Abstract

Often, international engagement efforts are set in vulnerable communities where there is great potential to do good, but a significant potential to do harm, and there has been a call for higher attention to the many effects of volunteer presence and efforts when engaging with such communities. Recent attempts have been made to have honest discussions about the ethical implications for service abroad, but rarely are these discussions and resulting policy decisions directly informed by the nuanced, contextual perspectives of host communities themselves. When they do, often the conception of “community” does not adequately represent the diversity of stakeholders that form the community in question.

This mixed methodological work explores how various stakeholders in one such community in Eldoret, Kenya respond to the question of what it is like to host young international volunteers. These perspectives were gathered over a three month period through interviews and a focus group.

Findings 1) A need exists for a broader conception of “host”; 2) The voices of hosts and host communities are underrepresented throughout the literature and the volunteering process; 3) Current language used to describe the role of volunteers is the product of inequitable historical relationships, has adverse effects on process and outcomes, and needs to be adjusted; 4) Host fatigue is a significant factor in adversely affecting outcomes of volunteer placements; 5) Resistance and dissent in volunteer encounters present differently than volunteers might expect; in Kenya, they often present as withdrawal, silence, slowness to respond, bearing the hardship, and much less commonly as direct confrontation, and; 6) Volunteer activity must be factored into what constitutes the social determinants of health of a host community when we try to learn about that community and the issues it faces. Suggestions are made for improving outcomes for volunteers, hosts, and sending organizations.
Preface

This thesis is based on work conducted in communities of the Uasin Gishu District of Western Kenya. I was responsible for planning the data collection and designing all interview guides with the guidance of my supervising committee (Grant Charles, Shafik Dharamsi, Samson Nashon, University of British Columbia, Canada), and input from the The Institute for Gender Equity, Research and Development (IGERD; Dr. Jennifer Wanjiku Khamasi, Moi University).

In the field in Western Kenya I collected all oral and written data in English interspersed with the local language (Swahili). I supervised all recruitment activities, and lead discussions on emergent themes throughout data collection. Andrew Thompson contributed to the transcription of research transcripts. I conducted all primary analysis checking in with Grant Charles, Shafik Dharamsi, and Samson Nashon to confirm emerging themes. I wrote this thesis manuscript in its entirety.

Certificate of Ethics Approval: H10-03103
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<tr>
<td>CSL</td>
<td>Community Service-Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIESL</td>
<td>The Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning (Project)</td>
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<td>IESL</td>
<td>International Engagement and Service-Learning</td>
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<td>ISL</td>
<td>International Service-Learning</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
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Glossary

altourism A (usually pejorative) portmanteau of altruism and tourism; see “voluntourism”

conscientization Paulo Freire's term, the process of becoming more conscientious

ethical capital Accumulated social trust which is guided by higher ethical values

host fatigue A negative feeling individuals or organizations get when they become weary of hosting volunteers from the outside. It occurs after a tipping point where the perceived costs and challenges of hosting volunteers outweigh the perceived benefits.

kujiunga (Swahili) “to join”

mzungu (Swahili) “white person”; “foreigner”

voluntourism A (usually pejorative) portmanteau of volunteerism and tourism; see “altourism”
Acknowledgements

“it takes a village...”

Thank you to the government of Kenya for allowing me to conduct this research. Thank you to the people of Eldoret for opening your lives to me. Thank you to UBC’s Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program for inviting me back into the intellectual sandbox. Thank you to all the individuals below. Without your love and support, none of this would have been possible:

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Dr. Grant Charles
Dr. Samson Nashon
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Nadav Goelman
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David Nush Wanjohi
Festus Beru
Chapter 1 – Introduction

“If you come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us begin.”

― Lily Walker, Australian aboriginal women’s leader

The 2009 Strategic Plan for the University of British Columbia (UBC), entitled Place and Promise, commits the university to producing outstanding “global citizens” as well as “international engagement” and “intercultural understanding” (UBC 2009). UBC along with many other universities utilizes International Service-Learning (ISL), research and volunteer placements abroad as significant opportunities to fulfill these commitments. Despite the tremendous growth of these types of learning experiences at UBC and elsewhere, the effects and outcomes of these experiences are not fully understood.

Even with the best of intentions, it is not difficult to do more harm than good. Work that presents the perspectives of volunteers and sending organizations (e.g. Hammond 1994; Clary et. al. 1998; Porter & Monard 2001; Abes et. al. 2002) tells us that there are a variety of ethical implications associated with volunteering in marginalized communities abroad. Yet we know comparatively little about the perspectives of individuals, organizations, and communities who host volunteers. Crabtree emboldens us on this matter: “Despite its difficulties, we in the field simply must begin to prioritize (or partner with development scholars and others to study) the effects of [International Engagement and Service-Learning] on community partners—organizations, leaders, client populations, and publics” (Crabtree 2011, 79).
University mandates to produce “global citizens” may be hazardous to the very populations they aim to serve if IESL projects and programs are left to continue as they exist now. We currently do not know much about how host organizations and communities experience the phenomenon of receiving volunteers such as UBC students; this is something we need to know in order to understand the effects that volunteers and organizations have on the volunteer-service recipient host communities served by international research, ISL and “voluntourism” projects. We need to understand community dynamics and how this changes with volunteer presence and also with the so-called development project as a whole. For example, what does volunteer presence do to the family unit and social cohesion? The prevalence of questions without answers such as this one is the reason why understanding the perceptions of community members is so important. It is important to fill this gap and create a more holistic picture of what durable, reciprocal international engagement looks like, in order to avoid unintentionally doing more harm than good.

Furthermore, there is still a lack of understanding of the ethical dimensions of the presence of students/volunteers/organizations from the perspective of host communities themselves. Though research standards exist through institutional ethics control boards for formal research, there exists no parallel set of standards in Canada for the wide array of volunteer or work placements in volunteer-service recipient host communities. Lack of ethical fluency in this regard also raises several practical issues: without fully understanding the effects IESL has on the quality of life of others, we risk harming partnerships and reputations, thus limiting the potential to be community-responsive and for collaboration to improve the standard of living in host communities. Lacking this knowledge and feedback mechanisms also reduces the opportunity for any kind of improvement on the part of individuals or institutions like UBC. Understanding
these types of issues from a community perspective can inform the development of this feedback mechanism, as well as curricular material in this area.

My qualitative study therefore addresses the general question “What is it like to host young international volunteers in Eldoret, Kenya?” More specifically, the overall purpose of this study is to explore how community members in a ‘receiving’ community perceive, interpret, give meaning to, and even resist, volunteer “development”-oriented interventions in their communities. This includes determining from the participants problems and/or ethical issues that arise for them when interacting with volunteers. This study will potentially contribute to our knowledge about how people experience and perceive the activities of international volunteers in their communities. This may, in turn, lead to the development of volunteering activities that are more enriching to communities.

My work with the UBC Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning (EIESL) Project was the inspiration for this study. The EIESL Project emerged out of a growing concern among several faculty and students at UBC around the conflicting motivations for international service-learning (ISL). Motivations range from a positive desire to promote equity, and to work with and for communities, as well as, and sometimes primarily to, fulfill a graduation requirement, enhance a résumé, and/or secure research funds (Dharamsi et. al 2009). The EIESL Project team worked for two years to further our understanding of the dimensions of these ethical issues and to collect, design and deliver learning resources to student groups, university departments, faculty, staff and citizens.
Rigorous codes of ethics and mandatory training programs exist for those working with chemicals or animals. However, there are no ethical requirements corresponding to volunteer activity in vulnerable communities in the poorly resourced settings. Nearly anyone can pack a bag, board a plane, and interact with individuals and communities, regardless of whether or not they have sufficient knowledge or expertise to help improve quality of life. This is despite the multiple dimensions of vulnerability (e.g. people living with HIV/AIDS, people with poor food/housing security, children and the elderly, victims of sexual violence etc.) that may exist in these communities. The volunteers can go without consideration for the ethical implications of their actions or even the effect their mere presence can have on individuals and their community.

I am not arguing that there is no understanding of the ethical dimensions of volunteering in the poorly resourced settings. However, this lens has been constructed primarily from the contributions of volunteer sending institutions, academics and volunteers themselves, leaving the voices of host partner communities, for the most part, conspicuously underrepresented. Not much is known about the ethical challenges facing communities hosting young development volunteers. It is this underrepresentation which I address with my study, which can potentially contribute to the democratization of knowledge and research in the field of “development” studies and can perhaps, in some small way, be emancipatory.

This is a story about encounters between young volunteers and communities in and around Eldoret in Western Kenya. But unlike most of the stories of this nature you have likely heard, this story is told from the point of view of a handful of Kenyan people, and not from the point of view of High Income Countries’ development workers, researchers, students, volunteers, or
guests of another kind. So often, “in the majority of accounts, the storyteller speaks from a Northern perspective, and Southern accounts or critiques of development and Northern interventions are relegated to the margins.” (Heron, 153, in EIESL Kit, Ch 2)

I should clarify: while the story is told from the point of view of certain Kenyans, the narrator is a young white man. A Whiteman, to be exact. Matt Whiteman. Me. The irony of a Whiteman traveling to East Africa to research the ethical implications of the white man traveling to East Africa to do research is not lost on me.

While often, the characters in this story speak for themselves, and they speak loud and clear, I am the one interpreting what they say and telling you what I believe this means. I have tried to do this as best as I can. As the storyteller and researcher, I am bound up and implicated in this story as much as the other characters. I cannot tell the stories of the Kenyans I speak to without including elements of my own narrative (Denzin 1997; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). And so although the point of view is a Kenyan one, the story is thus as much about guests as it is about hosts. I mentioned earlier that you likely have never heard this story before. Yet; it is a story that has been told many times. It is just that, for the most part, we have not gone out of our way to hear it. And we have feigned deafness for far too long. So here is your chance. Sit down. Listen. I have saved you a place.
Chapter 2 – Methodology

“Those who read or listen to our stories see everything as through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration, and it is ground anew in every story, ground between the temporal and the timeless. If we storytellers are Death's Secretaries, we are so because, in our brief mortal lives, we are grinders of those lenses.”

— John Berger 'and our faces, my heart, brief as photos'

2.1 Introduction: Approach to Inquiry

This is an interdisciplinary study, which draws upon such diverse fields as social work, ethics, global health, international development studies, and anthropology. I ask and explore my research question, “what is it like to host international volunteers?” at the place where these disciplines meet. One of the challenges, and also one of the advantages, of performing qualitative research in this liminal space is that there is no single intellectual tradition with corresponding standards for language or methodological approach to use as a guide.

To most effectively address the circumstances of my research, I use a generic qualitative research methodology in this study to select the best components of diverse methodological approaches and synthesize various aspects of each. Caelli et al (2008) explain that generic qualitative studies are those that exhibit some or all of the characteristics of qualitative endeavor but rather than focusing the study through the lens of a known methodology they seek to do one of two things: either they combine several methodologies or approaches, or claim no particular methodological viewpoint at all. Generally, the focus of the study is on understanding an experience or an event. For this article, we define generic qualitative research as that which is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies. (Caelli et al 2008, 2)

Building on this approach, Merriam (1998) takes the view that generic qualitative research studies are those that epitomize the characteristics of qualitative research but rather than focusing on culture as does ethnography, or the building of theory as does grounded theory, “they simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and
worldviews of the people involved” (p. 11, in Caelli 2008). This approach has allowed me to be descriptive, flexible, and inductive, without the need for rigid process or purism in any methodological sense. Drawing upon aspects of different methodologies will best enable me to extract relevant meaning from respondents’ stories. Moreover, this approach is consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of this study.

I initially chose to conduct this research using a combined ethnographical-phenomenological methodology in my research proposal. I assumed the study would be ethnographical because communities who host international volunteers may be said to form a distinct culture, as well as phenomenological, in order to better understand and capture the essence of their lived experience.

I later considered a purely grounded theory approach, once I identified a major recurrent theme in my interviews that was not comfortably described in existing literature. I also include aspects of narrative and case study in this work, the former because of the importance of storytelling and idiom in East Africa; the latter because there are individuals who have very specific stories to tell, and because their responses could be seen to represent a snapshot of how this question is answered within defined geographical and cultural parameters. I preserve elements of each of these in my final, integrated approach.

Because of this generic methodological approach, I do not specify patterns for analysis a priori; therefore, this study is subject to a post-hoc analysis bias. Because I was looking to understand the ethical implications of these encounters, I was looking for this type of pattern in my data more keenly than for patterns that were enthusiastic or celebratory of these encounters. This
could have been mitigated by asking different questions and focusing on other topics of research.

Caelli et. al. (2008, 5) posit that research reports aiming for credibility as generic qualitative research must address the following four key areas:

1. the theoretical positioning of the researcher;
2. the congruence between methodology and methods;
3. the strategies to establish rigor; and
4. the analytic lens through which the data are examined.

I lay out these elements below, and use this approach throughout my study to interpret and analyze the testimonies of the respondents.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1 Constructivism

The main theoretical underpinnings of this study stem primarily from a social constructivist paradigm, drawing from Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss’s The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967), which creates a framework for how to construct emergent analyses. “Strauss’s view of social life assumed emergence through dynamic processes of action (including interaction) and the construction and reconstruction of meaning” (Charmaz 2008, 160).

Constructivism is a common approach within qualitative research, and it carries epistemological and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The way human beings make sense of their experiences is confined within a person’s mental, social, and environmental constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism also possesses an epistemological assumption that, while exploring experiences within a research context, that an individual’s “truth” is constructed with the researchers as well, therefore influencing the construction of past experiences (Guba &
Lincoln, 1994). This assumption extends to methodological application, whereby “individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 111). The resulting objective is to create a mutually agreed upon construction that is sophisticated beyond the contributions of each person independently. As Arnold Toynbee (1946, in Woollard 2013, 126) put it:

Society is the total network of relations between human beings. The components of society are thus not human beings but the relations between them. In a social structure individuals are merely the foci in the network of relationships …. A visible and palpable collection of people is not a society; it is a crowd. A crowd, unlike a society, can be assembled, dispersed, photographed, or massacred [emphasis added].

In the branch of constructivism called social constructionism (Andrews 2012), reality is socially defined. Individuals and groups define this reality, and most of the knowing that is done is concerned with trying to make sense of what it is to be human, rather than focusing on scientific knowledge. I chose social constructionism because I was less interested in the cognitive processes that accompany knowledge and more interested in how knowledge is socially constructed.

Part of the reason for choosing this paradigm is that the current paradigm of volunteering abroad struggles with the use and misuse of language in this field of work. Ideas like “development” and “helping” are inherently patronizing to those identified as beneficiaries, implying a lack of reciprocity or mutual teaching and learning. I had my own thoughts before conducting my fieldwork about the language I would use to try to communicate what it was I thought I was doing – what volunteers ought to think they were doing when they arrived in such a place. I chose “kujiunga” as the title for this study, which means “to join” in Swahili, as an alternative to “helping”. This was done in an attempt to draw attention to the problems created when we say “I have come to help”, and to try to offer a more appropriate, more dignifying
substitution (see my discussion of Heron 2007, in Chapters 3 and 7). These ideas needed to come from the respondents, and this is ultimately why a constructivist approach is so essential.

2.2.2 Appreciative Inquiry

This study also borrows elements of the appreciative inquiry approach. Appreciative Inquiry, explain Cooperider and Whitney,

is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (3)

Appreciative Inquiry is meant to act as a counterpoint to a deficiency model of research, which focuses on challenges and problem solving. Because this study was designed to be inductive, it was initially designed to explore all aspects of encounters between volunteers and hosts, positive and negative. The research questions were written to invite hosts – individuals and organizations – to celebrate what might be right and good about these encounters, while also making room to ask some additional questions of their own that arise from these experiences. As I will show, this was done out of respect for cultural approaches to storytelling and provision of information that are particular to my site selection. I cover the positive aspects of these encounters where appropriate, and offered the space for respondents to join me in thinking about some of the questions they might have about their encounters, and potentially uncomfortable situations that may have arisen. To reiterate the thrust of my thesis, my ultimate aim is to assess the value in engagement abroad, and to explore its assumptions and practices.
2.3 Literature Review

I began cultivating my interest in this issue in 2009 while working as a research assistant for the Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning (EIESL) Project, which focused on the ethical implications of volunteer service abroad. As a result, while conducting my literature review, I focused more attention on literature that problematizes service abroad than I did on neutral literature or literature that documents success stories in international development. I recognize that I have a confirmation bias in conducting my literature review, toward the rhetoric employed in this type of writing, and in the analysis generated from it. I acknowledge that this work is caught in the currents of multiple, interacting biases: it is potentially subject to the Semmelweis reflex – the tendency to reject new information that contradicts a paradigm. However, this subject was selected as a result of a bias in popular literature and practice to over-report on the benefits of volunteerism and to underreport on the problems – my response to this sense was perhaps to question the validity of the availability cascade – the discourse put forth by those I chose to surround myself with in this research reaffirmed my belief that this was a substantive research issue.

Published studies and articles on my subject were identified through computerized literature searches of PubMed, EBSCO Databases (Academic Search Complete, Global Health Archive, Hospitality & Tourism Complete), and Google Scholar, with no language or date specified in the search criteria. A wide variety of terms were used to find relevant peer-reviewed articles, examples include “ethics”, “volunteering”, “service-learning”, “international service-learning”, “volunteerism”, “voluntourism”, “host”, “host community”, “service abroad”, along with recent historical, geographical and cultural writing on the Eldoret region and its street populations. Some of these articles were referred to me by Kenyans and expatriate researchers I met in
Eldoret. Additional articles were obtained through reference lists of published manuscripts. This review concentrated primarily on peer-reviewed published literature; however, in some cases internet-based searches of relevant government documents, grey literature, and other reports were also conducted. Chapter 3 provides a detailed review of this literature.

2.4 Site Selection

Volunteers travel all over the world to give service. So why did I choose Kenya? There are many places in the world that would be easier and more affordable to get to from Canada, and where helpful elements like language, transportation, and culture would be more accessible to me.

I selected Kenya for a number of reasons. First, relative political stability and attractive opportunities for tourism in the region make Kenya a popular destination for International Engagement and Service-Learning projects; this in turn makes for an ideal environment in which to conduct this research. However, an equally important reason is that as much as this is a critique of engagement abroad on a large scale, it is also fundamentally a critique of self. My first experience of volunteering abroad was as a 20 year old in Zanzibar, Tanzania – Kenya’s immediate neighbour to the South, and similar in many ways. As it was, I had a conventional view of the value of engagement abroad. However, as an undergraduate student in my third year of a degree in Human Geography at the time, I believe I had a developed somewhat more informed understanding of concepts like privilege and social justice. Being interested in these phenomena, Kenya is a good place to observe them.

Second, I took my volunteering opportunity very seriously, choosing a grassroots organization that seemed to be responsible and responsive, and one that paid close attention to properly preparing and training their volunteers before service. I spent the six months before departure
learning about the community I was visiting, reading transition reports, and learning Swahili. I imagined I would pursue a career in international development, and I thought I needed to go in order to know. But I also believed deeply that as a white man educated at a tier-one university, I inherently had something to offer. As an early twenty-something looking forward to an international development career, Kenya seemed to be good preparatory experience.

Third, my education and ethical bias gave me reason to believe that my research had the potential to produce useful results. I did two volunteer service trips, each four months long, the first to Tanzania in the summer of 2007, and the second to Kenya the following summer. Each time I returned with more questions than answers, and a growing skepticism concerning the volunteerism (voluntourism? altourism?) paradigm. In a sense, this thesis is a study of my 20 year old self – it is part of my ongoing attempt to unpack my own motivations, assumptions, and experiences. It made sense to me to do this research in a familiar context in a way that was consistent with what I had already experienced. Conveniently, two of my supervisory committee members are from Tanzania and Kenya, respectively. As a result, I had a lot of support, guidance, and validation that facilitated my entry into the community as a researcher. Dr. Shafik Dharamsi is from the South of Tanzania and has worked in Kenya, while Dr. Samson Nashon was born in the Eldoret region of Kenya, and has students and colleagues at Moi University in Eldoret, and one of these students offered his support to help me get set up. For all these reasons, this seemed like a natural site to gather my data.

2.5 Multi-Stage Ethics Approval

All research involving human subjects conducted by researchers affiliated with UBC must be approved by UBC’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). In addition, in order to conduct social sciences/humanities research in Kenya as a non-Kenyan, researchers must obtain approval
from their host institution prior to applying to the Republic of Kenya’s Ministry of Science and
Technology for permission to conduct research with human subjects. This involves obtaining a
letter of invitation from an academic at a Kenyan institution to act as supervisor for the duration
of the research period in Kenya.

Under advisement of Dr. Samson Nashon (UBC Faculty of Education), I wrote a letter of intent to
Dr. Jennifer Wanjiku Khamasi, a colleague of Dr. Nashon’s in the Institute for Gender Equity,
Research and Development (IGERD) at Moi University, an hour outside of Eldoret, Kenya (see
Appendix A). Once I obtained the letter of invitation, I delivered my application to the Ministry of
Science and Technology in Nairobi, with the assistance of one of Dr. Nashon’s graduate students.
Having my research sponsored by Moi University, and by one of its academic trusted by
members of the community I was to work with, enabled me to develop professional, trusting
relationships with some of the respondents of this study that could have been very difficult
otherwise.

The Kenyan permit was also issued with the expectation that the Ministry of Science and
Technology would receive two printed copies of the thesis, and that any respondent interviewed
who wanted one would be provided with an electronic copy. Jaffe argues that “studying a less
‘alien’ culture can intensify the reflexive experience of the ethnographer. The experience of
writing about people who read what we write and then talk and write back to us undermines
our ability to construct an unproblematic other, and hence, an unproblematic self” (52). All but
two of the respondents shared their email addresses with me, asking to be notified when my
thesis was complete. Reflecting on this, expecting that the respondents of this study will read my
work and that they have the opportunity to share their thoughts with me redoubles my need to be intentional in how I share their stories.

### 2.6 Escaping the Ivory Tower

For the first month of my fieldwork, I took up residence at one of the colleges at Moi University, in order to get settled, and to have access to Dr. Khamasi\(^1\) and the library. I eventually discovered that most of my research subjects were concentrated in and near to Eldoret. Moi University being situated an hour drive outside of Eldoret, meant that I spent a lot of time commuting. I also did not feel a sense of immersion in the community I was studying, or connection to my respondents and the contexts that were important for understanding what respondents were saying (Cresswell 2007, 18), and so I decided to relocate. After a month, I rented a modest apartment a short walk from the centre of Eldoret, which enabled me to be much more mobile and to make more effective use of my time.

I ended up living with one of the respondents from the focus group for three weeks towards the end of my stay in the region. We had become close friends after a few months as a result of his enthusiastic participation in my research and recruitment of other respondents. During my fieldwork, I frequently accompanied him to his organization’s headquarters, where he invited me to observe and interact with his colleagues, with volunteers, and with the community of street children and youth they served. This allowed me to see firsthand how volunteers fit into the daily rhythm of his life, and into the operations of the organization. He invited me to stay with him for a few weeks after I had completed all my interviews. We cooked together in his home and socialized during evenings and weekends, and we stay in touch as of this writing.

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\(^1\) Dr. Khamasi was not a respondent.
I was open in cases where volunteers from abroad asked me how I ended up in Eldoret, connected to his organization. It was interesting to meet other volunteers who were there giving service and to watch their behaviour toward me and body language when I told them my research topic. Many became visibly more guarded, perhaps imagining they were under observation, although they were not. This did not detract from the findings of my study, as I was focusing on the perspectives of hosts, not volunteers, and I began my participant observation after I had conducted the focus group with the organization.

2.7 Participant Selection

Following from my research topic, my aim was to speak to Kenyans who self-identified as hosts to international volunteers, in whatever way that manifested for them. Dr. Wanjiku Khamasi facilitated my first steps by connecting me with a few community members in her networks that might fit my requirements and might have something to say to me. Using the snowball sampling method, I asked respondents to refer me to others in their networks who might be suitable. The results of this research are therefore subject to the referral bias. I offered respondents 1,000 Kenyan shillings (approximately $14 CAD, quite generous for an hour of time given the cost of living in Kenya) upon completion of interviews in order to thank them for participation. In referring me on toward their colleagues, they could have mentioned this, which could have further biased referrals and the likelihood that these individuals would accept them.

I conducted 18 interviews with individuals or couples, some of whom were attached to organizations, and some of whom were not claiming to represent any organization in particular, but nevertheless identified as having hosted international volunteers. Without having narrowly-defined parameters for participant selection, and thereby not being able to identify a total population size, the results of this research could be subject to the sample size bias. I also
conducted one focus group, with six members of a single organization. The table below summarizes the interviews I conducted with individuals and groups, and their central focus of work within their community:

Table 1 – Respondents’ Central Focus of Work

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<th>Respondent Alias</th>
<th>Central Focus of Work</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>healthcare and research</td>
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<td>Focus Group</td>
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* PLWHIV: People Living with HIV/AIDS

Interviews were conducted in a place of the participant’s choosing, although as mentioned in the section on Participatory Action Research, these were not always real choices. The focus group was conducted outdoors, within the compound occupied by the organization. I did not conduct follow-up interviews.

There was no overlap between the individuals interviewed and the members of the focus group, although one focus group member was instrumental in connecting me with other respondents.
The community bias led me to recruit respondents predominantly within one field of work, the care of and advocacy for street children, youth, and mothers. This is an acute concern in Eldoret, which was heavily affected by the post-election violence in 2007-2008, which saw between 800-1,500 fatalities and 180,000-250,000 people displaced across Kenya.

Interviews were transcribed by me and I conducted a thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews in order to distil the topics which I have shared in the results section of this study.

2.8 Researcher's Personal Bias

I personally experienced a high degree of moral distress during my service engagements in East Africa in 2007 and 2008. I developed a lot of questions and disdain for the way I had chosen to give service. This took me a long time to understand: some of it was immediately obvious as it happened in the moment, other experiences required months or years of reflection to come to terms with. I still have questions, even as I write this thesis. This has conditioned the way in which I view international engagement and service-learning experiences, and my current position as I write is consistent with one of the central assumptions of the EIESL project: “even with the best of intentions, it is easy to do more harm than good” (EIESL 2011). I spent three years researching and presenting with the EIESL Project at the University of British Columbia, to staff, students from many disciplines, and faculty, including at international conferences. I therefore approached respondents and my analysis of their interviews with a perhaps biased set of assumptions around the potential harms to the community as a result of their presence, and the resultant moral distress that is often associated with operating in a dilemmatic space. I do what I can to be aware of and state the negativity bias in my analysis, which is to say that I hold significant skepticism about the value of the conventional volunteering paradigm.
2.9 Data Analysis and Representation, and Additional Biases

In alignment with a qualitative descriptive methodological framework, I used qualitative content analysis for this study that is “data-derived: that is, codes also are systematically applied, but they are generated from the data themselves in the course of the study” (Sandelowski 2000, 338). Once I completed an interview, I transcribed verbatim the audio recording of the interview using Microsoft Word© and the transcription software Express Scribe©. Respondents occasionally included words in Swahili, Kalenjin, and Luo in speaking to me, and this in combination with the sometimes noisy environments in which interviews were conducted resulted in some inaudible sections in the audio-recordings. In addition, listening to my interviews and taking notes on them within a few days of conducting them lent itself to an iterative research process where I revised my interview questions based on the data provided by previous interviews.

Jaffe (1996, 54) describes a familiar experience, how she
came with a list – an entire questionnaire – of all the right questions, and discovered to my disappointment that asking them did not seem to get me very far. In effect, the surface intelligibility of the culture dulled my senses to the degree of subtle understanding that is prerequisite to being able to ask questions that are relevant both to the ethnographer and to the people being asked. This sort of understanding cannot be rushed; it can only be accumulated with time.

Some interviews are certainly more insightful than others. One respondent was obviously impatient and inconvenienced by my request to speak with him, although he never said so directly. He gave his interview while driving a noisy truck, and as a result his responses were distracted and often off topic. Thus, interviews were not necessarily analyzed based on their quality, but those providing less detailed answers often served to confirm or discount patterns revealed in more illuminating interviews. As the interviews were mostly friendly and casual, on
occasion, conversation with respondents strayed off topic. I have therefore omitted the results of some of the interviews as irrelevant to this study.

I began my master’s degree in September of 2010. I conducted my fieldwork from May-August 2011. I began my transcription and analysis upon returning home, and I took a full-time job in February 2012. During this time, I effectively did not touch my study, returning to it again only when I left the job in April 2014. As such, memories and details unrecorded during my fieldwork may have deteriorated or disappeared altogether. The analysis of my data is subject to the recall bias. I use a few case studies to highlight ideas that are very strong and worth considering in the context of ethical issues in service abroad, even though they may be anomalous and do not fit comfortably within a theme.

Additionally, following Heron (2007, 18),

I am conscious that at times the effect may be to overly homogenize differences among participants, to inadvertently suggest a greater degree of consensus than exists, or to make it appear that I am speaking for all who participated in this study. Place myself within the analysis; see myself implicated in the issues I raise (in respect to relations of domination).

As someone who has volunteered abroad in the past and someone who is now criticizing the international volunteerism paradigm, I am aware of the “dangers of positioning yourself simultaneously as both ethnographer and participant” (Heron 2007, 19). I often use the first person plural, ‘we’ to include myself, to implicate myself in the issues I am raising, to include myself in the nexus of these subject positions. The dual roles are not easily negotiated.

For the first phase of the data analysis I used open coding where the “…concepts emerge from the raw data and later grouped into conceptual categories. The goal is to build a descriptive,
multi-dimensional preliminary framework for later analysis” (Khandkar, 2014). I read the interview on my computer alongside the audio recordings, checking for accuracy of the transcriptions and identifying common and outlier themes within and between interviews. I thoroughly listened to each interview two to three times. An open coding method allowed for the emergence of themes naturally through becoming familiar with the interview data, identifying experiences that are related, similar, or different for the participants (Khandkar, 2014).

2.10 Conclusion

In summation, I used a number of different analytic techniques, and that the result, while in principle more broadly productive than using a single-approach, also in consequence is subject to corresponding limitations, which I enumerate in Chapter 8.
Chapter 3 – Literature Review

3.1 Background – The EIESL Project

In an article in McLean’s Magazine, Rachel Mendelson (2008) asks the question, “Is volunteering about saving the world or enhancing a resumé?” Mosler (2003) explains that international volunteerism is on the rise, because we live in a world of increasing globalization (Anheier and Salamon, 2001), because of the desire to participate in worldwide causes or movements (Ziemek, 2002), and because of the transformation of communications via the Internet (UN Volunteers Expert Working Group on Volunteering, 1999; Lowenstein, 2002; SERVEnet, 2003).

In her PhD dissertation, Conservation Encounters, NGOs, Local People, and Changing Cultural Landscapes, Juanita Sundberg begins “Conservation organizations have created powerful moral visions of how social groups should interact with nature” (Sundberg 1999, viii). Similarly, host communities give us powerful moral visions for how volunteers should interact with communities.

The environmentalist’s adage, “take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints, waste nothing but time” rings true in this field: what are we taking with us and leaving behind that we may not even be aware of?

Volunteering abroad is certainly a feature of a globalized world (Grusky, 2000). Indeed, there is growing concern among a group of faculty members, students, and staff at UBC over the conflicting motivations for International Engagement and Service-Learning (IESL). My experience of wrestling with ethical dilemmas during my own eight months of international service in East Africa in the summers of 2007 and 2008 brought me to the EIESL Project. Sharing their concerns,
I joined with a number of peers and colleagues in a larger discussion about our roles and influence as teachers and learners in an IESL context. This discussion led to the creation of the UBC Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning (EIESL) Project in spring 2009. This project was created to “establish a sustainable platform for ethical international service-learning practices” at UBC (Dharamsi, Beaumont, Baldwin & Spiegel, 2009).

The initial phase of the project consisted of a dialogue series for students, staff and faculty, in order to identify some of the perceived ethical issues associated with IESL. These discussions generated a set of 6 interrelated themes: 1) Motivations; 2) Sustainability; 3) Balance and Reciprocity; 4) Intercultural Understanding; 5) Training and Education; 6) Witnessing and Observing. These themes then formed the basis for a set of materials to help guide the ways in which we might better learn and teach about the idea of ethical engagement abroad. I do not explain all the ways in which these themes are connected and overlapping. Nor do I assume that all ethical issues I present in this study necessarily fit neatly into one or more of these themes. While I consider respondents’ perspectives within this framework, what Crabtree and Miller refer to as “prefigured” themes (Crabtree & Miller 1992, in Creswell, 2007, 152), I do not cage them within it. Nor do I use this study to create an updated set of overarching themes for teaching and learning about IESL. I do, however, explore a number of additional subjects that emerged from individuals’ accounts.

This study is therefore complementary to the EIESL Project, and is situated within the same intellectual environment. As researchers at the EIESL Project, we realized we were creating resources based only on the perspectives of volunteers and sending organizations.

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2 For a more detailed description of the project and the themes, visit the EIESL website: [www.ethicsofisl.ubc.ca](http://www.ethicsofisl.ubc.ca)
Eriksson Baaz (2005, 22) notes that “development worker identities must, of course, be understood in relation to partner identities and their images of Self and donors/development workers”, and of course this works both ways. This study is, in a sense, a response to Baaz’s work. Because our project was confined to the University of British Columbia, we had no ability to gather perspectives from farther afield, and left out host communities altogether. In this study I ask and explore the question, “what is it like to host international volunteers?”

My approach has confronted a large gap in the literature. Much has been written about the growth and experience of IESL, but to date there has been insufficient attention paid to the exploration of the ethical implications of IESL. Even less understood are the implications of IESL from the perspective of communities hosting young service providers from abroad.

3.2 What is International Engagement and Service-Learning?

International Engagement and Service-Learning (IESL) is a term that describes not only service-learning activities, but is also meant to capture the broader typology of international research and service-based experiences available at the international offices of many universities, through service-oriented Non-Governmental Organizations, or through volunteer-tourism companies, and individuals traveling and volunteering alone and unattached. A more common, though certainly less helpful term might be “development work”. Again, this and similar terms are less helpful because of their subjective assumptions around what it means to be “developed”. Among other issues, it also carries a connotation of paternalism rather than genuine and reciprocal relationship in a service context. “There are sometimes romantic and even missionary overtones to these engagements, to be sure” says Ferguson; “but often enough there is a real commitment to work for liberating, empowering social transformations” (Ferguson 1994, 283).
reiterate that I focus on service-learning literature, because it is where most of the discussions around the ethical implications of engagement abroad by young people are situated.

Formal Service-Learning (SL) can be defined as an educational experience that places equal importance on three coupled processes: service, learning, and reflection. SL differs from other experiential opportunities such as volunteer placements, internships or co-ops in that:

- SL strives to achieve a balance between service and learning objectives - in SL, partners must negotiate the differences between their needs and expectations.
- SL places an emphasis on addressing community concerns.
- In SL, there is the integral involvement of community partners – SL involves a principle-centered partnership between communities and sending institutions.
- SL emphasizes reciprocal learning and the community partner as co-educator.
- SL emphasizes reflective practice - In SL, reflection facilitates the connection between practice and theory and fosters critical thinking. (Seifer 1998)

Crabtree (2008) states the basic tenets of SL as: the capacity to participate, reciprocity, transformational learning, citing Dewey on democratic and experiential learning, Freire (education is political; critical reflection and social action should be part of the education process), Kolb’s learning styles, and conflicting motivations or desires. Crabtree states that “the interview is more than a data-gathering technique: it is part of a process of building understanding and relationships and can be seen as providing a service itself.”

Eyler et. al. (1996) call reflection “the hyphen in service-learning” (adapted from Seifer 1998), and they suggest that the process is meant to be circular and ongoing. Service and learning are coupled; they are bound together as part of the same fabric. From a theoretical standpoint, I therefore tend to focus more closely on the concept of service-learning and related terminology rather than the broader idea of “development work” both because SL is a richer and more holistic base upon which to structure my research, and because it fits more closely with the
international service-based activities of university students and alumni, who do not necessarily identify as professionals. I also use the language of engagement, volunteerism and volunteers interchangeably with service-learning, service abroad and service-learners.

The value of reflection to SL, whether structured or unstructured, is self-evident, and indeed it should be a central aspect of any volunteerism encounter. Hatcher, Bringle, and Muthiah (2004) pose the question of how reflection activities can be best designed to optimize the quality of the learning experiences for undergraduates, although they do this with the beneficiaries of service in mind. They present two sets of guidelines for designing good reflection activities with the goal of determining if reflection is important to the quality of the learning experience. They proceed to empirically test the reflection characteristics individually to produce a model for practical use, with “relevance” (of their academic work and their SL placement to the real world) being the most important dimension. They stress the application of theory in practice, and note that there may be a value-added feature by regularizing reflection activities into a rhythm.

Daynes and Longo (2004) situate the SL discourse in a historical narrative. They outline an ongoing debate about whether the field originated in (or was most greatly influenced by) the work of John Dewey or Jane Addams. They argue that this debate is irrelevant, reminding us that Dewey and Addams’ work was often collaborative. Furthermore, they clarify that the origin of service-learning lies not in the university as a field of academic study, but in the community, “with institutions (including institutions of higher education) playing an important supporting role”. One of the most significant points is that Addams’ work was not program-driven, as many SL programs are today. Addams’ approach was adaptive and flexible, a feature which is often reduced with shorter, contemporary SL placements because of a range of issues, most notably
the problem of time. On the other hand, program-based SL has benefits which need to be fairly weighed, not least of all the ability to produce a transformative learning experience for students. Nevertheless, this paper offers suggestions for incorporating a broader range of ethical considerations into the IESL model that have the potential to be more sustainable.

With all this said, none of the respondents used “service-learning” or related terminology or pedagogy. If any were in formal service-learning partnerships, they gave me no indication. I found it more profitable to step outside this nomenclature and focus more broadly on volunteer-host encounters of all shapes and colours. This resulted directly in the situation I encountered in my field work: there are so many volunteers entering vulnerable communities to give service, each with their own values, motivations, and assumptions, and little if any scholarship trying to understand what it really means to the hosts and host communities.

3.3 Choosing Language Intentionally

It is important to acknowledge that the use of language in this field of study is controversial. After reading much, and consulting with both Canadians and people of diverse African descent, it is difficult to find a term to describe the region I worked in or the people I worked with that is not without problems: “developed/developing/underdeveloped/underresourced”, “rich/poor”, “first world/third world”, “global North/global South”, “industrialized/industrializing”, “marginalized”, “vulnerable”, or even at times “Kenyan” or “Tanzanian”. None of these are entirely appropriate, and none are entirely untrue. Spending time unpacking each term nullifies the point of using a single term in the first place. Of course, they are all relative, and their use sometimes depends what one is talking about. Developed compared to whom? Poor according to which values? What resources? Every process of inclusion is also a process of exclusion.
So what is a thoughtful, ethical way to talk about difference, or even to identify who exactly we are talking about in this field? My preference is not to generalize with broad brush-stroke terminology, but to be as specific as possible in each case. I conducted my fieldwork in and around Eldoret, Kenya, not in “Africa”. Ryszard Kapuściński said “Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say ‘Africa’. In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist” (Kapuściński 2001, ix). But then how do we make generalizations when we need to? How can this study have broader explanatory power?

The social determinants of health approach de-politicizes this language to a large extent when difference is understood in terms of health at the scale of the population group, defined in many different and intersecting ways: income levels, gender, employment conditions, educational status, geography. Health differences are not about poverty versus the rest – there is a gradient in health across all populations, all over the world. Frolich & Potvin (2008) help us:

The notion of vulnerable populations differs from that of populations at risk. A population at risk is defined by a higher measured exposure to a specific risk factor. All individuals in a population at risk show a higher risk exposure. A vulnerable population is a subgroup or subpopulation who, because of shared social characteristics, is at higher risk of risks. The notion of vulnerable populations refers to groups who, because of their position in the social strata, are commonly exposed to contextual conditions that distinguish them from the rest of the population. As a consequence, a vulnerable population’s distribution of risk exposure has a higher mean than that of the rest of the population. [...] Vulnerable populations, we argue, are those who concentrate numerous risk factors throughout their life course because of shared fundamental causes associated with their position in the social structure.

In this study, the majority of respondents work with street children, youth, and mothers, a population that Frolich and Potvin would define as vulnerable, because they are “at risk of risks”. As noted in Chapter 2, this does not accurately represent all the people served by the respondents of this study, but this is the area where ethical problems become most acute. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, I will use “vulnerable populations” with the qualifications
above, when speaking generally about “the community” served by the respondents of this study. I consider this usage within a broad conceptual understanding of community health, and I argue in this study that international volunteerism is a poorly understood part of the social determinants of community health. I will also use “vulnerable populations” at times in the context of volunteer-host or IESL encounters more generally, with the understanding that this excludes volunteers not working with vulnerable populations, or ones not necessarily working directly with or for a community people at all (hydrologists, for example). I will use other terminology as necessary, predominantly when discussing another author’s ideas. Intuitive readers can do their own work to connect this language to broader currents of engagement abroad, and transfer it as necessary into a form that will be relevant to them.

This unavoidable tension in language – not having an easy way to write about complex problems – points to the importance of making intentional choices with language, and of challenging ourselves to find better and more dignifying ways to talk to and about one other.

3.4 A Brief Tour of the Ethical Landscape

If you saw a child drowning in a fountain, even if the child was not your own, of course you would try to save them. So why do we believe we do not have the same ethical obligation to a stranger’s child on the other side of the world (Singer, 1972)? Authors like Peter Singer make compelling, indeed, sometimes panic- or guilt-inducing arguments for the need to give, aid, help, save the world. “Do you have a bottle of water or a can of soda on the table beside you as you read this book?” he asks. “If you are paying for something to drink when safe drinking water comes out of the tap, you have money to spend on things you don’t really need” (Singer 2009, xi). “What is to be done - by whom?” – asks Ferguson in his critique of “development” in
Lesotho, The Anti-Politics Machine (1994, 280). Lavery et. al. (2010, 1) ask “whether investigators and sponsors from high-income countries (HIC) have obligations to address background conditions of injustice in the communities in which they conduct their research”. How do we make sense of the voices around us? Of the ones inside us? How can we act when everything is so expensive and complex and, at times, far away? How can we use our privilege responsibly? I do not have answers to these questions – for me as well, they only lead to more questions. My approach to ethics is reflective, rather than directive.

It is a broadly accepted ethical premise we are all stewards of this planet, and accountable to one another as human beings. Peter Singer is right – we have an obligation to not stand passively by and watch as others suffer. But this necessitates critical reflection on our ideas about what is “just” and “right”. The service in which we engage is connected to our utopian dreams. We engage in “actions” to materialize our values and convictions of what is “right” and “just” in the world. Yet these actions, and even our convictions as to what is right and just are complex, complicated, and perhaps even invested with contradiction.

There is often an assumption made that services abroad are intrinsically effective and good, “regardless of their actual effects and possible alternatives to them in particular cases” (Gasper, 2004, 26; Epprecht, 2004). Holdsworth & Quinn (2010, 1) explain that there is “an emerging consensus among both politicians and academics that promoting student volunteering is beneficial for students, higher education institutions and the communities in which they volunteer”. They argue that “the benefits of student volunteering are assumed rather than proven, and, in the light of current political conviction of the need to promote volunteering, it is essential that we consider, critically, the motivations behind this agenda” (Holdsworth & Quinn
We need to question whether the community is involved in this kind of consensus? Given the lack of evidence in the literature from the host community perspective, my sense is probably not. Tiessen (2008) reflects that the excitement and increases in funding to these types of programs has overshadowed the need for critical evaluation of their outcomes.

Authors such as Des Gasper (2004) and David Crocker (2008) lead the field of development ethics, and they draw upon earlier authors such as Louis Joseph Lebret, Peter Berger and Denis Goulet, who helped to create a field of development ethics. The field is also influenced by the work of E.F. Shumacher, Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and Onora O’Neill. Questions of ethics in IESL also draw upon the work of several postcolonial writers such as Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Majid Rahnema, Vandana Shiva, Rajni Kothari, Wolfgang Sachs, Frederique Apffel-Marglin, James Ferguson, Vincent Tucker, Thierry Verhelst, Gilbert Rist and Jonathan Crush, Homi Bhabha, V.Y. Mudimbe, K.A. Appiah and Gayatri Spivak.  

Scholars such as Hoggett, Mayo and Miller provide invaluable insight in their book, *The Dilemmas of Development Work: Ethical Challenges in Regeneration* (2009), presenting a theoretical framework for understanding the dilemmas facing development workers, and drawing on life history interviews and providing case studies of the kinds of ethical challenges involved in this kind of work. They situate development work in a liminal space, a threshold between two planes of existence, between the state and civil society, one which is inherently fraught with ethical dilemmas. This space is also referred to as the “third sector”, wedged between public and private spheres. It is less regulated than either the public or private sectors, perhaps because of its association with charity.

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3 As suggested by Maria Eriksson Baaz. 2005.
As noted in Chapter 1, while there is a rigorous process of ethical accreditation for individuals doing research involving humans, chemicals or animals, there exists no broader set of commonly accepted ethical checks and balances guiding international engagement and service-learning involving humans. Keene & Colligan (2004) make a good comment on the way we have chosen to structure our research standards. They challenge current ethics review policies that apply to the field of anthropology and to SL: every institution creates its own ethical standards and most use a biomedical model which they argue does not apply to their field and impedes anthropological study. The authors point out that “questions cannot be submitted in advance because conditions of engagement cannot be fully anticipated.” I appreciate the value of spontaneity, which is a key component to anthropological study. A second debate the authors take up includes the normalized fiction of positionality: SL practitioners see themselves as “of the community”, which is often maintained to facilitate anthropological work. The truth, they say, is that we are usually somewhere in between “being in” and “being of”.

People entering vulnerable communities are therefore usually only bound or guided by the norms, policies or regulations of the groups (e.g. NGOs, religious groups, student groups etc.) that send them abroad. Individuals travelling and serving abroad solo (i.e. not with an NGO or ISL program) are often not provided with and therefore may not operate within an organizational or ethical framework appropriate to the culture they are entering, or at all. Raymond and Hall (2008, 530) conclude that “development of cross-cultural understanding should be perceived as a goal of volunteer tourism rather than a natural result of sending volunteers overseas”. My personal bias, as well as the examples I give throughout this thesis of harm done and the lack of adequate mechanisms for incorporating host community views and feedback mechanisms, leads
me to call the whole notion of volunteer tourism into question. “The toiling miners and the abandoned old women know the tactics proper to their situations far better than any expert does. Indeed, the only general answer to the question, “What should they [the community] do?” is: “They are doing it!” [...] They are not waiting for consultants to come and tell them what must be done” (Ferguson 1994, 281). We try to be decent people, certainly, but guide posts are helpful in a liminal space with its own unique set of ethical challenges. Even with the best of intentions, acting with a lack of ethical consciousness can produce more harm than good (Barber and Bowie 2008), especially in communities with high levels of vulnerability.

Hoggett, Mayo and Miller (2009, 9) state that “In a dilemmatic space there is no ‘right thing to do’ but one’s values can provide a crucial resource for navigating a terrain that is ambiguous, shifting and contested.” In a lecture I attended entitled “The Space to be Human” given by Dr. James Orbinski, former President of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), he said that “all we can do is act for the best”. Ferguson reminds us that “failure here does not mean doing nothing; it means doing something else, and that something else always has its own logic” (Ferguson 1994, 276). As global citizens, as human beings, we must learn to do this – to actively navigate this shifting terrain – rather than passively wandering through it hoping to come out unscathed and unnoticed. So what is the ethical price to pay for developing a generation of global citizens? Who pays?

The health professions open up a wealth of questions and concerns around ethical engagement abroad. Volunteer engagement abroad seems to be at an all-time high in the health professions. It is seen as “a responsibility, a challenge and an opportunity for service” (Van Tilburg, 1995), but a number of scholars have called its beneficial effect into question (Crump and Sugarman, 2008;
Van Tilburg, 1995; Wall et. al., 2006; Green et. al., 2009; Gray, 1992; DeCamp, 2007). In addition to the potential for service and learning, these experiences can often be self-serving, unsustainable, and can lack the reciprocity of genuine relationships.

The first principle of biomedical ethics is *primum non nocere*: “first, do no harm” – one of our most valuable guideposts for ethical decision-making. Yet the health professions tend to interpret this phrase according to a relatively narrow understanding in international engagement. One of the faculty members on the EIESL Project once said at a dialogue event “I have never been involved in a university international project that does not do harm.” Ackerman (2010, 40) examines “the ethics of affecting locals [in International Health Electives], frequently a vulnerable population or community utilized for training, as well as the ethics of physical or emotional harm to the students have not been carefully examined”. Opportunities for volunteer service experiences for students in vulnerable communities in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) appear to be at an all-time high (EIESL, 2011; Crabtree, 2008).

The benefits of exposing medical students to global health issues in the field are numerous. An increasingly globalized world means that those in the health disciplines “are now expected to have a broader knowledge of tropical disease and newly emerging infections, while being culturally sensitive to the increasing number of international travelers and ethnic minority populations”. International clinical rotations can provide this, as well as “a greater ability to recognize disease presentations, more comprehensive physical exam skills with less reliance on expensive imaging, and greater cultural sensitivity” (Drain et. al. 2007, 226). Many of these opportunities come in the form of “medical voluntourism”, an increasingly popular type of volunteer service by clinical professionals and medical trainees from high income countries that
blends short-term volunteer work with travel tourism, generally in an LMIC (Bezruchka, 2000). Bhat (2008, 1133) points out that “despite the increasing numbers of medical students travelling abroad for clinical experience, effectively no data that address the effect of this educational trend exist”, and that “risks are also associated with sending inexperienced medical trainees abroad”. The crux of ethical concern in international health electives stems from putting students in “a position to deliver care beyond their qualifications or without guidance”, in which “substantial room exists for malpractice and serious medical error.” In this study, I unpack this concern and apply it more broadly to volunteers as paraprofessionals, examining the risks posed when volunteers act and advise beyond their qualifications.

In the dental literature, Holmgren and Benzian (2011, 513) cite Ivan Illyich, “While volunteering can be a hugely rewarding experience for those who volunteer, as long ago as the 1960s concern was being expressed as to the real benefits to the host community of such actions and that there might be negative effects of volunteer actions in developing countries”. Dickson and Dickson (2005) also question whether dental volunteers do more harm than good. Campbell and Jovchelovitch (2000) make valid arguments around community health as a participatory process, not something that is done to a community by outsiders.

It is only recently that we have started to understand the role of a health professional in a broader sense. The 2005 CanMEDS framework for physicians and surgeons in Canada includes the role of health advocate among its core competencies. This is the skill that allows physicians to understand a patient’s broader social determinants of health, and make decisions that should prevent them from simply sending patients back to the conditions that brought them to see the doctor in the first place. Unfortunately, the role of health advocate is also the least well
understood (Dharamsi et. al. 2011). What would happen if ethical advocacy more broadly was a role that was expected to be mastered by volunteers, of any kind, wanting to give service abroad? Goecke et. al. (2007, 289) find that international health electives “are a useful vehicle to evaluate resident achievement of the CanMEDS competencies in a way that is reflective, realistic, and representative of the multiple challenges involved when working in international health”. Hancocks (2011, 499) believes that the health professions are headed towards the “development and eventual adoption of a voluntary code of ethical actions [...] achieved by the growth of strategic partnerships between charities, non-governmental organisations and others”. This has the potential to be more dangerous than helpful. If such a code were to be developed unilaterally, without input from and sensitivity to individual communities, it would be as useful as taking the name “Nepal” off the title sheet of a World Bank structural adjustment program, and writing “Uruguay”. The point is that geographical and cultural context is extremely important when considering a code for what might be “ethical” in any given encounter.

Parker & Dautoff (2007) take a longitudinal approach to measuring the effects of Service-Learning (SL) and Study Abroad (SA) on business students. They state that “because few SL projects are cross-cultural by design, little is known about how cultural learning enhances international understanding”.

In my study, I ask a few questions that are not easily addressed by the literature, and that give a looming sense of greater intractability: is volunteering in its current incarnation about addressing problems in another part of the world, or enhancing a resumé? What does it mean to help? Who am I in relation to those I serve? How am I situated within a historical context of service? Who, or what, is really being served by my actions? Do I have to go to know? What am I
learning by making mistakes, and at whose expense? As is common in the field of ethics, I have more questions than answers.

An indispensable text in this field is Barbara Heron’s (2007) *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender and the Helping Imperative*. She asks over and over again, “what does it mean to help?”, positioning the idea of helping as an insulting and paternalistic notion. Heron questions the helping imperative as unquestionably good and tries to reconsider the never ending influx of Canadians/Northerners into the South. She “draws from race theory, including space and whiteness studies, post-colonialism and colonial studies, post-structuralism, feminism and development theory” (2007, 6). The helping imperative is defined as a volunteer’s sense of entitlement and an obligation to intervene for the “betterment” of the Other wherever he or she resides. Race, while no longer overtly articulated, remains essential to the meaning and functioning of these continuities of thought. Bourgeois women enhance their hold on bourgeois subjectivity through the performance of goodness... they can stake their claim to the moral high ground.... direct experiences of intersecting relation of power in the racialized spaces of development – the "Third World" – have a transformative effect on feminine subjects’ claims to “true” bourgeois identity. All of this is bound up in the depth of bourgeois femininity’s desire for development. (2007, 7)

She continues that in our current discourse on “development” (developed according to what/whom?), “Development is really a longing for whiteness, which holds the promise of wholeness. [...] whiteness is constituted in doing what is “right”. (Heron 2007, 8)

Wallace (2000) introduces the problem of time, one of the most important issues in service abroad. Wallace splits the problem into two distinct yet coupled problems which mutually reinforce one another. The first is rooted in the fact that “university education is built upon numerous artificial constructions of time which [...] grow out of a scientific conception of learning” (Daynes & Longo 2004, 10). Host communities and their organizations function
according to different social norms and priorities from their Northern guests, and experience issues and contingencies which these artificial constructions cannot accommodate. The second problem is a frequent lack of appropriate preparation, skills and long-term commitment, which leads to students not being “fully present” in the experience. What a community organization needs, in contrast to this narrow presence, is for students “to be fully present as whole persons to the full complexity of the organization and its people” (Wallace 2000, 134). The problem of time was something respondents focused on, and I return to this issue in greater depth in Chapter 6.

Porter and Monard highlight the idea of reciprocity in partnerships with an anthropological example. They use the concept of “Ayni”, a conception of reciprocity particular to the Bolivian Andes which holds that, when it is your turn to serve, obligations must be fulfilled through personalized giving and you cannot pay someone else to do your part. Wealth is measured in terms of favours done and therefore favours owed. The authors remind us that reciprocal work cannot — and should not — be calculated in simple monetary terms. These are worthwhile questions to ask of any encounter – are volunteers worth their salt? What do they give to the community? What do they leave behind, both positively and negatively? We might also consider the Quaker philosophy of seat equity – are parties contributing equal (or at least, equitable) amounts of effort to completing a task or solving a problem? Just as these authors reflect more deeply on how an ayni-informed model of reciprocity could enhance their programs, I want to consider how alternative models of IESL might inform our models and notions of best practices.

While some literature frames the aim of service-learning as healthy, reciprocal relationships between institutions and communities, others position it as an opportunity to produce conscious
global citizens. Dunlap et. al. (2007) are in the latter camp, and do so by trying to activate Piaget’s (1965) cognitive disequilibrium. They placed students in inner-city homeless shelters for their SL class in order to expose them to conditions that would allow them to recognize and address their struggles with privilege and guilt, and which would upset pre-held perceptions of the status quo⁴. Their five-step model helps us understand why some students might return to their lives of privilege and not show strong evidence of having undergone profound transformation: some students become aware of their skin colour and socioeconomic status and accommodate this adjustment into their identity; others choose an assimilation strategy to avoid confronting the reality of social distance and the responsibility of becoming more active global citizens. I accept their argument that if a person is fully comfortable in an ISL context, they are not learning. I am also intrigued by their view that we tend to be educated out of consciousness as we grow, rather than into it: they note that “white children quickly become aware that their questions about race raise adult anxiety, and as a result, they learn not to ask the questions.” However, the authors tend to stress the positive aspects of Community Service-Learning (CSL) while focusing on students and less on the community and the potential harms associated with students’ grappling with their identities. This highlights a question that continues to trouble me – I have learned much as a result of making mistakes, but at whose expense?

Hammond et. al. (2005) situate SL in the context of participatory action research (PAR), although they focus more on the form of the SL class as PAR than its content and teleological purpose. They also fail to question what students learn about communities and from whom, as well as what students leave behind.

⁴ George Orwell also did this effectively and chillingly much earlier (1933) in Down and Out in Paris and London.
Pompa (2002) depicts a prison as both community and classroom. In this service-learning encounter, the prison was a potentially prohibitive 3-hour drive from the University, although all the class members agreed nevertheless to hold a 2.5 hour class there every week. I enjoyed the irony they point out of “correcting” a correctional facility. This idea carries over to ISL programs in that many “developing” countries end up “developing the developers” and thus equalizing preconceived notions of power and authority – Jomo Kenyatta would want it this way (indeed, a respondent performs this trick in Chapter 7). As in ISL, the prison is a community that often forces students to look more closely at things they will never be able to change and to come to terms with that. By “humanizing inmates”, the authors dispelled myths about difference and urged their students to deeply question the utility of the existing system of punishment. In a similar way, ISL practitioners are given the opportunity to question the existing model of “development”. The authors say that by the end they were “left with one group, whose common elements emerge more prominently than their differences.” An answer to this question would have important implications for IESL. The fiction of being “of the community” in Keene & Colligan (2004) again comes to mind in this instance.

Werner & McVaugh (2000) show that trying to carve global citizens out of ordinary students can be a bit like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. In trying to understand how the structure of a service project might relate to issues of long-term commitment, they bemoan the difficulties of trying to motivate people to try new things without using external motivators such as requirements or incentives. If students are not interested in understanding an issue or are not passionate about service and see it as more of a burden, they increase the risk of being ineffective and doing more harm than good. Might the students who are aware of “the burden” more conscious of the differential and capable of greater empathy of a shared burden—rather
than the dewy eyed idealist who may have no concept of the strengths (as well as the burdens) of the community members? This article promotes ideas that to me apply only to a narrow conception of service. Because most international volunteering encounters generally involve greater risk, financial investment and distance than local volunteering, the terms of service (at least in formal ISL) are generally much more carefully and explicitly agreed upon, and some autonomy is often sacrificed on the part of the volunteer in order to ensure smooth programming. There can also be diminished capacity to conduct proper monitoring and evaluation at a greater distance because of practical problems like lack of access to electrical power and/or a connection to the internet in many rural communities.

Handy et. al. (2009) surveyed 9,482 volunteers from 12 countries and found that students motivated to volunteer primarily so they could include the experience on their resumé were no more likely to volunteer than students with other motives. “However, in countries with a positive signaling value of volunteering, volunteering rates are significantly higher” (p. 2). The discourse around global citizenship and the value these countries place on volunteering abroad causes me concern over the university’s/country’s impetus to produce global citizens and having enough genuine needs that can suitably be fulfilled by under-experienced or inappropriately motivated student practitioners. Seeing the posters posted in the corridors of a university like UBC, one gets the impression that for-profit service abroad opportunities are often driven by a profit motive and a surplus supply of volunteers looking for an exotic learning or travel experience, rather than a genuine demand from communities.

Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) highlight the difficulty of measuring the effect of SL on the capacity for moral reasoning, but begin by re-evaluating a popular theory (Kohlberg 1971) which suggests
that a person makes ethical decisions according to a model of either ‘justice’ or ‘care’. They cite another relevant study which suggests that men prefer greater objectivity and hence are more inclined to use the justice orientation (Keller et. al. 2003), while women tend to favour a framework based on interdependence and therefore gravitate to a model of care. Their own study suggests that these two are highly correlated across both sexes in an SL context, and should not be considered exclusive reasoning styles. They reiterate the problem of time (Wallace, 2000), questioning also whether SL placements are long enough to affect the necessary or intended moral changes, or whether they should be treated only as a substratum for this journey. This could lead to a discussion of the purpose of ISL, and its strength as a credential on applications to professional schools. Keller et. al. (2003) also illustrates well how even when placed in the path of a potentially transformative experience, students can fail to take a more structural approach to understanding and addressing problems they see in the communities they enter.

Skilton-Sylveste & Erwin (2000) takes up the discussion around care ethics. They distinguish between two kinds of relationships—giving and caring, which correlate with the charity vs. justice dialectic in Moely et. al. and Bernacki & Jaeger, saying that “it may be easier for college students to develop a ‘giving’ rather than a ‘caring’ relationship, but meaningful service-learning is based on making connections with people that involves more engagement than is customarily associated with a giving orientation. In one example, they praise a SL tutoring program that reversed expectations by having the clients enter the college community for their tutelage, rather students entering a community. Although this is an unusual way of conducting SL which attempts to correct for socioeconomic distance, ideas like this are not broadly transferable to an ISL setting because community partners from other countries often cannot easily visit ISL offices.
at source campuses. As such, the idea of reciprocity in these settings necessarily possesses a different meaning. Community partners rarely (and sometimes never) meet the people involved in the upper administration of large SL programs, again indicating that although the domestic and the international forms of SL are rooted in the same philosophical traditions, they are divergent on specific aspects of their founding principles (i.e. reciprocity). Lastly, they support the idea that teachers need to be trained to “become effective at working with people who are different from themselves”. I believe from the weight of evidence, including my own study and experience, that this should be true of all who engage internationally in vulnerable communities.

Moely et. al. (2008, 37) compare the preferences of college students for one of two paradigms of SL: a charity model or a social justice model, which in many ways map well onto the care vs. justice model. The former involves “offering assistance […] in an effort to solve immediate problems”, the latter involves “producing changes in the larger societal structures that ultimately determine outcomes for groups of individuals in need” (ibid). The results show that SL students often prefer the charity paradigm over the social change orientation. This should be problematized, and the results became evident to me as I began to conduct my interviews.

While Bernacki & Jaeger focus on how individuals reach moral conclusions, Brody and Wright (2004) use a social psychological theory of interpersonal and intergroup relations to explore the motivations for engaging in SL. Using Aron & Aron’s model of self-expansion (1986), the authors build a quantitative causal model between the desire for self-expansion and the subsequent enrollment in an SL course. They connect this theory with other psychological models on motivations for service. Of particular interest is one which suggests that “service meets the values function by allowing individuals to express their beliefs through action.” If these actions
produce positive outcomes, then individuals can validate themselves and their beliefs as having esteem or worth.

Litke (2002) tries to assess what value, if any, students glean from SL experiences. The author assesses students based on reflection papers over a three-year period during an SL class intended to build oral speaking skills. The results are unsurprising and not tremendously significant: regardless of student performance in class, all students do identify a personal benefit from the experience. Again, in a more thoughtful regime for selecting volunteers for service abroad, students should be assessed on whether they “get it” or not before they are even accepted for placements. In entering vulnerable communities, individuals who do not “get it” in most circumstances pose more of a liability than they are worth. In this sense, Litke does not adequately draw out the ethical implications of her work. Many practitioners have moved beyond this question of the benefits of SL, as questions of mutual influence between communities and SL practitioners are more pressing. However, the author seems to have identified only the relevance of the particular SL experience being documented, from which few generalizations should be made.

Worrall (2007) conducts a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 40 representatives from 12 community-based organizations (CBOs) working with the Steans Center for Community-based Service-Learning at DePaul University in Chicago. Her goal was to better understand how CBOs defined community-campus partnerships. She asks important questions around motivations for entering into and sustaining a partnership, around what effect volunteers really have on the communities they serve and how CBOs roles are perceived in the service-learning partnership.
Authors such as Antonio Gramsci, Michael Lipsky, and Peter Marris and Martin Rein position their work more closely to the emotional dimension of the ethical challenges of IESL (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009). Gupta et. al. (2003) articulate the notions of “ethical capital” as “social trust which is guided by higher ethical values”, and tries to understand how we might harness social and ethical capital towards positive social transformation. Barriers to this transformation, they argue, lie primarily in the fact that the tenets of ethical capital may not have become social norms as of yet. Similarly, Tsukamoto (2005, 77; in Bull et. al. 2010) “suggests that ethical capital conveys the asset of morality in an organisation. Organisations espousing their moral virtues can attract a growing interest of followers, yield returns and competitive advantage, as Tsukamoto”.

As shown in my methodology (Chapter 2), I began my conversation with host communities from the same place: what are your motivations for doing this in the first place?

Ernest Boyer considered the “Scholarship of Engagement” as a field of study (1991, in Fogel & Cook 2006). Consider what knowledge we could obtain if the scholarship of ethical (global?) engagement were pried open as an area of academic specialization, and imagine the longer-term implications for how practice could shift as a result.

Freire’s work on of critical pedagogy has also been central in the literature on building more ethical IESL experiences. The EIESL project, and this study assumes a socially and ecologically just orientation toward service-learning within the framework of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that engages students in investigating the social, political and economic dimensions that frame lived experiences in order to “take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 35). Freire (1970) offers praxis-- the continuous cycle of generating knowledge, taking action, and reflecting--as a guiding strategy for uprooting and overthrowing systemic oppression. (EIESL, 2011, p. 18)
Kumagai and Lypson (2009) unpack Freire’s idea of critical consciousness nicely as linking the professional training... with human values, an orientation of education and practice towards addressing human needs and interests. [...] From a pedagogic perspective, development of true fluency (and not just “competence” [emphasis added]) in these areas requires critical self-reflection and discourse and anchors a reflective self with others in social and societal interactions. By “critical self-reflection, we do not mean a singular focus on the self, but a stepping back to understand one’s own assumptions, biases, and values, and a shifting of one’s gaze from self to others and conditions of injustice in the world. This process, coupled with the resultant action, is at the core of the idea of critical consciousness. (p. 783)

Freire says that education is political (i.e. it is part of somebody’s political agenda) and that critical reflection and social action should be part of the education process (in Crabtree, 2007, 27). Kiely (2004) discusses how intelligently-designed ISL placements teach students to let go of harmful assumptions, and allow them to better understand social distance and their position of power and privilege. Kiely describes a common phenomenon which he calls the “chameleon complex” experienced by many students upon returning from abroad, myself included, which “represents the long-term challenges and struggles students experience in attempting to change their lifestyle and engage in social action” (Kiely 2004, 10). I can relate this reading to my own experience as he identifies students who define their life in terms of two distinct phases: one before their ISL experience and one after the experience and subsequent “conscientization” (Freire, 1970).

Following Freire, Camacho (2004) focuses strongly on the idea of consciousness-building as a vital feature of much richer and more developed SL experiences. She does this by first revisiting the idea of power relationships, specifically those that unfold between her SL students and undocumented migrants in migrant labour camps in Tijuana, Mexico. Her emphasis is to “encourage students to think about and critically reflect upon their own social locations; that is, be cognizant of how their ‘gazes’ might be imbued with power” (Camacho 2004, 31). The
traditional charity model serves to reinforce existing hierarchies, and Camacho argues that Service-Learning is meant to be a tool to unpack the tensions created by these hierarchies and to challenge students to “name their own dimension of privilege”; deep reciprocity should become self-evident.

Hammond et. al. (2005) describe an adaptive and certainly irregular co-teaching experience, where the single instructor model of classroom authority is disrupted. Their participatory action research (PAR) method is informed in part by a wonderful student-generated metaphor of ‘SL as midwife’. This metaphor helps students to conceptualize their role in communities more humbly; they are reminded that SL projects are not their own. Rather, the students’ role is “to assist, seek information, make observations, and lend their energies to making the PAR processes of their community partners more viable”. They propose a model that encourages cooperative PAR projects, rather than individual researchers working on isolated projects, as is standard. The notes in this reading have useful monitoring and evaluation tools, although I found that without reference to the community partners, the article lacked a balanced representation of stakeholders. They talk a lot more about the class form than its content. What do students learn about communities and from whom? What do they leave behind? The authors do not explicitly make the connection between this fairly unusual teaching model and the benefits to the community, making it hard to concretize the mutual benefits they discuss.

A number of authors (e.g. Moely, Furco and Reed, 2008; Camacho, 2004; Skilton-Sylvester and Irwin, 2000; Heron, 2007; Mayo, Hoggett and Miller, 2009) have marked a necessary shift away from paternalistic notions of “helping”, which are based in a charity approach, and towards more
of a social justice approach to international service, one of “joining”, an idea to which I return frequently throughout this thesis.

One of the most valuable points in this review overall is that “we have plenty of men and women who can teach what they know; we have very few who can teach their own capacity to learn” (Wallace, 2000). Cultivating this depth of critical reflection will become part of our charge moving forward, and we should remember this when studying diverse epistemologies around the topic of international engagement.

By adopting a critically conscious approach to IESL, we can begin to consider the question of what a portrait of ethical IESL might looks like, if such a thing indeed exists, and contrast that with the lived experiences of volunteers and hosts engaged in IESL encounters. There is ample material written about the experience of IESL, but the gap that I hope to fill will involve the positioning of these experiences in the context of ethics as reflective practice.

3.5 If a Tree Falls in the Forest: Where to Find Host Community Perspectives

“When the Missionaries arrived, the Africans had the Land and the Missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible.”

— Jomo Kenyatta (disputed)

The great bulk of the formal service-learning literature looks at volunteer-host encounters from the perspective of volunteers and sending organizations – most commonly organizations in the United States (however, a review of the literature in other languages might reveal a different perspective). Anna Du Vent wrote her PhD dissertation on this subject, explaining that even the shift to collecting voices from volunteers themselves is a relatively recent phenomenon (Du Vent, 2008). Much of the existing literature deals with a Community Service-Learning (CSL)
regime where students do not leave their home country. Because of fundamental differences between domestic CSL-based curricula and International Service-Learning (ISL) scenarios (e.g. scale of travel and cultural preparation, cost, time commitment, sense of immersion), models produced based on domestic research are at times difficult to map onto projects with an ISL component, or onto volunteer encounters more generally.

Heron acknowledges that these comments are missing. She writes about the ethical implications of service abroad from the perspective of volunteers in *Desire for Development: Whiteness and the Helping Imperative* (2007, 20), telling us that

The decision not to carry out interviews with Africans was also consciously made, partially in connection with the point just discussed, but also because I did not want to pit the words of African people who work with Canadian development workers against the views of the latter, as if to prove my points.

As such, I recognize that while this work attempts to hear and share some of these comments, I am entering a discourse that is potentially adversarial. I am careful in my writing to not position the respondents’ viewpoints as personal or confrontational towards the volunteers they hosted.

There is relatively little scholarship from African authors (Wai, 2007), on conceptions of ethics, or perspectives on volunteerism and hosting more generally; rather, the current understanding seems to rest upon principally on views from the outside. There is a Malawian proverb: “The visitor usually brings a sharp knife.” As an example of how this can create a false impression of African viewpoints, Ashdown’s (2009) study gives us an anthropological sense of how ethics is conceived by the Maa speaking Ndorobo people inhabiting the southern portion of the Mau Escarpment in Kenya [approximately halfway between the capital, Nairobi, and my study site, Eldoret]:

Modern Western societies seem to lack a symbiosis of ethos and world view. Indeed, meanings and motivations of a personal nature often have little connection to one's social Self. This dichotomy between personal and social meanings of life often create conflicting moral motivations within the daily life of a Western individual since there is no single ultimate ethical code to act as a guide (Moseley 1979). Traditional African morality entertains no such conflict because Self is conceived to be a natural blend of individuality and community membership role acting in concert with each other. (Ashdown 2009, 27)

Just as it is absurd to describe Africa as a single, undifferentiated country, it does not make sense to attribute the beliefs of one ethnocultural group within a single country, as described by a Western anthropologist, to all other people (despite some similarities between groups). Kebede (2004) reminds us that “the great task of freeing the African mind from Eurocentric constructions takes priority over the design of development policies” (pp. 107). On this point, hear Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, speak:

It is important for the European teacher to realise that “he is not pouring new wine into new bottles, but into very old bottles”. But how can he discover the exact flavour of the old vintage, and where is the cellar to be seen? He may set out to learn something of family, clan and tribal organization, the rights and duties of individuals within the society, and the rules that determine the conduct of any individual within the context of the whole.

But after a sketchy study of those institutions, he thinks that he knows all about the mental outlook of his pupils, what they believe and what they do not believe, how they regard themselves, and the world of nature and the society of which they form a part. The assumption of knowing the African’s mind has been very often heard in the usual phraseology: “I have lived for many years amongst the Africans and I know them very well.” Yet this is far from the actual fact, for there is a great difference between “living” among a people and “knowing” them.

While a European can learn something of the externals of African life, its system of kinship and classification, its peculiar arts and picturesque ceremonial, he may still have not yet reached the heart of the problem. In “authoritative books”, he often loses his way as in a maze of knowledge not yet intelligible because not yet related.

With his preconceived ideas, mingled with prejudices, he fails to achieve a more sympathetic and imaginative knowledge, a more human and inward appreciation of the living people, the pupils he teaches, the people he meets on the roads and watches in the gardens. In a word he fails to understand the African with his instinctive tendencies (no doubt very like his own), but trained from his earliest days to habitual ideas, inhibitions and forms of self-expression which have been handed down from one generation to another and which are foreign, if not absurd, to the European in Africa. (Kenyatta 1938: 123-4)
This study is meant to contribute to the scholarship of engagement abroad by focusing on local voices talking about issues that are important to them.

3.6 Perspectives of Homestay Families

So where should one look for the stuff of IESL? Whose voices are important? My first attempt to understand the perspective of host communities was to look at studies focusing on the experiences of homestay families. On the whole, the perspectives of this experience seem to be mostly the same. First of all, most of the literature using the terminology of “host families” talks about study abroad, usually linguistic study, rather than connected to service-learning courses or volunteerism more generally (Bodycott & Crew 2000; Akbar et. al. 2004; Allen, Dristas and Mills 2006; Bachner & Zeutschel 2009). This literature focuses on linguistic gains by students, the quality of the homestays, the value of the programs, and on bridging cultures (Richardson 2003). Some studies talk about a “successful” homestay experience (Crealog & Derwing 1999), but what does that even mean? Is this successful for everyone? What cultural barriers might stand in the way of communicating discomfort or unhappiness? These are questions to which I will return later.

3.7 Perspectives of Community-Based Organizations

Another place to look – and certainly a place I have looked – is at people representing community-based organizations (CBOs). Those engaging abroad should be “critical of service-learning practices that perpetuate institutional power inequalities and that do not advance the social change objectives of community-based organizations” (Marullo, Maoyedi & Cooke 2009), however I would add that community-based organizations (CBOs) are not necessarily “the community” we are looking to hear from in its entirety. I am not questioning whether CBOs represent the interests of “the community” (however defined), but representing interests and
representing individual voices may be different. Studies that focus on a narrow definition of either volunteer or host have limited explanatory power, as they do not integrate the voices of a broader conception of community, in all its complexity. What about homestay families? What about schools? Religious organizations? What about the guy who drives the bus? Where are these voices? What are they concerned about?

Blouin & Perry (2009, 121-2) come close to asking the kinds of questions I focus on. “As service-learning courses become more prevalent,” they say, “it is increasingly important to ensure that they are mutually beneficial to both universities and communities. [...] While there has been increased scholarship on service-learning in recent years, research on the implications of SL for communities remains sparse and limited. The voice of CBOs is largely absent in the service-learning literature” except that their study is not set in an international context; the research setting is in Monroe County, Indiana, and so it is of limited help in trying to understand these dynamics in an international context. Stoecker and Tryon’s (2009) book is another example. They say their goal is to “amplify the unheard voices of community organization staff in the service-learning relationship” (vii). I applaud this motivation, but again, is the organizational staff fully representative of the community? Does this capture what it is like to host volunteers? Is this the whole picture?

Keith (2005) examines how three principles of globalization: neoliberalism, time-space compression, and globalism intersect with service-learning, specifically in the areas of reciprocity and meeting community needs. She reinforces the observation that marginalized ways of knowing (in the sense of academic contributions from the Global South) often have value and that we marginalize or exclude these epistemologies at our own peril. She advocates for the
The collectivization of knowledge creation in SL and showing ways that both server and served can benefit from SL.

The reason for blending International Service-Learning (ISL) with international engagement conceptually in this study is because a community can be host to multiple different kinds of volunteers. Although they are all people, different kinds of engagement means different paradigms, discourses, motivations, goals, activities and partnerships. “The people are not an undifferentiated mass. Rich and poor, women and men, city dwellers and villagers, workers and dependents, old and young; all confront different problems and devise strategies for dealing with them. [...] There is not one question, but hundreds (Ferguson 1994, 281).

A community is rarely one thing; I really should be saying a “community of communities”. Cruz and Giles (2000) ask “where is the community in service-learning research?” Diverse communities attract diverse kinds of volunteers, who are not bound to a finite range of encounters with a small portion of the population. A volunteer can have influence in the life of a shop clerk just as he or she does in the life of a street child they have come to serve through a CBO. This influence is often unintentional and unrealized: the things we say, who we listen to and ignore, the way we choose to spend our time and money. In this way we can create and sustain cultural stereotypes (Raymond and Hall 2008), and all too often, they are negative ones.

A community experiences all of this at once, directly and indirectly, in complex ways. Focusing on just service-learning or just voluntourism experiences should not be construed as understanding the totality of community-based perspectives, because communities are made up of many different kinds of people who cross paths and whose causality can be omnidirectional. The
subtle and sometimes merely semantic differences of what we call different kinds of volunteers may be irrelevant or at least obscured from the average host community, as are likely the individual’s or sending organization’s values, motivations, and operating models. Unless the community member is someone who is specifically responsible for the learning outcomes of the volunteer’s placement, to the average member of a community, a volunteer is usually just a volunteer.

A colleague in the EIESL Project offered the following parable to illustrate this point:

Imagine a Canadian non-governmental organization (NGO) has identified a community experiencing water stress. Women in the community are traditionally responsible for fetching water from a spring, requiring them to walk several kilometres a day in order to fulfill their water needs. The NGO has decided to fundraise to drill a borehole down to the water table, and construct a pump, in order to liberate these women from their toil. They use GPS software to ensure the site selection is more or less equidistant from all members of the community. They use locally available materials to construct the pump, and pay to train some of the locals in the skills necessary to fix it if it breaks.

From an ethical perspective, this appears reasonably well thought out, culturally intelligent, and more or less sustainable. But a relevant question surely is, “what happens to the social fabric of this community now that women are no longer fetching water together?” If this cultural phenomenon that has existed since time immemorial is suddenly dismantled, what effect will that have? In communities where there are clearly defined gender roles and expectations, this may be a woman’s only opportunity to socialize or relax during the day. If this is removed, what does this community lose? It may not be serious, and change is not necessarily a bad thing, but the question abides. What do we take with us when we leave that is invisible? What do we leave behind?
Attempts to get close to “the community” often have the opposite effect to that which they originally intend. Quist-Adade and van Wyk (2007) illustrate the false perspectives many volunteers hold of the places they intend to go, explaining that “people are exposed to ‘development pornography’ [also called ‘poverty tourism’ or ‘poverty porn’ (e.g. Selinger 2010)] through a plethora of visual, text and audio input via the mass media and popular culture, which present the African lifeworld as inferior and primitive, and African people as helpless, hapless, and in the throes of an unending series of epidemics on the short road to extinction” (pp. 66).

Peter Ngau explains how

an indigenous tradition of self-help called Harambee, meaning “let’s all pull together” [...] used to provide local mutual assistance and foster cultural values; today, those roles have been abandoned while only the material ends of Harambee are appropriated. Furthermore, local people have taken less and less part in decision making, management, and control of projects. This perversion of Harambee is referred to here as departicipation and reflects disempowerment at the grass-roots level.

My point is that for volunteers and organizations entering communities to give service, these nuances do not usually factor into the ethical calculus, and we have no way to gauge the cumulative effects.

As I have stressed, community-based organizations alone are not the (whole) community, they are meant to serve the community; they are entry points. Mtapuri (2008, 35) “presents the conceptions of poverty by the poor in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe” (italics mine). We need to take a more integrated and pluralistic approach to understanding community and our effects on the community. We should not equate “host” with “organization” with “community”. Like the tree in the forest that indeed makes a noise even if nobody is around to hear it, we should also remember that a community is still a community, even if no one is volunteering in it.
3.8 Whole-community Perspectives

Host agents and institutions are usually only considered in isolation from each other, and seldom is there more than one type of host examined in a single study. If we think of the whole community as a stakeholder, then our understanding of host perspectives on their guest(s) becomes less clear. Much literature focuses on the importance of building successful partnerships between sending organizations (usually universities and colleges) and communities: e.g. Baum (2000), Bringle and Hatcher (2002), Leidermann et. al. (2003), Kiely and Nielson (2003), Cherry and Shefner (2004), Ferman and Hill (2004), Boyle and Silver (2005), Creighton (2006), etc. This rests within the assumption that volunteers are engaging with communities through formalized organizations. This, however, is only part of the narrative. Sandy & Holland (2006) make a concerted effort to document community partners’ perspectives for building healthier community-campus partnerships. Together, the authors comment on several regularly occurring criticisms of SL programs and their ability to create outcomes desirable for a community. Some of these criticisms apply directly to international volunteer scenarios, while some are harder to map. One community partner comments on “the mythology of hours”, seeing volunteers’ hours documentation as an impediment, rather than being an appropriate measure of influence and accountability. Conversely, while ISL experiences are often less about hours and more about weeks spent, dollars earned or vaccines administered, both scenarios are commonly seen as boxes to be checked off for some baseline measure of “success”, and can run dangerously close to being community service for something other than its own sake. Another valuable point is the consistency with which community partners solicited more faculty involvement in the partnership. They note that in some instances, the self-imposed distance between professors and communities leads professors to make poor and sometimes even illegal decisions out of general ignorance.
“To date, there has been a dearth of information about the perspectives of host communities that are involved with international volunteers, despite the fact that volunteer placements are set up with the aim of working to further their development” (Comhlámh 2010, 4). The Comhlámh study interviewed representatives of 12 organizations from India and Tanzania. Responses were mixed. Their findings were that short-term placements were popular, and “only a minority of organizations received volunteers for medium- and longer-term placements” (Comhlámh 2010, 7). Some of the other impressions respondents shared:

“volunteers need to be more flexible, and cultural sensitivity needs to be taught to [people] as a prerequisite to becoming volunteers.”;

“Language is the number one limitation and yet, quite unfortunately, some of the volunteers don’t even try to learn the language, they are just satisfied with having a translator every time.”;

“we see many short-term volunteers here in Tanzania as it is a popular country to be in with lots of tourist places to see and experience, but the amount of work they actually do is questionable, mainly due to the lack of experience and language skills.”

“Some of these volunteers would come and be with us, but just [as] we start to get used to working with them they are already very tired and bored, and need a break in Zanzibar. So they tell us they will work for two weeks, but after three days they want to go on safari. Given a chance, we would screen them to make sure they are the enduring type.” (Comhlámh 2010, 8)

This report provides a good summary sense of some of the ethical issues at play in volunteer encounters, but it only provides a partial analysis. Questions left unanswered for me are around the longer term effects on individuals or on the community as a whole.

The perceptions host organizations held of the benefits they received were consistent with my findings (see Chapter 4), listing skill-sharing and improved cultural awareness as central benefits. Comhlámh has also developed a “Volunteer Charter and Sending Organization Code of Good Practice” (Comhlámh, 2012, 5-6); the codes core values are: Partnership, Quality, Security,
Appropriate Volunteer Attitudes, Valuing Volunteering, Sustainability, Solidarity, Contribution to Development.

Contreras (2010) conducted a capstone study for completion of a master’s thesis exploring these issues from the perspectives of both Peace Corps volunteers and host communities in Uganda. Again, there were similar perceptions of benefits, although the focus regarding host communities is around organizational improvements, and “how they expected the host community to benefit, how the host community actually benefits, and how they expect the host community to benefit in the future” (Contreras 2010, 25). There is little discussion of the ethical implications of providing service, or of entering the community in the first place. Contreras’ discussion focuses on who believes they have benefitted more from the partnership. Volunteers tended to believe they benefitted more, whereas host community respondents tended to believe the benefits were equal to both parties.

Commenting on the paucity of dignifying perspectives from host communities, Maria Eriksson Baaz in her book The Paternalism of Partnership (2005, 3), examines donor and development worker identities in relation to the partnership discourse. She says that “the language of partnership has come to encompass almost the whole spectrum of development institutions, from the World Bank to the multitude of NGOs... everybody refers to their work in terms of partnership.” I am, in part, examining host community identities in relation to the partnership discourse. Baaz says that leaving out the partners, risks silencing the voices that can disrupt or be an obstacle to “the discursive power of development”. [...] Such assertions often tend to be imbued with problematic notions of a position outside discourse and power. Power tends to be seen to reside in institutions such as the World Bank, and there is an “infatuation with the local and the indigenous” [...] This is not to say that experiences and ideas articulating unprivileged power positions are unimportant. On the contrary. What it means is that an account of these voices must be
accompanied by an analysis of the discourses that have constituted and shaped these identities and experiences. These voices must be situated within – not outside – the workings of discourse and power. [...] The single focus on the donor is problematic, in particular since it risks creating a one-sided picture of the partners as merely products, or passive ‘recipients’, of donor images and interventions. It is problematic since it tends to attribute passivity and powerlessness to those excluded from the analysis... test interviews with partner organizations could contribute to an image of them as passive recipients of donor discourses and interventions. [...] Development worker identities must, of course, be understood in relation to partner identities and their images of self and donors/development workers. (Baaz 2005, 20-22)

Clearly, we need to take a profound look at how volunteers engage abroad from an ethical perspective. This study begins to explore some of these issues.

3.9 Conclusion

The respondents of this study host individuals that fall along a wide spectrum, from high school students with fire in the belly who had never before left home, to seasoned, culturally intelligent development professionals, academics and consultants. Students are usually not professionals, and it is useful to consider the ways in which their experiences of engagement abroad might be qualitatively different. While the professional international development industry and IESL share a number of common characteristics, it is important not to treat the experiences of development workers and service-learners as being homogenous.

As discussed above, I will not rigorously align this study within the six themes that form the framework of the EIESL Project. However, to begin to explore the ethics of IESL, at least from the perspective of volunteers and sending organizations, for me the conversation always begins with questions around motivation and responsibility: “What responsibility do the rich have to the poor?” (Gasper 2004, 18), “What does it mean to help?” and “Who or what is really being served by my actions?” This is the place where all other questions we had around ethical international engagement came from, and helped me start to ask relevant questions of hosts.
The literature on the ethical implications of volunteer service in communities, while instructive, is silent to a large extent on the voices of those who are the recipients of IESL. My study, therefore, argues that an ethical assessment of IESL without hearing these voices is at best incomplete and at worst badly flawed. Further, my study begins to fill that void by having those that are too often silent speak.
Chapter 4 – Motivations and Expectations

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”
— Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, 1937

4.1 Introduction

Why would an individual, a family, or a host organization agree to host volunteers from abroad? What are their expectations of these volunteers when they arrive? Although they are different concepts, motivations, openness to outsiders, and expectations are closely related, and the respondents’ views in this section do not always distinguish between them.

The EIESL Project (See EIESL 2011), the progenitor of this study, started with questions of motivations. EIESL research project ran under the tagline “who is (really) being served by my actions?” The question of motivations provides us with an easy entry point into a much more complex conversation. This approach enables anybody to participate in ethical dialogue. We found we could start conversations with people in workshops or presentations without them feeling held morally accountable, often because they could speak about the perceived motivations of others. Asking this question enabled us to find out much about volunteer and sending organization motivations from the literature (e.g. Hammond 1994; Clary et. al. 1998; Porter & Monard 2001; Abes et. al. 2002; Brody & Wright 2004; Handy et. al. 2009). On the motivations hosts have for hosting volunteers from abroad, we know comparatively little. Given the success of this approach within the EIESL Project, it made sense to begin similar conversations with hosts in the same way. As such, I included questions about motivations in my interview schedule (see Appendix B).
However, I realized upon returning home from my fieldwork and beginning my analysis, it became clear that I was searching for “motivations” as a mirror to EIESL – but that my data did not match this schema. Not-for-profit organizations by their very make up are operationalized through voluntary contributions – both funds and people – worldwide. The decision to work with volunteers may be less characterized by “motivation” than by the reality of operating a not-for-profit. Like most organizations – as they grow over time and learn various lessons they may become more selective about who they invite/allow to work with them (voluntary or not). So the spectrum along which respondents answers fall may be less about motivation and more about clarity of who can fit in and how. Perhaps a more appropriate way to think about these findings is to ask about openness and expectations, rather than motivations. While respondents’ answers are still made within the language of motivations, I reinterpret them in this chapter under this new banner.

To expect is to look for something with reason or justification – in this case, a host looks to have a desired outcome or standard of behaviour met by those they invite and agree to host. This chapter will explore these connections and some of the challenges that emerge.

Openness to experience is one of five major personality traits within the Five Factor Model. While an in-depth exploration of this theme from a psychological perspective is beyond the scope of this study, we can nevertheless use Costa & McCrae’s (1992) NEO-PI model as a basis for understanding the idea of openness to new experience. Those with high openness to experience “are imaginative and sensitive to art and beauty and have a rich and complex emotional life; they are intellectually curious, behaviourally flexible, and nondogmatic in their
attitudes and values” (Costa & McCrae, 1992, 6). As I did not test respondents for these traits, any expression of openness to experience I note upon is purely subjective observation.

The mutual benefits of volunteering and service-learning relationships are also well-documented (e.g. Bringle & Hatcher 2002; Jones 2005), and it is important to acknowledge these benefits. However, this is beyond the scope of this project. This study focuses predominantly on the challenges, particularly the ethical challenges, faced by communities hosting volunteers from abroad.

4.2 A Note on the Respondents

Housing security, food security, and social security of street children, youth and mothers were the frontline issues for approximately two thirds (11 of 18) of the respondents I spoke with. This was due in part because of the snowball sampling method used to recruit respondents, discussed in Chapter 2 – individuals tended to recommend colleagues in their field of work. This relative consistency is useful when it comes time to discuss and compare individuals’ openness to hosting volunteers. There were a few outliers who also focused on areas such as education, agro-ecology, religion, and athletics. In some cases, these other areas were ways of engaging with the community, of which sometimes street children, youth, or mothers were a part.

The relevance of different types of organizations is apparent in how hosts experience working with volunteers. The ethical issues experienced by an organization that works with vulnerable populations will be different from the issues experienced by one that does not.

Consider that the volunteers many organizations invite into their work have direct access to vulnerable populations, usually children. When considering what motivates a host or leaves
them open to working with volunteers, it is important to remember that an individual’s response is informed by the context of the communities in which they serve. Where appropriate, I make note of the individual’s central focus of work.

While not directly addressed in my interviews, it is also important to consider that motivations for working in the non-profit sector more generally are likely to be different for Kenyans than they are for Canadians. First, we know that individuals will find greater satisfaction in work that aligns with their values and brings meaning to their lives. Consider also that the unemployment rate in Kenya is 42% (Sriramesh & Verčič 2009), whereas it is 6.9% in Canada (StatsCan 2014). Kenya is still on a journey to becoming a welfare state, with “up to 46.7 per cent of Kenya’s 44 million population (about 21 million people) [being] too poor to meet their basic needs” (Omondi 2014), and therefore the consequences of not having a job are potentially higher in Kenya. With a larger and more diversified economy, and thus a greater range of options and a greater chance of career stability regardless of career choice, Canadians have a greater ability to choose a form of gainful employment that, in addition to modest financial stability, also closely aligns with their values. The non-profit sector in Kenya is also much smaller than it is in Canada (Hall et. al. 2005). In such an environment, Canadians can choose a career that might pay them less, but might ultimately bring them greater satisfaction in life.

“The important point, though, is that, in contrast with the expatriate development workers, their Tanzanian colleagues are preoccupied with the question of survival” (Baaz 2005, 92). In community-based work with vulnerable populations, my observation has been that there is often a social pressure or an expectation to list personal satisfaction as a primary motivation for service. On the one hand, there is a belief service should be done as a labour of love, or simply
because it is the right thing, the human thing, to do. On the other hand there is “What can I do with my skill set that will put food on the table?” This will colour an individual’s approach to answering questions about openness to working with volunteers and ethical challenges in their organizations. For some, hosting volunteers may be secondary to economic consideration. While this topic never came up directly, it is important to bear in mind. A Western reader might assume that working with non-profits in Kenya means the same thing as working for non-profits in Canada, and I caution against this assumption.

The fact that Kenyan non-profits often rely significantly on monetary support from outsiders is often the obvious reality that is either ignored or going unaddressed in my interviews. It is safe to assume that most of the respondents’ incomes come from either government allocations or fundraising. But consider how it would sound to a donor or a researcher if one of the respondents said that their main motivation for working with volunteers was that it better positioned them and their families to be financially stable. Not knowing how this would be perceived by anybody reading this study, it would not necessarily be in their interest to enthusiastically list money as a motivation, even if it might be the primary motivation. As a result, the respondents’ comments on this subject are understandably guarded.

4.3 A Note on the Volunteers

It is useful also to reflect on who is showing up to for this sort of experience, and why that is relevant. The majority of the volunteers hosted by the organizations I spoke with are students who come from Western high schools and universities (or have recently graduated), where the culture of student involvement has become the norm. Students are eager to get involved with what matters to them. In many student clubs, students are given a high level of autonomy to make decisions about how to proceed, with varying levels of supervision from professional
advisors. Many of these students participate in meetings for clubs or student government, where they are expected to share their opinions, and help make decisions. They can ideate when designing a project, clarify and refine these ideas, develop necessary logistical plans and systems, and implement projects more or less according to plan – and improvise when necessary. Community-based organizations often have lots of programs to run, lots of stakeholders to manage, and there is always more work to be done. Volunteers provide valuable outside perspective, great enthusiasm, and help lighten the load. Themes of learning and idea sharing were common openness-related factors from the respondents, both on a personal level and on an organizational level. Baaz responds to the concept of idea sharing, noting that the volunteer arriving and

‘making them think in new ways’ implies conservative, immersed in tradition and not receptive to new ideas, versus the Self as modern white person, open minded and liberated from the bondage of conservativism and tradition. [...] The task of making people think in new ways is connected to the Enlightened, rational self, free from superstition, in contrast to an irrational, superstitious Other; at the heart of the civilizing mission. (114) (Baaz 2005, 113-4).

However, volunteers develop these skills within a particular cultural context. Many of the ethical crises that arise do so when volunteers try to learn new things, implement their ideas or practice their skills (i.e. for students in the health professions) without properly understanding or paying attention to the cultural context prevalent in their host community.

The point is that the majority of individuals who show up to volunteer with organizations like this are students and paraprofessionals, not certified professionals in a particular field. Also, just because a person is a professional, does not mean they have cultivated a strong cultural intelligence, or otherwise come to a foreign place properly prepared. Hosts do not necessarily expect to also have to provide an element of professional development, or to be their guest’s de
facto cultural interpreter. Certainly, several respondents said they enjoyed working with young people from abroad. But an individual or organization dealing with difficult issues like child poverty may not necessarily be “motivated” in the normal sense to work with untrained young people, especially if this is the only help on offer.

4.4 A More In-depth Definition of Openness

While it can be productive to dwell on the subject of motivations for some time when speaking to volunteers, when speaking with hosts this subject understandably gets complicated. Based on what the respondents shared with me, it makes sense to conceptualize openness of hosts to new experience along a spectrum. Here is a summarized version of that spectrum representing what I heard from my participants:

As I will discuss, many of the respondents do not deeply consider motivations for long. The conversations tended to go off in many directions, and I did not find it easy to tease out what the
intent of the comment is in each case.

None of the respondents said they would no longer host volunteers. A few had not hosted volunteers within the last few years, although we never talked specifically about why, or whether they planned to again in the future. Not only do they not dwell on motivations, but it is likely they are not divulging all of what they think, in part due to my identity as an outsider asking questions about their thoughts on outsiders, despite reassurances of confidentiality. As such, I caution about the accuracy and generalizability of the results.

4.5 What respondents said

As expected, the results were mixed. Conversations sometimes turned immediately to either lavish praise or frustrated condemnation of volunteers and their work. When I asked “What made you decide to host or work with volunteers?”, many individuals’ first reactions was to talk about their positive experiences hosting volunteers, and their responses revolved around themes of gratitude and satisfaction, rather than motivations necessarily. Rarely did respondents discuss a time before hosting volunteers, nor did they articulate that it was a conscious decision to do so. Boniface tells us:

it is been good (sic). The volunteers are very beneficial to us because they actually... Train the children with us, they work with the children, with any kind of work, they get involved in that day to day chores like cleaning, working in the kitchen, working in the garden, working with our cows... Working with homework for the children's schoolwork...

Kamau shares another benefit: “we were a young organization and most of us didn’t have experience on how to get funding, so they helped us to connect us with other organizations, and through these organizations we are able to get donors who would fund our projects.” This should be validating for volunteers and sending organizations in a way – some people believe
that we are getting it right, or satisfying expectations. Volunteers are useful because they help organizations to operationalize content. They are often welcome, and they are fondly remembered when they leave. The culture of hospitality in Kenya is incredibly strong.

Judy, a professor at a local university who has hosted graduate students from abroad, is unique among the respondents in her motivation for travel abroad as an academic as a result of her connections with visitors:

But there’s also the need to be international myself. I would want to, I’m definitely motivated by the desire to be able to interact at an international level too, because like we are saying, the world is a global village, so I can’t limit myself to my own home, I need to broaden out. [...] And competence of course, I know, when you have different people, interacting with different people, your skills and knowledge improve. Rather than inbleeding (sic) where you’re dealing with the same people all the time.

The positive stories are reassuring, and fairly common, and are surely important in considering what kind of volunteer work to invest in, rather than just using volunteers as an extra pair of hands. But these stories are not as interesting or useful to help us learn from our mistakes and improve our practice as are some of the challenges. This may seem self-serving, and I may appear to focus disproportionately on the problems associated with international volunteer engagement rather than the triumphs. Rather, my work with the EIESL Project gives me reason to believe that there are ethical considerations in every engagement, and reason to be suspicious of undiluted praise. Often, it is not the horror stories that have the most to teach us about how to engage abroad conscientiously and ethically. It is the smaller, nuanced interactions that on the surface appear to be unexceptional that most help us to challenge our assumptions.

Daniel, a medical student who had lived on the compound of a large health organization that hosts a continuous stream of volunteers, while doing a six month internship, cites interaction
with outsiders as important perk of his experience. At the time of the story he recounts, Daniel was trying to find the means to go to medical school:

But, while working in the diabetes department, [...] you see, a lot of things coming in, so that’s where I, where I met [volunteers], and I also used to go to [the compound], I stayed for a couple of months there, so I used to mingle there, to play football there, even some of the trips, we went together. [...] Yeah, so, at times, that’s when you, you introduce yourself, get introduced, that’s when, you can start now, interacting.

Daniel took an unpaid internship with this organization that would open him up to a diverse array of experiences. Whether he did so primarily because of the value of the internship on its own, or whether it was because the organization also hosted volunteers from abroad which could ally him with potential school sponsors, or some combination of the two, remained unclear.

Janet, a senior professional at a dental school, stresses the importance of the cultural interaction aspect because it “it opens up the world; now the world is global. So not only are we going to be traveling through the virtual world, but also the physical... the physical contact, and the physical... interaction, is also important.” Clearly, Janet acknowledges the benefits to her students interacting with students from other countries as mutual benefits.

It became clear from my first interview with Cedric that perhaps motivation was not even the right concept, or that I was getting ahead of myself.: “I don’t know whether I’m motivated, but...” Cedric would go on later to focus more on expectations, set high, and not always met. Lewis was also conflicted about his openness to working with volunteers: “But I am telling you, I think I have been very honest that we, we don’t say volunteers are bad, and we do not say they are good.” Perhaps, as discussed above, the involvement of volunteers is simply an inevitable feature of doing this kind of work. It took me a few interviews to make sense of this sentiment,
and one of the most pressing reasons I uncovered was because volunteer encounters were often not consensual. Quite often, it appears, volunteers show up uninvited. But hospitality prevails, and then students go home and tell their friends. This will be the subject of Chapter 5. Lewis continues:

First of all, I wanted to understand, “who is a volunteer?” And I told you, in a meeting, and we were trying to ask, this was a national meeting in Nairobi. We were trying to find out, “who are these people called volunteers? Why should they come to volunteer? Are they genuine?” And so we were being told, if you want, if someone is coming from [Volunteer Services Overseas], then you ask VSO country which is sending him to tell you about him! So that you know, under special cover you know this person. As I’ve told you, we, we have, we have seen... quite good volunteers, who can come and write up something and you really like it. You can learn something, from them. I, I don’t want to say we are always learning bad things. We can learn something.

Although Lewis was generally a kind and optimistic fellow, he hesitated to shower his volunteers with praise. More importantly, the fact that organizations like Lewis’s attend national meetings to discuss the issue of volunteerism in their communities is reason enough for mindfulness in international engagement. The Comhlámh report notes that

Lately, most of the volunteers have been sent to the host countries more to cater for the demand from the public for volunteer placements, rather than actually sending volunteers to address the local needs for development of the host country. This is also giving an opportunity to the volunteers to make it a holiday trip rather than actually contributing to the host country. (Comhlámh 2007, 9)

As volunteers and sending organizations, it is easy to forget that our hosts talk about us and try to make sense of their experience after we leave just as much as we talk about them. Lewis tells us that it is not only important for volunteers to know themselves, but for communities and organizations to engage in a process of knowing. Lewis highlighted that it was a reciprocal process of learning and service, which others echoed: “Okay, we wanted to also give room for people, all people all over the world to serve the children. [...] So, it makes me like hosting

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5 A large service organization based in the United Kingdom that merged with Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) in 2008 to become CUSO-VSO.
people, to learn about people. They also learn about us and that’s very good.” Lewis had himself made a trip to the United States to share his knowledge with a sponsoring group.

As with volunteers themselves, it became clear that the truth behind motivations or openness to experience was difficult to access – perhaps it is difficult to be honest with ourselves about our motivations, or at least, out loud. When I reframed the question, asking instead what respondents hoped to gain from an encounter with volunteers, Cedric replied:

Well, I don’t know. Let me say, (sighs) let’s put it this way: it’s good to interact. And as they come, they come with their expertise. [...] As we interact, we learn one or two things. Their way of life and this and that. And of course some of them are very diligent, and have been of great help to us, and so that input to my family, that can encourage me too.

Daniel replied:

Okay what motivated me is like, okay first, was this guy I was working with, [...] he was the one like, inside, he was kind of telling us “if you do something, even if you don’t [...] get something back, do it with all your heart, okay?” So when I was working with [the organization], [...] I was just working without expecting any payment, you see? Even if one day I started [the organization], I volunteered, I think for six months. Yeah. So, I was just doing it, helping out, that was my intention, just helping out.

The health organization Daniel volunteers for in this story hosts dozens of volunteers a year, perhaps hundreds. They are part of the system he is entering, and crossing paths with volunteers is a daily occurrence, and as such, not exactly a motivation. Catherine more clearly uses the language of expectations, remarking that her expectations were discordant with those of her volunteers:

I had a lady from Germany, and according to the way we ourselves know who a volunteer is, I thought they would come and we intermingle together, work, doing everything, but that was not the case. They came like with and then this and this and this is what I want to achieve, so that, they came with the idea of what they wanted to do, and us here, at our own expectations what we wanted from them. So it took us, it took me I would say some times marry the two (sic).

In my experience, this is a common issue in international volunteering: outsiders arrive with a
plan already in their back pocket, and expect to be able to execute this plan before they have had a chance to understand their cultural context or the realities particular to the organization they have chosen.

4.6 What Respondents Said About Money

Turning to the subject of monetary benefits as a perk of hosting volunteers, Cedric says:

Well, if I may add, of course there is monetary value. There is some... when they, after all this, some of them say, “Thank you”. Because as you have read in my guidelines, I have said that we will not charge you for staying with us. [...] Because I also realize that I’ve said “we’ll not charge you, so if you take that and don’t give, we have no quarrel”. But anyway, simply, we have those who at the end of it all, donate, and some, even when they leave, back to their country, some organize for a fundraising, and you get some few shillings. And so that’s a blessing to us.

Benedict describes the benefit of volunteers as free, no-strings-attached labour, free of the expectation of ongoing employment after the volunteer term has ended:

First and foremost let me say that... we as a civil society organization, sometimes we don’t have the capacity of hiring, you know, experts, you know, paying them. And mostly we rely on volunteering work whereby maybe somebody comes and maybe by profession because, you see like what we’re doing right now, rehabilitating street children, we needs people from different walks of life. Doctors, teachers, you know? All those professions. And sometimes is like, we cannot really afford to pay them as I’ve said. So we rely a lot on volunteering. And... mostly, the international volunteers actually we really, they really deliver a lot. It’s not like our local ones, you know? Because, the local ones, yes somebody will say “yeah I want to volunteer” but in real sense you maybe find, he, he has been or maybe she has been a student somewhere and she is looking for a job, you know. And so if there is no actually that motivation, and by motivation I mean, you know, maybe working for two months, three months, six months and maybe if there’s no employment you find maybe the work now that she or he is doing is not really to the standard, yeah? So it becomes a challenge. Why? Because maybe this person came as a volunteer but in a real sense, he wanted employment. Those are the local ones. But international ones actually, they work with all their heart... all their heart actually, but mostly the challenge that we normally have with them is that sometimes we really don’t, don’t understand what is their intention.

Benedict has worked with volunteers for up to two years at a time, and he still does not feel he always understands their intentions for coming to work with him.
One interesting thing Benedict says is that he does not have the ability to hire “experts”, and that perhaps un- or under-qualified volunteers become ersatz experts. While certainly a benefit to organizations, and something that organizations all over the world do, it is important to keep in mind the privilege that volunteers have that enables them to internalize the opportunity costs of spending their time volunteering instead of taking on paid employment back home. Benedict perhaps gives volunteers too much credit as altruists, and not using the experience to pad a resumé or an application to a professional program. It merely means they are not using the volunteer experience to get a job with his organization. It is also important to balance the value of a foreign volunteer against the reality that he or she might be replacing a skilled local who otherwise might earn the benefits of that position, monetary or otherwise.

Judy, our professor, is incredibly candid on this subject:

One, honestly, it’s money! I want money in my pocket (laughing). I want money that can spread to others around me. Most of the research projects... opportunities, have something to do with “out there”, so unless you have some international researcher from out there, you may not be able to access such research funds. Even consult-- research consultancies. I’ve done a few consultancies with USAID for example. USAID gives the consultancies to Americans and then the Americans hire us, which I find not quite right (chuckling). Because... the various occasions I’ve been hired by Americans as a consultant... and I consider that I will be more informed about this context; the research will definitely be in Kenya. So I’m thinking I’m more informed about this context and therefore I should not be hired, I should be the one hiring (chuckling). But anyway, so, if I want to access research consultancies again, I have to go international.

Daniel, our medical student, continues, with humility, on the subject of personal financial benefit:

and then, since I got from high school, okay my background’s not that well set-up, so, I was working, I was told just to work, to volunteer, and in case somebody might be interested to sponsor you in the, in university, so I’ve kept on doing the good work, wishing to follow the steps; there were some were telling me they were doctors, some they’re coming they were pharmacists, but, I was none of those, I was none of those, but one day, I wish to do the same. Yeah, that’s when I met, there was a guy from, he was a resident here, but still they do volunteers, so I was kind of interacting with him a lot, and, when he went back
home to America actually, he did something for me, that’s when I got an opportunity to go to a university to do medicine.

Lewis’ focuses on the fundraising aspect: “Others who can come tell you how to manage your office, how to manage your NGO, and how even where to source for donors. [...] They can even write proposals for you!”

There is also a clear awareness among the respondents of the social tension in the way hosts are perceived when the issue of money is brought up. While host fatigue, I will argue, has not been properly explored or understood, the concept of Western donor fatigue is a familiar concept. Certainly, there are dishonest people everywhere, and one dishonest person can spoil a sense of trust for everyone else, and once negative reputations or stereotypes develop, they can be difficult or impossible to dismantle. Judy, again, is the most forceful:

There are lots of corrupt deals in Kenya, openly corrupt deals in Kenya. But that does not qualify anybody to make sweeping statements about Kenyans like “All Kenyans are liars.” [...] Or any other country for that matter. Yeah, so, those sweeping statements are very very annoying and they make it difficult for the host. Because, you, you then begin to think when my visitor is looking at me, he’s thinking about me in terms of lying, in terms of corruption, in terms of stealing, in terms of, and you feel very uncomfortable, because, whatever statements the person makes, you try to relate them to stealing, to lying, to even maybe when the visitor or the international volunteer has nothing about it in their mind, but because a sweeping statement was already made, it makes it difficult to continue communicating and relating... respectful.

In all cases, either regarding individuals or organizations, this conversation around money was always honest, even when it was less direct.

4.7 Focus Group Viewpoints

The most revealing conversation I had overall throughout my research was with the focus group I held. All of the individuals in this group were younger – mid-twenties to early thirties, and worked for the same organization, one of the newer and most successful street children’s organizations in Eldoret. They seemed more outwardly driven by their values, as many of them
worked for modest income. One of the management staff shares his thoughts:

Well, like, for me, I’d be excited, one year ago I was happy. I mean a [westerner] coming along and coming just to spend time at [our organization]... I wouldn’t even worry much about what they will do or how they will think, but I was just excited they are coming. But I still feel the same way still, because for us, as, for me as the program manager it’s, the more I have more people outside there coming in, the more I build the network of people, and you know most of our, of NGOs, like here in Kenya or here in Eldoret, or like us, depend more heavily on American, Canadians, Western donors. And so, when that person comes I know a network has already came through [sic]. Yeah. So, I’m happy that they are coming. That was one year ago. But now, once I hear, I, I, I’m happy they’re still coming and I know that the network is improving; I’m happy that there’s a [westerner] coming along, but also I’m worried about time; I’m worried about what they will come and do.

The focus group identified an issue known in the literature as the problem of time. This will be the subject of Chapter 6 – a discussion of the implications of when volunteers show up and how long they stay. More to the point, the director of this organization sounds conflicted, very early on in our conversation. Here we have an organization that, at the time of this interview, had been recently established, had only been working with volunteers for a year, and has had to re-evaluate its expectations and therefore its motivations based on expectations not matching reality. The reason for his concern about “what they will come and do” can be illuminated by a simple thing another member of the focus group said shortly thereafter:

Because what we are doing here, it’s, it’s something, like in this organization it’s very different, I think, and it’s really different experience from any other, probably other normal work you’ve done. You come, you’ll have done a social work (sic), and then, but you have dealt with normal people, who are probably people from families, other things, but here we are dealing with street children.

Again, the instinct was to highlight the fact that volunteers were showing up to his organization, expecting to have access to one of the country’s most vulnerable populations. In each case where there was hesitancy around the question of the respondent’s own motivations, this was as a result of having had experiences with volunteers that did not meet their expectations, as we heard from Catherine, above. Abe echoes this sentiment: “Yeah there are benefits and challenges. But most of them they are challenges. What I usually feel is that they’re coming to
help, most of them they’re coming to help, their main goal is to help people here. Yeah... So some do support. But some, they just go and that’s it, and forget about it.”

4.8 Host Fatigue – A Grounded Theory

Another individual, Immanuel, who reported to have hosted more volunteers than the rest of the respondents combined, was also cynical right out of the gate when I asked what his motivation was for hosting international volunteers. The easy assumption was that it was in his job description to host them; it was part of the work his large organization did, and he was the de facto point person. He immediately said:

There has been over time a connotation that volunteers come with solutions. And sometimes this is brought up by the history of our country that previously we thought that foreigners, especially if they are white-skinned, we are coming with solutions for us in Africa. So most of the time, the first instance when you meet with our people as a volunteer, they think that, they sit back and wait for you to give them for your coming. It’s also this connotation, this belief that people that come from other countries have more to give in terms of financial assistance so most of the time you work, you work with volunteers and people just sit back, and every time they keep watching you, thinking that there is something you want to draw, there is a handout you’re going to give, so that is the first thing I think we should be, people should, find a way of removing it from the minds of the people. When somebody is a mzungu, a white person, a white man, is that they know or... They know, so when you come as a volunteer, being a volunteer you yourself, people think that you might be having a different background. So once you are a white person, you are expected to know all the things in the world. If you are a medical field person, they think that you know engineering, [both of us laugh] you are a teacher, you are a farmer, and things like that. Some people every time think that if there is an issue with you ... You have a solution for them.

Immanuel never returned to the subject of motivations or expectations. He continued straight on to unfold for me all the challenges he faced working with volunteers, and how his hands were bound. For now, I want to focus less on the story he is telling, and more on the way he is telling it. In considering the respondents’ remarks on motivations and expectations in their totality, I have noticed that negative aspects come up consistently. It may be that this negativity exhibits a different profile than that which flows from analysis of the experience of the volunteer.
organizations and the volunteers themselves. If so it draws attention to a phenomenon that donors typically miss.

We have a concept to describe the negative feeling individuals, organizations, or countries get when they become weary and desensitized to appeals for aid or engagement with a particular issue or charity, or from a particular country. This is variously named compassion fatigue, donor fatigue or donor apathy. In this thesis, I am proposing that an equal and opposite force develops in international volunteering encounters, and the way Immanuel and many other respondents spoke to me gives me reason to posit this as something real and worth exploring. What many of the respondents exhibit to me is a concept I will name **host fatigue** (which could also be called hospitality fatigue or host apathy). Host fatigue is a negative feeling individuals or organizations get when they become weary of hosting volunteers from the outside. It occurs after a tipping point where the perceived costs and challenges of hosting volunteers outweigh the perceived benefits.

At the same time, the perennial question is often, “do the benefits to working with volunteers or service-learners outweigh the challenges?” I argue that it should not be. The question is not a useful one, and the answer is inevitably “it's complicated”. A more useful, and a much more interesting set of questions is, “how do host communities understand themselves as hosts to volunteers, how do they understand the issues that come with this contract, and how do they approach this inevitable complexity?”

I sensed that a number of the respondents of this study were experiencing host fatigue. This concept will form the heart of this thesis, and in the chapters that follow I will use this concept
to form a grounded theory. The chapters that follow will explore the concept of host fatigue in parallel with other ethical questions and challenges raised by the respondents.

4.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, I assumed I would learn something about motivations from the respondents of this study, when in fact, I had been asking the wrong question. A more appropriate concept is openness to experience. Some respondents were very clearly open and enthusiastic about receiving guests, as well as about their past experiences; others had questions and deep concerns. Over the course of my data collection, I recognized that some respondents said things and/or exhibited behaviour which I have named host fatigue, which I explore in more depth in the following chapters.
Chapter 5 – The Complicated Experience of Exercising Agency

5.1 Introduction

The overarching question of this research project is “what is it like to host young international volunteers?” In order to do that, it makes some sense to first start with the question “what is it like to host?” I explored the concept of “host fatigue” in Chapter 4, which I define as a negative feeling of weariness of hosting volunteers from the outside.

In order to better flesh out the concept of host fatigue, I will begin by sharing what respondents said about the act and the process of receiving a guest. In this chapter, I demonstrate that while it is not productive to homogenize the concept of “host” to represent how all members of a community experience the presence of international volunteers, that nevertheless, “it takes a village to host a guest”, and we need a more sophisticated notion of “host”. I will further explore questions like “what happens when hosts do not get interviewed or asked what they need? What are some of the consequences for choosing to host? The respondents illuminate their challenges through their discussion of relationships with Volunteer Service Organizations or “parent” organizations placing volunteers with little consultation, with attitudes of volunteers assuming an approach that does not fit with community norms and with their own personal ethics and values or what it means to host. Respondents discuss how they perceive and exercise agency in these relationships. I show how the exercising of agency is fraught with power differentials, ingrained colonial mindsets and practices, neo-colonial advances and further complicated by each community’s unique cultural approach to hosting.
I then interpret their accounts by taking some time to understand the nature of hosting and hospitality and how the concepts are understood, and challenged, both in scholarly and general literature, and through accounts of lived experience.

5.2 What Respondents Said

One issue I became curious about (not part of my original interview schedule) was how and to what extent host organizations, representing vulnerable communities, were or were not part of the process of recruiting the volunteers they ended up working with. This evoked complicated feelings about this aspect of their encounters with volunteers. This question came up part way through my interviews, and because I did not conduct follow up interviews, I do not have a complete picture from which to draw my conclusions. However, the accounts I did collect are worthy of note.

It was clear based on the stories I heard from respondents that it was important to have the opportunity to recruit or interview volunteers ahead of time and to build a rapport before they showed up to work with the organization. I asked respondents whether it was always the volunteer that initiated the relationship or whether they ever went out of their way to invite somebody to join their organization or family for a period of time. Fay and Nigel replied “They [the volunteers] are available. They are the ones who are available. And they seek to come.” This type of response is typical of a passive approach to involving volunteers in an organization. Host volunteer encounters as matters of mutual convenience.

The process Boniface goes through is fairly straightforward, and more intentional:

They have to apply to the organization [to the international parent organization]. After they apply […], and then they are considered. And then [the parent organization] sends
their history to us, we have to read their CVs, get to know them. Yeah, and then they, they are accepted or they are rejected. Those who are accepted, are those who, whose applications actually, fit in with the vision of empowering lives. So those ones, we are told are coming. So also, they have to be ready to meet all their travel and expenses. [...] We don’t just let them come.

In a sense at least, the volunteers are “invited” and “accepted” into the community through this mechanic, and so the relationship between volunteer and host is not necessarily non-consensual, but it sounds from Boniface as though a big issue is one of communication between the parent organization and the local one. Cedric told me “Normally, it is the volunteer who apply.” Cedric goes on to explain how volunteers find his organization, which has a small online presence, but does not have a website:

one or two online, but, basically, a friend who visited and talked about the place, and then they gave them our contact. So it’s through the visitors. [...] We are not an island, so again, let them come. Let guests come, let visitors come, let volunteers come. Because, we feel that for someone to feel that I want to be in [the organization]... in our culture, we say, if... you come to my house, I am blessed. Because, you’ve passed that home (gesturing off to the side with his finger), and another and another and another, why did you not go to that home? So for the volunteers to come to us, that is a big blessing, because [...] they must have seen something unique and different and good, hopefully. That’s why they want to be part of our family. You know? But again, as the saying goes, not all that glitters is gold.

Because this issue often arose in an unsolicited way, as my interview process evolved I sometimes got the chance to ask respondents whether they had the chance to interview volunteers before they showed up. Catherine tells me:

We do. But we interview them ourselves. Not the person who referred them to us. Because when we ask the person who referred them to us, he will normally tell us, we don’t know much about them, they just came. And they, they requested to have some, some chance to work with you. So they, they themselves they don’t know them, so it is us who discover them. [...] Because if we were given time to, to know about them, we would see the kind of a person we want.

This results in “okay” or not, and can thus be considered an invitation. The tone in Catherine’s voice suggested it had not always been this way. Mwaka, on individual who worked with a different organization, continues:
The best way is to, to, okay, what I think, normally I’m informed when there are volunteers coming. I would like to know what they, they think. Like, have a prior knowledge of them. And let them have a prior knowledge of about the persons they expect to meet, that is, the organization, the clients, what kind of clients are they? When they come down here, or, normally before they come, we send them an expectation. How, how would we expect you to stay with us, and deal with our clients. Or, we have someone who has been a volunteer here, and in most cases it is the colleagues I started with to talk to them before they come [over email]. Yeah. We, we, we, we, they have to talk with them before they come. Actually, one volunteer had even to be interviewed by the board in Norway before they came.

I followed up by asking if Mwaka personally did any of the interviews with volunteers before they arrived. I also asked whether he has a say in whether volunteers come or not, or if they are just sent to him:

No, I didn’t attend, but when they come I talk with them. I have to have a one-on-one talk with them, and the staff, and just set down a few things about the expectations, what they have been told and what they see. And we allow them after a week or so to report back to us and say “these are the challenges I go through.” So we have, first a prior information and then we walk through it, we want to kind of monitor whatever is happening. And hear from them. [...] Normally we have not been able to say no. Okay, we don’t quite have a say, so there are people who are being, they want the opportunity, and they are given the opportunity. But they have to go through some talks with people who have worked with us. They have, they will have to have had prior knowledge about the going ons here. So... but, of course I’m asked what, what should be said to them. In terms, in terms, I give them some information.

Abe did not personally interview any volunteers who were to be under his supervision, but he did say that “they wouldn’t have come without permission from the [international parent] organization, because they were coming through them.” Cedric, who chairs yet another street children’s organization, has a similar experience: “No. Nnno. But, we do send the guidelines [via email]. In advance so that at least they can, I mean, yes, in advance so that they can read, and see whether they, feel comfortable. And if not, I have no problem.” I thought it interesting that he stopped at knowing that the volunteers were comfortable, without going on to speak about whether the guidelines were effective at keeping order within his organization. Perhaps order
was not his priority – after all, innovation is messy. I followed up to ask Cedric if volunteers ever
sent him a resumé ahead of time:

(sighs, speaking more carefully now) Sometimes. Sometimes. It’s unfortunate that, you
know, (sighs) the human heart is the same all over. I may say, it does bother me
sometimes, sometimes I say, that’s life, so what, so I have a lot to do here, so if I keep
thinking about all these things I’ll not be able: [...] Bef...(sighs), before we can say “yes”,
even though we don’t conduct an interview, at least we’ve written back and forth. So we
know that, yes, at least they can fit in. (holding back more laughter) And even if it’s not for
the three months, even if it’s three days (laughing now), they may change their mind, I
don’t know (chuckling).

The way Cedric speaks tells me something about the standards he has come to expect.

Cedric’s earlier comments from Chapter 4 explaining that he “didn't know whether he was
motivated” to work with volunteers make more sense now, because we learn that he has
had negative experiences with volunteers showing up on his doorstep without having
applied or contacted the organization in advance.

Bertrand sometimes has the opportunity to interview prospective volunteers before they
arrive, but explains that it is often not before they have already left their home country
and are en-route to Eldoret. He expressed that he would rather have five months to
prepare and communicate with these individuals in advance of their arrival:

So that is the area that I have failed. That connection abroad and here, and here, is
actually maybe is not working so clearly. Because what I have just said is, when it happens
that he’s already in Kenya, and maybe he’s identified that the place he can volunteer is
here in, [my organization], that is what we do that. But we’ve not had this opportunity to
maybe find out from them while they’re still there, before they get into the airplane to fly
to this place.

It was not clear what kind of partnership, if any, Bertrand had with an international sending
organization or a parent organization, and if so, whether the volunteers he had hosted all came
through this organization or if they arrived on his doorstep by some other means. In any case,
Bertrand went on to admit that he had had a positive experience with domestic service-learning programs based out of a local university.

If the same thing would happen maybe, abroad, like, of course I know that maybe, unless maybe there are cases where individuals are coming on their own grounds, but in a situation where it’s, it’s maybe a church sending some people, or it’s a school sending some people or it’s, a college or something like that, I would, I would see it good if this institution notified the [organization] by maybe email or by through some address, that on such and such a time, we have maybe... we have been made to understand that you are doing this kind of a service, and we are also doing something related to that, maybe in terms of training and all that. We have this number of volunteers or we have this volunteer and he, he’s supposed to be there for this period of time volunteering, and during his volunteer, or during his period of volunteer, this is what we expect him to do while he is there. This is what we are expecting him to get, and all that. Now if this comes, thing comes back to us as an application, we’d maybe look at all the requirements and all the needs and all the expectations and all that. We see that we are able to offer all this, then we’ll write back and say “yeah, we are comfortable, you can let them come.” So as these people are now coming, we are prepared, they also know that we are going to a place which is already prepared for our going. You see? I don’t know if really that can work, but it’s my perception that if that one can work, maybe it can help. Initially maybe we didn’t see it’s to be a very important thing, but the place is now growing.

The focus group picks up on this idea where Bertrand leaves off, with one member explaining how far in advance they usually hear about a volunteer coming:

It’s very intermittent, because... you might not be told well so much in advance; you can be told like, for the health talks, the person who is doing it is very good, she’s very good. She, she gives a list of the, the [...] students who are coming to give health talks on Monday afternoon. Well in advance! And then we have a very way, good way of communicating, but sometimes they don’t like communicate to us, like, at 1:30 and say you are coming at 2. Sometimes they forget, and sometimes we wait and collapse other programs as we are waiting for them but then they don’t show up, and so, and sometimes we start because they didn’t call, and then they show up. So for example, on Friday afternoon, or mostly in the afternoons we have kids playing soccer, or we have kids watching a movie. And so when they come and the movie has already started, how do you explain to the kids that you have, we have to stop the movie now. Yeah. [Because a volunteer] wants to do something. They are doing good, but you know, it wasn’t well, well, well-planned.

It sounded as though this was a reoccurring concern for this organization. Benedict continues in a similar vein:

That has been the weakness of many organizations, especially even my... Yeah, sometimes, we get international volunteers, but we really don’t understand, as I said earlier, what are their interests? We don’t vet them well, but I think, with transparency and also
accountability goes with that, whereby you need to vet somebody well. No actually what, where does he come from, what is actually his profession? What are his intentions? And what is he expecting actually maybe to... Okay to, to, the the the, what's the potential of coming to [our organization], what benefit actually that we expect, we as an organization? He has to clarify that. [...] No, sometimes you can actually post your expectations, and maybe that person might not meet them.

Catherine was the same: “sometimes she has already come, yeah. Sometimes she has already, so that when I say yes, she can be here tomorrow. [...] so if there was enough time, at least you prepare them. [...] then it is also easier, or it will be also easier on our side, to plan what we shall do.” The common trend across these accounts is that there is a need for clear agreements between volunteers, sending organizations, and hosts, with ample communication in advance of the arrival of volunteers so hosts are not left scrambling or adjusting their affairs at the last minute. Volunteers should not assume their presence is welcome or needed simply because they have the desire to help.

As a volunteer myself in 2007, I benefited enormously from having early contact with my host organization in Tanzania, with the result that I was able to better understand the language and cultural context I was entering and tailor my work to the needs of the organization based on reports from past volunteers. This can also be beneficial, for example, for securing agreement to spend extra time in-community, in the event that the original timeframe is too short for what the organization is asking. If there is a way to get the host and volunteer in contact further upstream in the process than is conventional, the chances of a better outcome are improved. This is important both to be able to communicate when there is no good fit and the assignment should be cancelled, and to improve the final product through early adjustment.

My account assumes the volunteer is an independent agent rather than as part of a greater plan. What if it is not about product but rather about practice? In this case, of all the types of sending
organizations, formal international service-learning programs with deep investment in the principles of ethical partnership (e.g. CCPH 1998) certainly have the most robust infrastructure and mechanisms for deep teaching and learning, sharing experiences and stimulating critical reflection for all involved.

5.3 On Creating and Sustaining Negative Stereotypes

What are the implications of not having the opportunity to properly vet volunteers before they arrive, or of the failures of a selection process that is thoughtful by all accounts? Lewis tells a very jaded story:

Yeah, yeah. So these fellows, were very good. But all of a sudden, they started drinking. They go out, and they come back at 3am or sometimes they come back at 6am. And they are very drunk, they start vomiting all over everywhere. So they, they caused a lot of trouble to my children, because my children had never lived that type of life. They caused a lot of trouble, and... we, what we did, we chased them away. Because we tried to- I tried to talk to these girls like my own children... apart from one who was not behaving like the other three, and their supervisor, or their teacher. There was one who was very good. But we said, now we cannot spare all of you. All of you will go, so that we don’t see my children looking at you as very strange people. So, they went away; this, this volunteer went to, to the [District Commissioner] to accuse us for chasing them away, but the D.C. told them, these are children, and children are supposed to be obedient. If, even me, my children cannot come and start vomiting everywhere, they are drunk, disorderly, I will not allow them! So, what we are saying, even that organization we had started cannot go on... because the foundation you have is bad. So, and the [District Commissioner] said he might not even allow volunteers to work here! [...] He said he will not allow, because what he has heard about them is very bad. So, I have been wondering, what hap- why is it that people look at volunteers as people... who are not very good? ... you know, when I asked someone to tell me the meaning of Peace Corps, and this was an American also, he told me, these people who join the Peace Corps are dead corpse, so we are trying to... there’s a state them to come back to life! (both laugh) So that they may live a better life, and that why they are sent all over the world to go and volunteer, so that when they come back, they have changed. But some of them, get worse. Others... realize that they were doing a wrong thing. [...] Yeah, because, because you see... the people who are told are a drug addicts, they come as volunteers. Some come and change. Others get worse. And so, someone who tell me, I am at the University of Columbia, I’ve just finished, as I look for what to do, I’d like to volunteer with your organization, and this is what I’ve done in college, things like that. But, we cannot just say “Okay, anyone walking in can be accepted as a volunteer”, because of that experience I have told you.

Here is a very clear example of a situation run out of control, and here we see the mechanics of host fatigue at work. Perhaps public drunkenness is a minor issue and we can question the real
harm it does, and this story should certainly not be taken to represent all host-volunteer encounters. However, in cases where the volunteers in question are placed in a position of authority amid a vulnerable population (of recovering street children, for instance), Lewis’s distress and growing weariness are without doubt justified. The problem became severe enough that he had to approach the District Commissioner with a warning. If he invites volunteers into his community with the expectation that they are going to be good role models for youngsters with difficult family situations and substance addiction problems, he is faced with substantial damage control when his expectations are not met. This experience has clearly affected how he perceives volunteers, as well as his willingness to solicit them again in the future. His trust has been taken for granted and abused, and his guard is up.

Another ethical issue that poses considerable concern for organizations working with vulnerable populations is photography and videography. The issue of taking photos in situations like this walks a very fine line; a person might innocently think what they are doing is mere travel photography, or they may intentionally or unintentionally be creating poverty porn. Poverty porn can be understood as writing or imagery that exploits people in conditions of poverty or vulnerability in order to elicit a response of shock or sympathy or increase charitable donations to a certain cause (Matt 2009). Abe and Benedict raised this as an issue in their interviews, but a member of the focus group articulates their experience with this issue most forcefully:

So, a mzungu’s taking pictures this week over there, and [Mark, a staff member at this organization] already told her not to take pictures. They had come and they had done some dental checkups to our children, and she’s very respected, she heads the school of dentistry in [a large university in the United States]. She’s busy taking videos, and [Mark] has already told her, so [Mark] comes and he’s like, I can’t tell her anymore, just go and speak to her. So I don’t want to tell her, like “don’t take pictures.” I’m like “excuse me ma’am... you know, these children don’t like people to take pictures, and” “but they are already telling me”, like... get this clear. He might be the only one who is feeling all right... actually, you’ll notice some are moving away from the video; she’s like “Yeah! And then this big guy over here have just moved away when I was taking a picture of him,” like, yeah, so, they say they want,
but others are feeling bad. Because sometimes when they come, they come with their clothes from the street, they are still dirty, their clothes are tattered. [...] They are self-conscious of the way they look. So if you are taking a video of that, then they feel, “I’m a bit offended by that.” And so... we try, but sometimes it can take a bit of time and waste of time; it can end up being a whole conversation. Like [Mark] found me typing. Now I had to waste another thirty minutes explaining, or maybe fifteen or 20, explaining to her why she should not take pictures. And one of the ways now we are thinking, is putting even a sign; as people are coming in, and even by the gates, “No video and photographs taking” so they understand it very clearly.

One issue is that in this case, the subjects of the photographs are usually children, and cannot consent to having their photograph taken. Moreover, the individuals and organizations do not know what the volunteer intends to do with the photographs once they return home. Do street children then become objects in a volunteer’s travel collection or wonder cabinet? Do their faces non-consensually grace the pages of newsletters or websites? Having to explain to one person that this is not okay must be frustrating. Having to do it so frequently that the organization needs to put up a sign as though it were a zoo must be considerably more taxing. While this is a larger issue that I cannot cover adequately in this study, it nevertheless is an issue to consider as we learn about host fatigue and how hosts develop impressions of their guests.

Cedric tells another story. I recalled reading in his guidelines, “love all children equally.” When I brought this up in our interview, he replied:

They need love. All of them. Even those who look like they are nothing in the world. Boys and girls. And because there are those who are very strong-willed, you need to know how to balance. And one of the things you can do is to say “Excuse me, I have played with you... quite some time... Please, allow me to play with your friend, with your brother, with your sister. You know? So for this guest to, to be in her room for an hour or two with one child, I’m not comfortable with that. Nothing wrong is going on, but that alone, just the time itself to me is a concern. But, also, worse still, after the guest left, we had to do a lot of counselling to that child, to our girl. Because, all she was talking about is “I’ll be going to live in a Western country”, whichever country I’ll not mention here, “I’ll go, here, you know, here is trouble, no good food”, you know, “too much work”, too much work means school work. (both chuckle) So, I’m a human being and I start thinking, it’s no wonder, they are too many hours together; it was some kind of interrogation. I may be wrong, but what can prove me wrong? Because I have seen it in this girl. So I... I’m very protective of my children. They do visit their friends in the neighbourhood. They have, we go to church, they visit their classmates, their classmates sometimes come. No problem with that. But...
immediately we sense there’s too much closeness, that is manifesting itself in disobedience. We say, please excuse us, and we start counselling.

[...]

You know, I, I like guests, but to balance in between Western culture, Western psychology with African culture, African psychology, to me, up to date: still a challenge. I, I have a difficult time marrying the two, balancing the two. And so, to say yes to a volunteer, Western or international volunteer would be okay, yes, it’s good that my children can see... someone who is not common, is not a common face. Sometimes actually when guests come, we give them the opportunity to be with age groups, for example, say what, ten years and above, so that they can read a book, or do some artwork or... Something. And then, the younger group do some scribbling or whatever they do. So we, we group them and see. So, to me, that’s good exposure. But again, I don’t know whether it is just that or that plus something else. We are all different... in our... (sighs) country, someone was here the other- last week actually and they were talking about some, someone who is being assisted or helped financially or materially by someone from outside the country and this lady who is being helped here is already talking about, “I don’t want that”... ... for example they are saying, “I cannot go to that school, I cannot go to that school. That is not my class.” And they have nothing, and they are being taken to school and they are saying (in a tone of disbelief) “I don’t want to go to that school”? Because of course they feel they are of a different class now. To me, that’s a time bomb. That, that needs to be addressed now. [...] Because, I don’t know, I don’t know whether they communicate with this girl, but certainly some seed has been planted and it is growing. That’s a big challenge to this family. Assume I have a volunteer who, after reading all this (gesturing to his guidelines for volunteers) says “hmm... after all, this child is an individual, they have their rights. They do their thing when they are there” – because I cannot be everywhere all the time... (sighs) you know, that seed is planted- and they are growing! ... very soon, I’ll have what, five? Ten? Who are telling me “what are you telling me?” That’s not our culture. Up to date, now I told you I’m fifty, and when my father calls, my father has called, and I cannot tell my father, “please excuse me, my father has spoken, and he has spoken”. At my age! That’s our culture. But, it’s being diluted. Un...for-tu-nately. (slowly sounding out each syllable) That pains me... I want my children to obey. Now, I cannot take them to the wrong things, and of course I’m not alone; my wife is there and we are the managers, and other responsible people who know what to do with children, so we’ll not take them to the wrong place, or the wrong things. But we need to guide- as we guide them, they also need to know that we deserve our respect.

[...]

Yeah. So, unless or until the visitor comes, the volunteer comes, you don’t know who at the end of it all will be a challenge, and who will fit in. And that’s why we have regulated it to three months.

Firstly, Cedric referred to volunteers as “guests”, which is an interesting choice of wording. A volunteer in Western society is someone who has come to do a task, someone who we host. But I don’t think she/he is ever thought of in terms of “guest”. This is an additional dimension that adds to complexity for the kind of hosts I interviewed which I will return to later in this chapter.
More importantly, this encounter is another example of the subtle and unintentional effect of well-meaning volunteerism. This volunteer observed a problem they thought could be solved with a Western cultural sensibility, before they had taken the time to understand what a culturally appropriate approach might look like. This volunteer’s imprudence resulted in Cedric adapting his policies for how he welcomed hosts into his community – the volunteer’s actions had the opposite outcome of what they intended.

Indeed, host fatigue cannot and should not be reduced to individual events or encounters, for occasional unhappy stories are inevitable and can broadly be forgiven. Host fatigue must be thought of as the cumulative result of encounters with many smaller discomforts, missteps, and inconveniences that slip in under the threshold of hospitality. Host fatigue is cumulative, made of bad impressions, broken promises, and walking stereotypes.

On aggregate, we must wonder what effect host fatigue has on a community’s willingness or ability to engage in genuine, reciprocal partnerships with volunteers, as well as what agency volunteers will continue to have to do good work that needs to be done. News travels fast, and this has an effect on other organizations’ ability to productively engage in the work of partnership building.

5.4 Lessons on Human Resources: Immanuel and Others

One respondent had a background in the flower industry, and he now coordinates a large-scale agroecology program that connected vulnerable populations to skills and resources related to food security. He was well-educated, and very experienced.
Of all the individuals I interviewed, Immanuel was one of the most perspicacious, and certainly the most measured in the information he shared with me. He understood that he trod a fine line, a political line, in speaking to me about how his parent organization worked with volunteers. I could tell his position was a conflicted one. He knew that an influx of volunteers meant also an influx of resources for his organization. I could tell he was trying to understand the cost-benefit analysis of inviting volunteers into his work. He seemed to be performing a constant calculus: will the potential benefits of having them here outweigh the potential costs? This question drew me back to an earlier question I asked in Chapter 4 about the motivations of hosts for hosting (am I invested enough in this work to care, or is this just a job for me?). After all, of the people I interviewed, not one was responsible solely for hosting volunteers – they had organizations to run. The story he told me was specific to his field, but the parallels with other experiences are relevant:

What brought this issue up in that the first [foreigners], we had an experience of time, came and they wanted to improve the country, they wanted to improve the people, the local people, so all of the time they were giving instructions, they were getting involved even in fields sweep program, probably they had no previous training, so, people think that it is still status quo. [...] The first thing I normally think when somebody says "so you want to volunteer", if I was to volunteer myself, I don't know what the volunteers think on their own, but when I feel that I want to volunteer, I want to volunteer in a field I am conversant with. I should think that people should volunteer in the things they are very comfortable in. In the field they know that they can make, make the best contribution to society, not just of volunteering because you are available. [...] It's not very common, it's not very common, but it's only the expectation of society. [...] The ones who volunteer in the field, in the technical fields, most of the time the volunteer in the fields they are trained in. [...] They do, in the technical fields. But now, my experience is working in, especially in a field whereby you give your contribution in terms of labour. Physical labour. So people come and volunteer in things even they don't know about. But on the higher scale of society and that people volunteer if, we get volunteers, they are medical field students coming here, they volunteer in the [...] medical field. The result is, [...] people think that you being white, you don't, you know. So when you volunteer, people think that what you do, even if it is wrong, they think that is a new technique now. So, being a volunteer in a field you're not conversant with might mislead the other people. Yeah. The first thing which is going to happen is that, when we now have a specialist come, the specialist in that particular field, it becomes very difficult to move it out of their minds. Especially if you are a local person. Or you are a black man. You are Kenyan. They think that, now, this [foreigner] came, knows it better than you [as a Kenyan] do. Yeah, so to remove that experience they had, that short experience they had with the people,
becomes really little bit of a problem. [...] It becomes the norm, and they think that because that volunteer did it, is a specialist in that particular field. If, in quotations if, that volunteer is white, we still have that colonial hangover.

This, it appears, are the implications of hosting. Immanuel was clearly frustrated at the sometimes subconscious, although ingrained perception (by both sides) of Kenyans being unskilled, even if they are the experts. This, he points out, has both scientific and social consequences. Volunteers not having appropriate experience and training means potential harm to the volunteer themselves, to others around them, and to the desired long-term outcome of a particular project (on an experimental farm that may employ dangerous chemicals, for example). The social consequences of learned inferiority are more insidious still, spreading like bamboo roots, difficult if not impossible to extirpate.

Janet gives us a similar impression:

Yeah, at, at the- and then also, the community will expect also that the volunteer will bring them something that they- either in terms of new knowledge, something new, something different. [...] I think the community in general have, have high expectations of people coming in; they think that these people are coming with something for them. It, it, it’s really not, because sometimes, unless you’ve negotiated, now I’m talking like a professional, unless you really discuss the negotiated, like a contract, then, then you don’t know what to expect. Yeah, that’s really, many times people have high hopes, “someone is coming to answer my problems. To bring me a solution, to whatever problems I have.”

A member of the focus group tells a similar story:

As for me, it depends. If the volunteer already informed us in advance that he or she is coming, it also depends on what, which way he is going to volunteer. [...] So, as for me, it’s important to be aware in advance; to be informed, what you’re coming to do. You have to probably say this and this and this, you, you forward it in advance, at the same time, this is what I’ll be dealing with. Some of them just come and even probably change our program, how we are running things. Like for example like today here, Andrew has been called, “hey, today you’re going to visit barracks, and then there are certain people that have come from abroad, you need to take them to barracks.” You see, you didn’t even ask Andrew, “What is your program today? What were you doing, and what was the next step?” You didn’t even consider the situation, probably there are so many situations at the moment in the street that is happening, so that has been always very hard, probably tell the volunteers, “you should have told me in advance”, because we feel like they are- some of them probably come here and stay for quite a while, for around six months or so, the
volunteers. And then, at the end of the day, they think they know more than you. Like, you’re already, you’re already in the field. So, that is also affecting us, because you’re trying to say a point, but because he has been there one or two, twice on the barracks, at the end of the day, he thinks he knows how things, she thinks she knows how things goes at the end of the day. So you feel like, sometimes you, at the end of the day you will think, “even if I let her, him or her go, something wrong might happen”. Because, most of the time, we will always be informed, by, we know, we really talk to, with these boys face to face; they, they con, sometimes conf-, do you say confide or? They tell us, they tell us some of the things, they tell “hey, we were planning to do this”, but at the end of the day, we convince them these people are here to help you and there are some, you tell them their purpose. At the end of the day, these children, they come to a common ground.

Immanuel, Janet, and the focus group give us a very clear picture of the assumed authority and expertise that is a feature of the “colonial hangover”, or what Barbara Heron calls “colonial continuities”. While it is beyond the scope of this project to include an in-depth critical race analysis of volunteer service, it is clear that the core of the issue at hand revolves around the erroneous perception, often on both sides, that whiteness or Western-ness is a qualification.

Baaz (2005, 50-51) explains that “Cosmopolitanism has a narcissistic streak... competence with regard to alien cultures implies a sense of mastery. Being an experienced mzungu [a foreigner] who knows his/her way around and knows what’s going on as a source of the status and pride”.

Based on the limited sample from the respondents of this study, we might have reason to believe that regularly, a volunteer’s assumptions about best practices may not just be wrong, but also at best ineffective and to an extent destructive. Combine naïveté and/or arrogance with ignorance of geographical and cultural context and you end up with non-solutions, duplications of effort, and wasted resources and time. So the question I return to is: who is really being served by these encounters?

Immanuel is fortunate in that he is in a position of authority within a very large and well-funded organization where can delegate appropriate work to unskilled volunteers in order to divert

6 Heron (2007) provides an excellent overview of the helping imperative from a critical race lens.
potential harm away from the most important areas of his work. Not all organizations have the option to turn away the help that shows up, and the financial support this often includes.

Recruiting does not happen in a vacuum. Intelligent organizations select people not just for their personal skills, strengths and accomplishments – although these are of course important – but also for their ability to fit into the larger team. As a once-upon-a-time employer at the University of British Columbia, I personally interviewed nearly everybody who I thought might be qualified and chose those I wanted on my team. I knew what to expect, and I had the opportunity to frame my expectations, and to create a shared sense of culture and community within my organization. This builds mutual trust and accountability. This was a best case scenario; organizations with an unreliable influx of labour face a higher volume of human resource-related issues.

Why is this relevant? Because in multiple instances, host organizations did not have the chance to interview and build a rapport with – let alone speak with – the volunteers that would be assigned to them, ahead of time. This task was sometimes carried out by a third party, who purportedly had the best interests of the community in mind in their recruitment. In this arrangement, the people who are the cultural experts are not necessarily the HR experts, and vice versa. So they either need a way to do both from the same place, or they need a way to talk to one another productively. When volunteers show up unannounced, it is either done in a reactionary, tokenistic way, or not done at all.

This would be less of a problem if the host organizations were at least able to be involved in the process of deciding on the criteria by which volunteers get recruited – on the methodology for
selecting a team. Unfortunately, within my sample set, this was not often the case. Many grassroots organizations in Eldoret lack robust guidelines to help them determine what this person is going expected achieve at the end of the day. A useful question to ask in instances like this is why the host organization is not defining the projects or saying no. The first part is beyond the scope of this research to address. The second part of this I address below in section 5.7. Without the ability to plan programming in advance based on knowledge of what volunteers are capable of, organizations scramble to create suboptimal or make-work projects. If the organization is weak administratively, this is one issue. If there are other power dynamics involved between host organizations, parent organizations, and volunteers, this is another issue altogether. While sending organizations must take responsibility for their share of the burden of communication and preparation, perhaps there should also be greater emphasis placed on supporting host organizations to establish required criteria for volunteers. Equally, organizations can consider which aspects of their work could be better served by excluding volunteers. This is related to a concept known as the problem of time, which I will explore related issues in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Imagine trying to operate a bakery, and on any given day, you may be assigned a plumber, a math teacher, and an osteopath to help you make your profiteroles. Or nobody at all. It will be a surprise. And you do not get any say in who shows up, when exactly they will show up, or how long they will stay. Maybe they have eaten a tart before. But they all have ideas about how you could improve your recipes and approach to business.

This example is only a caricature, but it is meant to be illustrative of the different standards we hold when we think about what good, ethical work looks like. Why is it okay to not take a
meritocratic approach to our encounters abroad when we place so much stock in these systems at home? When we apply this idea to work with vulnerable populations, the picture becomes much more vivid from the host’s perspective: *I do not get to decide who has influence on the vulnerable populations I have been working with. I do not know what they will bring with them, or what they will leave behind.*

All of these questions call into question the nature of the host-guest relationship, and whether there are alternative models that might be more fruitful. How is it that hosts allow this to happen in the first place? What are the prevailing narratives volunteers espouse when they enter communities like Eldoret, and how does this contrast with the way someone from Eldoret might understand the host-guest dynamic?

5.5 A Host of Meanings

What does it mean to host?

James Lipton suggests that when we seek to uncover the mysterious poetry of words, “we begin on familiar ground, to sharpen our senses by restoring the magic to the mundane” (Lipton 1968, 22). In order to fully understand the notion of host fatigue, it is relevant to explore the etymological and cultural understandings of hosting and hospitality.

In the old English game of venery (assigning collective nouns to groups of things, such as “a flock of sheep”), the word ‘host’ has been used to describe groups of both angels and men (Lipton 1968; OED, 2010). Lipton says this of hosts of angels:
An interesting term this. J. Donald Adams, in *The Magic and Mystery of Words*, says, “Angels in any quantity may be referred to only as a *host*. The word’s title to that distinction is clear enough; *host* derives from the Latin *hostis*, meaning enemy, and hence came to mean an army. It was presumably applied to angels as the warriors of God. (Lipton 1968, 25)

The Oxford English dictionary reiterates this. Words for ‘host’ in Swahili also have a host of other meanings when translated back into English: army, regiment, mass, crowd (cheshi/jeshi); one who makes a cracking noise, waiter, servant, minister, one who invites (mwalishi); native of a place, resident, inhabitant, owner, proprietor, master of the house, regular visitor, regular customer (mwenyeji) (Kamusi, 2011). “One who invites” particularly resonates with this chapter; in fact, this understanding forms a central aspect of this chapter, which I will explore later on.

As for ‘what’ a host is, this question is rather more messy and burdened by paradox. The Host appears, for example, as a character in Chaucer’s 1475 *Canterbury Tales* as a clownish guide for the rest of the characters. But academic literature theorizing what a host and hospitality are tends to begin relatively recently with Jacques Derrida’s work (2000; 2005). He begins by admitting that “we do not know what hospitality is. Not yet.” (2000, 6) and that “hospitality is not a concept which lends itself to objective knowledge.” (2000, 7)

Jacques Derrida, in his cleverly titled paper “Hostipitality” explains the immediate discomfort built into the concept of hospitality. “*Hospitalität*, a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, ‘hostility,’ the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body.” (Derrida 2000, 3). There is a beautiful tension in this image that summarizes what the respondents have told me about their encounters with volunteers. I explore this in detail later in this chapter.
Gideon Baker (2010, 101) summarizes Derrida’s paradoxical ‘double law’ of hospitality: “For hospitality there must first be a foreigner; and, for the foreigner to appear foreign in the first place, there must be hospitality.” This is why definitions of ‘guest’ and ‘host’ appear to be mutually constituted. Does this re-affirm the idea that the unit of analysis is the relationship rather than the individual? Can either exist without the other?

Immanuel Kant argues that hospitality should be thought of in the context of “right, not of morality and politics”. The “cosmopolitan right” is “the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory... Already hospitality is opposed to what is nothing other than opposition itself, namely, hostility” (2000, 4). This perspective has imperialistic implications and is still very much part of the way we engage abroad today. Any number of volunteer abroad opportunities can be used as examples. One, “Guerilla Aid”, seems to ignore rights, morality and politics – its very name is subversive in all the wrong ways. “Guerilla Aid is a style of volunteerism – simply go somewhere and do something, while teaching others to do the same” (Guerilla Aid, 2011). Much of volunteerism today has become just that, part of one’s lifestyle. And it smacks of arrogance and privilege and completely erases the rights, as well as the morality and politics of the host and their broader community.

It should then go without saying that the most important conceptualization of the archetypal host-guest relationship for this study is rooted in the colonial project in Africa. This is a complex narrative that is, for the most part, beyond the scope of my project, although it is relevant in the form of an archetype with almost countless parallels throughout human history, and in nearly any part of the world. My study is set within this narrative: it is not an account of the history that has already been told, but a chapter that is being written even today. By this I refer to a number
of “colonial continuities” persistent in the behaviour of “development”-minded folk that pertain to my work. On the basis of “planetary consciousness”, obligation, and a taken-for-granted sense of entitlement (to intervene), Heron says that white middle class women [and, in my case, men] are able to justify becoming development workers (or, presumably, volunteers) (Heron 2007, 38). These colonial continuities manifest (in this instance) in the form of young volunteers simply wanting to “help”. As I have already explored, certainly these encounters can prove to be mutually beneficial for both host and volunteer. However, even the best of intentions can place communities at risk of unintentional harm or exploitation, and it is here that these colonial relationships are played out; these are the host-guest relationships that I am studying. It is worth considering the mechanics of these encounters, independent of whether either side perceives harm is being done or not.

Derrida’s argument is certainly useful in theorizing international relations in a broad sense:

“The peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere. The idea of a cosmopolitan right is therefore not fantastic and overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity.” (Derrida, 2000: 5)

But he goes on to admit, far more to the point in host-guest relations at a grassroots level: “The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest [hôte], the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home” (Derrida 2000, 9). The dependency relationships that so often emerge in aid projects, big and small, are an apt example of this hostage scenario with no negotiator.

Derrida again, “Doubtless, all ethics of hospitality are not the same, but there is no culture or social bond without a principle of hospitality” (Derrida, 2005). He later goes on to admit, more
specifically that “therefore we do not yet know what hospitality beyond this European, universally European, right is” (Derrida 2000, 11). To claim to know this assumes that we know what it means to be foreign (6), and what it means to receive (7).

What happens when a guest entering a host community remains unconscious not only of their own expectations for hospitality, but also unconscious of the fact that the community in/for/with which they engage likely adhere to a different values and practices of hospitality from their own.

Julius Nyerere, Tanzania’s first President, summarizes the East African notion of host-guest relations brilliantly: “Those of us who talk about the African way of life and, quite rightly, take a pride in maintaining the tradition of hospitality which is so great a part of it, might do well to remember the Swahili saying: ‘Mgeni siku mbili; siku ya tatu mpe jembe’ – or in English, ‘Treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe!’ (Nyerere 1967, 5). This conception is instructive not only to younger generations of (in this case) Tanzanians regarding valued cultural traditions, but also to cultural outsiders for how they might be expected to behave when they arrive. Such local approaches to social relations are often missing from volunteer training.

Benjamin Franklin echoes this with his own pithy pronouncement: “Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.” (Why three days, I wonder?) Interestingly, the word ‘mgeni’ in Swahili

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7 A charming but irrelevant example of the three day hospitality rule: King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who died as I was writing this, as a young man was imprisoned by his father for three days for failing to rise and offer his chair to a visitor.
means both stranger and guest, and the two aren’t generally distinguished. Again, there is an artful tension in this; there is conflict and duality on both sides of this relationship.

In this study, I assume that the concept of host operates at a variety of scales: hosts can be individuals, families, homes, clans, tribes, communities, cities, societies, populations, nations, governments or countries. These can all form part of a nested hierarchy, but there are also horizontal host-guest relationships. Hosts can be people themselves or the dwellings in which they shelter guests. When we consider these multiple scales, so too must we recognize that there are different power differentials than what I address in this study. I realize that all these scales are not equal when we try to answer the question “what is it like to host”, and as such I acknowledge that much of the answer to this question lies beyond the scope of a Master’s thesis.

In the international engagement and service-learning (IESL) literature, a host tends to be identified in terms of points of direct contact between host and guest, usually focusing on host organizations (i.e. NGOs; Comhlamh, n. Date; Worrall, 2007) or the “counterparts” of Peace Corps volunteers in Uganda (Contreras, 2010) and, less frequently, on home stay families (Knight, 2002). There are other examples from domestic (i.e. not international) service-learning literature from which we may draw some useful conclusions, but even Blouin & Perry (2009) admit that

While the benefits for students are well documented, little systematic research has investigated the impact on community-based organizations (Cruz and Giles 2000). However, in order for service-learning courses to meet their intended goals—addressing community needs while giving students hands-on practical experience and encouraging civic responsibility—we must consider the evaluative counterpart: Does service learning offer real benefits to CBOs?

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8 In biology, a host is “An animal or plant having a parasite or commensal habitually living in or upon it.” (OED, 2010).
9 A term I qualify in chapter 2.
This is complicated, because no community in a democracy invites all who pass through unless it is closed and the “hosting” obligations of a town differ greatly from an organization. Given this complexity, it might be beneficial to develop common, local/organizational/individual-specific concepts of what host means in individual situations.

5.6 The Silence of the Hosts

Thinking of instances when I have played the host in my own home, a host is an actor and also an overseer or director, a person who is both in front of the curtain and behind it, much like Chaucer’s Host, telling and facilitating stories, as well as guiding the guests on a social journey (perhaps this performativity aspect is why we say “playing” the host). A host is the jester, providing general entertainment, but also the king or queen: master of the house, issuing commands so that food is made available and people feel safe. At a dinner party, or when I have a houseguest staying with me, it is nevertheless a role I can step out of at the end of the night, or week, or whatever. And the guest is (almost) always invited. I am one who invites.

But an organization or even a community that hosts a constant flow of international volunteers cannot – it seems to me – so easily step out of this role. Seldom are these guests “invited” in the normal sense. A guest who never leaves means a host whose job is never done. This host must always remain on their best behaviour, so as not to spoil the hospitable atmosphere. There should be no objective reason to take anger out on one stock of guests because of frustration that has built up over the entire flow. But this was the sense I got from respondents – the sense of being a not entirely willing host, and being too polite to say so.
But it is important to set this understanding of host amid complex relations of power, relations which are bound up in dynamics of race and gender. The host organization does not always have the option to quit. Indeed, although it was certainly not true in all cases, in some respondents I sensed a build up of resentment because of this reality. Barbara Heron in her book The Desire for Development (2007), describes how white people take for granted the “development option” as a career choice; they take for granted that African people (or any people of the Global South) are available for them to “develop”, thus securing their sense of self and racial superiority.

In this instance where community becomes host to perhaps unwelcome (much as this may remain unspoken) houseguest, the biological connotation of host suddenly becomes more enlightening. Using a health metaphor, a community can be seen as not entirely willing host to guests who may have overstayed their welcome. But, as with many conditions, we often do not see the symptoms until an illness has overcome us. In some cases, an illness cannot be fought; the cure cannot be prescribed, and the host is left to wait it out. Even if the host overcomes an “illness”, the damage may be permanent, even though it may be slow to accrue and invisible to the naked eye (like the slow build-up of fat and lack of exercise eventually leading to a heart attack). This is the basis for questions like “what is the effect of volunteer presence on the family as a social unit?”, or for questions around creating or sustaining negative stereotypes.

Stuart Hall (1997: 257-8 The Spectacle of the Other, in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices) reminds us that stereotyping is part of the maintenance of social order, and as such is often manifest where there are ‘gross inequalities of power’ (p 257). According to theorists such as Sander Gilman (1985) and Homi Bhabha (1994), the stereotype can be seen as an expression of insecurity and conflicting feelings and the efforts to handle and protect oneself from these. In this perspective, feelings of insecurity, failure and shame are dealt with and denied by being projected upon the Other. (Baaz 2005, 17)
Changes at the community scale happen over a long period of time, making them more sinister, and this slow silence makes it easier to rationalize a continued volunteer presence as a force for “good” in a community.

I recognize the potential danger in framing host-guest relationships in terms of illness, particularly when it comes time to talk about “treatment”. I also recognize that an extreme portrayal of hosts being non-consensual partners in these encounters can act to remove their agency. It appears a slippery slope to xenophobia and worse, and this is not my intention at all. Certainly, neo-colonial practices exist – but not without some agency to reform. Like Finley Peter Dunne’s newspaper, this study aims simply to “to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”, to peel back our assumptions about the good we believe we do, to advocate for a more reflective and intentional approach to serving and hosting. Rather than substituting one form of passive racism with another, I hope instead to make the familiar strange.

The lesson to be drawn here is that means need to be found to allow hosts to convey their concerns when problems arise in a way that does not violate their own ethics of hospitality (for example, a feedback loop that allows the sponsoring organizations to intervene without putting the specific host in a difficult position).

5.7 Means of Resistance

“The colonization process itself created a spirit of resistance” (Baaz 2005, 57). People take different approaches to resisting adversity in social situations that tend to be culturally informed. I was curious to know how respondents chose to resist when they felt uncomfortable. How do they say ‘no’?
Daniel tells us: “You might find that I was, at first, I was so jovial and taking you around everywhere, spending most of a time with you, but when there’s that withdrawal, it’s like, you might find that some of the time I might find excuses not to, take you around.”

Cedric sets his response within a wider cultural context:

When I feel uncomfortable, that’s a big challenge to Africans. I know in the Western, most of the Western culture, it is... (gesturing with hand from one side to another) “no... yes”. You know, but us, it may be a challenge to say no. [...] So... in any case I sense, maybe, maybe not... one of the things I may say is, for example, “please, think about it”. [...] Unfortunately, this is African psychology, that’s our life, that’s our culture. To say no is like to say, I don’t love you, I don’t care about you, I don’t want you... that is the interpretation of our African, most of, you know, some of us are coming out of that. Some of the people are coming out of that. [...] Yeah, it will be that we’ve said, for example a maximum of three months and maybe after four days we see some of these things, negative things start manifesting themselves, it will be difficult for me to say, “excuse me, this is the end.” It would be difficult. So I would better suffer for the rest of the two months plus, than to say “excuse me”. [...] When it comes to touch on the children, then we may have to say “excuse me, things are different here”, “how about considering A,B,C,D?” So we may not touch on the direct issue.

One of my own mentors raised this point with me in conversation as I was preparing to begin my field work: “In the Western world, silence in a room full of people tends to connote assent, right?” He began. “For example, if you present an idea in a meeting, then ask if there are any questions, when you are met with silence, you tend to carry on as you planned, right?” This made sense to me. I agreed. “However, the opposite is true in a place like Kenya. Silence means dissent. Silence means you do not have the trust of the people at the table. But to the outside observer, the behaviour looks the same.”

Judy independently confirms this:

Matt: How do you say no?
Judy: Probably keep quiet... (laughs) and yet, in English, silence is consent. But, very much in
our, in our context, very much, if somebody’s keeping quiet, they’re saying they are not in it.
...

Matt: ...Thus making it very difficult for somebody to- if they don’t already know that...

Judy: Yeah. Very difficult. If you don’t know that. But that is the situation. If you find
somebody is hesitant to say yes, then they are saying no. But probably if you push them a
little more, they will say yes, but they didn’t mean yes. They didn’t quite want to do it.

My heart sank as I thought of all the times I had been met with the silence he described in my
own experiences volunteering in East Africa. How many times had I barrelled through with my
best laid plans because I heard no protest from my stakeholders and thought that meant I had
their blessings? This combined with the cultural norm of not embarrassing a guest, even long
after they have left, means volunteers often will never know they are making the wrong
decision. How many volunteers who go to this region every year know that these cultural norms
exist? With information like this, suddenly, a lot of failed projects proposed by outsiders make
more sense. Local organizations are motivated by the need for injections of money and labour
and ideas, though perhaps not necessarily the behaviours of the volunteers who bring these
things. They grit their teeth, and proceed with an idea proposed by an outsider, even if it is not
in the best interests of their community, because of these culturally binding factors. Baaz
explains that “resistance, AKA ‘advice not taken’, can be taken in terms of passivity” (Baaz 2005,
76). This is something I learned anecdotally as well: host communities will sometimes go along
with the suggestions of their guests until they leave, and then go right back to the way they were
doing things before.

Daniel reminds us that “You can’t confront a visitor. It’s bad manners. You can’t do that. [...] You’re supposed to be nice to the visitor. Even if they have something that is not in line with the
customs you just, you just ignore, saying that he’s just here for a few months and he will go. So
you cannot confront them.”
We can understand this phenomenon more clearly within the discipline of cultural psychology.

Steven J. Heine (2008, 389-90) explains:

Although nonverbal communication is a big part of communication in all cultures, there are some rather pronounced cultural differences in the degree to which communication relies on explicit verbal information versus more implicit nonverbal cues. In explaining these cultural differences, Edward Hall (1976) made a distinction between high context and low context cultures. In high context culture, people are deeply involved with each other, and this involvement leads them to have much shared information that guides behaviour. There are clear and appropriate ways of behaving in each situation, and this information is widely shared and understood so it does not need to be explicitly communicated. Much of what is to be communicated can be inferred because people have a great deal of information in common that they can rely on, and thus they can be less explicit in what they say. In contrast, in a low context culture, there is relatively little involvement among individuals, and there is less shared information to guide behaviour. Because of relatively less shared information among individuals, it is necessary for people to communicate in more explicit detail, as others are less able to fill in the gaps of what is not said.

In this case, “African” cultures are good examples of high context cultures, whereas North American and English-speaking cultures more generally, are good examples of low context ones. The late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe summarizes this “African approach” artfully: “The white man is like hot soup and we must take him slowly-slowly from the edges of the bowl” (Achebe 1989, 85).

The best case scenario, of course, cannot be reduced to one solution, and must fit with the needs of the organization. Not infrequently, however, volunteers show up unannounced and uninvited. Within a culture of hospitality as exists in Kenya, it would be challenging, if not socially unacceptable to turn a volunteer away. With the reality that volunteers can potentially financially support the organizations and bring crucial traction abroad to the issues they face, hosts inevitably run into a conflict of motivation.

Immanuel has a memorandum of understanding for longer volunteers, something most other
respondents seemed to lack. This is an agreement outlining the terms of service and hospitality between volunteer and host organization. Both parties must read and sign a copy before the encounter is considered legitimate. “They will be here, and this is what we expect from them, and this is what they expect from us.” The question is, is it followed? Is it enforced? Perhaps a template like this could be developed, with broad inputs, which the host organizations/individuals could modify for specific circumstances.

5.8 Towards an Intercultural Mythology of Host

What I want to consider then is: what if we reframe our international engagement activities by discarding this mythology of volunteer as saviour (Robin Hood, the Good Samaritan etc.) and switch instead to a mythology of to one of host and houseguest? This tends to evoke a completely different kind of imagery: boarders (and borders), company, pests and miscreants. Would this shift make the volunteer more mindful? Would it change the way hosts accept volunteers? There is a need to also reformulate the notion of host in this specific context to recognize that there are qualifications both to the concept of host and guest/volunteer that should be established as the norm for the relationship to become more mutually productive. Another fertile area of investigation, might be to look at what tools host organizations or individuals have at their disposal to manage situations and how might these be improved upon?

5.9 “It Takes a Village...”

Kenya has welcomed incoming groups from the dawn of time, and the tradition of extending a welcome and providing hospitality is deeply ingrained in the national psyche. What’s more, the Kenyans are really good at it. So, whether it is to welcome a visitor into a hotel, into their home, or into their business premises, they can be relied upon to do everything in their power to make them feel at home. And if the visitor “enjoys,” the Kenyans are delighted.

~ From Kenya: A quick guide to customs and etiquette. By Jane Barsby 2007, 41

Yemi feels very grown up. Today she will take care of her little brother, Kokou, at the market while Mama sells mangoes. “I will watch you,” Yemi tells Kokou proudly, “all by myself.” But Mama and
the villagers just smile, because they know better. Oh, how wonderful Yemi feels as she leads Kokou through the marketplace. But the moment she turns her back to buy some peanuts, Kokou wanders off. Through the maze of stalls Yemi searches, but Kokou is nowhere to be found. Little does she know that her brother is being well-cared for by the friendly villagers. And it’s not until Yemi finds Kokou just waking up from his nap in the mat vendor’s stall, that she discovers what Mama and her friends knew all along.

From It Takes a Village. By Jane Cowen-Fletcher 1994, i

The proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” is as elusive in origin as it is clichéd. Debate exists as to whether it is of African or Native American origin. Chinua Achebe used it in his novel “Things Fall Apart” (1958), a cornerstone in both the African and the English canons. Jane Cowen-Fletcher wrote a children’s book called “It Takes a Village” (1994), centred on this proverb, based on her Peace Corps experience in West Africa. Hillary Rodham Clinton also wrote a book in 1996 called “It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us”. Numerous proverb books (e.g. Zona, 1994; Riley, 1995) representing different cultural groups contain the proverb or a facsimile thereof. The Swahili equivalent can be found printed along the hem of a kanga10: Mkono mmoja haubebi mtoto, “one hand alone cannot carry a baby”. So whether Cowen-Fletcher, Clinton, or anyone else knows the real provenance is anyone’s guess. Perhaps it does not matter.

Nevertheless, I would argue based on what I heard from respondents that often – at least within more traditionally collectivistic cultures such as Kenya – we can adapt the proverb to say also that “it takes a village to host a guest”. This idea forms one of the central pillars of this oeuvre. At the core of this work is an exploration of the questions of what it is like to be a host and what it means to be a host in the city of Eldoret, in Western Kenya.

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10 A colourful piece of fabric emblazoned with different traditional proverbs, commonly worn by Swahili women as a skirt, baby sling or headdress.
I argue for a broader definition of host, with a view toward deepening our consciousness of the reach of the actions and words of volunteers in their communities. By using this aphorism, readers should not imagine that people and organizations experience hosting equally throughout a community. For example, being a host organization is very different from being a shopkeeper or being a host family. While the notion of the host-volunteer encounter extends far beyond the direct relationship between the host organization/family and the volunteer, the community as a whole is far more concerned about day to day life than they are about an international volunteer. The true extent of the indirect influence on the “rest” of the community it is difficult if not impossible to know in any certain terms. In some instances it may be minimal, if it exists at all. One example of a relatively minimal influence encounter might be in the case of a respondent in this study, Felix, who trains marathon runners. He hosts professional athletes from around the world to train with local athletes and help run programs. They stay in his gated compound and, aside from daily runs throughout the region, it sounds as though they have a closely curated experience, and thus relatively little interaction with vulnerable populations. In any case, it is important to the practice of ethical volunteering to make the consideration, and I will explore this idea in greater depth in chapter 7.

In host-guest encounters, particularly in unfamiliar cultural settings, the guest is in many ways similar to Kokou in Cowen-Fletcher’s storybook: a child. I say this not to patronize international volunteers or to trivialize their efforts, but rather simply to illustrate that guests coming to a new community for the first time often do not know their way around, cannot speak the host’s first (or perhaps even second or third) language, and generally need to be introduced to local social norms. As “independent” as an individual may be, without local knowledge and insider status,

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11 Eldoret is between 2100 and 2700 metres above sea level (7000–9000 feet), making it an excellent region in which to train athletically.
even the most creative, culturally intelligent, and well-seasoned engager-abroad cannot depend on a map, a guide book, charisma, or intuition alone in a country like Kenya. Baaz presents the idea of solidarity as myth: “It is impossible to hide privilege. You can’t simply become one of the community by living like them. Hence it has to be acknowledged” (Baaz 2005, 89).

As I put forth in Chapter 3, every process of inclusion is also a process of exclusion. By only considering a few types of hosts, as we have for the most part done in academia to date, we have severely delimited our ability to understand host-guest experiences in international engagement, and by extension, the place and role of guests as the other half of this binary relationship. Who academics choose to include under the term “host” can have consequences in the real world. If, in research or in “development” practice, we exclude particular groups that are affected by our behaviour and even mere presence in communities, then we risk compromising the dignity of the people and communities with which we engage.

5.10 Conclusion

We can draw a number of important conclusions from the accounts featured in this chapter: Host fatigue is a real thing. It is clear from both the respondents of this study and from the supporting literature that hosting and hospitality are complex and conflicted concepts. Given this complexity, it might be beneficial to develop common, local/organizational/individual-specific concepts of what host means in individual situations. It is important for volunteers and host communities to speak to one another, build a relationship, and clarify expectations and boundaries long before volunteers leave home – most acutely in cases where “do nothing”12 may be the best course of action for the volunteer. Where this fails, volunteers risk creating and

12 i.e. stay at home and do not engage in a community as a volunteer without having fully considered the ethical implications of doing so.
sustaining negative stereotypes which have implications for future generations of volunteers who may not be welcomed into a community. Moreover, this may be the least drastic of responses – it may taint the desired openness and trust needed for collaboration more generally, be that internationally or simply outside one’s immediate circle.

Colonial continuities and assumed authority on behalf of volunteers result in negative outcomes for vulnerable populations. Host communities do not always communicate their dissent in ways volunteers are accustomed to, which can fuel the feedback loop of host fatigue. They could develop and share a template for a memorandum of understanding for hosting volunteers to adapt according to their individual needs. And lastly, the effects of the behaviours chosen by volunteers have ripple effects beyond the confines of the family, organization, or region they partner with.

In the next chapter, I revisit a concept in Service-Learning ethics called the Problem of Time. Then, in Chapter 7, I draw together the arguments I have put forth so far and posit that, when trying to understand international engagement and service-learning, volunteer encounters should be considered alongside things like gender, education, and social environments, as a social determinant of community health.
Chapter 6 - Revisiting the Problem of Time

6.1 How Much is Enough, and When?

Wallace (2000) introduced an important concept in service-learning literature which he calls “the problem of time”13 (see Chapter 3 for more detail). This concept is at the centre of a number of conversations around ethical engagement abroad and should be situated in the context of broader considerations on ethical international engagement and service-learning. Wallace begins by explaining that “Colleges and communities structure time differently” (Wallace, 133), although one could easily replace “colleges” with “volunteers” or “sending organizations” and this would still be true.

The problem of time as Wallace defines it is two-fold. The first question is whether volunteers are in a community for enough time. Wallace summarizes:

For most community organizations that partner with colleges and universities in service-learning, the presence of students is a decidedly mixed blessing. On the positive side, the students constitute a large pool of volunteers, many of them highly motivated, who bring new energy, viewpoints and ideas to the organization. On the negative side, the students tend to stay in their service jobs for only the ten to fifteen weeks of the service-learning course. The student leaves the organization just as he or she is coming to understand its mission and philosophy and is becoming competent and comfortable in helping with its work.

This is reflective of my own volunteer engagement in East Africa during the summers of 2007 and 2008. There are, of course, additional considerations to make in the context of international placements: language and cultural barriers, the limitations placed on volunteers due to transportation and infrastructure, just to name a few. I picked up the language fairly quickly,

13 The problem of time is unrelated to “African time”, a common and sometimes pejorative turn of phrase uttered by either a volunteer and a community member to connote differences in social norms around punctuality. Baaz comments: “It doesn’t really make sense to say that Swedes are more punctual than Tanzanians because of culture, because this takes for granted that most Tanzanians do not have access to methods of transportation that run on fixed schedules, nor do they have road infrastructure and so on to support this. This has to do with the meanings attached to time and punctuality. Rather than look at punctuality, look at Western vs African conceptions of time” (Baaz 2005, 97).
having dedicated six months to studying Swahili before the first placement. This helped me “hit the ground running” to an extent. But my team and I still struggled with such a short time span – twelve weeks. It was over, or so it felt, before any of us felt we had made durable contributions to the community. One respondent, James, talked about a volunteer who had to get a project proposal signed by an area’s Member of Parliament. These kinds of bureaucratic processes are common in this kind of work, and can operate on far longer time scales than are available to the typical volunteer.

Organizations sending volunteers often address this by scaling back expectations for any single group of volunteers, assuring them that they are likely participating in only a small part of a longitudinal project.

The second aspect of the problem of time is that often, the fixed and finite times during which volunteers arrive for their placements do not necessarily line up with the needs of the community, which are dynamic and ongoing. Colleges/universities, volunteers, and sending organizations tend to be bound by more rigid structures of time: classes and breaks start and end according to schedules set out years in advance; sending organizations need to plan and sometimes train with volunteers for many months before a project in-community begins. Any individual engagement in a community from a student’s perspective will often have to fit into these formal structures. Students do not often buy one-way tickets to accommodate this uncertainty when planning to volunteer abroad.

By comparison, life in communities does not adhere to these same structures of time. Communities are fluid, vibrant, complex, and constantly evolving, and community-based
organizations need to be able to respond to these dynamics in real time. Volunteers on short
time-scales see only a small slice of this complexity, often lacking sufficient context to really
make sense of what they are learning and witnessing. While a volunteer may nevertheless learn
an incredible amount from engaging abroad, the problem of time can compromise a volunteer’s
ability be able to make intelligent decisions that depend on this larger context.

Put another way, chronic issues and emergencies do not wait for volunteers to arrive before they
arise. These issues existed before volunteers arrived, and persist after volunteers leave. We need
to consider whether it is ethical to prioritize our own learning objectives and our sense of
accomplishment and adventure over the needs of communities and the organizations embedded
within them.

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**Travelogue | Zanzibar, Tanzania | Kiponda street | May 2008**

I sat and talked for an hour or so yesterday with an old man from town named Mohammed. He told me that in two days, two plane loads of tourists would land, hailing the start of high season for tourism [and volunteerism] on the island. During high season, he said, people eat three meals a day, children get new clothes, and some people can afford their medication. This is the most important time of year, but everybody knows that they must not get too sure of themselves because once tourist season is over, it will be a long time again before they return. It is just before high season that they must pinch hardest. Mohammed, with many mouths to feed, tells me he is worried that as soon as he sees the planes, he might get so excited that he’ll reach up and pull them from the sky.

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Given that the problem of time is so prevalent in the literature related to volunteers and sending
organizations (give more citations), it is important to consider this issue from the perspectives of
host communities. To date, this issue has not been explored with enough significance.
Each of the respondents shared with me, where they could, the rough minimums and maximums for volunteer engagement with their work, their families or their organizations respectively. Regardless of whether their answers were “a few weeks” or “a few years”, my follow up was “is that enough?” Because of the semi-structured nature of these conversations, I did not ask this question in every interview. In some instances, the question did not fit with the flow conversation and was not returned to, or was not appropriate given the nature of the work done by the respondent. Maryam, for example, is the administrator of a guest house and not directly connected to the outcomes of the work done by volunteers. As such, it would be difficult for her to assess whether their time spent in community was appropriate to the kind of work being done.

It is also important to consider that the reason this issue exists in the first place is due to the type of people who typically enter vulnerable communities from the outside to volunteer. Sending organizations often rely on students to fill their spots, as students tend to have a few months off a year at predictable times. Much of the literature on ethical volunteering abroad is service-learning literature, which often focuses on students and the learning outcomes related to community engagement, rather than professional volunteers. Throughout this study I will often refer to volunteers in terms related to student life. However, I also take a broader approach, not focusing exclusively on strict service-learning relationships. Respondents spoke about experiences with volunteers who were students as well as volunteers who were not. Some made no distinction. Indeed, many of the volunteers I have met have been students, whether during my own volunteer placements or during my fieldwork. However, for the purposes of this study, volunteers are not distinguished according to whether or not they are also students. I did this because I did not select for organizations that had formal service-learning partnerships. The
study focuses on the perspectives of hosts and host organizations on receiving volunteers generally, rather than on service-learning relationships specifically. The fact that a volunteer might also be a student is incidental from the perspective of the host that does not sustain formal service-learning partnerships.

6.2 Results

The table below is summarizes the length of time hosts hosted volunteers throughout the total of their involvement with volunteers, demonstrating each individual’s response as a range (where applicable), as well as their perception of whether this amount of time was “enough”. I have also included the respondent’s central focus of work to give context to their perceptions:
Table 2 – Volunteer timescales for all respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Alias</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Central Focus of Work</th>
<th>Enough?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>healthcare and research</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>graduate students</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedict</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedric</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>it depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fay and Nigel</td>
<td>a few days</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boniface</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immanuel</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>30 days</td>
<td>agroecology/PLWHIV*</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamau</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>athletes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>primary school children</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>healthcare and research</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertrand</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwaka</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>street children and mothers</td>
<td>it depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>vocational training</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abe</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>dental students</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>&gt;4 hours</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>street children</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>question did not come up</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time was enough</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time was not enough</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it depends (see discussion)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* PLWHIV: People Living with HIV/AIDS

6.3 Discussion

As you can see, the ranges are quite broad. One of the respondents, Cedric, is the director of an organization that houses and provides primary and secondary education to children affected by HIV/AIDS. Here, he shares his story of why he chose to place a limit on the amount of time volunteers can engage with his family:

The other day (chuckling), I received an email from one and they said, they visited, and after visiting they went back and wrote and said this is the place they want to be. For life. And I thought... this is good, but uh... things don’t work out that way... (both laugh) So, we, anyway, we worked out things, kept writing to each other and they said now, the
maximum, we have put three months as maximum stay of a volunteer. With reasons. One of them is that even though volunteers are welcome, we want as much as possible to maintain our family. [Bahati] family. And sometimes, it’s difficult to maintain that kind of family relationship with guests. When guests are around, there are things which are neglected, just because Matthew is here. [using me as an example]. But when we are as a family, we put right a few things. You know? Before the other guest comes.

Three months tends to be somewhere in the middle of the time respondents cited their volunteers staying. Cedric is anomalous in this instance, as generally the respondents would like volunteers to stay for a greater amount of time. He has chosen a shorter amount of time compared to some of his colleagues so that he can insulate his “family” from the influences of outsiders. Of all the respondents I interviewed, it was clear that Cedric had spent the most time thinking about and developing policies for volunteers who wanted to engage with his organization. We will return to examine Cedric’s story more closely later on.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have James telling us that two years is still not enough. He explained that he had hosted four Peace Corps volunteers throughout his career, each of which stayed for approximately two years. One volunteer he hosted named Tim faced a number of constraints when trying to implement a complicated project. Tim’s placement was due to end shortly before a national election, when new funds were slated to be disbursed for projects such as the one he was working on:

If he could remain here until the elections were over, maybe we could get the funds and we could complete the project that we wanted. But now, he went, the funds were withheld, and then, we don’t move the project. So there was a lot of wasted time. To him, and to us. As a volunteer, you may be happy when your purpose has been fulfilled. But he left without fulfilling his purpose.

Without the presence or support of the volunteer as the project lead, the project was seen to have mothballed, and so was not funded. The volunteer left thinking that he had put everything in place and that the project would be funded, and then completed without him. Without
someone to create continuity when actually implementing the project, all the work that had
gone into visioning, developing and funding amounted to naught.

While James began our conversation by saying that pretty much everything else was satisfactory
with his relationships with volunteers, he nevertheless said that two years was “too short to
implement what he had come to do.”

Bertrand lands right in the middle: “Mmm... well (laughing), I really can’t say, but to me I think [a
year is] actually a good time for somebody to learn a lot, and to be at the right perception of the
whole thing. It’s a good time. One year is a good time. As opposed to somebody who comes for
a month or two.”

When asked “is that enough?” Mwaka, another respondent, said “it depends”. Here, he
discusses why:

Mwaka: What has happened is that, okay, the... as you work through this job... you may
not see result tomorrow... it is a process.

Matt: I’m getting you.

Mwaka: And I, I’ve known some of the people who have been here who got really
discouraged, because you can-

Matt: The volunteers?

Mwaka: Yeah. You can carry on with someone, see them get out of the streets, see them
stay in a house, change their lifestyle, take them to school, we participate in buying them
one or two things that they need for school, and one month in school, the next day, you
see them in the streets. And they feel (quick sigh representing frustration), I don’t think I
want to do such a thing... So, I don’t know, but you see people react differently, but I have
seen those who, I feel, they got so discouraged.

Matt: Mm. Do you feel like the amount of time that somebody stays here has anything to
do with that?
Mwaka: Yeah. You stay here for only three months, you don’t need to make decisions (laughs).

Matt: You don’t have to make decisions?

Mwaka: Ah, like, not decisions but judgment, don’t, don’t make something like a ruling, like, “okay, this person will make it or this person...” but at least mostly you see people come here for three months to six months, six months being the longest.

Matt: Is that enough?

Mwaka: No... okay, if you come for six months, I would rather you make a follow-up visit again, to see what is happening. Then, if you are the person who follows up to see something, I, I did, reached here, then, maybe that is, that is what I can say, but just three months or two months, then you are visiting.

[...]

Matt: How, how long would be ideal?

Mwaka: Six months.

Matt: Six months is ideal. As a minimum or as... an average?

Mwaka: As an average.

Matt: Okay.

Mwaka: Yeah, six months is ideal. Because six months, at least they serve here, and six months is a good time.

So according to Mwaka, a modest time in community is acceptable, as long as there are steps taken to ensure projects are properly monitored and evaluated. Unfortunately, returning to a community to do this work is not in the capacity of most volunteers who engage abroad in this manner. Most volunteers go once, and never return.

The focus group said volunteers

average 4 months for the longer ones. Some come for three, some come for six, some come for one year [...] but some come for days. Actually the worst ones come for a day, actually hours! Afternoon! You are calling “[Moses, the organization’s director], I’m having some [foreigners] coming over”, I was called on Thursday, there are those who are coming on Monday in the afternoon. And... you know, this, it changes [our organization] to be almost like a zoo.
The problem of time can make planning to host volunteers in advance quite challenging. By the time volunteers arrive, the issues or projects as they were defined when volunteers were initially requested or recruited may have changed. This can limit the types of work volunteers can do if they are only in-community for limited periods of time. In this study, two-thirds of respondents work strictly with vulnerable populations, or with “people at high risk of risks” (citation), such as street children and mothers. Inviting volunteers to work with higher-risk issues in these communities would not typically be in the best interests of the community if they are only planning to be in-community for a few weeks or months.

As we will see in Chapter 7, many of the more easily identified ethical issues tend to emerge when volunteers approach the frontier of these higher-risk aspects of community engagement. For instance, it is interesting, albeit difficult to measure, to consider what effect shorter stays in community have on host community perceptions of the value of volunteerism in general. If they are short, are they consistently “too short”? Similar to the concept of “research fatigue”, where communities become reluctant to participate in research projects when they do not feel they are engaged in a reciprocal process, one could use an example like Cedric’s to build a case for “host fatigue”, a central concept of this thesis that I will return to often.

Some international engagement may not be as adversely affected by the problem of time, and may more easily be done at any time of the year without compromising the economic, social or environmental sustainability of a project, or creating strong dependency relationships or continuity gaps. However, this question is beyond the scope of this project. The reality that I observed suggests that much of the relationship between volunteers and hosts is susceptible to the problem of time: building relationships with members of a community, or participating in a
small part of a long-term projects or issues that do not have an easy cut-off point or a definite end.

Some organizations try to address the problem of time by structuring their relationships with communities using phases. For example, one group of volunteers will work for four months; those volunteers will write reports documenting their progress, and be replaced by new volunteers who will work for another four months, and so on. This “relay race” style of volunteer engagement is common, and can be more effective at giving the sense of consistency to the relationship between volunteers and hosts, and can serve as a useful conduit for information between communities and sending organizations – the real keepers and stewards of long-term relationships – no matter what time of the year. However, from the perspective of hosts, the presence of any single volunteer or group of volunteers is merely episodic. Any new group will have to relearn the same fundamental information and go through the same process of meeting stakeholders and building trust before being able to make meaningful progress, although, where mechanisms exist, new incoming volunteers can profit to an extent from feedback from the outgoing volunteers. By the time most volunteers are ready to begin, it is time to go home. This is colloquially referred to as “parachuting in” and “helicoptering out”. It is an inherently frail model of community engagement.

The manifestation and perception of the problem of time may shift when volunteers arrive in a community as part of a more formal, for-credit, international service-learning placement, which can place a group of volunteers in community for a few weeks or can take place over a semester or two. Nevertheless, because of the school schedules discussed above, the period between classes from May-August tends to be when communities see the most volunteers, while the rest
of the year is relatively quiet. Any deeper discussion of the connection between formal international service-learning and the problem of time from the perspective of host communities is beyond the scope of this study.

6.4 So, How Long is Long Enough?

This is a question that is difficult to settle definitively. We as volunteers and sending organizations tend to arrange our plans based on our assumptions of what we think is enough. Cedric has said three months is enough. Janet says “six months to a year is okay, but a short time may not be long enough to, something like a month may not be long enough for some experiences to be complete, but probably just like an entry.” If organizations host volunteers in a loose patchwork of “entries” only, one can imagine it can be difficult to make substantial progress or pursue meaningful goals with volunteers. Mwaka suggests that a year is appropriate, as long as there is an opportunity to follow up.

James tells us that 3-5 years is enough, echoing the above concerns about parachuting in:

Why I’m saying so, maybe the first year, the volunteer may be laying out what he knows. When a volunteer is sent, he is sent by an organization or country. For the first year, he or she will want to understand, okay? Even if he’s an expert in that area, he would like to understand actually what is contained in this, and to understand that operation of the organization. Because sometimes, we’ll find that, if a volunteer is brought in, he has not understood the correct vision of the organization, it may go wrong. And the whole thing will be on him or her. From his country or her country [...] Take six months understanding, having meetings with the organization, the group and other people, to understand it better.... Now she is a part of the community.

But this would certainly be too much from Cedric’s perspective. Indeed, the respondents of this study help us to consider a wide variety of scenarios where volunteers are involved with an organization, ranging from casual drop-ins lasting only a few hours, to volunteers who give two years of their life to a project. In the majority of cases, respondents told me that the amount of
time volunteers stayed and worked with communities was not enough. This does not necessarily mean that longer is better. We might rephrase it so that we think not about “enough time” but rather “the right amount of time” for the work communities expect volunteers to do. Since there is such a diversity of opinions on how long is long enough, it can be difficult to settle on a range.

Catherine tells us

“oh, I wish it was a full-time, full-time business, that you come in the morning, we work together from Monday to Friday, and then we have the weekend, you go away, you begin on Monday, like that. [...] So [the community] say “Ah Ah! Sister today, may I not go with you? You just go, and, and, and do your work, we shall meet tomorrow.” So if they had a work plan that today we are visiting this village, we shall do one, two, three, I'll end up doing it alone. So the concept people have about [Westerners] is sometimes a disadvantage on our side.”

Following the EIESL project, I support a reflective, rather than a normative approach to ethical questions like this. A volunteer seeking to engage abroad should carefully reflect on the commitment they are hoping to make, and who is really being served by their actions. Sending organizations should include these conversations in training and preparation of volunteers, and invite volunteers to consider that they are participating in a system that is inherently flawed.

In addition to my Kenyan respondents, I informally interviewed a prominent American expatriate who asked to remain anonymous. He had lived and worked in health systems management in under-resourced countries for 30 years, including in Kenya for the previous ten years. He was well-known and respected in Eldoret, not least of all by the respondents of this study, many of whom were his collaborators. The organization he oversaw had hosted countless volunteers in the health professions since its inception. He had this to say on the problem of time:

If someone comes in here to fix something or heal something, they won't get anywhere. You may as well come here as a missionary and call that what it is. You have to disappear into the fabric of local systems. The question then is, how do Kenyans lift up their
institutions to be responsive? We don’t need heroes. We like Kenyan heroes. [If you want to help], bring a life. Because that’s what you’re going to have to give. The more comfortable you can get with the idea that you have to plant yourself, the more helpful you’re going to be.

None of the Kenyan respondents advocated so strongly for this level of commitment. Understandably – this falls outside of any recognizable definition of “volunteer”. Certainly, some Western individuals make their careers in places like Eldoret. Can we make space for this kind of commitment in our conversations around ethical volunteer engagement abroad? If you as a volunteer are not prepared to make a commitment of time that will satisfy the needs of your partner community, should you be volunteering at all? Certainly, some of this is not attributable to the individual, but to the organizations (including universities and host organizations) who arrange/negotiate the placements. Whatever the “right” amount of time is, it is clear that the issue is complex, and one that merits considerable thought from everybody involved.

Questions that remain unexplored from this discussion are: what happens to a volunteer if a host organization wants to renegotiate the tenure of their stay? Is the problem of time a significant deterrent to volunteers hoping to engage abroad? Why or why not? These issues of course happen in a community context, and trying to answer them outside of that context is meaningless. However, the process of asking these kinds of questions of our systems of international engagement will do nothing but promote a more thoughtful cohort of volunteers.

6.5 Conclusion

Volunteers and sending organizations need to thoroughly understand the problem of time, no matter how long they plan to enter a community for. Communicating with a community partner well in advance and asking lots of questions is the best way to ensure that the needs of the community are well understood and can be matched with what volunteers can provide. It should
be negotiated in advance between a volunteer/sending organization and the community hosting the volunteer. Host organizations should seek to inform themselves of the potential implications for the tenure of a volunteer in their community. In the chapters that follow, I discuss host community experiences with this process of negotiation in advance of placement.

Problems of time need to be a part of the process of joining, and, while perfection is unattainable, mechanisms are needed to ensure they meet the needs of the community to the extent feasible.
Chapter 7 – The Price to Pay: Volunteerism, Joining, and Social Interdependence

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I take a step back and consider the larger implications of volunteer encounters and host fatigue, and how hosts react to this. What does this mean for volunteers, sending organizations and host communities trying to do good, dignifying work, and trying to ameliorate the outcomes of host-volunteer encounters? Although volunteer encounters may indeed be a valuable means to understand the social determinants of health and disparity of a particular community, both for volunteers and hosts, the literature is silent on the host-volunteer encounter as a social determinant of health and disparity in and of itself. Furthermore, I argue that because of the complex connections that exist within and between volunteers, sending organizations, and groups, all are complicit in this system.

The real answer to the question “what is it like to host?” is that hosts can become complicit in sustaining a system that does not serve them optimally, and may in some cases do more harm than good. This chapter argues that volunteer-host encounters and the resulting host fatigue are part of the social fabric, the web of connection that has a profound influence on communities’ health and quality of life outcomes.

In examining this phenomenon, I revisit the way we use language and suggest how we might unlearn and reconstruct the helping imperative. I focus on accounts from respondents to demonstrate how one person’s negative influence can spread throughout a community, as well as to help me crystallize the notion of host fatigue, and position this process within a larger context of social interdependence theory.
7.2 Finding a New Language

In my years of research and teaching younger people about the ethical implications of service abroad, the default concept used by both prospective and established international volunteers describe what they do, or want to do, is almost invariably “help”. As introduced in Chapter 3, Barbara Heron (2007) has defined this as “the helping imperative”, Canadians/Northerners travelling into the South “authorized by a sense of entitlement and an obligation to intervene for the ‘betterment’ of the Other wherever he or she resides” (Heron 2007, 7).

What would happen if any well-meaning person showed up at the scene of a major humanitarian emergency demanding the opportunity to help? In the case of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, there were churchgoers and high school students who showed up with nothing but good intentions end up using precious resources like food and clean water, as well as transportation in and out of a volatile region (Aleccia 2010).

I asked respondents to help me consider this notion of the helping imperative, and to offer what they thought might be a more realistic and dignifying substitute.

Judy, a professor of ethics at a local university, has hosted graduate students from other countries, as well as having worked with organizations hosting volunteers. She tells us about her general impression of working with young people from abroad. She begins from something relatively commonplace, language issues:

Initially it was a little difficult for me to interact with them, first because of language, (both chuckle) although I speak in English, very good English by Kenyan standards, (laughing) I’ll be censoring myself. I’ll be like, wondering whether I’m speaking the right English, and thinking that their English is the standard, it’s the best, and so my English will be... should be judged
by that standard. So even as I speak with them, I’ll be judging myself and I’m speaking exactly as they are speaking! So I imagine that happens to very many people in Kenya. [...] Yes. So unfortunately for... for us, while we are interacting with international volunteers, the international volunteer is, I would say, “superior” in quotes, in our minds, because we are already judging ourselves by his or her standards. Yeah. [...] It has a terrible effect, because it even messes your own English (laughing), your own ability to communicate, the ability to communicate is, like, if I’m communicating with a fellow Kenyan, I’m definite, I’m saying what I want to say. But if I’m speaking to an international volunteer and if he’s saying what I really don’t want to say, because when I’m checking myself, I’m editing what I’m saying, before I say it, and secondly, I’m thinking in terms of saying the right thing. So I’m thinking about the international volunteer and wondering, what does he want to hear? And giving him that which he wants to hear.

Bertrand, Catherine, and Mwaka also cited the language barrier as being a challenge when hosting volunteers, and it was implicit in a number of other interviews. Language issues are well-documented in the international service-learning literature (e.g. Kiely 2004; Stocking & Cutforth, 2006; Niehaus 2013), but usually from the perspective of student learning. We know little about the language issue from the perspective of hosts, whether it be about learning, or about accommodating outsiders who do not speak the local language. It sounds as though Judy has developed a compensating behaviour arising from her self-consciousness about language, and has made some kinds of compromises that the volunteer is not concerned with in the relationship as a result. If this behaviour is widespread, one wonders what the aggregate effect might be. But of course, Judy continues,

It’s not just English. I think it’s the whole difference in colour, because you know, there is more communication than words. Even colour itself communicates. Just, I don’t know how to explain it, but the minute you see somebody of, a white, who is white, when you’re black, you’re already beginning to think of him as the Other, or her as the Other. You’re classifying yourself... against him, as the Other. Especially in the historical experience, as, as... as a post-colonial people, the experience of colonialism hangs over very much, and it’s that hangover, so that we are constantly thinking in terms of who we are in relation to who the international volunteer is.

Baaz corroborates Judy’s sense in *The Paternalism of Partnership*: “Just as identities within ‘donor communities’ reflect ideas that have their origin in colonial history, identities in the ‘partner societies’ are constituted in relation to this history” (Baaz 2005, 63). When I asked Judy to go a little deeper, she replied:
First, for me now, today, I think in terms of like... are we this bad? Are we this poor? Are we this ignorant that the whole world will want to come and help us? (chuckles) Is it impossible for us to sort out our own problems? Those are the things that come to my mind, and I keep wondering what it is we don’t have that... international volunteers have, is it in the orientation, is it in the growing up? I don’t know. I keep wondering what it is. […] But there’s also something about... attitude. We think, or rather, personally, I don’t know whether this is what others think, but sometimes I think that international volunteers seem to know too much. Or appear to know too much (chuckling), even when they don’t seem to know a lot. And they will talk and talk about anything... without... understanding our cultural context of modesty.

[...]

Okay. First, I’m very very clear of the importance of understanding context, and not just one aspect of context, but in totality. And yet, even I see, as I say this, I appreciate the complexity of our context; it’s also complex that I don’t know how anybody is going to know about it. But one thing that is definitely very clear about post-colonial context like Kenya is the impact of colonialism. It’s not like it has cleared. You have to be clear about that. That colonialism continues to have an impact, so that there is clearly a difference between a white person and a black person. Clearly. In every... almost every Kenyan mind, I can tell you, for sure, there is... some trait of colonial mentality. Yeah. The Other may not be having it, because they may not be products of colonialism, but, people in this context would definitely be having it.

In such examples, Judy and others are making a plea to their guests for humility, for volunteers to be more sensitive in the act of entering communities to give service. How might volunteers appropriately address this tension? On the one hand, the desire to help and do good feels like the right and sensible reaction to the many situations we learn about, and the people volunteering abroad have often been taught to look out for the Other from a young age (“Don’t waste your food! Don’t you know there are children starving in Africa?”). On the other hand, what are volunteers to do with the knowledge that their mere presence, never mind their actions upon arrival, might reify harmful and deeply held beliefs their hosts have about themselves? Peter Singer’s claim in *Famine, Affluence and Morality* that “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it” (Singer 1972, 1, emphasis mine) seems, decades later, to remain firm moral ground. The challenge therein lies in cultivating among volunteers an ethical fluency nuanced enough to know what might be “of comparable moral importance”. How
do we know for sure? How do we not go too far in the other direction, mired in navel gazing analysis paralysis? Strengthening ISL programs ensure any students sent abroad have strong ethical literacy may be the most practical approach.

It appears, therefore, that “helping” carries too many negative connotations to be serviceable. What about “partnership”? Maria Eriksson Baaz, in her work The Paternalism of Partnership, pleads with us to examine more closely what we think we mean when we say “partnership” in service-learning literature, demonstrating that it is also inherently paternalistic: “The terminology of partnership underplays the power inequalities inherent in the aid relationship and gives no hint of the chasm between the partnership policy and day-to-day practices” (Baaz, 9).

Because Judy is a professor, I felt I could use more explicit language surrounding the ethical implications of international engagement and hosting than I could with some of the other respondents, to try to find a more suitable, balanced schema. Here is her reaction:

Of course, all the issues, the ethical issues, and the ethical principles of research practice and even health practice or economic practice it is we are engaging in, all the principles apply. Like, it’s definitely very important to respect persons. And while we are all clear about respect of persons, how we express it differs from context to context... so that the way you express respect in America is probably different from the way we respect persons in Kenya. And therefore it would be important for a researcher or an international volunteer to be aware of the cultural context within which he’s going to do his work, so that he can respect persons as understood in that context.

Lewis and Cedric also see respect as being of fundamental importance when a volunteer enters a community that is not their own. I then asked Judy to describe the Kenyan way of respecting a person:

Like even in interactions, it’s important to give time to people, when you’re discussing something, it would be important to seek other people’s opinions. Like I keep saying, when
we’re in a meeting of mixed people, it would make much more sense to go around the table. Rather than to be the person who talks first. Because if you are saying whoever talks first is listened to, then the outgoing will be listened to... and very often it’s the Americans or the Europeans who would be outgoing. So, at the end of the day, you don’t listen to them. Because they’re waiting. They are waiting for an opportunity. We have a big problem of waiting for opportunities to be given. And yet in the world, we want, we are in a situation where it’s about grabbing opportunities when they come, rather than waiting to be given. So that needs to be bridged. Like I was saying, there are strategies. It’s like, both have to appreciate that this is, these are people who are coming from a different culture. These are people, we are from a different culture, so there may be this and this, when you need to speak up, don’t wait for opportunities, but at the same time, the others need to know that these ones may be waiting for opportunities.

Some (but perhaps not all) of the difference comes from different perspectives on what the objective of a dialogue might be. As a family friend of mine from Paris points out, the objective of a meeting in North Americas is to reach a decision, while in Europe it is to change the minds of those who disagree with you. It is possible that both these models are lacking, and that what we need in this case is a common understanding of what is really needed, as a precursor to effective action. Judy continues:

One of the long-term effects I see is... development of dependence... amongst Kenyans, Africans. You sort of get to feel like, if you have a problem, it can only be sorted out by somebody from out there, and therefore you don’t seek ways of dealing with it yourself. [...] I have lot of... doubt about our understanding of development, our, as a human community. [...] Because in my thinking, in the same way a child develops from being a child, to youth and to adult, ideally as a human community we should be moving from- or as a person, as a family, as any human unit, we should be moving from dependence... as a child you, know what I mean, a child is dependent on others for their own survival, to a situation where you are interdependent.

Speaking to Judy’s thoughts, Keith (2005, 16) agrees; here they are talking about dependence on a smaller scale, as it relates to inputs of service from abroad at the grassroots level. Keith says that we need to “move from the language and assumptions underlying exchange and service provision, toward the language of interdependence, social justice, and global, multi-ethnic citizenship”. She suggests that this can be accomplished if we “support communicative democracy and advance the capacity of all partners across social divisions to contribute their
knowledge and resources toward public work.” (16) Judy turns this around for us and forces volunteers and sending countries to look in the mirror:

And the period of independence should be very short... which I think of as the youth... period. You know, there’s a moment when young people want independence and they want to feel free, but that moment does not last long. If it lasts long, it’s very dangerous... because then, you begin to think you are an island, and it’s not possible. So we should quickly transit from being dependent, to being interdependent, thinking of ourselves in terms of how we relate with other people. But very often, our development paradigm is one that moves us from dependence to independence. Linking, cutting off our links with other people. As a nation, as individuals, as communities. [...] We are hanging too much on youthhood. We operate like youth for too long, rather than transit. See youth, or period of independence as a transitory phase, that helps us move from dependence to interdependence. So very often, we hang around here. And it’s unfortunate that, probably I’m wrong, but my idea of this is, my best illustration probably is America, I see Americans refusing to move beyond independence. And we would want to see people have very little time here of independence and quickly transit to interdependence, so that we see one another as part of us. You see... I, you know, in the African philosophy, we say, “I am, because you are”, and because you are, I am. Ubuntu. [...] Because, I can never be an island. I will need you. And you need me.

Baaz (2005) reminds us that “It was the backwardness of the colonized and the position of the colonizer in the top position on the evolutionary ladder that legitimized ‘the white man’s burden’ – to civilize and develop the underdeveloped.”, and that “Characteristics of the Other framed within a classic symbol of childhood and childishness.” (37-40) Whether “America” as a source of volunteers can be reasonably substituted as well with “Europe” or any other area of the world sending volunteers remains to be seen. Given the European history of colonialism, it would not be surprising if the same framework of misunderstanding holds true, perhaps even more so. Baaz continues:

One of Edward Said’s conclusions in his seminal work Orientalism (1978) is that Orientalism was a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the West and the East. In this discourse of Orientalism, the East was discursively produced as the West’s inferior Other, a process that both constructed and strengthened the self-image of the West as a superior civilization. East and West were discursively constructed as each other’s opposite. While the East was presented as irrational, sensual, backward, female and despotic, the West was represented as rational, progressive, dynamic, masculine and democratic... in a similar way to Said, Mudimbe (1994: xii) concludes that deviation is the best symbol for the idea of Africa. (43)
Returning to the question I posed in Chapter 3 on choosing language intentionally, I asked Judy, if we cannot talk about “developing”, or “helping”, or “partnering”, how should we talk about volunteer-community encounters? None of the respondents look at these encounters as completely without merit if properly managed. Otherwise, there will be only separate solitudes. It would be hard to make a theoretical case for such an arrangement, which is in any case, given human nature, a practical impossibility.

Assuming the host-volunteer encounter, suitably adjusted, is viable in the long term, is there a verb (and a set of beliefs and behaviours to go along with it) that we can use to talk about going to a vulnerable community and offering service that, as she says, is respectful of persons? Such a term would need to not just act as a euphemistic stand-in to allow us to feel better about ourselves and continue with business as usual, but would need to reflect a shift in practice as well as in our manner of thinking. How should we relate to each other? Can we, morally, relate to each other in these kinds of encounters? What might that look like? Certainly, many of the respondents used “helping” and its related terminology, although generally in the context of performing daily tasks as part of operating an organization, rather than the paternalistic notions of helping I have already discussed. Immanuel consistently used the neutral terminology of “interaction” throughout his interview. Lewis talked of “assisting” and “supporting”. Not one person talked about global citizenship or changing the world with international service. Judy’s reply:

Well, it’s difficult to find a word, but in theological terms, we prefer to use the term “accompany” [e.g. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me...” (Psalm 23:4)]. Accompaniment, so that you’re walking with me; you’re with me. We are together in this. It’s not about you... it’s not about you coming to help a helpless person, it’s not about me coming to sup-, help somebody else, because I have and the person doesn’t have. It’s about walking together, because life amongst
human beings is about walking together. And that ties up with what I was saying about interdependence. I depend on you, you depend on me, so let’s walk together.

I was delighted that Judy brought this up. Upon hearing this, I presented her with the unofficial title I had given my research study when submitting for ethics approval, “kujiunga”, which is the Swahili word for “to join”. I chose this name as my alternative to the helping imperative, as it seemed to be free of paternalism or hierarchy based on power. It was my hypothesis, as it were, for what I hoped to find in talking to host communities. Bertrand also uses the language of joining:

We are trying to live with these kind of challenges and trying to see how best we can help these children overcome their past. Be better people and promise them a better tomorrow. We want the volunteers who coming in to join us, and to take in our ideas, to buy our objectives. We want them to buy our objectives and actually if there is anything they want to contribute, let them contribute or add into the objectives we already have in place.

What would it mean for service abroad if we were to think and behave according to the language of accompanying or joining, rather than helping? How would pre-departure orientation and training change? How would we facilitate critical reflection? How would we measure success? These are questions for further examination if a positive transformation of the volunteer-host relationship is to take place.

7.3 A Very Nice Notebook

Cedric’s wife, Camellia, who showed up partway through my interview with him, tells us a story about a volunteer who oversteps their cultural boundaries:

I think also to add onto that, I can remember just one time that we had a child that was unruly, and she, she was really disrupting everything, it was one of the volunteers had promised her to take her to America, and she was really rude to other children, and she, she, she quite many other things that were really not nice to other children in the home, and so when these volunteers were still around, they stayed with us and then moved on to some place. They came back, and she happened to just talk to them, tell them that she was not liked. I think she was trying to get away for them to say “we will take you with us, back”. So finally, they sat down with her and gave her a very nice book. [...] The volunteer gave our daughter, our, one of the children in our children’s home here. A very nice
notebook. Beautiful. And said, “I want you to be writing in this book. Whoever makes you happy, you can write them down on that day, note the date and the person who made you happy. Then, anybody who makes you sad and unhappy, unhappy, you’d note the date and you write them down.” That, that is quite sensitive. So (chuckles), she was not wise, because after they talked to her and told her, anybody, they should, she should also note anybody that she, she doesn’t like. She should write them in that book. When they left, lo and behold, she had it with one of the other girls, and so, the message reached us, and so I got her here, and I said I wanted her to talk to me, and so she talked to me, and she talked to us, and she told us everything she had been told by this, these girls, and our way of punishment, what we said was, next time they come here, we didn’t tell her, we didn’t tell our daughter this, but we decided next time they come to this it- this particular volunteer, because they were still within Eldoret. We will send her away! So, (chuckling) so that’s what we did. [...] So the next time, they came here, they didn’t find her here. And they were so mad. [...] They didn’t ask [why], and we didn’t, and we wanted them to ask. And because they didn’t ask, we didn’t tell them. And the next time they came, she wasn’t here. We sent her away, and you know, it all depends, because like me, I’ll say the volunteer is here only for a short time, so, I, it’s better not to make the whole thing ugly, because I know they will go away. Next time they write to come back, they will not come back. So, and I will be, I’ll have solved my problem with this girl. So the next, after they had gone, we sat down with her, and we talked. And we, we, I mean we had already talked and she knew. So, because what she was doing through them, she had grown to be so disobedient and was making the other children do her work, instead of her. So volunteers, simply, you know, there are those challenges, so we have to be wise. So finally she’s okay now, she’s doing well. She’s with us. But she’s come, and she was here with the children, she took some of the children home, doing well. But you see, we also have to balance our psychology with the Western psychology.

Of course, there are many sides to every story, and I only have the one. The way it appears here is that this outsider, moved by guilt and compassion towards an underprivileged Other and ensorcelled by the helping imperative, looks around them and imagines that this child’s life is nothing but solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. She promised to take a child to America, it appears without even speaking to the administrators of this children’s home about it, which is problematic in and of itself. This puts the Cedric and his wife in an incredibly difficult position as they are forced to, from the child’s perspective, “take something away”, this imagined opportunity of a better life, something that in the real world was unrealistic, irresponsible, and almost certainly disruptive to the organization’s intentional, culturally appropriate rehabilitation plan. Moreover, this gave the child a sense of entitlement and superiority over the other children, which ended up becoming a mess left to Cedric and Camellia to clean up. Imagine what
this child might have told her peers. Imagine the ripples caused among the other children in the home for what it means to “escape”.

So to make a promise like that and not be able to keep it has one set of absurd ethical implications – what will happen, after all to that child’s willingness to trust authority figures, or foreigners, as well as her relationship with her parents? To make a promise like that and determinedly keep it against the advisement of the local authorities has another set of implications. Both are, at a minimum, cavalier, and more likely, potentially highly destructive. Of course, international adoption is a complex and prickly ethical issue, and anybody arguing against it outright must provide a better alternative. In this case, Eldoret is cultivating the social services to address the problem itself.

Perhaps this volunteer learned something as a result of this encounter. But is this learning worth the harm caused? Can we reasonably defend learning obtained at someone else’s expense – especially in a situation with such a pronounced difference in power? Who is really being served by this arrangement?

It is important also to remember that children living on the street are not necessarily without parents, or without options for a good life. Ayaya and Esamai (2001) describe the typology of children living on the street in Eldoret:

Type 1 street children were the “on” the street children who spent most of their time on the streets but went home in the evenings, type 2 were the “of” the street children who spent all their time in the streets and had severed their links with their families and did not have a home to go to, type 3 were abandoned children staying in a shelter. (1)
The 2007-2008 post-election violence internally displaced hundreds of thousands of people, and the effects of this and other local and regional issues are still felt in cities like Eldoret today. It follows that the reasons children turn to the street are many, as are the approaches to getting them off the street. Local street children’s organizations in Eldoret gather in a community of practice to study and understand the difference. It is clear to them that a child must be “ready” to change, and social workers can tell who is ready and who is prone to recidivistic behaviour. The actions of this volunteer indicate a failure to consider how the host community is dealing with its problems.

Catherine tells a not dissimilar story to Cedric and Camellia’s about the impressions left on the children she works with of the as a result of finding she has smokers and alcoholics in her midst: “my children were quite scandalized to see a lady smoker!” To Westerners, this soft-spoken nun’s words likely appear quaint and old-fashioned. But what are the cumulative effects of these kinds of behaviours from volunteers?

7.4 The Social Determinants of Health

Can organizations not simply ignore these unintentional troublemakers or find ways of compensating for them? Many of the problems or ethical issues raised by respondents were perhaps minor in the grand scheme; things we know about and can work on: issues with comfort zones or cultural intelligence, and not considerable ethical issues at all. If this happens once per organization every three to six months (the average stay of the average volunteer according to respondents), is that not a reasonable risk to take given the potential benefits to the organization and its communities? What about Immanuel, who hosts up to six volunteers every week?
Difference is a wonderful teaching tool, and it makes for productive reflection on both sides. Volunteers should engage in ethical, humble witnessing and observing in places unlike what they are accustomed to. More mutual understanding can never be a bad thing.

However, I use Judy and Cedric and Camellia and Catherine’s accounts to demonstrate how one person’s negative influence can spread throughout a community (as well, they are excellent stories of resistance). But in each case, this is one person’s story about an unfortunate experience with another individual or individuals. How can we understand host-volunteer encounters as a system, rather than as an unrelated patchwork of random events with no connective tissue? For every dismissible anxiety I heard from respondents, there was at least another story worthy of deeper ethical inquiry. So what can we learn from considering the aggregate effects on communities of ethically questionable encounters?

Service-learning literature tends to focus more on learning outcomes for students, maintaining healthy partnerships with communities, and reciprocity, and less on the outcomes for communities. What would be the ultimate price to be paid for continuing current arrangements, and who would pay it? How can we enrich our ethical dialogue and practice around service abroad, and around hosting? “Developing a critical consciousness to the injustices around us and locating them in the context of the environments that contribute to their existence” (Ventres, Dharamsi and Ferrer, 2015) is essential for volunteers, sending organizations, and hosts alike.

The social determinants of health are a useful entry point for understanding economic poverty and social vulnerability that exist in communities like Eldoret. The desire to understand these dynamics and “help” are often a significant part of what attracts volunteers to give service in
these communities. According to The World Health Organization (WHO) “The social
determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.
These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global,
national and local levels.” (WHO, 2014)

With the growth in volunteerism over the last few decades, many communities have a constant
or near-constant volunteer presence. As I remarked in Chapter 5, a guest who never leaves
means a host whose job is never done. Although volunteer encounters may indeed be a valuable
means to understand the social determinants of health and disparity of a particular community,
both for volunteers and hosts, the literature is silent on the host-volunteer encounter as a social
determinant of health and disparity in and of itself. After all we have heard from the
respondents of this study about their experiences hosting volunteers, there is reason to believe
that, in applicable communities, the presence and actions of volunteers should be counted
among the “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age”. Volunteerism is a
social determinant of health, and both volunteers entering these communities and the host
communities themselves would do well to recognize this as they try do research, create policies
and programs, and conduct monitoring and evaluation activities.

Service abroad is, by default, promoted as a positive thing by universities, NGOs, and for-profit
sending organizations. Is this just a problem for those communities who choose to host
volunteers? If it is a problem for host communities, then ipso facto it is a problem also for the
service abroad organizations and the people they send, because they have a fallacious
understanding of its implications. Can communities make the choice to not host volunteers, or to
adapt their policies and practices to be more careful of how they host? While this is certainly
advisable anyway, we have seen that host communities do not always choose to have volunteers enter; sometimes foreigners show up on their doorstep uninvited and unannounced. Moreover, “health promotion advocates quickly recognized that an excessive emphasis on lifestyle could lead to a “blame the victim” mentality. Smoking, for example, was not merely a matter of personal choice but also a function of one’s social environment.” (Glouberman and Millar 2003, 388). Similarly speaking, it does not make sense to dismiss negative encounters between volunteers and host communities as a matter of personal choice on behalf of the host, as it is not simply a choice. Hosting volunteers in a community is absolutely a function of social environment, and of cultural norms. Hosts may accept volunteers for financial reasons, for the real or imagined credibility associated with these relationships, or because others are doing it, or because it is too difficult to say no.

As initially raised in Chapter 3, volunteer activity and presence is a social determinant of health, and needs to be understood in that context.

7.5 Social Interdependence Theory

If we accept that volunteerism has become commonplace enough in communities like Eldoret to be understood as part of the conditions people are born into, we suddenly have a new language, a new disciplinary approach to creating good standards of practice for ethical international engagement and service-learning. Furthering this line of inquiry, Ventres, Dharamsi and Ferrer (2015, forthcoming) argue that inequities are not caused by social determinants. Inequities are a result of those who create and support—knowingly and unknowingly, or through willful ignorance—conditions that lead to circumstances of inequality that result in health disparities. By focusing predominately on determinants as the referent source of social constructions of morbidity and mortality, we as health care professionals can often be led to believe that the origins of poor health-related outcomes exist out there, somewhere else, disconnected from the ways in which social,
economic, political, and environmental factors are established and maintained. (Braveman and Gottlieb 2014, 4) We can fail to develop a critical awareness of how power and privilege—“the web of causation” (Krieger 1994)—perpetuate social systems that foster inequity, injustice, and oppression, which in turn directly, and negatively, affect many people’s health and well-being. We can fail, as well, to develop a thoughtful understanding of how tightly our actions (and inactions) can be intertwined with the negative results these systems engender.

According to Johnson, Johnson & Smith (2007),

Social interdependence exists when the accomplishment of each individual’s goals is affected by the actions of others (Deutsch, 1949, 1962; Johnson, 1970; D. W. Johnson & R. Johnson, 1989). There are two types of social interdependence, positive (cooperation) and negative (competition). Positive interdependence exists when individuals perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other individuals with whom they are cooperatively linked also reach their goals and, therefore, promote each other’s efforts to achieve the goals. Negative interdependence exists when individuals perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only if the other individuals with whom they are competitively linked fail to obtain their goals and, therefore, obstruct each other’s efforts to achieve the goals. No interdependence results in a situation in which individuals perceive that they can reach their goal regardless of whether other individuals in the situation attain or do not attain their goals. Each type of interdependence results in certain psychological processes.

Certainly, there is a complex constellation of social determinants that may surround a socially vulnerable group such as street children and mothers living on the streets of Eldoret. However, given how many of the street children’s organizations in Eldoret I interviewed who host volunteers from abroad, we must acknowledge these encounters as a real and significant force in the health and disparity outcomes for the vulnerable populations and the broader community as a whole.

Borrowing again from Ventres, Dharamsi and Ferrer (2015, forthcoming),

Conceptualizing a social inter-dependency in volunteer encounters requires:

- Accepting that social structures profoundly influence health outcomes. The term “structural violence” is useful to describe those situations when some in society harm others through the active establishment and perpetuation of unjust power arrangements. (Farmer 2006, 11)
- Recognizing that these arrangements are the root causes responsible for health inequities, made manifest through determinants of health such as poverty, racism, classism, sexism, and ecological degradation, among others.
- Becoming aware that these arrangements are inherently part of any social system—including any educational, service, ideological, or economic system—that functions to
marginalize large sections of the majority world (the truly massive numbers of people living in or near poverty (NPR 13) as it disproportionally centralizes power and maximizes profits in the hands of a select few.

- Acknowledging that each of us is involved either in the sustenance of social systems that produce adverse illness-related effects or the disestablishment of these systems through actions that denounce and disassemble the beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, and practices underlying them.
- Realizing that alternatives to oppressive social structures exist, and that each of us can play important roles in creating and supporting alternate structures that seek to lessen the burden of illness and promote health, especially among those who are most oppressed.

This force is not a matter of passive circumstance. This is a force that involves real people, sometimes making choices, sometimes acting according to cultural expectation. This is not imaginary, it is real. An individual, or merely the interchangeable, prototypical volunteer, may become a part of the fabric of another person’s life, sometimes on a daily basis. The decisions or instincts of one person, organization, or community, should be understood in relation to, as connected to its neighbours. All of our interactions, even something as simple as speaking or performing the unconscious habits of our daily lives can leave a lasting impression on people.

Vanessa Andreotti describes listening to someone conduct a visualization exercise meant to inspire a sense of global citizenship in young activists:

At the end of a ‘Make Poverty History’ (MPH) training session for activists, as an inspiration for a group of about 30 young people to write their action plans, a facilitator conducts the following visualisation (reproduced from my notes):

“Imagine a huge ball-room. It is full of people wearing black-tie. They are all celebrities. You also see a red carpet leading to a stage on the other side. On the stage there is Nelson Mandela. He is holding a prize. It is the activist of the year prize. He calls your name. You walk down that corridor. Everyone is looking at you. What are you wearing? How are you feeling? Think about how you got there: the number of people that have signed your petitions, the number of white bands on the wrists of your friends, the number of people you have taken to Edinburgh. You shake Mandela’s hands. How does that feel? He gives you the microphone. Everyone is quiet waiting for you to speak. They respect you. They know what you have done. Think about the difference you have made to this campaign! Think about all the people you have helped in Africa…”

Listening to this as a Southern person was disturbing, but what was even more worrying was to observe that, when the young people opened their eyes and I asked around if they thought the
visualisation was problematic, the answer was overwhelmingly ‘no’. They confirmed that their primary motivation for ‘training as an activist’ was related to self-improvement, the development of leadership skills or simply having fun, enhanced, of course, by the moral supremacy and vanguardist feeling of being responsible for changing or saving the world ‘out there’. This actually echoed one of the sayings in a poster of the organisation that was running the course “do what you love doing, but save the world while you do it”.

Part of the reason why I felt so uncomfortable was that the group seemed to be unaware that the thought patterns and effects of ‘what they love doing’ could be directly related to the causes of the problems they were trying to tackle in the first place. This points to a central issue in global citizenship education: whether and how to address the economic and cultural roots of the inequalities in power and wealth/labour distribution in a global complex and uncertain system. (Andreotti 2006).

We can and must work towards a clearer understanding of the ethical implications of host-volunteer encounters within a social interdependence framework. It is important to understand that much as we may espouse good intentions for service abroad, *that we provide service and the way we host volunteers is part of the problem.* Heron (2007, 8) reminds us that “the development industry, although increasingly homogenized, is still too diversified and heterogeneous to harbour a coordinated conspiracy”. As such it is hard to point fingers. In reality, all are complicit in this system: volunteers, sending organizations, and hosts.

Andrew Dobson (2006) lends us his perspective on interdependence:

> for many in the political sciences today, it is precisely the assumptions of progress and values/morality of the West that are at the root of the problem. He poses another question: “what should (then) be the basis for our concern for those whom we have never met and are never likely to meet?” He proposes that the answer should be framed around political obligation for doing justice and the source of this obligation should be a recognition of complicity or “causal responsibility” in transnational harm (in Andreotti 2006).

What may appear at first to be positive interdependence, even in “ideal” volunteer encounters (e.g. where a volunteer shows up with good intentions, healthy motivations, appropriate skills, and enough time), may in reality more closely resemble negative social interdependence, for reasons I have explained in preceding chapters. This takes shape when, for example, volunteers
have conflicting motivations for service, organizations do not facilitate connections between hosts and volunteers in advance of placement or involve them in the recruitment process, or when hosts cannot or do not for various reasons communicate their needs or their dissent.

We must rethink our approach to international volunteer service. “Otherwise we risk adding to human suffering by reproducing structures of power that suppress healthy human development, especially to those most in need” (Ventres, Dharamsi and Ferrer forthcoming 2015, 9).

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter makes the argument that international volunteerism should be considered among the social determinants of health for any community hosting volunteers. It further argues that there is evidence that volunteers entering a community to give service can be understood as a social determinant of health, and that we need to think about volunteer encounters using a social interdependency framework.

Given everything the respondents of this study have said, we may want to reconsider the environmentalist’s adage, noted in Chapter 3: “Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints, waste nothing but time.” Within the framework of the ethical implications of service in communities, this now sounds like dreadful advice. In Chapter 5 respondents demonstrated that photography is a very touchy subject. In Chapter 6, they explain the consequences of wasting time. And in this chapter, we see that the footprints we leave in communities go deeper and wander farther than we initially think. What do we carve off and take with us? What do we shed of ourselves and leave behind? These questions require substantial care and reflection.
We are responsible for our actions, and the consequences of those actions. Volunteers coming from abroad are not responsible for things like the violence that disarranged Kenya after the 2007 Presidential election, which in part led to the conditions that see thousands of Kenya’s children living on the street. But volunteers are coming to try to help, and universities and sending organizations are promoting it. What the effects of this will be over the long term, positive and negative, remain to be seen.
Chapter 8 – Findings, Recommendations, and Limitations

8.1 Introduction

Crabtree (2008, 18; citing Bringle & Tonkin, 2004) suggests that “much of the research about ISL remains before us to do”. The goal of this chapter is to acknowledge the limitations of my study and the ways I would attempt to address them if I were to perform this study again. It is not exhaustive; rather, I focus only on those limitations that had the greatest potential influence on: a) the quality of my findings; and b) my ability to effectively answer my research questions. I outline the major limitations of this study in sections below. Where relevant, I suggest how I might address this in the future, and offer thoughts for future research.

The purpose of this work moving forward is to provide the reflective and institutional space to continue cultivating interdisciplinary communities of dialogue and practice about the ethics of international engagement and service-learning in higher education institutions, and organizations, and communities. If what volunteers are doing is potentially harmful, then continued conscientization (Freire 1970) and research in this field is potentially emancipatory.

8.2 Summary of Findings

To recapitulate my findings:

1. A need exists for a broader conception of host (Chapter 1)
2. The voices of hosts and host communities are underrepresented throughout the literature and the volunteering process (Chapters 1, 3)
3. Current language used to describe the role of volunteers is the product of inequitable historical relationships, has adverse effects on process and outcomes, and needs to be adjusted (Chapter 3)

4. Host fatigue is a significant factor in adversely affecting outcomes of volunteer placements (Chapter 4)

5. Resistance and dissent in volunteer encounters present differently than volunteers might expect; in Kenya, they often present as withdrawal, silence, slowness to respond, bearing the hardship, and much less commonly as direct confrontation. (Chapter 5)

6. To improve outcomes, volunteers, together with their organizations as appropriate, need to:
   a. become more effective at working with those different from themselves (Chapter 3)
   b. take host views on the ethical implications of ISL into account (Chapter 3)
   c. recognize that host communities might not be motivated to work with volunteers in ways we might expect, and that hosts might find this difficult to openly express (Chapter 4)
   d. take steps to improve pre-encounter interaction between volunteers and hosts (Chapter 5)
   e. involve host organizations/individuals in the establishment of criteria for volunteer recruitment (Chapter 5)
   f. assist host communities in establishing avenues of clarity to provide feedback when problems arise with volunteer behaviour and facilitating solutions, respecting the fact that confrontation is difficult (Chapter 5)
g. have greater regard to the importance of the length of time of volunteer assignments, both to ensure successful project outcomes and to reduce the adverse effects on the social health of individuals and communities (Ch. 6, throughout)

7. Volunteer activity must be factored into what constitutes the social determinants of health of a host community when we try to learn about that community and the issues it faces (Chapter 7)

8.3 Ethics is Messy. Knowledge is Emancipatory

So far I have shared some of respondents’ answers to the question “what is it like to host?” Through their stories, they have given us powerful moral visions for how volunteers should interact with communities. Sherene Razack reminds us of the importance of storytelling:

Storytelling refers to an opposition to established knowledge, to Foucault’s suppressed knowledge, to the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms. [...] Storytelling is essential for social change. [...] We must overcome one difficulty – the difference in position between the teller and the listener, between telling the tale and hearing it. [...] Those whose stories are believed have the power to create fact. (Razack 1998, 36-7)

Overall, I have shown respondents’ impressions to be mixed, although on balance, there seems sufficient reason to question whether, in the specific context which I investigated and given existing arrangements, the benefits to the host justify the challenges they face, especially when we consider what these challenges mean for the community as a whole over the long term.

As such, any work we do should first and foremost acknowledge and preserve the dignity of those we accompany. Baaz (2005, 31) asks difficult questions, such as “what right do we have to be here?” and “Do we have anything at all to contribute?” Daniel, a respondent, asks “do they
have the, the proper skills to do what they’ve come here to do? As young people?” As
volunteers, as sending organizations, and as hosts, we must keep asking these questions.

We have seen that ethics is messy, that at some point we need to pick some ethical ground to
stand on, and that we may never feel comfortable with the answers to our questions, or feel a
sense of closure. A student I worked with once summed it up nicely: “not all problems come
with solutions.” Indeed, at the end of this work I still find myself with more questions than
answers. “What are the ethical implications of service abroad?”, “who is (really) being served by
my actions?” For every distance I have traveled outward to find definitive answers to these
questions, I have traveled an equal distance inward, and after every journey still I emerge
unsatisfied.

Moreover, ethics is a reflective practice. We must engage in continuous reflection on our vision
of the world, what we believe is “right” and “just”, and “good” in the world, and what we are
doing to work toward that vision. We must reflect on our assumptions, convictions, and actions,
and not take them for granted.

In Facing Mount Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta talked about “the idea of education as participation in
the community” (Kenyatta 1938, 119). After all I have considered here, I agree. More harm has
come from separating ourselves from one another and from what we want to know than has
come from immersing ourselves in it. Community is knowable only by performing community. By
joining in.
Like Crabtree (2008, 29), and based on these encounters, I remain intellectually and ideologically conflicted about IESL work. On the one hand, I am who I am in no small part because of the experiences I had volunteering and researching and traveling in East Africa. They have offered me the opportunity to deepen and enrich my knowledge, research and practice around what it means to be human and alive. I am deeply bound up in this work, as it is in part a critique of my own experience and struggle of being in a dilemmatic space. From this perspective, I see moral distress as a good thing. It felt fitting that this is what I should end up studying.

Through my research, writing, and teaching, I have taken it upon myself to critically reflect upon my experiences, to learn what I could from them, and to share my findings and convictions with others. I recognize that a lot of the mistakes I learned from, that have shaped my process of conscientization, were at someone else’s expense. Did I need to go in order to know? Did I do more harm than good? Is there a difference between atonement and expiation? Where does forgiveness fit in? Who decides when it is enough to warrant any of these? Is the alternative of not caring, not acting any better? What are the opportunity costs (for good) of inaction? Who is paid when the leger is balanced? I still lose sleep over these questions. I hope in presenting this work that I have paid for whatever harm I may have caused in my encounters. I hope it will give others pause for reflection.

Through a critical evaluation of our practices, and recognizing that all parties are complicit in the existing system, we can reach for two coupled outcomes: first and foremost, better outcomes for communities, but also, better outcomes for those participating in IESL experiences.
8.4 General Recommendations

The Irish advocacy organization Comhlámh (pronounced ‘co-law-ve’) released a report called “The Impact of International Volunteering on Host Organisations: A summary of research conducted in India and Tanzania” (2008), in which they suggest some recommendations arising from the research. Based on the conclusions drawn from my study, these recommendations remain relevant, particularly:

- Sending organisations should ensure the participatory involvement of host organisations in the selection, recruitment, development education, and training of international volunteers.
- Sending organisations should ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of volunteering by developing policies that include standardised processes and evaluation tools, based on the principles and indicators in Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practice and Volunteer Charter. Consultation with the host organisations/communities can provide critical input to this process.
- Sending organisations should publish case studies of successful volunteering to guide and motivate new volunteers.
- Sending organisations should place volunteers with relevant skills as required by the host projects.
- Future research should be considered on a number of topics, to increase awareness of all aspects of international volunteering.

8.5 Specific Recommendations

- Prospective volunteers should take personal responsibility for developing a critical consciousness, an ethical fluency, and a deep cultural intelligence before embarking for service abroad.
- Host organizations should develop policies and/or memoranda of understanding for hosting volunteers and share these with one another in order to create clear expectations for volunteers wanting to join.
- One of the respondents, Daniel, when asked what he would change, said he wanted better reporting and feedback from volunteers for the community or the organization, not just for their home university.
8.6 Specific Limitations, and Future Research

8.6.1 Being “in” the Community, Rather Than “of” the Community

“The visitor usually brings a sharp knife.” Malawian Proverb – the stranger was known for having the keenest perceptions. (Theroux 2002, 338)

Not having grown up in Africa, this work will no doubt fall short in terms of its explanatory power regarding the understanding of the lived experiences of Kenyan individuals and communities hosting volunteers. But I suggest that it may serve to pry open this question so that we may come to a fuller understanding. While I have had the opportunity to develop my general cultural intelligence to a significant degree, my specific cultural knowledge is relatively low. This is the nature of meeting new people; it is unavoidable, and can be a good opportunity for learning. Therefore, what aspects of how people who grow up in Africa contribute to the construction of norms of behaviour (or lack thereof) in this role are left to African scholars to clarify (Wanjiku Khamasi & Maina-Chinkuyu, 2005, 2). In this sense, this is not an Kenyan’s image of the North, but perhaps it is a collection of Kenyan images of the North, collected by a non-Kenyan.

8.6.2 Does the “Host Community" Really Exist?

I undertook this research study under the assumption that there indeed exists such a thing as a “host community”. This was more because of a need for compositional shorthand than it was an attempt to engage with the concept of community on a theoretical basis. Benedict Anderson’s (1981) concept of imagined communities is perhaps useful here, as I envisioned the host community as one in which its members do not necessarily know of each other’s existence and may never meet, but which nevertheless have a common experience of hosting young international volunteers. Of course, in practice, when we try to interrogate this community, we are speaking to individuals. These individuals can speak generally to this experience of hosting
within whatever communities they define in a way non-hosts cannot. I argue in Chapter 7 that these individuals are connected in subtle and complex ways which are worthy of consideration when we think about what it means to volunteer abroad. Whether the communities individuals identify with means their neighbourhood, their field of practice or study, their social relations, their city or their country etc. was beyond the scope of this research. In this study, I conceptualize “host community” therefore to mean a number individuals and organizations hosting young international volunteers within a loose geographic area, in this case, Eldoret, Kenya. Because of the methods I used, the respondents ended up being predominantly individuals connected in some way to the issue of children, youth, and mothers living on the street. In this sense, the concept of the host community is still not well-defined, and merits greater scholarly attention. A fuller study might have accounted for this variable by including it in the interview schedule.

8.6.3 Estimations of Real Costs and Benefits of Volunteer Service to Communities

It is beyond the scope of my study to understand and analyze the real financial and social costs and benefits of the presence of international volunteers on Eldoret and its hinterlands. The costs and benefits to any community of such encounters are the product of multiple intersecting factors, and from an economic and social standpoint, are based on subjective accounts from the respondents and are qualitative in nature. Despite attempting to be conservative in my analysis, I may have underestimated or overestimated financial and social benefits of the recommendations. I acknowledge that Eldoret may have a relationship with international volunteers that looks different than it would in other similar communities, in East Africa, and across the world. Therefore the explanatory power of this study is limited from that point of view. I maintain that my analysis is sufficiently accurate to support the recommendations made in this study.
8.6.4 Volunteer Provenance

Because I was studying hosts rather volunteers, I decided not to focus on how volunteers of different nationality might produce different impressions among hosts. Moreover, I did not ask about or analyze how volunteers of different provenance (i.e. volunteers coming solo, through NGO’s, ISL programs, for-profit voluntourism companies, professional consultants, church- or high school-based groups etc.) might have left different impressions on hosts. Doing this would have to assume that hosts kept accurate records of this, or that it even mattered to them. A more controlled, longitudinal study that asked participants to track this information might be able to account for this. Additionally, what would happen if this study were conducted within a narrower scope, with only members of a community who host foreigners entering within formal International Service-Learning programs?

8.6.5 Ways to the Centre

I chose not to analyze the influence of religion on the answers respondents gave. Many respondents enthusiastically identified to me as faithful in some way, and nevertheless were equally enthusiastic about discussing what they saw as ethical problems. However, in more than one case, a respondent’s faith appeared to stand in the way of them acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that might otherwise have been apparent and problematic. Instead, things that gave these respondents a moment for pause, were often dismissed as being “God’s will.” Although one respondent identified as Muslim, given that Kenya is a predominantly Christian country, it is not unreasonable to assume that the majority of respondents were Christian. Whether this was the reason for overlooking what appeared to me to be glaring issues, or whether this is as a result of the strong cultural imperatives I discuss in Chapter 4 that silence hosts within a cloak of respectfulness for their guests, was beyond the scope of this study to ascertain. If this proves to
be an important scholarly question in the future, one might frame a study with an eye to more thoroughly understanding the notion of Kenyan hospitality, including an element of religious influence.

8.6.6 “Helping” vs. “Joining”

What would it mean for service abroad if we were to think and behave according to the language of accompanying or joining, rather than helping? Good ISL programs will already understand this difference and will proceed accordingly. How might we better understand and address the helping imperative within formal International Service-Learning programs? How would we structure pre-departure orientation and training differently? How would we facilitate critical reflection? How would we measure success? How would a community of practice hold itself accountable?

8.6.7 Ethical (Health) Advocacy

In Chapter 7, I position the host-volunteer encounter, volunteer presence, and host fatigue within the language of the social determinants of health, and further within the language of social interdependence theory. The next question that seems obvious to me is: what does (health) advocacy look like in this situation? If the social determinants of health help us understand the reasons negative outcomes exist for individuals and communities, and we connect these outcomes to real people who have taken action in the world, we can perhaps adapt the concept of health advocacy as a way to help us understand and subvert these negative outcomes. I would like to know more about how one might do this. Health advocacy is already a difficult thing to practice and to measure (Dharamsi 2011). How might we conceptualize ethical advocacy as it relates to host-volunteer encounters?
Anybody addressing a “development” issue must imagine their ideal outcome being to work themselves out of a job – eliminating the problem that needed their labour and knowledge in the first place. Can we be more conscious of the behaviours (on the part of volunteers, sending organizations, and hosts) that sustain oppressive power relations or marginalize certain kinds of people, so that we can eliminate these problems rather than send people back to the harmful environment that brought them to ask for help (or accompaniment) in the first place?

8.6.8 Policies for Hosting Volunteers and Memoranda of Understanding

In Chapter 5, I raised concerns from some respondents about the effects of not having the opportunity to vet volunteers in advance of their arrival in community. This would be less problematic if the host organizations were at least able to be involved in the process of deciding on the criteria by which volunteers get recruited – or on the methodology for selecting a team. Unfortunately, within my sample set, this was not often the case. Comhlámh has suggested a Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Organisations, which offers a good template for sending organizations. While a fuller investigation into this outside the scope of this study, an exploration of how host organizations or individuals develop policies or codes of practice for hosting volunteers.

8.6.9 (Dis)embodied Service

Another possibility for future research is to investigate the concept of physicality in International Service-Learning. Service often implies physicality or physical presence, but part of service may be to measure the power of ideas to the concept of service more than physical presence. Is physical presence necessary? Letter writing can be very powerful – someone will ask a colleague “how might we deal with this problem?” and get a response that might be equal in some sense to service provision. One aspect of this research could be to measure the power of the virtual
and ask to what extent it plays a role in the processes of service and learning in an East African context.

**8.6.10 In Which the South Joins the South**

We understand well what North-South volunteer service looks like, and we have images of South-North service through organizations such as Canada World Youth, which creates bi-directional international cultural exchanges for young people. But what does South-South cross-border volunteer service look like, and what can we learn from it? I would like to make a case for a comparative study of International Engagement and Service-Learning. Moreover, there is more literature calling for more African images of the West and critical evaluation of the effects of IESL experiences than there are actual critical evaluations and African images of the West.

The fact that a Western/poor-country ISL model is predominant does not render it unproblematic. The pedagogy of International Service-Learning is a field where diverse perspectives should be actively sought out. In one study (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008) that documents the experiences of students at a smaller, private Catholic institution, the authors themselves unconventionally point out that their limited study may not be able to account for differences in the moral character of non-religious students. Similarly, North American depictions of ISL activities cannot cover the full breadth of the ISL experience, particularly given the significant differences that have emerged in the past twenty years in cultural psychology.

Since current ISL models are based primarily on North American psychology and research, the experiences of students at academic institutions in under-resourced countries helping their own neighbouring communities either rarely reach academic publications or are not documented at
all. Entering communities without these voices does not best serve the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

Because international service-learning is by its nature an intellectual pursuit, located within the academy, it is more easily subjected to critical analysis. Other forms of volunteerism that are not connected to for-credit courses across a diverse typology can more readily escape our gaze. How can we gather data on diverse types of volunteers and make sense of the benefits and consequences of their behaviours in community?

8.7 Conclusion

The implications of this kind of research could potentially be valuable within the field of ethics, as well as within predeparture training and orientation programming. In the field of social work, this research may help individuals to better understand their own conflicting emotions and (on occasion) moral distress associated with their experience, as well as to facilitate a more appropriate, holistic process of reflection and reintegration when individuals return home. It may be useful to both providers of IESL experiences and the participants as we continue to paint a portrait of the moral dilemmas typically experienced by students on IESL placements.

Knowledge can be redemptive, and individuals, organizations, and communities hosting volunteers can only benefit from further (ethically-minded) scholarly inquiry.

Camellia gives us some final thoughts for reflection:

I think what, the message across should be, if they are volunteering, they are very much wanted, very much welcome, but if they could come and be part of that family, live in that family. [...] Because, it comes, boils down to, you know, a volunteer arrives to come, it’s between me and them. At the end of it all, it’s between me and an individual.
On the encounters she made doing similar work, Baaz (2005, ix) says “They taught me that the main difference between me and my friends in Bosobe was located not in different dreams and visions of life, but in the material possibilities to realize these dreams.” Kenyans or anybody else we meet are not in need of “development”. Each person we meet is living a life as vivid and complex as our own. If we choose, and if we are invited, we must both benefit from walking together.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Intent to Dr. Jennifer Wanjiku Khamasi

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Schedule
Dear Dr. Wanjiku Khamasi and the Institute for Gender Equity, Research and Development,

My name is Matt Whiteman, and I am a Master’s student in my first year of an interdisciplinary studies program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). I first heard of The Institute for Gender Equity, Research and Development (IGERD) from Dr. Samson Nashon, Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at UBC, and a member of my graduate supervisory committee. I approached him with my research question, and he suggested that I consider studying through IGERD, directed by his colleague Dr. Jennifer Wanjiku Khamasi – herself an alumnus of the PhD program at UBC. IGERD and Moi University, as well as Eldoret town and environs would be a phenomenal place to expand my knowledge because of IGERD’s strong emphasis on “collaboration and linkages at local, national, regional and international levels”, as well as, most importantly, an overall commitment to social justice. The spirit of my research is consistent with both of these principles. Additionally, UBC and Moi University already have a memorandum of understanding through the Faculty of Education at UBC. The research problem on which I intend to focus is as follows:

Given the growth of international engagement opportunities through universities, NGOs, and volunteer tourism companies, the impact and outcomes of these experiences are not fully understood. Even with the best of intentions, it is easy for these experiences to do more harm than good. There is still a lack of understanding of the ethical dimensions of the presence of students/volunteers/organizations from the perspective of host communities themselves. I plan to conduct a qualitative investigation on how community members themselves perceive ethical problems associated with “development”-oriented interventions in their communities.

Indeed, better outcomes for host communities cannot be understood without other important linkages at various scales, or without a social justice imperative. I hope to enable dialogue on these issues through my work.

Under the guidance of Dr. Wanjiku Khamasi, I intend to recruit 12-20 research subjects to participate in both in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as well as one or two focus groups of up to five individuals.

In summary, I would be honoured to conduct this study with the direction and supervision of Dr. Wanjiku Khamasi, IGERD, and Moi University more broadly. I hope IGERD will consider me as a candidate in this exciting research collaboration.

Sincerely,

Matt Whiteman
May 20, 2011

Semi-structured Interview Schedule
A Study of Communities Hosting Young International Volunteers in Kenya

Investigators

Dr. Grant Charles
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Dr. Samson Nashon
Professor
Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy
Faculty of Education
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Dr. Shafik Dharamsi
Associate Professor
Department of Family Practice
Faculty of Medicine
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Matt Whiteman, B.A., M.A. (Candidate)
Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Section 1: Demographic/Introductory Information:

a. How old are you?
b. What is your mother tongue?
c. What role do you play in your community?
d. What do you do for a living? Are you in any way connected to any community-based NGO?
e. What is your role there? How long have you served this NGO? (if applicable)

Section 2: Pre-Experience Prompts

a. What comes to your mind when a foreigner comes to your community as a volunteer?
b. Have you ever hosted/worked with non-local volunteers/representatives from abroad? What made you decide to host/work with them?
c. How did you come to get involved in hosting/working with volunteers...?
d. What different kinds of volunteers are there? Do you have different names for them?
e. Do you remember what the situation was like in your community before you/your community became involved with hosting/working with volunteers?

f. Did you have any questions before getting involved about hosting/working with international volunteers? Did they change over time? If yes how did you deal with them?

g. What experience/knowledge might have helped you prepare for engaging with international volunteers?

Section 3: Experience Prompts

a. What kinds of activities have you and your community participated in during your experience working with/hosting international volunteers?

b. How is it like for you to host/work with international volunteers?

c. How is it like for your community to host/work with international volunteers?

d. What can you say about your experience hosting adult volunteers? Young volunteers? The two of them mixed?

e. When you were doing these activities, were there any questions arising? Has this changed over time since you have been hosting/working with volunteers?

f. Have you ever had any questions while working with international volunteers?

Section 4: Post-Experience Prompts
(If applicable, for those no longer/not currently hosting/working with volunteers)

a. What kind of questions have come to your mind following the experience hosting/working with international volunteers?

b. What impacts would you say volunteers have had on you/your family/your community?

c. What impacts would you say you/your family/your community have had on volunteers?

d. Looking back to the experience hosting/working with international volunteers, what would you like to see happen differently for a more fruitful future hosting/working experience with foreign volunteers?

Section 5: Conclusion

a. The point of this study is to help make your voice heard on these issues. Once I start doing my analysis and writing and perhaps publishing, what would you like this information you are giving me to do?