it is such a great opportunity to experience true Balinese culture before beginning your volunteer program.” Prefacing something as “true” implies that one could have a false or fabricated experience of Balinese culture. For many of the bloggers studied, the realness of their experiences is connected to their proximity with locals and their daily lives. Dhana (2016) speaks of learning “how to live like a local” during her orientation by “riding the combi with the locals and listening to the local music.” Dhana describes these experiences with the local people as “something very authentic,” elaborating that “it made me feel like I was one of them already.”

Arrival is a time of encountering difference, of being stripped from one’s identity but not yet fully obtaining a new one. In a liminal state, says Turner (1969), “It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (95). During orientation to a local way of life, volunteers in a liminal state feel as though they are obtaining the powers needed to cope with their new situation. It feels so real because one needs to assimilate and not just observe.
Of course, every phenomenon has outliers. Overall, during the arrival period there is a sense that one is being presented or taught a culture—that one is being taught the local way. However, Nina (2016) was skeptical as to how authentic this presented culture was as she expresses in the following passage:

Orientation was cool although I’m not sure how relevant or accurate. I always imagine what a presentation about English culture, food and drink and language would look like. Probably a lot of tea. And attempting to explain our obsession with queuing. But great to meet some ex-interns and to pick their brains on where is best to go out and how to rent a moped and what to do/where to go at the weekends.

Nina (2016) also questions whether the orientation was needed. This suggests that, unlike others, Nina did not feel a need to act like the locals but felt she could retain a semblance of her old identity. Without the feeling that she had to act like a local, it makes sense that she felt disconnected or questioning of what she was exposed to. What was lacking for Nina and present for others was an intimacy with the experience of local culture.

3.4.4 Establishing the Project: The Goal or Purpose of Action

While the type of training offered varies greatly among programs, receiving clear goals or objectives is not a given. Regardless of whether they are explicitly written or not, each organization has a set of goals that it communicates to its participants.

Participants talk about the goals of their project using the same or similar language as their respective organization’s website, and this suggests that participants internalize the purpose communicated to them as volunteers.

Volunteers for Operation Groundswell, for example, are told that the organization is about more than just “helping,” but more focused on learning and fostering connections. Participants in Operation Groundswell programs do not tend to talk about their impact in terms of poverty reduction but rather in terms of relationships and shared learning. Operation Groundswell’s goals are outlined in its Backpactivist manifesto, which reads:

PREPARED TO CHANGE The most important quality in a backpactivist is the ability to reflect and adapt. You need to be prepared to change yourself, prepared to change your
perspective of a new place, and prepared to change the lives of others. A backpacktivist
isn’t just keeping an open mind. S/he is actively changing who they are and how they
interact with the world around them.

FULL LIFE LIVIN’ The world has infinite opportunities for wonder and enjoyment.
Every tree can be a playground, every street can be your dance floor. A backpacktivist
squeezes the sweet nectar out of every opportunity the world throws at them. “Gee, that
mountain seems impossibly high,” to which a backpacktivist would respond, “That must
mean that the top is impossibly beautiful!”

CONSCIENTIOUS A backpacktivist is a guest in a place others call home. Adhering to
local traditions and customs allows us to understand the value of cultures different from
our own. It opens the door for a greater understanding of our similarities, not just our
differences. RESPECT People clash. That’s natural. Being a part of a cohesive group has
less to do with how much everyone likes each other and more to do with the level of
respect between those who like each other least. This respect extends to the people we
meet all around the world. Make an effort to understand the people we don’t get along
with. Why are our perspectives different? What can we learn from them?

HUMILITY Travelling is a humbling experience so long as you let it be. Humility
allows us to connect to anyone – be it a doctor, teacher, farmer or street performer. A
backpacktivist may look silly searching for words in a new language, but the very attempt
connects them to locals on a different level.

SOLIDARITY A backpacktivist stands in solidarity with those who are confronted by
oppressive powers. A backpacktivist stands in solidarity with all peoples, regardless of
race, gender or class. Solidarity promotes greater understanding and inspires the
oppressed and those who stand beside them to shape a more just world.

GROUP FOCUSED Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of
thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever
has.” Groups make us confront ourselves in a way that can’t be mimicked by individual
experience. Groups challenge the way we think, the way we empathize, and the way we
relate to the world. An OG backpacktivist leverages the power of a group to develop a
deeper understanding of the world around them and a deeper understanding of
themselves.

THIRST FOR LEARNING The road is the best classroom. At the heart of OG is the
quest for knowledge of a world none of us can fully comprehend. A backpacktivist is
looking for truth.

LEADERSHIP We are training the next generation of positive leaders. There are enough
leaders in the world that tell people how to think. We believe the greatest leaders are the
ones that teach people how to think for themselves.

A “backpacktivist,” according to Operation Groundswell’s (2018) manifesto, is not there as an
individual to change a situation or to make a difference, but instead to change as a person and to
make an impact through working as a team and through the connections participants make to locals. For Talia (2016), an Operation Groundswell participant, the goal she had for her time overseas was to “[reach] out to the community beyond those we were working with, to really grasp the Tibet/China diaspora.” Talia goes on to measure her success in terms of connections saying, “I was able to learn about their personal struggles, learn more about their fight for Tibet, and most importantly, learn how to listen and be an ally.” It is clear that Talia (2016) internalized the “backpactivist” manifesto (Operation Groundswell 2018) as she had a “Thirst for Learning”; showed “humility,” as evidenced by her connections with people; was “prepared to change” her understanding of the local situation; and showed “Solidarity” with those she learned from and forged connections with.

In contrast to Operation Groundswell, the vision statement for International Volunteer HQ (IVHQ) is: “we believe in a future where any traveler, anywhere in the world is empowered to make a meaningful difference in the community they are visiting, and we take pride in making this happen” (IVHQ 2018). Here, the key words are “empowered” and “meaningful difference.” According to IVHQ’s website, IVHQ’s guiding purpose for participants is to make a difference and have an impact as individuals. When Isabel (2016) arrived at her project site, she was overwhelmed by how better off she was and what kept her going was the realization that she was there to help. In Isabel’s own words, “I was there to help out even if it was just the tiniest difference.”

IVHQ participants are clear that the purpose of their work is to help and they rarely seem to question whether they are making a difference. Karin (2016) writes, “the volunteer work is a blessing to every community I went to, helping them financially and also making them feel that someone really cares and that their wellbeing does make a difference.” While Operation Groundswell participants are told that the value of their work is in the connections they make as allies, IVHQ participants are told there is intrinsic value in the work they do for and with communities and this is reflected in participants’ interpretations of their own purpose.

3.4.5 SUMMARY OF ARRIVAL PERIOD

The arrival period is a time of great upheaval and learning, where one’s world is torn apart and then quickly put back together through forming deep connections to others. Dunlavy (2018)
summarizes many of the sentiments discussed in this section in her brief account of her own arrival period:

Initially when I arrived there was a lot to get used to. There were ceremonial rules to follow, ways of dress, mannerisms, etc, to follow in order to be respectful within the village. There was new food to try, people to meet, chores to do, students to teach and classes to plan! It was a lot to take on board and all at once. The first week was tough, but it wasn't the hardest part of the programme by a long shot.

That tough first week was short-lived. The staff members were so supportive, I had new friends going through the same things I was, a wonderful new Fijian family who took me in like one of their own, a beautiful village surrounding me, and amazing students who deserved the world and more. The privilege of being there so quickly overwhelmed me, that my tough first week blew by. The following weeks, months, were the best of my life.

Dunlavy talks of great difference in terms of food, ways of dress, and mannerisms, as well as new people and tasks. Relying on her quick-forming relationships with fellow volunteers, local family, and those she worked with, she got through the uncertainty. Her fear washed away, leaving her with a great sense of privilege to be there and experience what she was experiencing—setting her up for a period she considers as the “best of her life” (Dunlavy 2018).

Arrival is a time of liminality where the old is stripped away and replaced by new relationships and expectations. To return to the concept of a moral community, the arrival phase is where the moral order is being established by the creation of new relationships and identities as volunteers confront new expectations for behavior and judgement as well as new responsibilities for action. The arrival period provides the building blocks for a new ordinary way of living and judging as an international volunteer.

3.5 Everyday Thematic Analysis

The everyday period is where the values and identities introduced to participants in the arrival period are enacted and added to through the course of daily life.

3.5.1 Pattern of Behaviours and Expectations – General Acceptance of New Values

Everyday life, according to Shutz and Luckmann (1983) in the book *The Structures of the Life-World*, “is that province of reality in which we encounter directly, as the condition of our life,
natural and social givens and pre-given realities with which we must try to cope” (1). A period of orientation leaves participants as members of a temporary moral community and they experience the daily reality of this space. The work of creating this reality is not done with identity acquisition but is constructed, reconstructed, and changed in the course of action. To return to Schutz and Luckmann (1983), “the life-world is the quintessence of a reality that is lived, experienced, and endured. It is, however, also a reality that is mastered by action and the reality in which—and on which—our action fails” (1). Through trial and error, patterns of action are established that form a sense of known or normalized reality. In descriptions of daily routines, moments of triumph, and struggles or hardship, participants are outlining the actions that make and encompass everyday life for them as international volunteers.

Although every day is unique, a set pattern is often created with the day being split into the same basic categories. Aspects of daily routines include familiar sections such as breakfast, work, leisure time, and so on. A sense of normalcy is created through the establishment of patterns using familiar elements. Below are two accounts of daily routines:

**Our routine:**

Our routine; we start off our day with a BIG breakfast, proper mayan food, fresh and everything! start work at 8am till noon and then they feed us again and again and again. We usually have most of the afternoons to drive down to the city area, Mayan ruins, local cenote or just bike around, people in the towns and villages only use bikes to go around, no wonder they are so fit. Dinner is served around 7:30pm but we are usually ready by the dinning area around 6pm, excited to eat all that delicious fresh organic food. No wonder my clothes don’t fit me anymore. Anastasio, being the strong man he is, gathers wood logs during the day so we can end our day with a peaceful bonfire. (Dhana 2016)

**Every morning bar Sunday I’m up at 6.10 and breakfasted and teeth cleaned by 6.30 before loading up the trucks with the rest of the volunteers and am on my way to one of the core home sites by 7 am. The distance to the sites changes but is about a half an hour journey by bamboo-laden and volunteer-filled truck. The core homes are permanent houses made almost entirely of bamboo with six concrete and steel blocks that secure them and a roof made of recycled materials. The bamboo’s flexible nature and structural design means it’s earthquake proof and has been developed so that the homes are expandable by the beneficiaries later on. The main structure is built to last 30+ years but even then can be replaced and each house is adapted to suit the needs of the family whose home it will be. (Baker 2015)

Both of the above routines break the volunteer day into expected categories of action. Meals, work, and leisure are all included. From the extreme difference of the arrival period, a sense of
normalcy and order is carved out for participants. To return to the idea of liturgical order, an established period is being enacted.

Within an established period, the ethical is being enacted through practical judgement. This does not imply that an organization’s or local peoples’ set of values are being unquestionably embraced but rather that the set of values available for judgement has altered. In the words of Robbins (2016), “whether or not people at every moment desire the things that values represent, people do acknowledge in a second-order way that they are worth desiring” (8). Changes to practical judgement reflects the particular criteria that have some worth or credibility within a period. As one long-term Sangam volunteer noted when asked to reflect on what qualifies as “good” within the volunteer experience: “you have to stick to the standard of the space” (Bina 2016). Newly established ethics and past obligations and enduring values are used to judge actions and interactions and to make in-the-moment decisions on how to act and react (Lambek 2010). As time goes on, habits are formed that embody an ethical way of acting in particular situations. Schutz and Luckmann (1983) recognize that habitual knowledge encompasses not only routinized action but also routinized project-guiding action (27). Understood in this way, habits represent established goals or criteria and the way to act towards them. Das (2015), therefore, suggests that habits be “recast” as a form of “moral action” (138).

Participants reflect on this establishment of new habits, writing not only about new routines but also about how their way of thinking has changed with these new routines. For instance, Dhana (2016) states, “Living out in the open, engaging with people who have no idea what you just said, immersing in the Mayan culture has created new pattern of thoughts, new wave of emotions, a new connection to the world and a new belief system in myself.” What Dhana is referencing is a perspectival change embedded in her new way of acting and interacting with people during her volunteer experience.

3.5.2 ACCEPTING THE DIFFERENCE

The feeling of difference that is felt so strongly during the arrival phase does not entirely disappear; however, this difference is accepted and one’s perception of the difference shifts. For instance, international volunteer Meagan Stark (2018) talks of local life as “beautifully different” as opposed to scary or simply unknown.
The new normal is still separated from life back home, but it is accepted as normal in the setting. The first time I was in Ghana as a 19-year-old with Operation Groundswell, my group had a way of conceptualizing the expected difference—“Ghanaian time.” Whenever the bus was late, or the friend you were meeting showed up far after the arranged time, the group would simply say, “Oh it’s ‘Ghanaian time.’” This phrase was not said out of frustration; it was simply a way for us to understand and accept that cultural perceptions of being on time were different. My Operation Groundswell group was not the first or only group of foreigners to invent a term to describe the difference of where we were living. For Yalling (2018) and friends, the term was “so Indonesian” or “Classic Indonesia,” as she explains in the following passage:

Indonesia is a different place. Natalie, my roommate from Pittsburg, says “Oh man, that’s so Indonesian.” When something so typical here happens. Let’s see if I can try to have you understand what I mean with a couple of examples. A private car picks me up from Jakarta and takes me to Cirebon, a drive that should only take 4 hours tops but instead it takes 10.5 hours and traffic isn’t an issue. Cars pull in front of you to park while you’re walking, so they’re totally cutting you off to the point that you need to stop walking. It is believed if you’re sick you must have gotten it from swimming at night or a ghost is haunting you. My money went missing it could be a ghost. You must leave your porch light on at night to keep the spirits away. Ask for wireless internet for your house- it will take more than a month to happen. It is extremely typical to be at the gym and be using some equipment and for someone to come up and say - I was using that and expect you to get off so they can use it. When returning my gym stuff (towel and locker key) to the front desk, they tell me to put the towel in the gym locker so they’ll get it later. Classic Indonesia. Nothing makes sense!

While Yalling (2018) says that “nothing makes sense,” she gets used to it, or at least recognizes it as normal in the setting. A four-hour trip taking ten hours is not normal for Yalling (2018), but it is “so Indonesian”—a recognition of what is normal in Indonesia. Sutera (2015) explains that she labels something as “TIA,” meaning “this is Africa,” to help mediate her expectations. Elaborating on TIA, Sutera (2015) says, “The phrase is used often across Africa, and is meant to help you adjust to new situations and experiences where things do not always work out the way you intended.” Labelling the difference as normal where you are, while not fully accepting the difference, is an acknowledgment of its reality.

Acknowledging difference as situationally normal does not imply that individuals know how to interact in that setting right away. Through a process of trial and error, ways of acting and interacting are refined and normalized through time. This is a continuous process that lasts throughout the everyday life phase. Normal does not mean stagnant, but rather involves little
changes and negotiations carried out through daily actions and interactions. Tina (2015) quickly
developed a strategy for dealing with the language barrier but after this strategy failed her, she
was forced to change her ordinary way of interacting in this extraordinary setting. She recalls:

I was walking to my volunteer site and these ladies next to me started talking to me really
fast! I couldn’t understand a word they were saying so I just nodded. This went on for a few
minutes before I realized there was a GIANT bug on my leg! This is the first time I realized
nodding and saying “si” doesn’t always work! I always laugh when I remember that. (Tina
2015)

An interaction strategy that worked for this participant, nodding and saying “Si” when language
proved a barrier, was undermined in this interaction and so this strategy was no longer seen as
the automatic go-to.

Over time, the experience during the arrival phase becomes known, but this does not mean it is
the same as being back home. Participants are aware that the experience is impermanent, that
there is a distinct end date. This allows a sense of the extraordinary to remain despite growing
comfort and normalcy.

For blogger Kaelyn Lynch (2018), there was a concrete moment during her overseas
volunteering when, in her own words, she made the choice to “go down the path towards a new
normal.” She found a fly in her rice and although she was initially disgusted, she chose to simply
accept the fly as normal and continue eating. Kaelyn reflects on this incident and the change she
noticed in her perspective, writing that:

The real shift comes not with this acceptance of a new normal, but rather with the
abandonment of the idea that how you were raised to do things is superior to that of others.
When you stop seeing another culture’s habits as strange or inferior, you realize that for
many things, there is no “right” or “wrong,” only different. (Lynch 2018)

In this way, accepting a temporary new normal is potentially evocative of a wider perspectival
shift.

3.5.3 PATTERN OF RELATIONS—SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The arrival phase is marked by a period of comunitas, where relationships are fast forming and
very close; these relationships transform over time into more structured but still very close
soon develops a structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae” (132). Dhana (2016) describes the community that forms as like living in a ball-pit playground: “That moment when you get into your routine and vibe with everyone else … is like living in a bubble of positive and fun energy.”

It is through these structured relations that a volunteer can judge their own actions and experiences. UBELONG Medical Assistance in Ecuador program alumni Ketan Jain-Poster (2016) answered questions about their volunteer trip for the organization’s public blog. In response to the question: “What was your impact on your volunteer project?” Ketan wrote:

I found the first week to be particularly challenging. There were so many times in which I felt that I was “holding back” the clinic instead of contributing to its efficiency, and I worried that I wasn’t able to contribute to the clinic in the way that I had originally hoped… Once I became more confident in my role, with the help of the nurses and the other volunteers, I found myself working almost completely independently to provide triage and manage clinic flow. It was such an amazing feeling to know that I had helped someone or at least brought a smile to someone’s face on what may have possibly been one of their worst days, and that was the impact I was hoping to make. By really getting to know each patient and providing them service that was directly relevant to them, I felt that my work became so much more meaningful. There were multiple times in which a patient approached me outside of the clinic to tell me how thankful they were for the clinic and the care they had received. Although I am not a doctor or a nurse, I quickly learned that it doesn’t necessarily take a medical degree to make a positive impact on another human being. (Jain-Poster 2016)

Based on his interactions with patients, Ketan assessed that he did have an impact at the clinic despite not being a medical professional. The positive feedback and thanks received from individuals qualified his placement as positively impactful in his own eyes.

Categorizations and assumptions about people based on specific relationships start to happen over time. Just as one’s judgement of one’s own actions is mediated by interactions with others, the judgement and categorization of people, places, activities, and objects are also mediated by one’s own particular experiences and their associated relationships. For example, Daphne (2015) made a sweeping judgement that Nepalese youth were an inspiration regarding resourcefulness and community engagement. This sentiment is illustrated as she relates a particular relationship she had with the daughter of a neighbour:
Fifteen year old Diya is my neighbor and determined daughter of my friend Sudha. She
volunteers at many community events and was one of the first to lead the local children in
activities whilst we camped outside during the earthquake. She is intelligent, confident and
has many plans for her life and the betterment of her beloved country. We have many
political debates and I call her a PM, as I am confident she will grow up to be the next Prime
Minister. (Daphne 2015)

As relationships with local people grow and become more normalized with a great number
of interactions, one’s understanding of an impoverished situation and living in poverty changes. A
common narrative shift is from shock at poverty to amazement at the joy being found despite
poverty. For instance, Debbie (2014) reflects, “I’ve been amazed by the happiness and
contentment people can have when from our UK point of view they have very little.” This
change in perspective comes from a change in lived experiences. Runa (2016) witnessed kids
happily call to her each day and this added to her categorization of them as more than just
impoverished children. “The highlight of my trip was definitely the work with the kids,” writes
Runa (2016), elaborating that, “even though they come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they
are so welcoming and loveable. I will never forget how they ran up to me every morning when I
entered the classroom, screaming ‘Teacher, teacher!’ and then all came up to hug me.”

3.5.4 OVERCOMING CHALLENGES – MORAL UNCERTAINTIES

Doing the right thing is always a matter of balancing different values that are at play. As Lambek
(2015b) explains, “a given act is a matter of balance between say, justice and compassion, or
responsibility to one’s family and generosity to others” (284). For international volunteers, the
organization, fellow volunteers, locals, and previous experience back home all provide a vast
toolkit of values to sort through when choosing to act. Relationships help individuals to mediate
the act of weighing values. Bina, a centre volunteer I interviewed at Sangam, expressed that she
felt responsible to her co-workers at Sangam, her bosses or supervisors, the Girl Guide
community at large, her home country of Lesotho, and all her friends and family back home. She
explained some of her different responsibilities saying:

My role in my association is managerial so expectations for me, even when I had the most
difficult time I wasn’t allowed to quit because I am a leader, so it is different from a person
who is just a Guide at home. So, I am responsible, I am accountable. I am also here because I
want more people to come and volunteer, so even when I had the worst of days I had to pick
out the good in them so I had to bring back something positive and tell a story. So it is
different. So it is different for me as a person I wanted to come here so that I can grow more and get better opportunities for me as a person (Bina 2016).

Keane (2014) suggests that ethical action is closely tied to constraint, or a limiting of one’s own willingness to live up to expectations of what the good is. The limits Keane speaks of, are not merely explicit rules (ethics) but also “take concrete form . . . in social interactions with others, who matter to one’s own self-esteem” (12). When challenges rise and participants question what they are doing and contemplate abandoning their course of action, relationships with peers, staff, and locals can persuade against such action. For instance, after a poor experience with her first lesson, Nina (2016) was ready to leave feeling the “teaching” aspect of her trip was not worth the difficulty. She recalls:

I came back to the room and I was super deflated and teary and just couldn’t see how this was going to work. My thought process has always been Cambodia first and teaching second so for me, I was happy to throw in the towel with the teaching after such a negative first experience. But Molly, Paul and Annette really pulled me out of it. Last night at dinner, I had told them about a Public Speaking workshop that I had had with Kym Andrew, a previous BBC journalist and now wonderful life and confidence coach, and how her workshop completely altered my outlook and that I booked this trip not long afterwards, as I felt so empowered and confident. They reminded me of this workshop and just really pushed me to believe that I can do this. And for that, I am so grateful because I was able to pull myself together and teach two lessons 2 hours post-meltdown and while I’m super proud of myself for that, I wouldn’t have been able to do that without their help. (Nina 2016)

The reaction of her fellow volunteer program participants and the value they placed in volunteering gave Nina the support she needed to continue with the teaching that was expected of her. Nina also found that her relationship with her students helped her push through difficult moments. Nina (2016) writes, “it can be hard to motivate yourself, when sleep-deprived and hungry. But the students really love you and that gets you through.” Her responsibility to her students made giving up not a viable option. Dhana (2016) recalls that it was her relationship with the International Volunteer HQ team on the ground that motivated her to do her best work:

Throughout my time there they really cared about all of us like a family and worked really hard to make this experience an awesome one. Even when I decided to change my placement and move to a home stay they went out of their way to make things happen and made sure I was okay with the change. What I really loved about them was, they operate like a family, caring for each other and fix any problems that hinder in the way and help with anything and everything that was needed. In return, I personally felt that it
was important for me to do justice for all the hard work and efforts that they put in and in being apart of mine and every volunteer’s experience there.

How individual volunteers feel about their work is mediated by the relationships they make with fellow participants, program staff, and locals. The encouragement of a peer can help one decide whether an action is positive and worth pursuing, and similarly, a positive response to an action reinforces that action as worthwhile. Participants receive various forms of positive or encouraging feedback through their relationships on the ground and this colours their moral experience of their volunteer work.

3.5.5 SACRIFICE WORTH IT – NOT A VACATION, BUT MORE

Another way that participants talk about valuing their volunteer work is in terms of personal sacrifice. Volunteers speak of hard work and how only through this hard work are positive results accomplished. The fact that volunteer work is not as easy or as comfortable as a normal vacation adds value to it. Grenning (2018) talks of earning blisters and a smile after a hard day of volunteer work:

> Our project included building a privacy wall and a new housing unit for a local man. His living conditions were not ideal and with every batch of cement mixed and every brick laid it was a great feeling to know we were making a difference. This did not come without hard work! At the end of each day some of us had blisters or cuts, sunburns, sore joints, covered in dirt without a doubt, and a smile on our faces.

Similarly, Dos Santos (2015) writes, “I have suffered through sun, wind and rain in the construction site and learned how simple it is to be happy.” Through hard work, Grenning (2018) and Dos Santos (2015) experienced a deeply positive emotion. For Turner (2014), the people who did not listen made it even more of an accomplishment when she made a breakthrough with her education campaign. She remarks, “My favorite saying since I’ve been a volunteer is ‘You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.’ That’s what it sometimes feels like when you’re advising and mentoring—some messages are definitely more warmly received than others. But when the horse drinks, boy it feels good” (Turner 2014). In the volunteering context, through advanced struggle comes a greater reward.

3.5.6 SUMMARY OF THE EVERYDAY
The period of the everyday is where a temporary moral community is being continually established and enacted. Patterns of action are created that serve to normalize encounters across difference. Within this normalized difference, different values and criteria are being used to judge situations. For instance, a late bus may be unacceptable back home but is simply “Ghanaian Time” while in Ghana. The everyday is an ongoing process of trial and error where through the actions and interactions of others, one learns how to act and react. Relationships play an important role in making judgements in these temporary moral communities. The reactions of those deemed close relations impact how an individual interprets a situation. If one receives praise or even a smile from one you have a relationship with, then one judges one’s action as positive. The period of the everyday is the enactment of a temporary moral community; although short-lived, these moral communities are marked by close relationships and patterns of action and judgement.

3.6 DE-ORIENTATION THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The de-orientation period prepares participants to leave the volunteering space and return home. This period can be marked by formal reflection or can simply be a time to say goodbye.

3.6.1 GOODBYES

As participants prepare to leave, various goodbyes signify and conclude different relationships. The goodbye does not imply the relationship is over but signifies a shift in the relationship stemming from the ceasing of close regular contact. Physical proximity is changing and so too is the nature of formed relationships. These goodbyes are made between participants and between participants and locals.

Goodbyes initiated by locals signify to the volunteer the importance of the relationship. Dunlavy (2018) did not even realize her presence had made an impact on one teacher she volunteered with until it was time for her to leave.

On my last day I had a tearful goodbye with my students and the teachers. One teacher who had been rather stand-offish, approached me and another volunteer (she hadn’t ever spoken to me in the months I was there) with tears in her eyes thanking us, saying how happy she was to walk by the mural everyday and see it. Then suddenly all three of us were sobbing together! (Dunlavy 2018)
For Dunlavry, it was only at the conclusion of a daily relationship that she learned what the significance of that relationship had been for the other party. Through the act of crying, the importance of the relationship is enacted. Jochim (2016) also cried when she left the group of kids she was volunteering with:

It ended up being a big hug, farewell and sobbing party but I have never once cried upon leaving a group of kids until this trip. It was a great way to show the relationship we created amongst ourselves.

The fact that Jochim cried is significant for her because it is not something she has done before. Tears are one often-mentioned way of signifying the importance of a relationship between participants and locals; gift-giving is another, as Sutera (2015) acknowledges in the passage below.

My last day teaching, Doreen ran up to me and gave me a special gift... At first, I wasn’t sure what it was. But looking closely I realized that the items inside the bag were treasures to her, and may be considered treasures for many others as well. The bag contained a Dubrovnik pen, half of a pencil, an eraser stub, a necklace, and a small plastic pin. You might be wondering what’s so special about this stuff. One of the things I noticed right away when I began my volunteer program in Zambia was how thrilled the kids were to color and draw, especially the girls. I realized that they were not used to having resources at their disposal all the time such as pens, paper, crayons, and pencils. It was heartbreaking to see how unbelievably talented writers and artists many of the kids were, and yet they had limited access to the tools that allowed them to use these talents. However, it was encouraging to see the way they learn to make do with what they have despite how little that may be. So hopefully that gives you an idea of how meaningful this gift was for Doreen to give me. Something that may seem like garbage to one person can have significant value for another.

When saying goodbye to the locals, one is not only saying goodbye to individuals, but one is also saying goodbye to the identity one had while there. For Nina (2016), this meant saying goodbye to being “teacher Nina,” for this was a role she played as a volunteer but not in her home life.

Just as participants say goodbye to the locals they were volunteering with and for, so too do significant goodbyes take place between participants. The experience of being in a new environment together accelerates the relationship process and close friends are made very quickly. As Taddy (2015) explains, “Travel had turned single-serving friends into partners in adventure. In a rare moment of vulnerability, these good-byes made me choke up.” Similarly, Errington (2015) had very emotional goodbyes with their fellow participants, writing that the
last day was pretty hard, I was dreading saying my goodbyes. I had seen so many goodbyes while I was there, but I didn’t ever want it to be my turn to have to leave. We woke up, took a group photo, and then as my taxi arrived it was my time to say my goodbyes. I was sad saying goodbye to everyone but it’s when it got to Anna I started to cry my eyes out, and I actually didn’t manage to say anything when I was hugging her goodbye... And then as I stopped hugging Anna I looked over at Sammy, another one I knew I would never want to say goodbye to. It’s hard when you spend 70 days with people, living and working together and you get so close. They truly felt like family by that point, and honestly the hardest goodbye I’ve ever had to say to someone.

3.6.3 EMOTIONS—SAD AND LONGING

Emotions evoked in the de-orientation period are often mixed. On the one hand, goodbyes provoke sadness, while on the other hand there is a sense of excitement and longing to return home. Weddle (2014), reflecting on his pending return, realizes that although he longs to be home, he will long to be away again once he is home. He continues,

I am excited to go home. However, I know that the second my feet touch US soil, I will be yearning to go on that next adventure. That is the wonderful vicious cycle of traveling and volunteering . . . wanting to go home and then immediately planning for the next journey. (Weddle 2014)

3.6.3 REFLECTIONS

De-orientation is a time of goodbye, but also a time of reflection. As participants prepare to leave, they often reflect on their experience volunteering as a whole. Schutz and Luckmann (1983) believe that looking back at one’s experience places that experience in a broader context of meaning, and that this context of meaning concerns “the relation between an experience and something else” (3). When looking back on their experience, participants start to connect that experience to their lives back home or to their larger understanding of the world and humanity. For Turner (2014), reflection resulted in the conclusion that her volunteering is connected to much broader efforts. She writes, “I am a piece of the puzzle; one of many in a concerted effort to reduce poverty” (Turner 2014) placing her impact into a wider context.

Departing reflections are often future focused. Volunteers consider how they have changed and reflect on what changes they want to bring into their post-volunteering lives. For instance, Debbie (2015) writes a list of things she has learned and wishes to carry with her into the future:

This is a list of things that I’ve learned, experienced and appreciated a lot while being here, and I hope to continue these in my current and future life. By writing this down, maybe
that’ll spur me into action! I realise some might be culturally relevant, (i.e. speaking to strangers on the tube might get me locked up . . . ) but we’ll see how it goes! **Helping each other out** – the amount of times people have completely gone out of their way to help me is ridiculous. In many cases it was a complete burden on them, but I have no idea what I would have done otherwise. Being all independent and self-sufficient is fine and all, but sometimes people need help! **Sharing** – The people here are so generous, with their time as well as their possessions, no matter how limited they are. Sharing really is caring. At first I felt guilty at receiving things I’d never asked for, but one sure-fire way of dispelling that guilt was by reciprocating. It’s a great way of showing people you care for them. As well as often making things much more enjoyable and fun! **Greeting and smiling at strangers** – strangers are still people! Perhaps they want to chat, perhaps not. Perhaps they desperately need help, and need to find someone to ask. People noticing my confused/helpless/upset expression and looking out for me has helped me in many a case, or at least cheered me up or given me confidence. A smile and a hello really do go a long way. **Listening to people’s stories** – People are so interesting. And people showing an interest in me and my life is really something. I think everyone has got something to say if asked and given the time, and there are many hidden stories and battles out there. I’ve learned so much about people and life just by listening. I hope to learn and listen some more . . . **Noticing things** – I’ve constantly had my eyes and ears open while being here, and while travelling around. I’ve found a whole range of things fascinating, and there’s always something new to notice. Why don’t I do this wandering around my home town?! I’m sure there’s lots I haven’t noticed yet! **Doing nothing** – haha, perhaps not one for my CV. But actually, I’ve learned quite well, and now very much enjoy, just sitting, looking, watching and thinking about life, perhaps on my own, perhaps in people’s company. It’s wonderful!

Debbie has found things to appreciate in her interactions with locals and claims to have learned from these interactions. For Crossley (2012), through the act of appreciating, volunteer tourists can both acknowledge poverty and preserve their own lifestyle. Crossley explains, “by dissolving ignorance and replacing this with gratitude, ‘appreciation’ becomes an ethical end in itself, allowing volunteer tourists to resume their lives back in the West in the knowledge that they have undergone a personal, internal transformation. This removes the onus for volunteer tourists to maintain efforts to combat poverty once they have returned home and because this is a modification of the Self rather than of the Other it is a much more easily attainable resolution” (243). Departing reflections by volunteers typically focused on the self and how one has changed as an individual through the experience of volunteering. For example, Sutera (2014) wrote:

I came back home with the discovery that not only did I teach them, but they taught me. Many of us are so concerned about having the newest car, the latest technology, or the biggest house. In reality, none of these material things really matter. Not in the way that personal connections and relationships with others matter.
Many bloggers talk about how they have changed and how they want that change to stay with them in their everyday lives outside of volunteering. This is not the only conclusion that reflections can bring. For Nina (2016), what she learned is that she does not want to change her life back home. She confesses,

This is a hard post because I think there is an expectation when you do something like this that you come home and you say it’s super challenged you and you found things about yourself that you never knew and while this is all true, it hasn’t been life altering-ly so. I still know that I love my life at home, and I love my family and friends too much to be away for long periods of time. A lot of people on this trip are running from things I think, hoping that Cambodia, and Asia as a whole, will provide them with new careers, new experiences and essentially, new lives; but I’m so happy with my own and feel like it’s time to begin the journey home. (Nina 2016)

This post is hard for Nina (2016) to write because it does not follow the narrative she was expecting. She was expecting to be life-alteringly changed, but instead she simply found that she actually was quite happy with her pre-volunteering lifestyle.

In departing reflections, individual volunteers also compare their experience with the assumed experiences of others. Volunteers reflect on the value they have gained compared to individuals who travelled without the volunteer component. Amanda (2014) enthusiastically concludes:

Thousands of tourists visit SEA every year, but none of them are going to get to see Thailand and Cambodia the way we did! We eased our way into the chaos of Bangkok, mellowed out with monks and “ethical” elephants. We wandered into the countryside of Cambodia long enough to make friends, explore ancient ruins without a tourist in sight and learn about land grabbing or water shortage issues, instead of just getting a great facebook photo of a stilt house by a rice field. We partied with Cambodians in Cambodia (crazy?!?!) and were envied by all the backpackers hanging out with backpacker’s when we told the tale. We sang karaoke, took the broken down bus with the locals and fit 13 people into one tuk tuk instead of four!”

Amanda reflects on how she experienced South-East Asia differently than mere tourists and places inherent value in an experience that is outside of the tourist norm. Leslie Huey (2014) reflects that she could have gone on a vacation for cheaper and with a lot less work but that that trip would have been less rewarding. She reflects:

No it is not a vacation. If you wanted a vacation, you can do it much more cheaply than through a volunteer organization. Yes it is work. It requires planning, executing,
managing, assessing, repeat. Yes it requires some training. Yes, it is hard, but it is worth it in the end. (Huey 2014)

Volunteering is not a vacation; it is hard work, but there is value in that. Through reflecting on how their trips are different than a vacation, volunteers are able to identify the value in their own trips.

3.6.4 Next Adventure—Yearning to Go Back

After a reflection on what has been gained, the next common thread in departure blogs is the yearning to go back. As they prepare to leave, volunteers often speak of their next volunteer trip. Huey (2014) admits:

I am excited to go home. However, I know that the second my feet touch US soil, I will be yearning to go on that next adventure. That is the wonderful vicious cycle of traveling and volunteering . . . wanting to go.

Some volunteers speak of a need to return to where they are leaving, while others simply speak of a need for the next adventure or volunteer experience. The commonality is a longing to return to volunteer work again.

The period of de-orientation prepares individual volunteers to leave the temporary moral community created in the volunteer space. Through goodbyes, individuals put an end to the roles and relationships they formed while in the volunteer space. De-orientation is equally a period of sadness for what is being left and excitement and anticipation for a return to what one has left back home. Once an individual has undergone de-orientation, they are ready for the return to their lives back home.

3.7 Return Thematic Analysis

The period of return is best analyzed in two parts: the initial return and six or more months after the return.

3.7.1 Immediate Return Home
The immediate return home is often described with reference to mixed emotions. On the one hand, it is exciting to return to the life one left behind; and on the other hand, one has created a life while volunteering to which one will likely never return. Errington (2015) recalls:

As soon as I got home on the 5th I cried, I couldn’t believe I wasn’t at camp anymore. I had serious withdrawal from camp for the first week of being home before I readjusted to not being there. It was lovely to have my usual cup of tea, to see my pets, friends and family but at the very same time I left a life behind at camp.

Return culture shock is short lived but real and is especially poignant after longer trips. For Mike and Mary (2018), who had spent three years volunteering in Uganda, their old home of London was at first strange to them but it became familiar very quickly: “the dramatic height changes of London were mesmerizing at first, although like so much of the once so familiar that had then become strange, it quickly became familiar once more” (Mike & Mary 2018).

3.7.2 WELL AFTER RETURN – RETROSPECTIVE JUDGEMENT

Judgement or evaluation is continuous and, as such, can be prospective, immediate, and retrospective (Lambek 2010). Although the moral communities of volunteer tourism are temporary, participants continue to evaluate the actions within that liturgical order after the fact and from outside of the moral community to which they once belonged.

There is a lot of similarity in the narratives told in blogs during the volunteer period. The majority of volunteers speak of their experience positively while it is happening and find a great deal of value in their experience. It is only after the return that a significant divide happens in the interpretation of the volunteer experience. Two camps emerge: those that continue to champion volunteering and those that, once removed by time and space, start to question the value of their volunteering.

Flora (Baker 2018) interpreted her goodbye with the orphanage children she volunteered with in a dark light only months after returning home. She writes in a reflective blog post, “Looking back now I’m really ashamed that I thought spending just a month in an orphanage would be sensible; but I went for it” and she elaborates that:

What followed was a painful realization of how bad it is to give deprived children such a short amount of your time before leaving them forever. They clearly expected me to stay for
much longer than I did, and it was heartbreaking to say goodbye, knowing they didn’t really understand; and, moreover, watching them immediately latch onto another volunteer that had just arrived. (Baker 2018)

Similarly, while Anna Bury (2016) has fond memories of her three volunteering trips to Guatemala, but years after her trips she has come to question her intentions and outcomes. She writes in a medical student community journal:

As a volunteer, I was expected to build a house, serve at the homeless shelter, visit the malnutrition center to feed and play with the kids, organize clothing distributions and harvest vegetables from a large garden for a food drive. To be sure, I was not particularly qualified for any of these tasks. In fact, I likely slowed each of these processes. After a week of hard work, we took relaxing weekend trips to Lake Atitlan, once deemed ‘the most beautiful lake in the world.’ We visited Monterrico, a coastal town known for its black sand beaches. We indulged in food, drinks and shopping. The poverty we witnessed and claimed to improve was juxtaposed with the wealth and gratification to which we were accustomed. At the time it was fun; as I reflect, it seems odd and unsettling. (Bury 2016)

Former overseas volunteer and current vocal critic of voluntourism Biddle (2016) sympathizes with those who have positive memories of volunteering but suggests that one has to take how one is changed personally away from the assessment of volunteer projects. She writes, “Almost every piece I write I am met with the same line of criticism, ‘but it changes my/my child’s life, so isn’t it worth it?’ I’m sorry, but no, that’s not a good enough reason” (Biddle 2016). Years after being a volunteer herself, Biddle (2016) is able to distance herself from the experience. Volunteers place value on their experience based on the individual relationships they built. Biddle (2016) and other critics are disregarding relationships and instead looking at long-term indicators of wellbeing and poverty. The difference of time, for these volunteers-turned-critics, is a difference of perspective from the micro to the macro. Biddle is not criticizing the relationships that changed the individual, but rather the lack of change those relationships caused to social and economic indicators. When in the middle of a moral community, relations of responsibility are mediating how one judges one’s actions. The immediate and positive response of others, both fellow volunteers and locals, colours one’s judgement of one’s action. Once removed from the immediate positive response of others, past action can more easily be judged using more objective and removed factors.
This chapter has shown how moral communities are formed and end through a similar lifecycle in all volunteer trips, and the following chapter will explore how to productively illustrate these lifecycles.
4 Untangling Relations of Responsibility: A Moral Systems Approach

The lifecycle of the moral communities formed by volunteer tourists has been outlined. The lifecycle of a moral community provides the setting for this chapter, which will focus on different ways to present the interactions that create and occur within the lifecycle of a moral community. The question is, how to understand both the individual variety and commonality of moral judgment within these spaces? Every individual has agency within any moral setting, but that agency is complicated by the presence of freedom and responsibility. This tangle of relations of responsibility can be outlined in words through vignettes of experience, but also made visible through mapping or diagramming. Prosser and Loxley (2008) make a case for social science research that goes beyond words, arguing that visual methodologies can “provide an alternative to the hegemony of a word-and-number based academy; slow down observation and encourage deeper and more effective reflection on all things visual and visualisable; and with it enhance our understanding of sensory embodiment and communication, and hence reflect more fully the diversity of human experience (4).”

Laidlaw (2014) has strived to illustrate how freedom is embedded in both ethics and the ethical. Drawing on Foucault’s later work, Laidlaw suggests that for power to exist, and therefore action to be acted on, there must be self-directed conduct that can be influenced by external ideas. In other words, actions and the power to act are embedded in interaction; in the interplay between various actors influencing and being influenced by each other and the context of the interaction. If morality is a system comprised of explicit ethics, the ethical (as an aspect of action), and subjectivities, these components are given life through human interaction.

Human interaction is influenced by morality as a system but not simply reducible to the elements of a moral system (ethics, the ethical, subjectivity). There is always variability of judgement based on the creative combining of different values (Lambek 2015a), which are established through rules and statements, interactions and action, as well as the identities or roles one plays. The results of judgement come into effect through relations of responsibility. The relations of responsibility are the result of judgement and become visible through various reactive attitudes displayed in interaction. Gratitude, resentment, indignation, guilt, shame, pride, forgiveness,
love, hurt, and other reactive attitudes stem from situational considerations of values, and are used to assess responsibility and guide action (Laidlaw 2014). For, “every person acts, and every person experiences the action of others” (Schutz & Luckmann 1983, 7) and thus through action we communicate our own expectations and respond to the moral stances of others.

“As a matter of principle, humanity is precarious: each person can only believe what he recognizes to be true internally and, at the same time, nobody thinks or makes up his mind without already being caught up in certain relationship with others which leads him to opt for a particular set of options” (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 87). A person is the product of all the acts they have been engaged in and in which they have been held accountable by themselves and others, but simultaneously a person is also categorized, both by oneself and others, based on socially shared personages (Lambek 2015a). Personal experience and external labels affect individual judgement, which is itself both affected by and affects the action of others. For example, a young woman from Lesotho volunteering at the World Girl Guiding and Scouting Centre in India, expressed the cultural difficulties she faced when she first arrived as a volunteer (Bina 2016). For Bina, punctuality—although something she recognized as having some value—only mattered to the extent that it served to make people happy. Although at times growing sad at being scolded for making choices that made sense to her, this individual held an administrative position in Girl Guides back home and to live up to this role she felt she needed to always find the positive in a situation and have a useful story or message to tell those waiting at home. The ethical is simultaneously a quality of judgement that is attached to actions and persons. Just as judging and reacting to others is an aspect of life, this ethical quality is also creatively applied to oneself through a continuous process of self-formation or subjectification (Das 2015). Personal experience and external labels affect individual judgement, which is itself both affected by and affects the action of others. Within interaction, an interconnected web is continually formed and reformed between ethics, the ethical, and subjectivities assembling an ever-shifting moral system. The webs that connect these three elements are relations of responsibility. For instance, Bina, the volunteer from Lesotho had responsibilities to live up to the identity of “leader” that came from both herself and those back home, and which she judged based on her interactions with people back home. Additionally, Bina had responsibilities to meet the expectations of her volunteer position supervisors. However, one of the only reasons she cared so deeply about fulfilling these relations of responsibility was that she connected them to achieving the identity
of “leader” that she was trying to maintain. At first, Bina explains that she was constantly torn over what the “right” way to tackle a situation was. Should she focus on guests at the centre at the expense of other values? Or were there objectives that were considered to be a part of the “happiness” of guests, such as completing certain tasks, even if causing some short-term discomfort, that she had not thought of? During her first month of volunteering, Bina had to constantly re-evaluate her ethical judgement of every act, trying to connect it to competing ethics and learn how to maintain her identity as a leader in this new context. As months passed, Bina no longer had these ethical concerns, as she says, it is now “normal” as she now knows how to evaluate her own actions in the context of her volunteer work.

To explore the conceptions of the good that are sustained in volunteer tourism experiences, the changes these conceptions can go through, and how they impact action/reaction, it will be important to recognize that ethics, the ethical, and subjectivities are inseparably entangled within fluid relationships of responsibility. This entanglement can be viewed as a meshwork. Ingold (2015) defines a meshwork as an “entwining of lines” (3). For Ingold, every person is a blob that sends out lines that get tangled and knotted with the lines of others. The knots that form between individuals encompass relationships of responsibility that influence how the individuals judge, act and react. Within each line are different experiences, sets of ethics, and identities. How different lines merge together affects every actor involved. Ingold (2105) points out that even when a knot is untied, there are kinks left in the rope and, as such, when a relationship is ended, both parties are still left with indents based on those relationships.

Sidnell (2010), who turns to everyday talk to locate ordinary ethics, identifies three key points about locating ethics within interactions and action:

1) the ordinary ethics of interaction happen in time—in sequence of action
2) the ordinary ethics of interactions happens together with a host of other goings-on, simultaneously in other modalities
3) the ordinary ethics of interaction happen within particular configurations of participants (138).

Thus, an effective model of ordinary ethics would have to recognize context, show change through time, and illustrate relationships among individuals. I propose a moral systems approach that looks to trace fluid moral systems—identifying both objectified and enacted components and
looking for patterns of action and reaction. This involves not only recognizing the visible and invisible aspects of morality but also how their position in relation to the whole system creates different relations of responsibility.

4.1 HOW TO OUTLINE MORAL SYSTEMS?

To visually show moral systems through relations of responsibility, I will turn to network analysis as a starting point. Carrington and Scott (2011) define social network analysis as “a specific application of graph theory in which individuals and other social actors, such as groups, organizations, and so on are represented by the points and their social relations are represented by the lines” (4). Although this approach is often used for mapping quantitative data, it can also be used to represent qualitative data. Hollestein (2011) recognizes that social anthropologists have long conducted network research with the use of “qualitative data, less structured approaches to data collection, and interpretive methods in describing and analyzing social networks” (404). Instead of looking at class structure or organization theory, as anthropologists have used social network analysis in the past (Hollestein 2011), I will be using the concept of points and lines to show the relationships and identities that affect moral thought, judgement, and action.

To return to Ingold (2010), the points on my social network analysis can be considered blobs with their own knots composed of the various lines that are intersecting with them. The goal is to illustrate a moral system at a single point of time. These networks are a visualization of the moral system showing all the relations of responsibility that affect ethics, the ethical, and identities and are not predictive models that can be used to predict action. Social networks of moral systems are merely a tool to understand the factors that affected judgement and action and not predict it. To recognize that these systems represent action and, as such, constantly change, I will be using different networks to show each major period in the lifecycle of a moral community of a volunteer trip.

To create an accurate social network analysis of a moral system, a great deal of information is needed regarding an individual’s many direct and indirect relationships. Therefore, to demonstrate this method of mapping moral systems, I will be using my own experience as a volunteer at the World Guiding Centre in India, Sangam. The moral system during each period in
the lifecycle of a volunteering trip will be modelled using myself, the researcher, as the primary subject. Although, moral systems would be similar for participants on the same trip, they would not be identical—as their relationships would vary based on their pre-existing identities, experiences, and held values.

The remainder of the chapter will show short vignettes from my experience at Sangam, followed by a diagram visually illustrating the described period. Each period in the established lifecycle of volunteer trips will be displayed both in words and a diagram. At the end, the benefits and potential shortcomings of this methodology of diagramming will be discussed.

4.2 Pre-Departure

For myself, pre-departure was a drawn-out process, occurring painfully slowly and then with sudden speed. I not only had to choose a program and apply, but I also had to have my research explained and accepted. Although most organizations offering international volunteering trips, that have been studied here, claim to have opportunities for a broad range of individuals catering to different ages and levels of experience, the idea of accommodating research proved to be outside of many approached organizations’ comfort zones. At first, I wanted to find the perfect program: one that would allow me to participate and interview a variety of people and have an experience that thousands have already had alongside others experiencing it for the first time. Over time, as the list of outright and eventual rejections grew, I simply wanted to get the chance to experience what I had read about in international volunteer blogs.

As I entered August, and the end of the summer research period loomed ever nearer, I considered abandoning the idea of conducting participant observation altogether but decided to make one last attempt. Using personal connections for leverage, I contacted Sangam, the World Guiding Centre in India, and asked whether I could join their community volunteering program scheduled for mid-September to early October. They were keen to accommodate me, but the situation did not match my carefully constructed research plan. Sangam was more than willing to run the program just for me, and to have staff and long-term centre volunteers from around the world be interviewed, but there would be no one for me to observe and participate alongside; there would be no group for me to initially meet and interact with until the day we departed.
I sent an introductory and proposal email to Sangam, a version of the initial contact letter I sent to every organization I had approached, and simultaneously had a friend of my sister who represents the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts at the UN headquarters in New York put in a good word about my proposal on my behalf. At this point, it was officially time to utilize any personal connections I possessed. To my surprise and relief, I promptly received a reply from Sangam outlining that my request would be reviewed by the team. Three days later, I was told the team would be “delighted” to have me and sent me the formal application package. Only once before, on my journey to set up fieldwork, had I done anything even close to resembling the regular application and pre-departure process. I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop, that is, for the “Oh sorry, the [insert authority here] says that you won’t be able to do it after all” email or phone call.

I had for so long been focused on gaining permission to do my research that, at first, I was taken aback by the standardized application form. Sangam staff wanted to know all about me, not as a researcher or a graduate student but as an individual, as a potential volunteer. They had accepted the fact that I would be performing participant observation and interviews and now wanted to know what I would bring as a participant so that they could tailor their program to me and my skill set, interests, experiences, and non-research goals. As I filled out the form (see Appendix 1), I found myself struggling to determine and then represent relevant aspects of myself. I was a graduate student conducting research, a former Girl Guide who through this process was re-kindling ties with the Guiding community in Canada and internationally, an avid traveller with cross-cultural experience, and a leader with experience managing both groups of adults and children. These are the identities I deemed relevant to the program, and so they are what I chose to share in order to benefit my research endeavours and ease my immersion into the volunteering program.

I had only a few weeks before I was to get on the plane once all of the paperwork had been completed. With the actual trip finally formalized, my anxiety swiftly switched gears; I was doing my field work, but how? I did not have months to stress over the particulars of what was to come, and, although immensely stressful at the time, I think this was a blessing because it prevented me from over-analyzing how I was to analyze my own experience.
At the crack of dawn on Friday, September 16th, 2016, I left my London, Ontario, apartment en route to India. Having “left” for my trip, my pre-departure period was officially over; however, I was yet to arrive. A time in-between locations and identities ensued. In-between moments of bustling—as I checked bags, went through security, boarded and un-boarded planes—my travel day was full of waiting. After several weeks of the craziness of making this last-minute trip work, this was the first time that the reality of what I was doing sank in and I let myself feel excited. There could be no cancelling now. My short pre-departure period, beginning with acting on the intention to participate in a volunteer abroad trip and ending with the departure for precisely that, was marked by planning and preparation, an active working towards something, while the time between periods was a time of inaction. My physical location changed, but as I was being transported, there was nothing other than attempt to rest that I could do to progress forward as a “international volunteer.” Compared to the liminality of having left to volunteer internationally but not actually arrived as such, the time of preparation is a defined period with a purpose and a corresponding identity. The goal, motivated by the desire to actively participate in what I was academically seeking to understand, was to go on an international volunteer trip, and pursuing this goal made me a future volunteer.
Figure 7, above, outlines the various relations of responsibility that existed and were constructed during the pre-departure period. This visual depiction of my pre-departure time highlights two main categories of relationships that affected my action and judgement. The first is with Western University and my roles and responsibilities as an academic student. The role I played with the university as an institution was one of a student. Within the institution, I had more specific relationships with individuals and the institution of the Western Anthropology Graduate Society.
(WAGS). Dr. Walsh was my thesis supervisor, and it was my responsibility to share my research progress with him. This was a mentorship relationship with Dr. Walsh, who provided feedback as I navigated the ethnographic research process. At the time, I was also elected co-president of the Western Anthropology Graduate Society (WAGS) and, as such, was responsible for running the society’s projects and providing the executive committee with leadership. The time of pre-departure was late summer and the main purview of WAGS at this time was to welcome the new graduate students into the anthropology department. My role with WAGS somewhat conflicted with my role as a student, as I both needed to conduct research and be there when the new students arrived. Leaving at the beginning of the school year was an inconvenient time in terms of the WAGS calendar of events, but it was also my last opportunity to perform field research for my Master’s thesis. I judged my research more important but took efforts to ensure I still met my WAGS responsibilities. In the few weeks leading up to my departure, I organized the welcome packages for the new students and made sure I was still in town for the department’s orientation and the WAGS-run social event.

The second category of relationships is with the Girl Guiding world. My relationship as a student was the reason I created new and reached out to old Girl Guides connections. I was reminded of the Tare volunteer program at Sangam by my older sister who has been heavily involved over the years with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). My sister, Emily, had volunteered as a centre volunteer at the World Guiding Centre in London, England, for two summers in a row. Through this volunteering, she had made friends with a woman who was now the Girl Guide and Girl Scout representative at the United Nations. Emily not only reminded me of the Sangam volunteer program, but she offered to put in a good word for me through her United Nations friend. My sister utilized her relationship as a friend to ask for a recommendation for her sister and this friend then used her standing in the WAGGGS organization to recommend to Sangam that they give me a chance to conduct research on site in India. Several sets of relationships were being invoked to get the administration of Sangam to agree to my research. Once Sangam accepted my proposal to conduct research at their centre, they then treated me as a regular Tare and had me fill out the normal application documents and sign the official pre-departure forms.
Having been reintroduced to the world of Guiding by my sister, a world I grew up in and very actively participated in from the age of 5 to 18, I decided to get involved at the local level in London, Ontario. Most Tare program participants are active members of their own country’s Girl Guiding organization. I felt a responsibility to the organization that was helping my research to get involved. This was not mandatory, but something that I felt strongly about. To help the organization that was helping me, I volunteered as a Brownie leader at a unit in London, Ontario. The unit was thrilled to have my help and was excited that I was going to Sangam and would be able to bring my experience back to the group. My relationship to WAGGGS, being accepted as a Tare participant with the acknowledgment that I would be doing research, led me to pursue another relationship, that of local volunteer.

The tangle of responsibilities to the local and international Guiding community, and the University of Western Ontario affected my judgement and thus my actions. I judged joining local Girl Guides to be a good thing to do as the larger organization was greatly helping me and so I volunteered. The fact that my sister had called on her connections to help made me feel extra committed to making this particular research endeavour work. This, alongside the responsibility to my program and supervisor to complete my proposed research, led me to accept a research opportunity that impacted my role as co-president of WAGS. I judged the inconvenience to my role of WAGS Co-President to be a worthwhile sacrifice in the name of my other responsibilities. I however, was still obliged to fulfill my role as WAGS Co-President and so I ensured my pre-departure preparations did not impact my pre-school year WAGS duties of organizing welcome packages, creating a welcome presentation, and organizing a social event.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the pre-departure period is marked by a choice: the choice to volunteer abroad. In my case, this choice was not independently made but was influenced by my relationship with my sister and my role as student and researcher. I chose to reach out to Sangam because of my sister and her contacts. For others, the choice to volunteer might be influenced by friends or family who have volunteered and similarly the location or organization might be influenced by the recommendations of others. I also felt comfortable reaching out to Sangam because I still felt myself to be a Girl Guide at heart, and to prove this self-felt identity, I rejoined the Guiding world as a Brownie leader. Acting on the choice to volunteer abroad also creates new relationships with the host organization. I had no previous communication with Sangam.
and, after the decision to go on their volunteer program was made, it was solidified with a formal agreement with the centre. Choices always occur in webs of relationships—although these various influencing factors are often hidden from view under the guise of independent agency. It was ultimately my decision to contact Sangam; however, without the suggestion of my sister and the knowledge that she had contacts, I never would have known that choice was a viable option. Choices always exist in the context of an individual’s relationships and subjectivities and visually mapping these relations requires one to pay attention to them.

4.2 ARRIVAL

I arrived in India at 9:30 p.m. on September 18, 2016, and I was to be welcomed as a community program participant twice that evening. The first welcome was in the form of a sign with my name on it and the title Sangam Community Programme, held by a driver who stood in the long line of drivers waiting to pick up clients. After a long car ride through Mumbai and onto Pune, I was greeted again at the centre itself. The second welcome came from a volunteer who was waiting up into the early hours of the morning for me. This welcome was brief as we were both anxious to get to bed, but also friendly. I was given a second copy of the program agreement to sign and a very abbreviated tour that ended in my bedroom.

After going to bed in the early hours of the 19th, I woke up later that same morning and joined the rest of the current residents for breakfast. My main goal for the next few days was to avoid jet-lag and to get right into the swing of things. At breakfast, I met a few of the current Sangam volunteers and one staff member. I was told the “family” was small right now, as the manager and assistant manager were both out of the country and would be arriving back over the next few days. Additionally, two volunteers were feeling ill and another had their day off and was sleeping in.

I received an orientation schedule in a small bag of goodies waiting for me on my bed when I arrived. The first thing in my schedule was simply called “Welcome,” and as I waited in the sitting area in the entry hall, I wondered what the welcome and other even less descriptive segments would entail. As I examined the schedule, I noticed that everything was colour coded. At first I thought it was merely rainbow writing, as a single word would be multiple colours with colours switching every few letters. However, there was no set pattern to the colour
switching. Attached to the schedule was a document titled “Community Programme Syllabus,” which contained a list of the same eight objectives found on my Programme Agreement, each in a different colour. It appeared that everything was planned according to the program objectives. My initial thought was, wow this is organized and incredibly useful for me. What I was supposed to be getting out of every aspect of my day, including tea times, was clearly spelled out for me. Not only was this program aware of its goals but it openly presented those goals to participants. I greatly appreciated this, not only as it was interesting to know the intended purpose for my research, but because I always like to know what I should be trying to get out of something and what I should pay attention to or think about. I find that when I have goals, even really broad ones, it is easier for me to fully engage in and get the most out of an activity. For example, I rarely just read an article or academic book but instead have certain objectives or areas of focus in mind. According to the schedule and syllabus, for instance, chai time was not merely a snack or break to replenish energy but meant to help participants “gain an international experience,” and “share the international friendship that Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting offers” (Girl Guides of Canada 2018). After participating in a chai, which is always optional and happens every day, I have learned that it is one opportunity for everybody at Sangam, from local staff to event participants and everyone in-between, to mingle and socialize.

The welcome turned out to be a very intimate affair. All the staff and volunteers who were on for the day, and not ill, joined me in the gymnasium-sized event room. We all sat on pink cushions placed to form a circle. The Community Relations Manager who is in charge of the Community Programme introduced herself and explained that she would be the one working closest with me during my stay. Next, we went around the cushion circle telling a little about ourselves, everyone saying what they did at the centre and going through their personal “Guiding or Scouting” story. When my turn came, I explained that I was looking forward to working with the community but I also was there to gain hands-on experience related to the research I was doing. At this point, I also mentioned that I was hoping to interview them all at some point during my stay if they were interested. I was aware that they had all been informed of my research ahead of time. Of course, I also highlighted my 13 years of Guiding as a girl member and that as of a few weeks ago I was now helping to run a Brownie unit in London, Ontario. When introductions were finished, it was time for me to be pinned. As I displayed the Guiding hand sign (left hand at level of heart with three fingers raised), an official Sangam pin was put on my shirt. As with most Guiding gestures,
the handshake has symbolic significance dating to the start of the movement. As laid out on the WAGGGS (2018) website, “the Founder suggested a Left Handshake to recognize other members of the Movement and it is still used widely. When asked to explain the origin, Lord Baden-Powell related a legend told to him in West Africa: two hostile, neighboring communities decided to try to live together in peace, and so they flung down their shields, which were carried on the left arm, and advanced, unprotected, to greet each other with their left hands extended in trust and friendship.” Three raised fingers, as in the three prongs of the Guiding/Scouting trefoil represent the three elements of the Guiding/Scouting promise: 1) to be true to one’s duty—now conceptualized as being true to oneself, one’s faith/beliefs, and one’s country; 2) to do one’s best to help others; and 3) to know and obey the Guiding law (WAGGGS 2018). The significance of this gesture was not stated at this time, as it was implicitly understood that all who stood in that circle, as members of a Guiding organization, were well versed in the action.

Once I was pinned, the director of the Community Programme and I were left alone to complete the next part of my schedule entitled, “Ready for the Stars Session.” This session was presented to me as a way to get ready for being a “Tare” or community volunteer. It was just the two of us; so instead of a formal lesson, we had a conversation around the information to be conveyed in the session. Originally started in 2004 to offer something for young people seeking international experiences during a gap year, the program has expanded and adapted to cater to any individual, of any age, who wants a well-organized cultural experience and a chance to engage with one of Sangam’s long-standing community partners. Sangam sends week-long event participants on a one- to four-day volunteering project with local organizations that in some way work towards one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and fit with core Girl Guide values.

After a basic history of the program, we moved on to discussing its objectives and aims. This was directly building on the information available on the website and Community Programme Agreement. Sangam, it was stressed, is a member of WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts) and, as such, all of its programs fall under the organization’s broad mission “to enable girls and young women to develop their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world” (WAGGGS 2018). Within that purview, the specific aim of this program was described as, “to work with participants to develop community leadership skills and to
strengthen community partners’ capacity to make an impact” (Sangam 2018). So the “potential” this program targets is community leadership skills, and the goal is to encourage participants to act as responsible citizens of the world by helping community partners to make an impact. This was broken down for me into the eight objectives, and we went through each one—alternating reading them aloud and then discussing what they meant.

The eight objectives that each Tare should be working on are

1. **Gain valuable work experience and life skills such as leadership (Red)**

2. **Learn About WAGGGS, Its MOs [Member Organizations], themes, projects, regions and world centres (Orange)**

3. **Share the international friendship that Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting offers (Brown)**

4. **Support WAGGGS by raising Sangam’s profile in the local community (Green)**

5. **Build the capacity of Sangam’s community partners (Blue)**

6. **Experience the unique culture of India, through its traditions, history and people (Dark Purple)**

7. **Gain an International experience (Light Purple)**

8. **Be prepared to represent Sangam’s community program and WAGGGS and be more involved in your own MOs (Pink)** [Colour coding adapted from original document]

As we went through all eight objectives, I began to silently sort through them in my mind—developing three categories of objectives based on impact, namely: impacting local communities, impacting Sangam and WAGGGS, and impacting the participants/volunteers. At that moment, it was clear to me that the objectives were a mixture of gaining and giving, following the basic premise that through building individual capacities and providing them with opportunities, a wider impact will be made through the actions of those individuals. I was told that these objectives would be revisited at the halfway point and again right before I left. Every check-in, I was told, would assess where I was at with the objectives and where I might need some extra
support to fulfill them. These objectives moved from the abstract periphery, where I placed them initially, to the forefront. What at first appeared to be sporadic use of colouring, was in fact a purposeful way to communicate the specific objectives one should be thinking of during any given orientation activity. The specifics I was searching for were to come from how, under the guidance of the Community Relations Manager, I chose to address the eight objectives.

The Community Relations Manager spoke of both the eight objectives and the whole Community Programme, with great passion. Later that first day, a Sangam volunteer described the program as the Community Relations Manager’s “baby,” and another called it her “thing.” The Community Relations Manager, in contrast to the majority of higher-level staff who are international, is a local staff member. As an active member of the Pune community, she manages existing ties with community organizations and works to forge new ones. After two days with the Community Relations Manager, my impression was that she was a kind and thoughtful woman who simultaneously pushes people to be independent and grow while also nurturing and supporting them. Although she would never come with me to my site, she was to act as my guide through the Tare experience, checking in and doing debriefs with me on a daily basis.

The “Ready for the Stars” session ended with some homework. I was instructed to write a letter to myself that would be kept until I left. This was not the first time I had written a letter to myself, nor even the first time on an international community-based program. In 2011, I went on an Operation Groundswell “backpacktivist” trip to Ghana, West Africa. I recently found and reread a letter I wrote and had mailed to myself at the end of that program. I found segments very cliché and even cringe worthy. I could not believe that I had actually written those things. All I remembered about the Operation Groundswell letter before rereading it was that I felt it was a deep reflective experience at the time. As I tried to write this new letter, I kept on thinking, but what will it read like in a year’s time? In the end, I reflected on that in my letter and talked about the complicated tangle of goals I had for this experience. On the one hand, I wanted to fully engage in the program and be open to any personal growth, learning, and reflection that occurred. However, at the same time I wanted to focus on being observant and try to understand how the program was structured and worked.
The scheduled afternoon activities were tours of Sangam and the Pune neighbourhood surrounding the centre. The napkin bag and meal ticket system that I completely ignored at breakfast and lunch was explained to me, and I learned how to sign up for sit-in or take away meals. My time as “naive” newcomer was swiftly coming to an end. The property turned out to be bigger than I thought. Behind the main buildings that encircled a large swimming pool, there was a massive field for camping and a platform for large events. Additionally, there were also two different gardens, a gazebo, and a playground. I was the only one on the tour and my guide laughed that, although I would be a resident and part of the family, she had to read off the sheet and give me exactly the same information. After the tour, I had to sign the resident agreement. The agreement was explained to me as family rules and that “residents might not always get along, but they had to live with each other like a family.” Similarly, I was told that if I needed something essential like a water bottle or flashlight, I could borrow it from another resident as that’s what “family members do.”

Repeatedly throughout this first day, everyone highlighted that I was both a Tare and a Sangam Family Member/Resident. These titles were frequently compared to others such as Guest, Participant, and Sangam Volunteer. It became clear that Sangam had its own system of human organization and a distinct language to go along with it. As a potential wearer of multiple hats, my role in the system fluctuated based on who I was interacting with and how they categorized me in the moment.

My position as Sangam family member and as a community volunteer was at times hard to differentiate from that of other family members/residents who were Sangam volunteers, but my identity was clear and easier to negotiate in relation to a guest. On the day I arrived, alongside paid staff and Sangam volunteers, there was also an independent guest staying at the centre. Throughout that first day, I ate meals with her and we shared many conversations. We shared a name (Sarah), a hair colour (red), and a home country (Canada). Despite these similarities, we were on two very different trips to India. This “Sarah” worked in information technology (IT) and was on a six-week trip with her Canadian employer to develop a project with a local Indian company. She had been living in a city a few hours away on the coast and everything she did before coming to Sangam was paid for by her company and therefore had to follow their strict guidelines. In order to spend two days in Sangam, she had to seek special permission because it
broke the company policy of always travelling with another company employee from Canada. The company put her and her colleagues up in a resort-style hotel, provided them a massive daily stipend, and required that they take private cars everywhere. During her two days in Sangam, IT Sarah broke a lot of her employer’s rules. She was allowed and encouraged to explore the local neighborhood and was taken on a tour of Laxmi Road where she rode in both rickshaws and busses. Sarah told me she came to Sangam to take pictures and collect resources for her teenage daughter who was an avid Guider, but that she was unexpectedly getting to see a different side to India, a more local side. Interacting with this “independent guest” solidified my identity as a “Community Volunteer” through contrast. Our expectations of our time in India and the expectations Sangam staff had for us were markedly different. I was a member of the family and thus was expected to help out, and in return I was rewarded with more freedom.

In many respects, the second day of orientation was a repeat and direct add-on to the first. The program session in the morning was called “Reach for the Stars,” as opposed to the previous day’s “Ready for the Stars,” and was a review of the Tare objectives followed by a conversation about my specific volunteer placement site. I had already visited the website to learn about my site, which was Tara Mobile Crèche, so the factual information was not new. What I gained was an experiential account of what the site would be like. The Community Relations Manager’s assistant, who is also a local living with her family just minutes from the centre, kept repeating that I would have such a “good time” and that “it is great the appreciation you get from the children and staff.” The rest of the morning was independent time for me to look at the centre’s resources and plan activities for the first few days on site. It was suggested that I mainly watch on my first day at site but to have colouring and a few games ready just in case.

The Tara Mobile Crèche offices were located on the second storey of a large rectangular multi-use building and we had to ask for directions as there were no signs. After warm introductions, I was asked to sit, and my new contact went straight into talking about the program and my particular site. The organization operated in construction labour camps all over the city and many other cities throughout the country. After this repeat of information (I did not mind the repeat as I now can recite from heart everything about the organization), the conversation shifted to me and the work I would do. She had read that I was a Master’s student and reflected that I was the only volunteer at the site at the time. Since I had the skills and would not be working with others, she
proposed that I not only run fun activities for the kids and assist the teachers, but that I do some research for the organization. She asked that I come up with a theme about the program or the community and collect data around it in order to write a very short formal paper or report. I asked, what about? but she was insistent that I was to see and decide for myself. This report, she explained, would be more useful to the organization as it could be shared with the board and donors and could provide insight that would help them keep track of the project site. The organization was constantly expanding and adapting based on the current “holistic” needs of the children at different construction sites, and she thought this would help in that aim. I agreed, as this request sounded reasonable. It would be more work than expected, but it was also what would be of use to the organization. This is what the organization wanted and I had the ability to do it, so I agreed and added significant work to my agenda. Having met with the organization, I felt I was now actually a Tare, my role with the community having been outlined.

At the close of day two, I felt truly oriented; however, there was still the relationship with the actual staff and children I was to be engaging/working with to be solidified. The first day on site was to be an observation day. I was to spend the regular Tare work day (10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.) on the site to get a feel for how things were done and where and when. To ensure that I was comfortable on the first day, the assistant was to join me for the morning. She would introduce me to the Crèche teachers in the local language and clarify my hours and days with them. Slightly after 9:30 a.m. (running just a tad late), the two of us got into a rickshaw that had been arranged to pick us up from outside the centre, and we were off. The trip took about 25 minutes but I was told it would only be 15 minutes in better traffic. To get into the site, the rickshaw turned into a road marked “Construction Site.” Several guards stood along this road and on either side of the road there was a corrugated metal fence. The rickshaw dropped us at the wall with a sign saying “Construction Site School.” The actual Crèche was hidden from view until you passed through the fence and turned a corner. Stone steps led right up to the school which was a corrugated metal rectangle adorned with colourful paintings of animals and flowers. Inside the school were more paintings and handmade garlands hung from the ceiling (see figure 11 and 12).
Figure 12 OUTSIDE TARA MOBILE CRÈCHE

Figure 13 INSIDE TARA MOBILE CRÈCHE
As soon as I entered the building, the children stopped what they were doing, stood up and said, “Namaste,” putting their hands together and bowing in a local formal hello. I said, “Namaste,” and bowed in response. I then moved into the school’s second room and repeated the action.

After the kids were fed and washed, the teacher asked, “Activity?” I shook my head and said, “Observe today” and pointed to my eyes. She nodded and smiled gathering the kids in the circle and starting some signing games. I followed along as best I could trying my best to accurately repeat the local language—playing the part of the kids. After several songs, the teacher turned to me and said, “Sarah song.” I froze. I know a lot of silly children’s, songs but I frantically tried to think of one with minimal English. I went with “Ram Sam Sam” and even did the actions. It is not a repeat-after-me song, and the kids/teachers alike just stared at me. I got a couple of giggles when I slammed my rear on the ground, but not much. At the end, the teacher clapped, encouraging the kids too as well, even though it was clearly a disaster.

The teacher did not directly ask me to lead a song again that day, but while kids were filing back in from a bathroom break, the teacher was absent for a few minutes. The kids quickly started to wander and I knew I needed to get their attention and interest or risk losing them to chaos. I quickly started the song “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” The English was just sound for them, but they got the actions and enthusiastically went along. I did around ten different actions before the teacher returned and smiled. Despite the lack of English, body language made it clear when an activity was successful or not.

This marked the end of my orientation as a Tare, but Tare was not the only role I was playing, and throughout the next week my orientation into my various potions continued. I was still to be oriented into the social hierarchy of the Sangam family, as well as the much broader organizational family.

I had two main introductions to my role as a peer resident of Sangam. First, I was invited to the volunteer house to watch TV. I was told that there had been a meeting about whether I would be allowed in the volunteer house as I was a Tare and not a centre volunteer. While we laughed and watched bad American television, the functional difference between a Tare and a Sangam
volunteer was explained to me. Although both were residents, their relationship to the centre was explained to be very different. Tares were paying for the experience and therefore were thought to be able to have more expectations of the centre. On the other hand, Sangam volunteers were free labour who, in exchange for helping to run the centre and all its programs for paid guests, received room and board for free and most of their airfare paid for. Sangam was home for Tare and Sangam volunteers but was also Sangam volunteers’ place of work.

My second introduction was more intimate, and involved an outing with Emily, a centre volunteer. Emily was from the United States and was around my age. She took me, via rickshaw, to a local mall and a bar that was serving half-off Strawberry Daiquiris that day. Together, these two experiences mark the first instances where I felt like I was making friends and interacting with individuals as peers.

Days later, I was once again welcomed, this time as an official guest at Sangam. This was my most formal welcome and took place alongside a large group of visitors from Japan and two Sangam volunteers who had just arrived. There was a short ceremony where we were given flowers and marked with a Diwali, two traditional signs of being welcomed as an honoured guest in India. Everyone wore Guiding uniforms from their own countries as a sign that we were all sisters together in the global Girl Guiding community. Every guest was very briefly acknowledged and welcomed with the flower garland and a mark on the forehead. Although there were many people, the ceremony felt very intimate and the individual attention—despite being only a few seconds in length—made me individually feel welcome and part of a larger community. I was told the whole point of the ceremony was to officially become a member of the community of Sangam guests of all types: centre volunteers, Tares, and short-program visitors. It felt like joining an exclusive club through the simple gesture of being given flowers the same way as many had before me and would after me. It was a very simple performative action that made me not just someone staying at Sangam but part of a community of Sangam guests. For me, the period of orientation was not a single-bounded period of time, but in fact occurred in several parallel but distinct periods—each resulting in my acquisition of a different identity and my readiness to play particular roles.
FIGURE 10 ARRIVAL PERIOD RELATIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Key:
- Person
- Institution
- Primary Subject
- Relationship to person or institution pointed at
The arrival period forms a much more complicated diagram (see figure 8) as there is the introduction of multiple new relationships and identities forged through the acts of welcoming and introduction.

The first relationship to form when I arrive in India is a simple one. A taxi driver signals that I am his patron through a sign and a relationship of patronage begins. The sign further complicates my identity as it identifies me specifically as a Tare. With that sign, I am officially a Tare and not a soon-to-be Tare. Through the sign, a new identity is enacted. The taxi driver only knew to call me a Tare because he was hired by Sangam and that is how Sangam viewed me. The identity of Tare is reinforced through all the interactions I have in the next 24 hours. From the volunteer who welcomes me, to the director of the Community Programme, to a short-term guest of Sangam, everyone acknowledges me as a Tare.

Tare is not the only significant new identity I gain in the arrival period. When I arrive at Sangam, I am welcomed by the Sangam volunteer Amahle who has stayed up to greet me. Amahle welcomes me as a Tare and as a resident of Sangam. She has me sign an official code of conduct outlining the expected behaviour I must show as someone staying at Sangam. This document is a code of ethics, showing directly what rules I most follow. The difference in location affects the meaning of the document from a set of rules I will have to follow in the future to guidelines of how I must act in the present.

The next morning, I am officially welcomed and pinned as a Tare. The receiving of the pin is a physical display of my new identity and the act of receiving it was an acceptance of that role. At this time, I also introduce myself as a graduate student and as such formally establish my identity as a researcher. After the formal welcome, the Community Program Director and I sit down and establish our relationship. She makes it clear that she is a mentor and resource for me. If I have any problems with my placement she is the person I am to turn to. It is also established that I will be accountable to her and I am to check in with her on a weekly basis.

My role as Tare is further fleshed out with a meeting with my host organization, Tara Mobile Crèche. At this meeting, my specific role as a teacher and as a researcher for the organization is outlined. The role of teacher was one I was already aware of, but the role of researcher was unexpected. This second role carried the expectations of targeted action on my behalf and the
writing of a report. What it meant to be a successful Tare was adjusted by my relationship with the representative of Tara Mobile Crèche.

My role as Tare was further defined by my introduction to the teachers and students of the crèche. They welcomed me formally with a namaste as a volunteer—a role that was temporary, as opposed to the role of teacher. Within minutes of observing the crèche, it was clear that the level of English was very minimal to the point of nonexistence in many of the teachers and students. The lack of English immediately characterized how we would communicate throughout our relationship. Gestures and facial expressions became the primary forum of communication between myself and the crèche’s students and teachers. The lack of spoken communication did not prevent the teachers from making their expectations clear. I was gestured at expectantly after the Kindergarten teacher finished a song, which was a clear invitation to sing a song of my own. The children’s confused reactions to my song, “Ram Sam Sam” clearly indicated that the song was not a success and did not meet their expectations. Later in the day when I sang “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and played hand games, the reaction of smiles and giggles was a clear sign of success. I was never specifically told what a “good” activity was, but I could gauge from the students’ reactions whether an activity was deemed good or not. This started a process of trial and error that would last the duration of my time as a volunteer.

In the arrival period, I also gained the role of housemate. This role was first given to me when I arrived and was greeted by a fellow housemate. On my first afternoon, a tour solidified my role as a member of the Sangam family and the ethics attached with this role were outlined. I was to treat fellow residents as family; I could rely on them but most importantly, I was to treat them with kindness and respect. My role as housemate was further solidified by the sharing of meals and public spaces, such as washrooms. The act of sharing meals and space made us housemates just as much as the signing of the resident agreement did. Emily, a volunteer from the United States, was the first to become more than a housemate. She clearly invited the relationship of friendship by inviting me to drinks on one of my first days at Sangam. The conversation went from polite to more personal and established a relationship outside of the imposed one of housemates. Relationships of friendship would form more slowly and without a single indicating moment with other housemates.
In addition to having my roles at Sangam established, the roles I did not occupy there were also made clear. For example, I was not invited to participate in the morning meetings, and this separated me from those who worked at Sangam as staff or volunteers.

The act of welcoming creates new relationships and with these new relationships comes new subjectivities and expectations. One’s immediate relationships are new and thus nothing is ordinary or known. Creating new relationships is joined by a period of creating new norms and becoming familiar with how to interact with people and the new environment. Therefore, the arrival period is a time where ethics are made explicit and one is learning how to incorporate these new rules and values into action. The relationships and subjectivities that are created in the arrival period are not fleeting but are meant to create the foundation for the everyday period. I was welcomed as a Tare by a taxi driver, but it took several days of instruction to learn how to act and live as a Tare. With each new relationship I made in which my primary identity was a Tare, my new role was solidified. Thus, the arrival period is a time of creation and learning where ethics are learned and subjectivities are established.

4.4 The Everyday

After the first four days, I had my routine down. I woke up and got ready for the day before I took breakfast with the rest of the residents. Promptly after breakfast, I would make my packed tiffin lunch in the kitchen and then move my name to “Out” on the residence board before waiting for my rickshaw. I rode with the same driver every morning and afternoon, and we quickly developed a pattern of friendly chitchat where I would talk about life in Canada and he would tell me a bit about his family. Upon pulling up beside the familiar “Construction Site School” sign, I would immediately make my way to the Kindergarten room. On the second day of visiting the crèche site, it was decided that I would spend the mornings with the Kindergarten class, and then after lunch with the rest of the teachers I would provide recreational activities for the school-aged children who had just returned from local public schools. After finishing the recreational activities, I would return via the same rickshaw to Sangam. I would arrive just in time for “chai,” which was an afternoon snack served with local-style chai tea. The afternoon and evening were for program planning and collecting my notes and thoughts from the day. Late afternoons and evenings were also when I would interview centre volunteers. Dinner was with
the family, or could now be taken out if I told the kitchen in advance that I would not be there. The evening was time for a swim or other forms of socialization.

Every day at the crèche site was different but similar. I interacted with the same teachers and students daily and even at the same times of the day. It was my job to prepare activities: one activity for the Kindergarten class and about an hour-and-a-half of activities for the school-aged children. I drew heavily on my own experience in program planning for children, five years as a day camp counsellor, and one as a day camp supervisor, and also used the resources at my disposal. Sangam was constantly being given donations of craft supplies, games, and colouring books from the centre’s international guests. My largest challenge was not coming up with ideas but executing them through the language barrier. The Kindergarten students were a lot harder to communicate with and I often sought to visually explain my activity to the teachers so they could explain to the students. For example, one day I brought a parachute and physically shook and moved with the parachute showing the teacher how I wanted the students to interact with it. I could not easily communicate with the Kindergardeners directly, as they had a harder time understanding my miming and facial cues. Part of this difficulty was simply that the facial cues were different. For instance, a nod of the head did not mean “yes” for these children; instead, a quick side-to-side motion meant “yes.” The teachers and older students, having had more exposure to foreigners and especially foreign media, were better able to interpret my attempts at communication. I found I was able to teach whole games and new songs to the older kids, despite the language barrier, as they were eager to copy and quick to pick up on the basic concepts of games.

Although I developed a routine and was able to communicate my supplementary activities to the teachers, the day did not always go as planned, and once I could not even pinpoint why. One morning, the Kindergarten teacher had the idea of creating a tree out of hand prints. I thought it was a good idea and said I would bring the supplies the following day. I brought the supplies and although excited at first, the Kindergarten teacher grew distressed. I saw her talking with another teacher in the local language. I was making faces with the young children and only caught a glimpse at the two teachers’ faces, which were growing more and more distraught. I briefly saw the Kindergarten teacher cry before she plastered a smile on her face and did the next scheduled activity with the children. The time for my activity came and we made the tree by tracing all the
kids’ hands to create leaves (see figure 14). We finished the tree without any problems, but the Kindergarten teacher still looked upset. Once the kids had left and it was time for the teachers’ lunch, we spread out the cloth as normal and all seemed well. Partway through the meal the Kindergarten teacher clearly started talking about the tree as she mimed tracing kids’ hands. All the teachers started talking rapidly and loudly. I could not follow a word. Occasionally, I was pointed at, but no one attempted to communicate directly to me. Eventually, another teacher went to a drawer and took out a similar tree craft and taped it to the wall. Both trees were now displayed on the wall, and the commotion ended. I looked at both trees and said, “Good” and smiled. The teacher appeared proud of her tree, pointing and smiling with me. I think it all ended well and am unsure whether the crying was even about the tree or another separate incident that was happening at the same time. I will never know exactly what was said about the infamous tree and its doppelganger project, but the truth of the matter is that I was only peripherally involved. This incident showed me that my relationship was not on the same level as the ones the other teachers had with each other, and although we were developing a relationship, the communication barrier prevented us from having complex discussions or arguments.
Despite continued minor miscommunications, I began to develop a relationship with the teachers of the crèche. Every day, I would have lunch with them while the children spent their parents’ short work break with them. We would spread out a blanket and all bring out our various tiffins, which are Indian-style lunch boxes with multiple tiers. The teachers started to include me in the conversation, instead of simply speaking around me. They would use gestures and their very minimal English to ask questions such as, “Sister? Brother?” I was able to establish that I had one sister and that she was a teacher like they were. Whenever I successfully shared a new piece of information about myself everyone was so thrilled, it was a little relationship accomplishment that we had successfully communicated something.

In the early days of my stay, I was continuously learning about and solidifying my role in the Sangam community. The Sangam World Centre volunteers chose how they would characterize me. As I began to develop friendships with the volunteers, I was invited to more and more outings with them. I was even invited to a training evening, even though I did not need to be trained in how to run the type of excursion they would be discussing. The point of inviting me was simply that they thought I would be interested. Other evenings, we would go to the cinema to watch a Bollywood or Western film. As I started to become friends with the volunteers, I also started to interview them. Most of them were quite excited to be interviewed as they thought it was an opportunity to share their personal experiences and let their opinions be known about their volunteering experience. Interview lengths varied from thirty minutes to nearly two hours depending on how chatty the individual was.

This period of the everyday was characterized by my having a routine and established identities and relationships, which I enacted on a daily basis.
Figure 12: Everyday Period Relations of Responsibility

Key:
- Person
- An Institution
- Primary Subject

Relationship to person or institution pointed at
The above diagram (Figure 9) shows the relations of responsibility within the everyday period of volunteering. This diagram contains most of the same relations as in the arrival diagram (Figure 8) but becomes more complex as roles and relationships are added and specified.

After visiting the crèche site a couple of times, my role there became routinized. My relationship with the crèche teachers became one of volunteer and co-worker. A purely social role was also established. Every day, I was invited to take lunch with the crèche teachers and share my tiffin (packed) lunch with them. My identity as lunchmate included me in the social day of a crèche teacher and, as such, was a sign that I was welcomed as a helper and as a peer. The lunchmate relationship was always a pleasant but strained role, as I could only participate in the primary lunchmate activity of socialization through a few words, facial expressions, and hand gestures. We were able to communicate several facts about each other, such as my having a sister and living in Canada; however, communicating always required a fair amount of work by all parties involved. The role of lunchmate valued sharing both socially and physically (through the sharing of food). I was accepted as a lunchmate by my sitting with the teachers on their mat but also by the offering to partake in the group’s food. Everyone brought something and shared at least part of that something with the rest of the group. Once this value of sharing was clear through the actions of the group, I started to pack extra nuts and dried fruit in my tiffin to share with the group, an action that was warmly received with smiles and words such as “thank you” and “I like this.”

My other role among the teachers was as a volunteer and this came with the expectation that I would come prepared to lead at least one activity with both the Kindergarten class and the school-aged kids. This role was formally established in the arrival phase but was reinforced by smiles and kind words at the end of every activity I performed. I was also prompted daily with the expression “Activity!” when the Kindergarten teacher felt it was a good time for me to step up. The dual nature of my identity among the teachers was reinforced through positive feedback and daily routinized action.
My relationships with Sangam personnel also continued to develop. Meetings with the director of the Community Programme became routinized as I met with her every day for a quick check-in. The relationship of mentor-mentee was reinforced through these daily check-ins and through a more thorough halfway-through assessment meeting. My role as Tare continued to separate me from Sangam volunteers through the expectations that were placed upon us. Several times I offered to help set up for an event and although this action was met with appreciative thanks, I was never asked to help nor expected to simply do so. Helping with centre activities was positive behaviour, not an expected behaviour. Sangam volunteers, on the other hand, would be chastised if they did not complete the tasks they were assigned or were seen to be slacking and not completing tasks in a timely manner. Bina, a Sangam volunteer from Lesotho, told in me in an interview that the expectation to be timely clashed with her own values and especially her prioritizing the wellbeing and happiness of the guests above any other centre task regardless of how time sensitive. She stated that she was often talked to and reminded of her responsibilities as a Sangam volunteer and her duty to make sure all programming occurred in a timely manner. In contrast to Sangam center volunteers, as a Tare my job was my work at the crèche and not at the centre itself.

Despite the separation in duties, I grew closer socially with the centre volunteers as we continued to share meals and spare time together. We became social peers or equals with the same expectations as housemates as the volunteers had among themselves. I was expected to not only be respectful of others but to socialize with them. The expectation of socialization quickly turned into friendships as we continued to communicate. It was a lot easier for friendships to form between volunteers and myself than it was between crèche teachers and myself because of the ease in communication. Although our backgrounds greatly varied, the volunteers and I shared an understanding and command of the English language. Soon, we chose to spend time together outside of the required meal times. I was invited to training endeavours as both a friend and a researcher and was warmly welcomed into the volunteers’ hangout space as a friend despite not being a centre
volunteer. My identity as friend physically opened up the spaces, namely the volunteer hangout space, that I was allowed to enter.

Another role, that of researcher, was also enacted during the everyday period as I started to conduct interviews with Sangam volunteers. Although not changing in nature, my relationship with Western University continued to play an important role in my judgement and decision making. My research responsibilities were always at the back of my mind and ensured that I agreed to any opportunity presented to me. For example, one afternoon after volunteering at the crèche I was invited to go on volunteer training walk. I was very tired and this opportunity was not directly related to my position as a Tare; however, I felt it would give me a chance to further interact with site volunteers and gain insight into their lives and so I felt I had to go despite being exhausted. My research role added value to this experience that did not come from my role as Tare.

The everyday period is where the moral community established in the orientation period is being enacted and through doing so relations are strengthened and added to. The diagrams clearly show this process, as the everyday diagram (Figure 8) directly builds off the orientation diagram (Figure 7).

4.5 De-Orientation

Just as I did not receive a single-bounded welcome, my goodbye was similarly split up with each ritual of goodbye connected to a different type of relationship. The first site of farewell was the crèche, as my last time on site was several days before I left. The teachers took the lead at organizing my goodbye, and had all the students at the end of each class say “Goodbye” and “Thank you.” From the teachers, specifically, I received a lovely handmade card and a bouquet of handmade paper flowers. I hugged each of the teachers before I left, and I thanked each one of them.

On my way back to Sangam, I said goodbye to my rickshaw driver who had driven me to work every day and had even come and picked me up early on a day I had been sick. He had brought his niece with him that last trip with him and asked if the three of us could snap a picture. I did
not take any photos of the children as it is against Tara Mobile Crèche policy for volunteers to take such pictures.

My next goodbye was from the Sangam volunteers. They decided to take me out to dinner and a club to celebrate my time there. This was a very informal goodbye and took place off Sangam grounds. It was clear that by taking me to a restaurant and club they were saying goodbye to a friend and not merely a guest at Sangam. The conversation was casual and at times quite goofy and at the club all the volunteers let loose as it was one of the few settings where they were not representing the centre.

The formal centre goodbye came on the actual last day of my stay, some mere hours before I was to take the taxi to Mumbai and my plane back to Canada via New Jersey. This formal goodbye took the form of a ceremony that I had to plan. I picked out the songs that would be sung and organized a presentation of my time there. After the songs were sung, I gave my presentation. I decided to illustrate some of the challenges faced during my placement by running an activity I had run with the older group of kids but without using any words. Through mime, I was able to get the group to hold hands and pass a hula hoop around the group without breaking the circle. I was also able to indicate, “Go again, but faster.” I used this activity as a way to talk about trying to run meaningful leadership activities despite the language barrier. When my short presentation had ended, I presented my Tare Book page (see below). Then I was presented with a Tare pin and a certificate that read:

This is to certify that Sarah Knowles has provided outstanding service to Tara Mobile Creche with enthusiasm, dedication, talent, and creativity while challenging herself to learn and grow by: exploring Indian culture, planning educational activities, living in an international community, making the most of new experiences, and becoming a community leader as a participant in the Community Programme at Sangam World Centre.” (Emphasis from original)

Before they leave, each Tare must leave their mark on Sangam in two ways. First, each Tare must complete a page representing their experience. These pages can be completed by individuals—or, if a group volunteers at the same time, the group can work together on one page. The purpose of the book is to leave a memory of your time for others to look at when they come.
I found this book very useful as it gave me a sense of the feelings of the Tares that came before me. I photographed the entire book and used it as part of my body of research. For my own page, I had the challenge of representing my work with the crèche without any actual pictures of the children. I decided to utilize a traditional Indian art style of Warli to illustrate some of the activities I did with the kids. The reason for this style choice was twofold: first, I wanted to pick a culturally relevant way of expressing my time there; and second, I was short on time and a style based on stick figures was relatively easy to draw. I also included a few of the crafts we made: a windmill flower and puzzles. The second way a Tare leaves their mark is by their star. The walls of the Tare lounge are covered in colourful painted stars. Each individual Tare gets to create their own star to show that they are part of the Tare community. My star was a simple star within a star. No significance there; I just could not think of something symbolic or meaningful, so went with simplicity and colours I liked.

My actual final farewell came hours after the goodbye ceremony. After an early afternoon of packing and conducting one last interview, it was finally time to take the taxi ride back to Mumbai and the plane home. Everyone gathered by the cab and I got a last hug from everyone before I entered. During the hug with the director, she reminded me of the date to apply to work as a Sangam Centre volunteer and encouraged me to apply. Once in the cab, the staff and centre volunteers started to sing the Sangam World Centre song. They grew louder as the cab left the driveway and they continued to sing until it left the centre’s gates. Although I had only been there for three weeks, I felt a connection to these people. They were fast-forming and short-term friends similar to the friends I used to make at model United Nations conferences. The connection was real and strong, but I knew they were temporary and for that reason they were highly treasured in the moment.
Figure 13: DE-ORIENTATION PERIOD RELATIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Key:
- Person
- An Institution
- Primary Subject
- Relationship to person or institution pointed at
My experience of de-orientation was a process of saying goodbye to the various roles and relationships I had assumed while there. In the above diagram of the dis-orientation period (figure 10), the relationships of the everyday period are changed into former/past or long-distance relationships as goodbyes take place. The act of the goodbye signals the end of an identity as the corresponding relationship ends. A goodbye does not necessarily mean a complete end of any relationship but signals a change in spatial proximity or an end of a pattern of interaction. The exact way the relationship changed with the goodbye, ending or turning long distance, depended on the nature of the relationship. Friendship did not simply end with separation, as thanks to technology, there were promises to stay in touch online. My relationships with the crèche teachers never quite turned into friendships due to language barriers hindering communication; so these relationships ended with the goodbye. The end of the current relationships did not mean the goodbye was negative. Goodbyes with the teachers were moments of mutual appreciation, in which both parties thanked each other for their time. In figure 10 the lines signaling a relationship with the teachers does not simply disappear because the relationship was significant enough to still have an impact on me. I carried lessons, especially on how to communicate with people, from those relationships and therefore the former relationship continued to play a part in the knot of entanglements which is me long after the relationship ceased.

Although my relationships with people changed with the goodbye, my departure did not visibly affect the relationships among Sangam personnel. The rest of the residents continued to be housemates, and volunteers continued to have a pseudo employee/employer as well as housemate relationships with Sangam staff. Similarly, my relationships with Western University and anthropology department staff and fellow graduate students did not change as my leaving and returning was an expected part of the graduate student relationship.
4.6 RETURN

My return to Canada was marked by an immediate return to busy graduate school life. In addition to being submerged back into the world I left behind, how I thought about my trip immediately shifted towards analysis. This immediate shift in thinking separates my return from those of typical volunteers who do not need to deeply analyze and think about their experience in terms of specific research questions.

\[\text{Figure 14 Six Months after Return Relations of Responsibility}\]
The above diagram (figure 11) shows my relations of responsibility regarding my trip six months after my return. This diagram is a lot simpler than the dis-orientation diagram (Figure 11), as many of the relationships I developed while in Pune have ended. I did not stay in touch with the teachers at the crèche, Pune locals, or any of the staff at Sangam. The only relationships from Pune that remained were my relationships with Sangam volunteers. I left with many new friends and the promise that we would stay in touch as Facebook friends. Facebook friends is a very passive form of relationship and in this case involved very minimal contact aside from the ability to check in on the curated goings-on in each other’s lives. We occasionally commented on each other’s photos or statuses, but other than that we did not have any direct contact. This minimal contact ended about another six months later, when I deleted my Facebook. I now have no contact with these individuals that felt like such close friends at the time.

Upon my return to Canada, my relationship with Western University and the 3rd London Brownie unit moved from the background to the forefront. I went from having sparse direct contact to consistent interactions with my supervisor. My responsibilities to Sangam and the crèche had ended and now my only responsibilities regarding the trip were to the university and to the Brownie unit. I was expected to produce a thesis based on my work and to do an interactive presentation on Sangam for the Brownies. My relationships shifted once I returned to Canada—and with this shift, my priorities changed.

4.7 DISCUSSION

While vignettes of a volunteer tourism experience paint a very vivid picture, by diagramming the experience one is forced to think carefully about connections. Diagramming guides one’s reflection of an experience causing one to think carefully about how all parts are related—as opposed to simply telling a coherent story. Together, the vignettes and diagrams give a full picture of a moment in the lifecycle of a moral community, each complementing and adding on to each other.

The above diagrams (Figures 7-11) mark a first attempt at visually showing moral relations of responsibility in a case study, and as such have room for improvement. In the future, these types of diagrams could be improved by visually indicating the relative importance or daily impact of each relation of responsibility. For instance, during the everyday period, my relationship with
Western University, although still present, was less impactful in my daily life than my relationship with Sangam and the Tara Mobile Crèche teachers. Colours could be used to indicate what relationships are foregrounded and which are in the background. In this way, the power of relationships and how this power shifts over time could be illustrated.

Using social network analysis to visually represent moral communities has shown, alongside more traditional written accounts, to be a powerful way to represent the lifecycle of complex moral systems.
5 CONCLUSION

Flora (2017) is a serial voluntourist who loves to travel the world and chooses to volunteer wherever she goes. On her blog recounting her travels, Flora (2017) writes:

> From Nepali orphans, Lithuanian teenagers and the English homeless to Indian celebrities, Thai farmers and Icelandic rockstars, I’ve found that **volunteer work allows me to discover the essence of a country** – and to connect with its people – like nothing else. (Flora 2017).

Volunteers speak of feeling incredibly attached to the people and places where they volunteer, and this suggests that strong relationships are formed between themselves and locals. These relationships colour how individual volunteers evaluate their actions while overseas. I have shown that through the process of overseas volunteering a temporary moral space is formed which shapes participants’ judgement while in this voluntourism space. This moral community can be broken down into a five-stage lifecycle, of pre-departure, arrival, everyday, de-orientation, and return, and can be expressed verbally in short vignettes and represented visually through social network analysis.

To return to this study’s guiding questions, let’s look at what answers we can glean from this thesis. How are ethics established and what does the ethical look like in the humanitarian space of voluntourism? Ethics and the ethical are established and reinforced through relations of responsibility forged between participants and locals, other participants, and program staff.

What are the ordinary ethical conditions within the voluntourism space and how is it constructed? Positive feedback is a common occurrence within the voluntourism space creating a sense that what one is doing is good. The good is being judged through relationships and is connected to emotional responses. Nuanced feedback is often difficult to convey due to language and culture barriers. Furthermore, a positive feedback loop is often created between participants as they colour the way each other reacts to the situation. The Tare book at Sangam World Guiding Centre, for instance, is meant for other Tares to look at it when they first arrive and add a page to when they leave. The positive tone of the book could easily influence the participant to look for the positive in their own experience and to only write about the positive on their own page. My own Tare page (figure 12) shows a positive and simplified version of my experience.
show the activities I did with the kids in pictures and example crafts and fail to talk about the complex feelings I have coming from a development background or my struggle to find the balance between researcher and participant. My page matches the tone and descriptive nature of the rest of the book. My representation of my trip is being mediated by how others have judged and represented their trips. Judging occurs within the context of the voluntourism space and this space cyclically recreates similar reactions and judgements.

FIGURE 12 TARE BOOK RESEARCHER’S PAGE

What specific meta-values are established and how do these values shape the judgements of participants during their voluntourism experience? In the pre-departure period through training and in the arrival period, meta-values are established that help participants judge their experiences and actions. These meta-values are communicated through rituals and constantly reestablished and confirmed through relationships. Some of the common meta values seen through the blogs studied are: authenticity of place and relationships, acceptance of difference or new values, acting with purpose/more than a vacation, valuing hard physical labor and
discomfort, and personal growth. Different organizations also present different meta values to their participants. Operation Groundswell (2018), for example, specifically promotes relationship building as having explicit value. Sangam, on the other hand, specifically promoted respect and cultural acceptance as having great value.

And finally, how are subjectivities striven towards, created, or imposed during a voluntourism trip? The identity of volunteer is constantly worked towards by participants and this identity colours relations of responsibility. Participants are expected to act a certain way because they are volunteers as opposed to mere tourists. Furthermore, many participants feel the need to live up to the identity of global citizen and for them volunteering in and of itself is helping them to fulfill this identity. The type of volunteering work being done also affects the specific identities one is trying to live up to. For example, the responsibilities of being a teacher are quite different than those of being a house builder.

I vowed to approach my time as a Tare at Sangam as a volunteer first and a researcher second. Although I tried to separate myself from my analytical brain, my time in Sangam was necessarily coloured by being an anthropologist and having training in critical international development. This is most clearly seen in the difference in the letters I wrote to myself during volunteer trips in 2011 and 2016. I am incredibly reflexive in the letter I wrote while at Sanagam. I talk about being a researcher and trying to leave my analytical brain aside. It is clear I am thinking about what experience would be beneficial to my research. I also talk about writing a letter for my first volunteer trip and being ashamed at what I wrote, labeling what I had written as “simplistic” and “naïve”. In this earlier letter, written while I was finishing a volunteer trip with Operation Groundswell in 2011, there is none of this reflexivity and instead I write about the experience I am having and how it affected me at the time. In the Operation Groundswell letter, I speak emotionally of what I want to remember and how I want this to affect my life. I wrote:

Firstly, I want to remember how most in Ghana lived a life full of joy. How people celebrated meeting new people, experiencing something new, or simply life itself and the people around them that they share this world with. For example, remember how a widow in Kattama smiled and laughed in-between recalling the poor economic condition she currently found her family. Likewise, try to recall how a man doing a funny dance or being shown pictures recently taken on my camera made whole families collapse in fits
of laughter. As you start to remember how others can celebrate life try to celebrate the little things in your own life.

I spoke of how relationships influenced me in 2011, while in 2016 I spoke of the relationships I needed to have to fulfill my research. In 2016, I understood that my experience was happening at a particular time and space and that how I felt in the moment would not necessarily reflect how I felt after the fact. My past experience with the old letter and the years of learning that had taken place since I wrote it, clearly influenced my writing. Although I approached my time in Sangam with an open mind, I was still aware of the fact that time affects how one views an international volunteer experience. I do not think that this reflexivity hindered my research, but instead produced a very honest account of my experience and how it might have differed from those without my background. Ultimately my experience as a volunteer in Sangam is uniquely mine, however, regardless of my added role of researcher it produced a temporary moral community that can be examined. As any moral community should, my personal experience and perspectives, as the key informant, are built into the examination of the moral space.

This study has looked at the micro reality of volunteering as opposed to the big picture context that critics tend to focus on. Through looking at voluntourism as forming moral communities this study has used verbal vignettes and visual diagraming to show the lifecycle of an international volunteering trip. Moral communities formed through different experiences can be viewed using similar methods. The idea of breaking down a moral community into a lifecycle can be reproduced with other moral communities such as the moral communities formed in other situations with a clear beginning and end point such as a school year, or summer camp. Diagraming could also be used to show other complex moral communities both at fixed point of time and tracing how it changes and evolves other time. In a future study, by adding colour differentiation to these social network diagrams of moral communities, the relative impact or importance of different relationships at a given point in time could be illustrated. This study not only provides insights on the moral communities of voluntourism but provides ideas on how to examine and visually represent moral communities.

Critics and international volunteers are coming at voluntourism from different perspectives. The critics are looking at macro indicators at a removed distance, while international volunteers, while abroad, are judging voluntourism based on emotional relationships. To merge the impasse
between critics and participants, the two parties need to be made to understand the others’ perspective. This is a daunting task as it would involve pushing past one’s own perspective. If critics want to have meaningful conversations with voluntourists and would-be voluntourists, I think it is important for them to first understand that participants do have rationale for judging their experiences of overseas volunteering as good. Starting from a point of understanding the individual positive relationships that are formed, critics could then suggest meaningful ways for voluntourists to ensure that their impact extends past individual relationships. The approach of simply condemning voluntouring is not working as voluntouring itself generates such a positive experience that is hard to argue against. A more productive approach to addressing the macro concerns with voluntourism would be to first accept that positive relationships can be formed and then work on using those powerful relationships to create longer lasting or more meaningful change in terms of global indicators. Furthermore, finding ways for voluntourists to translate their experience into more lasting impact would negate the negative feelings that often occur for participants after the fact when the realization dawns that their experience was fleeting. The question I am left with is: could critics work within the powerful phenomenon of voluntourism to create a greater impact or is voluntourism inherently shallow and volunteer-centric? Since international volunteering creates such emotive relationships could these relationships be utilized in more productive ways if critics worked within the system of voluntourism instead of simply opposing it?
Sangam World Centre

Community Programme Application Form

Personal Details

Full Name  Sarah Knowles  Gender  Female

Preferred Name____________________  Nationality  Canadian

Do you have any other nationalities/passports? No

Passport/Travel Document Number    

Date of Birth (DD/MM/YY)  19/02/1992  Age in Years

Address

Country of Residence  Canada  Telephone No.  

Mobile No.____________________  Skype ID  

Email  

May we share your contact details within the WAGGGS network? YES/NO

If selected, may we share your email contact with your fellow participants? YES/NO

How did you find out about this opportunity? ________________________________

Photo

Please attach a photo of yourself, so we can get to know you better!

Term Dates

I would like to be considered for the following Community Programme term dates:

□  September 18th - October 8th 2016 (# of Weeks, Month and Year)

Exact term dates can be found on our website by clicking here.

If selected, do you want to be considered for scholarship?

□  No, I don't require scholarship

□  Travel Grant

□  Full Programme Fee Scholarship

Sannam
If you answered yes above, please indicate what you will contribute financially to your experience: ____________________ and what your Member Organisation (if applicable) will contribute financially to the experience: ____________________

If elected, which accommodation do you prefer? (Fees apply. For most current fees, click here or email communityprogramme@sangamworldcentre.org.)  Twin Room/Shared Dorm Room

Please Note

World Centres can receive up to 50+ applications for positions. When filling out this application form, please keep this in mind and answer in one paragraph only for each question (approximately 3 sentences in total).

Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting Experience

Name of Girl Guide/Girl Scout association of which you are a member: Girl Guides of Canada

Present position in Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting: Adult - Link

Are you an active member? YES

Have you volunteered/worked in another World Guide or Scout Centre? YES®

If yes, please specify ____________________________

Have you stayed at or attended an event/programme at a World Centre? What event/programme?

Pax lodge - 2009

Have you visited a World Guide or Scout Centre (specify which centre and when)?

What is your understanding of the mission and vision of WAGGGS?

WAGGGS strives to empower and enable girls to reach their full potential and to be able to positively contribute to the world.

Give a brief description of your Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting Experience.

As a child and teenager I was heavily involved in Canadian guiding, both through my local unit and national opportunities. I took advantage of every opportunity that was available through guiding completing every badge in the Brownie program, deciding to complete my Canada cord in both the Leadership and Outdoor streams, and obtaining my Gold Chief Commissioners Award. As I grew up in the guiding program I started to take on more...
leadership roles, running numerous camps and activities for younger girls. As a unit I was involved in several fundraising campaigns to travel across Canada and to Pax Lodge in London, England. My fellow rangers and I won a district leadership award for all of our fundraising efforts. As a teenager I also got involved on the national level. I was chosen to represent Canadian Girl Guides at a National youth conference in Ottawa where hundreds of youth across the country created policy suggestions for the Canadian Government. When I started university, although I retained some loose ties to the Canadian Guiding community, I was no longer able to be an active member. As I now finish my Masters Degree I have a flexible schedule that will allow me to be more active in my local Guiding Community. I am in contact with my provincial Guiding office and am in the processes of starting to volunteer with some local units.

Other Relevant Experience

Please give a brief description of your experience in the following fields:

International or Cross-Cultural Experience

In 2011 I joined a 'ethical travel' organization on a two month trip to Ghana in West Africa. On this trip I worked with a village girls club, facilitating leadership and health education activities, and conducted surveys with small scale family farmers to gather information for an emerging NGO with local collaborators.

I returned to Ghana again in 2012, this time for nine months, as part of my University program in International Development. During the second half of the program, I completed a independent educational placement in a small city in the north of the country. For my placement I worked with a grass-roots community organization that was working to provide holistic educational opportunities in their community. I worked in the primary school run by the organization, filling in for teaching positions while some staff changes were made, helping to format and structure organizational documents (vision, mission, goals, statements for funders), and conducting participatory community research to be used in the construction of new community programs.

Education/Training Received

2010, Gifted high school diploma...
2015, Joint Honors BA in Anthropology and International Development from Trent University
In progress, MA in Socio-cultural Anthropology and Western University

Work/ Professional Experience

Day camp councilor at the Calgary Shawnessy YMCA
Junior Day Camp Supervisor in charge of a staff of 12
Trent-in-Ghana Assistant - helping to promote the Trent-in-Ghana program and facilitate the application and training process of upcoming participants.
Teaching Assistant- running seminars for undergraduate courses and assisting Professors with marking of assignments and exams.

Team Work

As a day camp supervisor I worked with a team of four other supervisors, each responsible for overseeing a type of camps. Alongside working with the supervising team to ensure consistency, I had to guide a group of councilors in successfully fulfilling their jobs.
I am currently an elected member of my departments Graduate Student Association. The student association is currently working as a team to plan and run a student led academic conference that will occur in the winter term.

Personal Statement

Describe yourself as a person

I am a hardworking graduate student who genuinely loves to learn and to better understand the world. Although I am a very analytical person, always questioning and digging beneath the surface, I maintain an optimistic attitude choosing to focus on the positive and what I can control rather then being overwhelmed with harsh realities. From my experience the best way to learn is through interacting with people and accepting their words as true to their reality. For this reason, I am pursuing anthropology a discipline that does not try to merely understand phenomenon but strives for mutual understandings. When I am not studying or researching, I am an avid hiker who loves to summit mountains and go on multi-day backpacking trips. I also have a passion for photography, creative writing, and art.

Describe your leadership and social skills

As a leader I always attempt to enable my team. I am an idea generator and am normally the first person to offer soloutions to a problem, however, although I may start the
brainstorming I am a firm believer that collaboration between people who see the world
differently provides the best solutions. As a leader I always aim for every team member to
feel included and valued. Treating people fairly and equally are not always the same
thing. In my opinion, a good leader knows when to offer a hand and when instead to take
a step back, when to encourage, and when to compliment.

What skills of yours do you expect/hope to share with this Programme?
I have experience working with groups of both adults and children that I think will be of
value in this program. As a Camp Councilor (working with small children) and a Teaching
Assistant (working for young adults) I successfully organized and planned both educational
and fun activities. I know hundreds of games from around the world and have experience
teaching games to a multi-cultural group. I also have a reputation for being able to invent a
craft or a game on the spot with very limited supplies. Working with others I am patient and
respectful. I am open to new ideas and actively seek the ideas and input of others.
I came from an anthropology background and as such I will bring an anthropological
perspective to the programme. Anthropology defines culture as systems of meaning
making and recognizes that the world can be experienced and understood in very different
ways and that these ways are all valid within their own contexts. I always try to identify my
own cultural biases and look past them in order to experience and understand other
people’s realities. Learning is collaborative activity and I hope to facilitate mutual learning
during this programme.

What are your work interests within this Programme? Number the following in order of priority, with
1 being your first choice. Your placement will be based upon your interests as marked
below.

- Working with children
- Working with young people
- Environmental issues
- Sustainability
- Teaching general
- Teaching English
- Crafts
- Dance and Music
- Women’s empowerment
- Primary health care
- Health care
- Working with people with Mental Health issues
- Working with people who are differently-abled (have a disability)
- Working with men to end Violence Against Women and Girls
- Stop the Violence Campaign
- Free Being Me Campaign
- Other 1: _______________________
- Other 2: _______________________
What do you expect/hope to learn and achieve through this Programme?
Through this program I hope to experience what it is like to volunteer overseas in order to apply firsthand understanding to the large collection of written accounts and interviews I have already obtained. On a personal level I do not have any expectations for what I will learn or achieve but I am open to any personal growth or realizations that occur.

What do you think will be the most challenging aspect in this Programme? And how would you manage the challenge?
I anticipate that the most challenging part of this programme for me will be separating the theatrical concepts I have been studying for a year from my experiences, not allowing known theatrical frameworks to overly structure my experiences. I will manage this challenge by being mindful of it, and then actively separating my analytical thoughts from my experiential and emotional thoughts.

What is your understanding of Community Leadership?
I understand community leadership as leadership that is in, for, and by the community. It is a community coming together and making decisions and taking charge of action rather then outsiders coming in and directing action in and by the community.

How do you plan to fund (pay for) your Community Programme experience?
As my Community Programme will contribute to my thesis research I will be using a combination of formal research funding and personal savings set aside for my Masters Thesis.

Police Record Check
In your home country have you had a police records check? YES/NO If yes, please supply evidence such as a certificate. Answering no to this question will not exclude you from being selected but we will ask your International Commissioner to research and then sign off the form.
APPENDIX 2 ETHICS APPROVAL
Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrew Walsh  
Department & Institution: Social Science/Anthropology, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108238  
Study Title: An Ethnographic Study of Voluntourism

NMREB Initial Approval Date: September 16, 2016  
NMREB Expiry Date: September 16, 2017

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

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The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000411

Ethics Stated, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

Ethics Officer: Erika Basile  Nicole Kaniki  Grace Kelly  Katelyn Harris  Vikki Tran  Karen Gopaul

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150  
London, ON, Canada  N6G 1G9  t. 519.661.3036  f. 519.850.2466  www.uwo.ca/research/ethics  
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## APPENDIX 3 Table of Key Blogs

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Blog Name &amp; Address</th>
<th>Home Country</th>
<th>Countries Volunteered In</th>
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### Table of Key Online Reviews from GoOverseas.com

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